

Amendment 60

to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

Commercial Snapper Grouper Unlimited Permits, Bottom Longline Gear Requirements, and Trip Limits



Environmental Assessment, Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis, and Regulatory Impact Review

June 2026 DRAFT

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
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Award Number FNA15NMF4410010

Amendment 60 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

Proposed action(s):

Remove the two-for-one requirement for snapper grouper commercial unlimited permits, revise bottom longline species limitations and stowage requirements, and increase commercial trip limits.

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Summary

Why is the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council considering action?

Purpose for Action

The purpose of this amendment is to increase long-term stability of the commercial fishery by maintaining the current number of permits and to increase flexibility, adaptability, access, and economic profitability in the snapper grouper commercial sector.

Need for Action

The need for this amendment is to provide increased access by modifying limited-access commercial permit requirements, allowing greater flexibility for changing fishing gear at sea, and modifying trip limits to more consistently achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, commercial closures and other adverse social and economic effects, consistent with Executive Order 14276 – Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.

What Actions are Being Proposed in This Amendment?

Amendment 60 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region proposes the following actions:

Action 1. Remove the 2-for-1 requirement for the snapper grouper commercial unlimited permit

Purpose of Action: Facilitate transfer of permits in the snapper grouper commercial sector by removing the two-for-one requirement for obtaining a snapper grouper commercial unlimited (SG 1) permit.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not change the current permit requirements. To acquire a limited access, transferable South Atlantic snapper grouper unlimited permit, a person must obtain and exchange **two** such permits for one new permit.

Alternative 2. To acquire a limited access, transferable South Atlantic snapper grouper unlimited permit, a person must obtain and exchange **one** such permit for one new permit.

Action 2. Revise bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species that may be harvested while gear is on board and stowed

Purpose of Action: Provide additional flexibility for commercial fishermen that use bottom longline gear to be able to deploy multiple gears within a trip, improving trip efficiency, while maintaining law enforcement's ability to monitor the gear used to catch snapper grouper species.

Alternative 1 (No Action). A vessel that has on board a valid Federal commercial permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper that fishes in the EEZ on a trip with bottom longline gear on board may possess only the following South Atlantic snapper-grouper species: snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish.

Alternative 2. Modify the regulations restricting possession of snapper grouper species to allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Appropriately stowed means longline hooks are not baited and are not on the deck of the vessel.

Alternative 3. Modify the regulations restricting possession of snapper grouper species to allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Appropriately stowed means longline hooks are not baited and are not on the deck of the vessel. **Vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip must submit an at-sea notification, prior to switching gears.**

Alternative 4. Modify the regulations restricting possession of snapper grouper species to allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Appropriately stowed means longline hooks are not baited and are not on the deck of the vessel. **Vessel operators who intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip are required to carry an active vessel monitoring system on board. [Further details on minimum requirements for VMS systems will be defined later in the amendment development process.]**

Action 3. Increase commercial trip limit for greater amberjack

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip limits for greater amberjack to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest the annual catch limit (ACL).

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limits for greater amberjack. The current trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 1 (March 1 through August 31) and Season 2 (September through February) is 1,200 lbs ww or gw.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 1 to:

Sub-Alternative 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 2 to:

Sub-Alternative 3a. 1,500 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3b. 1,750 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Action 4. Increase commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip limits for vermilion snapper to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest the ACL.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper. The current trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 1 (January through June) and Season 2 (July through December) is 1,000 lbs gw.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 1 to:

Sub-Alternative 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 2 to:

Sub-Alternative 3a. 1,250 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3b. 1,500 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3c. 1,750 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3d. 2,000 lbs gw.

Action 5. Increase commercial trip limit for red porgy

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip limits for red porgy to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest the ACL.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for red porgy. The current trip limit for red porgy during Season 1 (January through April) and Season 2 (May through December) is 15 fish.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for red porgy during Season 1 to:

Sub-Alternative 2a. 30 fish.

Sub-Alternative 2b. 45 fish.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for red porgy during Season 2 to:

Sub-Alternative 3a. 30 fish.

Sub-Alternative 3b. 45 fish.

Action 6. Increase commercial trip limit for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina)

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip limits for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina) to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest the ACL.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina. The current trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina is 500 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina to 750 lbs ww.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina to 1,000 lbs ww.

Action 7. Increase commercial trip limit for red grouper

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip limits for red grouper to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest the ACL.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for red grouper. The current trip limit for red grouper is 200 lbs gw; 236 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for red grouper to 300 lbs gw; 354 lbs ww.

Action 8. Increase commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip limits for gray triggerfish to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest the ACL.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish. The current trip limit for gray triggerfish is 1,000 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,200 lbs ww.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,400 lbs ww.

Action 9. Increase commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line only)

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip limits for golden tilefish (hook and line component) to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest the ACL.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for the golden tilefish hook and line component. The current trip limit for the golden tilefish (hook and line) is 500 lbs gw; 560 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 600 lbs gw; 672 lbs ww.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 750 lbs gw; 840 lbs ww.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. What Actions are Being Proposed?

The actions proposed in Amendment 60 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP) would remove the two-for-one requirement for snapper grouper commercial unlimited (SG 1) permits, revise species possession restrictions and stowage requirements for commercial vessels with bottom longline gear on board, and increase commercial trip limits for greater amberjack, vermilion snapper, red porgy, hogfish (Georgia through North Carolina stock), red grouper, gray triggerfish, and golden tilefish (hook and line component only).

1.2. Who is Proposing the Actions?

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) is responsible for managing fish stocks in the South Atlantic Region under the Snapper Grouper FMP from 3 to 200 nautical miles off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida through Key West. The Council develops the framework amendment and sends it to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), who publishes a rule to implement the framework amendment on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce. NMFS is an agency of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration within the Department of Commerce. Guided by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the Council works with NMFS, other partners, and stakeholders to assess the status of fish stocks, specify catch levels, reduce bycatch, and enforce fisheries regulations.

The Council and NMFS are also responsible for making this framework amendment available for public comment. The draft environmental assessment (EA) was combined with the framework amendment and was made available to the public during public hearings and in Council meeting briefing books. The final EA and framework amendment will be made available for public comment during the proposed rule stage of the rulemaking process. The final EA and framework amendment will be found on the Council's website at <http://www.safmc.net>.

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

- Responsible for conservation and management of fish stocks in the South Atlantic Region.
- Consists of 13 voting members and 4 non-voting members; voting members include 1 representative from each of the 4 South Atlantic state fishery management agencies, 8 members appointed by the Secretary of Commerce, and the Southeast Regional Administrator of NMFS.
- Responsible for developing fishery management plans and amendments under the Magnuson-Stevens Act; recommends actions to NMFS for implementation.
- Management area is from 3 to 200 nautical miles off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida through Key West, except for mackerel which is from New York to Florida, and dolphin and wahoo, which is from Maine to Florida.

1.3. Where is the Project Located?

Management of the federal snapper grouper fishery located off the southeastern United States (South Atlantic) in the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) (3-200 nautical miles from shore) is conducted under the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 1983) (Figure 1.3.1). The Council manages fifty-five species of snappers, groupers, and other bottom- or reef-associated fish species under the Snapper Grouper FMP.

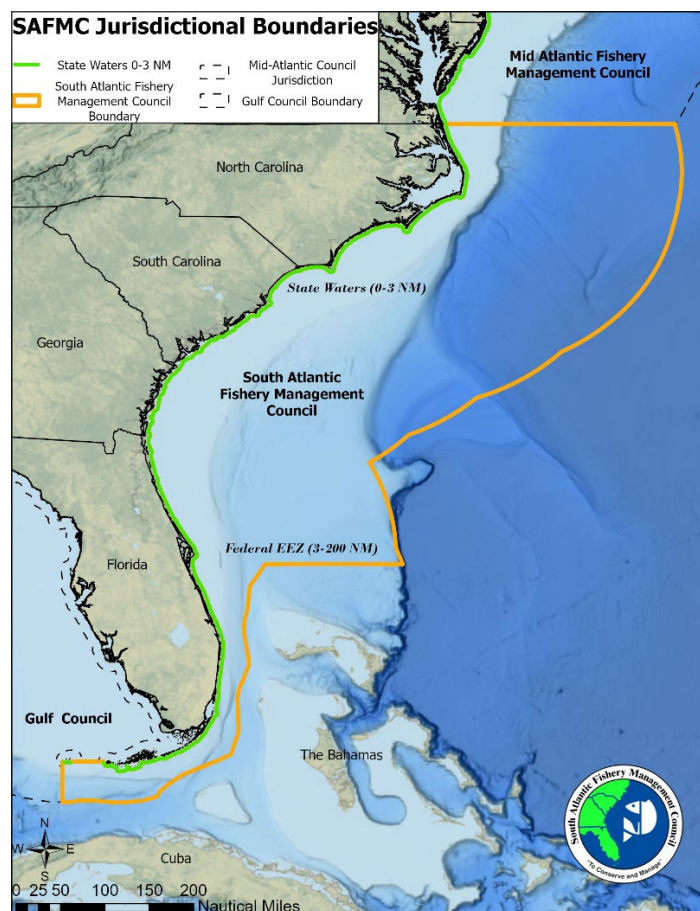


Figure 1.3.1. Jurisdictional boundaries of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council for the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

1.4. Why is the Council Considering Action? (Purpose and Need)

Purpose: The purpose of this amendment is to increase long-term stability of the commercial fishery by maintaining the current number of permits and to increase flexibility, adaptability, access, and economic profitability in the snapper grouper commercial sector.

Need: The need for this amendment is to provide increased access by modifying limited-access commercial permit requirements, allowing greater flexibility for changing fishing gear at sea, and modifying trip limits to more consistently achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, commercial closures and other adverse social and economic effects, consistent with Executive Order 14276 – Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.

Background

Through Amendment 60, the Council intends to increase access and efficiency for the commercial sector of the snapper grouper fishery.

By removing the two for one requirement for SG 1 permits (Action 1), the Council intends to maintain the current number of SG 1 permits while allowing an easier process by which current permits may be transferred. By revising species possession restrictions and stowage requirements for bottom longline gear (Action 2), the Council intends to allow increased efficiency for commercial trips through added flexibility to change to or from bottom longline gear while at sea. Finally, by increasing commercial trip limits for several species (Actions 3-9), the Council intends to allow commercial fishermen greater ability to take advantage of opportunities when species are being effectively harvested, increasing the potential for annual harvests to optimized.

In developing Actions 2-9, the Council recognizes the mixed species and multi-faceted nature of commercial fishing in the South Atlantic region. Under current regulatory and economic conditions, many fishermen need multiple permits or multiple target species to sustain their businesses. Additionally, fishermen have expressed the need to be able to switch between fishing methods or target species within trips to be efficient with fuel and other fishing-associated costs. Increased flexibility and increased trip limits are not expected to result in trip limits for all available species being met on most trips. However, such changes will enable fishermen to maximize harvests for species that are available and being caught during a trip.

1.5. Are These Actions Within the Bounds of the Scientific Recommendations?

Federal fisheries management under the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the use of annual catch limits (ACL) to prevent overfishing. All actions considered in this amendment would occur under current ACLs, which are at or below the respective species' acceptable biological catch (ABC) levels. Harvest at or below the ABC is recommended as a sustainable level of annual harvest by the Scientific and Statistical Committee. For species-specific discussions supporting current ABCs and ACLs, reference the FMP amendment that established the current ABC and ACL for each species, listed under Section 1.6 or on the Council website.

1.6. What is the Management History for the Snapper Grouper Fishery?

The snapper grouper fishery is highly regulated and regulations have been in place since the initial development of the Snapper Grouper FMP in 1983. More information on management for all species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit may be found at <https://safmc.net/fishery-management-plans/snapper-grouper/>. Stock assessment information can be found at www.sedarweb.org and Section 3.2.2.

Below are select amendments to the Snapper Grouper FMP that are relevant to consideration of the SG 1 permit two-for-one requirement, species restrictions gear stowage requirements for commercial vessels with bottom longline gear on board, and current trip limits for greater

amberjack, vermilion snapper, red porgy, hogfish (Georgia through North Carolina stock), red grouper, gray triggerfish, and golden tilefish.

Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 1983)

The Snapper Grouper FMP included provisions to prevent growth overfishing in 13 species in the snapper grouper complex and established a procedure for preventing overfishing in other species; established minimum size limits for several snapper grouper species.

Amendment 4 (SAFMC 1991)

Amendment 4 to the Snapper Grouper FMP prohibited the use of various gear, including fish traps, the use of bottom longlines for wreckfish, and powerheads in special management zones off South Carolina; established bag limits and minimum size limits for several species, required permits (commercial and for-hire) and specified data collection regulations; and required that all snapper grouper species possessed in the South Atlantic EEZ must have heads and fins intact through landing.

Amendment 8 (SAFMC 1997)

Amendment 8 to the Snapper Grouper FMP established a limited access program for the snapper grouper commercial sector. Two types of permits were established. Transferable unlimited (SG 1) permits were issued for vessels with at least 1,000 pounds of snapper grouper species in any year from 1993-1996 and that had a valid snapper grouper permit at any time between February 11, 1996, and February 11, 2027. Non-transferable 225-pound (SG-2) permits were issued for vessels that had landings that were greater than zero but less than 1,000 pounds of snapper grouper species in any year and that had a valid snapper grouper permit during the previously stated time periods. Vessels with an SG 1 permit did not have an overall limit of snapper grouper species per trip. Vessels with an SG 2 permit were limited to 225 pounds of snapper grouper species per trip.

Amendment 8 also established the two-for-one requirement for SG 1 permits. For an SG 1 permit transfer to occur to any entity that is not an immediate family member or family corporation comprised solely of the transferee's parents, siblings, children, or spouse, two SG 1 permits must be exchanged for one SG 1 permit. The Council established this requirement to reduce the number of commercial fishing vessels for snapper grouper in the South Atlantic, because at the time, the fishery was characterized as having excess capacity and several stocks that were overfished or near the overfished status.

Amendment 9 (SAFMC 1998)

Amendment 9 to the Snapper Grouper FMP specified that vessels with longline gear aboard may only possess snowy grouper, warsaw grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish. The Council's intent stated in the amendment is that all longline vessels (i.e., pelagic and bottom longlines) would be subject to this measure.

Amendment 18B (SAFMC 2012)

Amendment 18B to the Snapper Grouper FMP established the commercial longline endorsement for golden tilefish, separating this component from the hook and line component. This amendment established a commercial trip limit for the hook and line component of 500 lbs gw.

This amendment also specified the commercial ACL for the golden tilefish commercial hook and line component of the fishery.

Regulatory Amendment 18 (SAFMC 2013)

Regulatory Amendment 18 to the Snapper Grouper FMP reduced the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper to 1,000 lbs gw. This amendment also specified ACLs for vermilion snapper and red porgy.

Amendment 29 (SAFMC 2014)

Amendment 29 to the Snapper Grouper FMP established commercial split seasons (Season 1: January-June; Season 2: July-December) and a commercial trip limit (for both seasons) of 1,000 lbs ww for gray triggerfish. This amendment also established (Georgia – North Carolina) and revised (east Florida) the minimum size limits for gray triggerfish.

Amendment 37 (SAFMC 2016)

Amendment 37 to the Snapper Grouper FMP specified the management of hogfish into two separate stocks, one for the EEZ off east Florida and the other for the EEZ off Georgia through North Carolina (GA-NC). This amendment established a commercial trip limit for GA-NC hogfish of 500 lbs ww. This amendment also established status determination criteria, annual catch limits, minimum size limits, and accountability measures for both stocks of hogfish.

Regulatory Amendment 27 (SAFMC 2019)

Regulatory Amendment 27 to the Snapper Grouper FMP established commercial split seasons for greater amberjack (Season 1: March-August; Season 2: September-February) and red porgy (Season 1: January-April; Season 2: May-December). This amendment also established or revised commercial trips for the following species: greater amberjack (Season 1: 1,200 lbs ww or gw; Season 2: 1,000 lbs ww or gw), red porgy (Season 1: 60 fish; Season 2: 120 fish), vermilion snapper (1,000 lbs gw for both seasons; trip limit reductions when 75% of the seasonal quota was met were removed). This amendment also reduced the commercial minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in the EEZ off the east coast of Florida.

Regulatory Amendment 30 (SAFMC 2019)

Regulatory Amendment 30 to the Snapper Grouper FMP established a commercial trip limit for red grouper of 200 lbs gw. This amendment also revised the rebuilding timeframe for red grouper and modified the seasonal spawning closure for red grouper in waters off South Carolina and North Carolina.

Amendment 49 (SAFMC 2023)

Amendment 49 to the Snapper Grouper FMP increased the September-February commercial trip limit for greater amberjack to 1,200 lbs whole weight (ww) or gutted weight (gw). This amendment also specified annual catch limits (ACL), revised sector allocations, reduced the commercial minimum size limit, and revised the April spawning closure for greater amberjack.

Amendment 50 (SAFMC 2023)

Amendment 50 to the Snapper Grouper FMP decreased the commercial trip limit for red porgy during both of its seasons (Season 1: January-April; Season 2: May-December) to 15 fish. This

amendment also established a rebuilding plan, specified ACLs, and revised sector allocations for red porgy.

Chapter 2. Proposed Actions

2.1. Action 1. Remove the Two-for-One Requirement for the Snapper Grouper Commercial Unlimited Permit

2.1.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not change the current permit requirements. To acquire a limited access, transferable South Atlantic snapper grouper unlimited permit, an entity must obtain and exchange **two** such permits for one new permit.

Alternative 2. To acquire a limited access, transferable South Atlantic snapper grouper unlimited permit, an entity must obtain and exchange **one** such permit for one new permit.

Discussion

Action 1 addresses the two-for-one requirement for the limited access South Atlantic snapper grouper unlimited (SG 1) permit. Under either of the alternatives considered under Action 1, the SG 1 permit would continue to be a limited access permit, with no new permits being created. This action only addresses requirements to transfer existing SG 1 permits.

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, after one unlimited (SG 1) permit has been acquired, the new owner has one year after the expiration date of that permit to acquire a second SG 1 permit to exchange the two permits for a new SG 1 permit. Ownership of each permit is not transferred in the federal permits system until both permits are exchanged. **Alternative 2** proposes removal of the requirement for two permits to be exchanged, allowing permits to be transferred on a one-for-one basis. A letter was mailed to SG 1 permit holders in January 2026, informing them that the Council is considering a change from the two-for-one requirement. All other current snapper-grouper limited access transferable permit and transfer requirements will remain in place.

During the development process for this amendment, the Council received information on limited access permit pools, and decided not to consider a permit pool at this time.

2.1.2. Comparison of Alternatives

Will be completed later in the development process. For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

2.2. Action 2. Revise bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species that may be harvested while gear is on board and stowed

2.2.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). A vessel that has on board a valid Federal commercial permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper that fishes in the EEZ on a trip with bottom longline gear on board may possess only the following South Atlantic snapper-grouper species: snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish.

Alternative 2. Modify the regulations restricting possession of snapper grouper species to allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Appropriately stowed means longline hooks are not baited and are not on the deck of the vessel.

Alternative 3. Modify the regulations restricting possession of snapper grouper species to allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Appropriately stowed means longline hooks are not baited and are not on the deck of the vessel. **Vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip must submit an at-sea notification, prior to switching gears.**

Alternative 4. Modify the regulations restricting possession of snapper grouper species to allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Appropriately stowed means longline hooks are not baited and are not on the deck of the vessel. **Vessel operators who intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip are required to carry an active vessel monitoring system on board. [Further details on minimum requirements for VMS systems will be defined later in the amendment development process.]**

Discussion

Action 2 was developed to allow commercial fishermen who use bottom longline gear to have additional flexibility by allowing them to retain species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish during trips when they use bottom longline gear to target other species. Currently, under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, if bottom longline gear is on board, those species are the only snapper grouper species that may be retained on that trip. Therefore, switching to or from bottom longline gear to target other snapper grouper species within a trip is not allowed. Similarly, using bottom longline gear to target non-snapper grouper species (e.g., sharks) and then switching gear to target snapper grouper species within a trip is not allowed.

The species restriction for longline gear was established through Snapper Grouper Amendment 9 (SAFMC 1998). This action was intended to prevent targeting overfished snapper grouper species that were not in the deepwater complex and to prevent the use of longlines on essential habitat. At the time of Amendment 9's development, longlines were already only allowed in waters deeper than 50 fathoms, only north of St. Lucie Inlet, Florida, and only for species other than wreckfish. At that time, reports had also surfaced which indicated that fishermen were landing with a species composition that would only be caught in waters less than 50 fathoms. The species restriction was implemented to increase enforcement of the depth and area restrictions for longline gear.

Under all Action 2 alternatives, harvest restrictions are maintained, such that the only snapper grouper species that may be harvested using bottom longline gear are snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish. **Alternatives 2, 3, and 4** would all allow fishermen to switch to or from bottom longline gear and be able to target and retain all snapper grouper species within the same trip. To ensure bottom longline gear is not being used to harvest snapper grouper species for which it is not a legal gear (all snapper grouper species except snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish), when fishing for other snapper grouper species, the longline gear must be stowed off the deck of the vessel and with no bait on the longline hooks.

Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 differ in the forms of accountability that would be required to verify catches from different fishing gear. **Alternative 2** would not require any additional communication with law enforcement, and enforcement of regulations under this alternative would be most dependent on on-the-water interactions between fishermen and law enforcement officers.

Alternative 3 would require that before switching to or from bottom longline gear, fishermen submit an at-sea notification, alerting law enforcement of their intent to switch gear. Such notifications would only be necessary during trips when fishermen are switching to or from bottom longline gear and harvesting snapper grouper species.

Alternative 4 would require all vessel operators with a snapper grouper commercial permit that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear within a trip be equipped with an active vessel monitoring system (VMS) that would communicate information to National Marine Fisheries Service law enforcement. This information would be used to verify fishing activities and associated catch. Snapper grouper commercially permitted vessels that will not be used to switch to or from bottom longline gear and harvest snapper grouper within the same trip would not be required to have a VMS.

2.2.2. Comparison of Alternatives

Will be completed later in the development process. For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

2.3. Action 3. Increase commercial trip limit for greater amberjack

2.3.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limits for greater amberjack. The current trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 1 (March 1 through August 31) and Season 2 (September through February) is 1,200 lbs ww or gw.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 1 to:

Sub-Alternative 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 2 to:

Sub-Alternative 3a. 1,500 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3b. 1,750 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Discussion

When the commercial split season and associated trip limits for greater amberjack were established through Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 27 (SAFMC 2019), the trip limits were specified in units of pounds whole weight (lbs ww) or gutted weight (lbs gw). Council discussions during this amendment process recognized that landings are monitored on the NMFS website in pounds gutted weight, and decided that the unit for the trip limit should match the unit used to monitor the landings. Therefore, all sub-alternatives under **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** only use pounds gutted weight as the unit.

Table 2.3.1.1. Commercial regulations for greater amberjack in the most recent fishing year (2025-2026).

Season	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Trip Limit	Minimum Size Limit (total length)	Seasonal Closure
March-August	544,990 lbs gw	1,200 lbs ww or gw	34 inches	No harvest in April
September-February	363,327 lbs gw*	1,200 lbs ww or gw	34 inches	None

*If the March-August ACL is not met, unused ACL from this season is added to the September-February ACL. Unused ACL from September-February is not added to a future season.

Table 2.3.1.2. Greater amberjack commercial trip limit and recent (2021/2022-2023/2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL). September-February percentages are relative to the ACL for that season, not including any rollover from the March-August season.

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)
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		2023/2024 (Preliminary)	2022/2023	2021/2022
Greater Amberjack	1,200 lbs ww or gw	Mar 2023-Aug 2023: 45.4% Sept 2023-Feb 2024: 33.1%	Mar 2022-Aug 2022: 66.5% Sept 2022-Feb 2023: 59.0%*	Mar 2021-Aug 2021: 69.0% Sept 2021-Feb 2022: 61.9%

Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

*Management change became effective during this year/season

2.3.2. Comparison of Alternatives

Will be completed later in the development process. For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

2.4. Action 4. Increase commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper

2.4.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper. The current trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 1 (January through June) and Season 2 (July through December) is 1,000 lbs gw.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 1 to:

Sub-Alternative 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 2 to:

Sub-Alternative 3a. 1,250 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3b. 1,500 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3c. 1,750 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3d. 2,000 lbs gw.

Discussion

The Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee proposed consideration of 1,250 lbs gw only for Season 2 because the northern part of the region (South Carolina and North Carolina) has a wider variety of species available to them during Season 2, making the fishery relatively less dependent on vermilion snapper in that area for that time of year. Some concern was also expressed for the northern part of the region about effects of upcoming reductions to black sea bass catch levels and switching of effort toward vermilion snapper in that area. Data show that Georgia is particularly dependent on vermilion snapper throughout the year.

Table 2.4.1.1. Commercial regulations for vermilion snapper in the most recent fishing year (2025).

Season	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Trip Limit	Minimum Size Limit (total length)	Seasonal Closure
January-June	454,240 lbs ww	1,000 lbs gw	12 inches	None
July-December	454,240 lbs ww*	1,000 lbs gw	12 inches	None

*If the January-June ACL is not met, unused ACL from this season is added to the July-December ACL. Unused ACL from July-December is not added to a future season.

Table 2.4.1.2. Vermilion snapper commercial trip limit and recent (2022-2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL). July-December percentages are relative to the ACL for that season, not including any rollover from the January-June season.

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)		
		2024 (Preliminary)	2023	2022
Vermilion Snapper	1,000 lbs gw	Jan-Jun: 65.3% Jul-Dec: 56.4%	Jan-Jun: 61.9% Jul-Dec: 92.6%	Jan-Jun: 61.7% Jul-Dec: 88.2%

Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

2.4.2. Comparison of Alternatives

Will be completed later in the development process. For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

2.5. Action 5. Increase commercial trip limit for red porgy

2.5.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for red porgy. The current trip limit for red porgy during Season 1 (January through April) and Season 2 (May through December) is 15 fish.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for red porgy during Season 1 to:

Sub-Alternative 2a. 30 fish.

Sub-Alternative 2b. 45 fish.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for red porgy during Season 2 to:

Sub-Alternative 3a. 30 fish.

Sub-Alternative 3b. 45 fish.

Discussion

Average weight for commercially landed red porgy, estimated as the terminal 3-year (2015-2017) average weight from SEDAR 60 (2020), is 1.62 lbs ww.

Table 2.5.1.1. Commercial regulations for red porgy in the most recent fishing year (2025).

Season	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Trip Limit	Minimum Size Limit (total length)	Seasonal Closure
January-April	13,500 lbs gw	15 fish	14 inches	None
May-December	31,501 lbs gw*	15 fish	14 inches	None

*If the January-April ACL is not met, unused ACL from this season is added to the May-December ACL. Unused ACL from May-December is not added to a future season.

Table 2.5.1.2. Red porgy commercial trip limit and recent (2022-2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL). May-December percentages are relative to the ACL for that season, not including any rollover from the January-April season.

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)		
		2024 (Preliminary)	2023	2022
Red Porgy	15 fish	Jan-Apr: 47.3% May-Dec: 44.8%	Jan-Apr: 54.1%* May-Dec: 57.0%	Jan-Apr: 35.2% May-Dec: 38.8%

Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

*Management change became effective during this year/season

2.5.2. Comparison of Alternatives

Will be completed later in the development process. For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

2.6. Action 6. Increase commercial trip limit for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina)

2.6.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina. The current trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina is 500 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina to 750 lbs ww.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina to 1,000 lbs ww.

Discussion

Table 2.6.1.1. Commercial regulations for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina) in the most recent fishing year (2025).

Season	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Trip Limit	Minimum Size Limit (fork length)	Seasonal Closure
January-December	23,456 lbs ww	500 lbs ww	17 inches	None

Table 2.6.1.2. Hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina) commercial trip limit and recent (2022-2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL).

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)		
		2024 (Preliminary)	2023	2022
Hogfish (GA-NC)	500 lbs ww	72.6%	74.1%	74.7%

Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

2.6.2. Comparison of Alternatives

Will be completed later in the development process. For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

2.7. Action 7. Increase commercial trip limit for red grouper

2.7.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for red grouper. The current trip limit for red grouper is 200 lbs gw; 236 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for red grouper to 300 lbs gw; 354 lbs ww.

Discussion

Table 2.7.1.1. Commercial regulations for red grouper in the most recent fishing year (2025).

Season	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Trip Limit	Minimum Size Limit (total length)	Seasonal Closure
January-December	71,280 lbs ww	200 lbs gw	20 inches	No harvest January-May off NC and SC; No harvest January-April off GA and FL

Table 2.7.1.2. Red grouper commercial trip limit and recent (2022-2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL).

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)		
		2024 (Preliminary)	2023	2022
Red Grouper	200 lbs gw	52.6%	27.1%	25.4%

Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

2.7.2. Comparison of Alternatives

Will be completed later in the development process. For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

2.8. Action 8. Increase commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish

2.8.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish. The current trip limit for gray triggerfish is 1,000 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,200 lbs ww.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,400 lbs ww.

Discussion

Table 2.8.1.1. Commercial regulations for gray triggerfish in the most recent fishing year (2025).

Season	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Trip Limit	Minimum Size Limit (total length)	Seasonal Closure
January-June	156,162 lbs ww	1,000 lbs ww	12 inches	None
July-December	156,162 lbs ww*	1,000 lbs ww	12 inches	None

*If the January-June ACL is not met, unused ACL from this season is added to the July-December ACL. Unused ACL from July-December is not added to a future season.

Table 2.8.1.2. Gray triggerfish commercial trip limit and recent (2022-2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL). July-December percentages are relative to the ACL for that season, not including any rollover from the January-June season.

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)		
		2024 (Preliminary)	2023	2022
Gray Triggerfish	1,000 lbs ww	Jan-Jun: 34.2% Jul-Dec: 47.7%	Jan-Jun: 54.1% Jul-Dec: 73.1%	Jan-Jun: 58.9% Jul-Dec: 92.2%

Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

2.8.2. Comparison of Alternatives

Will be completed later in the development process. For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

2.9. Action 9. Increase commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line only)

2.9.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for the golden tilefish hook and line component. The current trip limit for the golden tilefish (hook and line) is 500 lbs gw; 560 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 600 lbs gw; 672 lbs ww.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 750 lbs gw; 840 lbs ww.

Discussion

Table 2.9.1.1. Commercial regulations for golden tilefish (hook and line) in the most recent fishing year (2025).

Season	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Trip Limit	Minimum Size Limit	Seasonal Closure
January-December	110,722 lbs gw	500 lbs gw	None	None

Table 2.9.1.2. Golden tilefish (hook and line) commercial trip limit and recent (2022-2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL).

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)		
		2024 (Preliminary)	2023	2022
Golden Tilefish (H&L)	500 lbs gw	94.2%	84.5%* (10/31/2023; Re-opened 12/7/2023)	107.7% (7/6/2022)

Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

*Management change became effective during this year/season

2.9.2. Comparison of Alternatives

Will be completed later in the development process. For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

Chapter 3. Affected Environment

This section describes the affected environment in the proposed project area. The affected environment is divided into five major components:

- **Habitat Environment** (Section 3.1)
- **Biological and Ecological Environment** (Section 3.2)
- **Economic Environment** (Sections 3.3)
- **Social Environment** (Section 3.4)
- **Administrative Environment** (Section 3.5)

3.1. Habitat Environment

Information on the habitat utilized by species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP is included in Volume II of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP II; SAFMC 2018) and in the [SAFMC EFH User Guide](#) (SAFMC, 2024), which are incorporated here by reference. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council)-designated essential fish habitat (EFH) and EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC) are described in the [SAFMC EFH User Guide](#) and spatial representations of these and other habitat-related layers are in within the Council's [SAFMC EFH Mapper](#).

3.1.1. Essential Fish Habitat

For current EFH information for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP information, refer to Appendix D.

3.1.2. Habitat Areas of Particular Concern

For current HAPC information for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP, refer to Appendix D.

3.2. Biological and Ecological Environment

3.2.1. Life History and Landings

The species addressed in this amendment represent key components of the South Atlantic snapper-grouper multi-species complex and inhabit a diverse range of marine environments across the continental shelf and upper continental slope. Comprehensive biological profiles, life history assessments, and detailed descriptions of the ecological roles for these managed species

are documented in Volume II of the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP II; SAFMC 2018) and the SAFMC Essential Fish Habitat User Guide (SAFMC 2024), which are incorporated herein by reference.

Greater Amberjack

Greater amberjack (*Seriola dumerili*) is a pelagic and epibenthic warm-temperate species in the family Carangidae. This large jack is distributed from Nova Scotia to Brazil and throughout the Pacific, Indian, and Eastern Atlantic Oceans as well as the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea. Greater amberjack are often found near reefs, rocky outcrops, or wrecks off the southeastern United States, with a relatively broad depth range of 50 to 780 ft. greater amberjack has a fast growth rate and reaches a maximum size of 74 inches, maximum weight of 178 pounds, and maximum age of 13 years. Females are generally larger at age than males. This species is gonochoristic with a spawning season from January to June with a peak in April and May. Spawning appears to be more prevalent off south Florida and the Florida Keys compared to locations further north along the Atlantic coast. They mature at 1 year of age and 29 inches in length. Greater amberjack are included in the Snapper Grouper FMP and are managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Recreational fishing for greater amberjack began in the early 1950s, but there was no targeted fishery until the 1970s.

Table 3.2.1.1. South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings and ACLs in lbs gutted weight (gw), and percent of the ACL landed, 2020-2024. Fishing year is March 1-August 30 (Season 1) and September 1-end of February (Season 2).

Year	Landings (lbs gw)	ACL (lbs gw)	% ACL landed
2020-2021 Season 1	251,635	461,633	54.5
2020-2021 Season 2	201,100	307,755	65.3
2021-2022 Season 1	318,628	461,633	69.0
2021-2022 Season 2	190,558	307,755	61.9
2022-2023 Season 1	306,855	461,633	66.5
2022-2023 Season 2	181,607	307,755	59.0
2023-2024 Season 1	296,202	652,817	45.4
2023-2024 Season 2	143,924	435,212	33.1

Vermilion Snapper

Vermilion snapper (*Rhomboplites aurorubens*) is a warm-temperate and tropical lutjanid occurring from North Carolina and Bermuda, throughout the West Indies and Gulf of Mexico, and south to southeastern Brazil. Off the Atlantic waters of the southeastern U.S., vermilion snapper is a schooling fish that is commonly associated with patches of sponge/coral habitat, rocky outcrops, and rocky ledges on the continental shelf and shelf-break (85- 180 ft), as well as the upper-slope reef habitats (~330 ft). Young fish occur in shallower waters than the adults (typically < 85 ft), where they also form large schools. They feed on fishes, shrimps, crabs, polychaetes, other benthic invertebrates, cephalopods, and planktonic organisms. Vermilion

snapper is relatively small, reaching maximum lengths of 24 inches and maximum ages greater than 20 years old. They are gonochoristic and spawn off the Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S. from April to September, with a peak between June and August. They mature at a young age (nearly all are mature at 1 year old) and small size (beginning around 6 inches in length). There is also a skewed sex ratio, with more females present than males. This species has been targeted by commercial and recreational fishers for decades. In the Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S., vermilion snapper is managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council under the Snapper Grouper FMP and is subject to annual catch limits, size and bag limits, trip limits, and gear restrictions. They are caught by both commercial and recreational fishers, with hook and line gear being the most common gear.

Table 3.2.1.2. South Atlantic vermilion snapper commercial landings and ACLs in lbs whole weight (ww), and percent of the ACL landed, 2020-2024. Fishing year is January 1-June 30 (Season 1) and July 1-December 31 (Season 2).

Year	Landings (lbs ww)	ACL (lbs ww)	% ACL landed
2020 Season 1	333,855	502,520	66.44
2020 Season 2	492,100	502,250	97.93
2021 Season 1	270,724	478,720	56.6
2021 Season 2	388,682	478,720	81.2
2022 Season 1	285,574	463,080	61.7
2022 Season 2	408,289	463,080	88.2
2023 Season 1	281,137	454,240	61.9
2023 Season 2	420,445	454,240	92.6
2024 Season 1	296,702	454,240	65.3
2024 Season 2	256,197	454,240	56.4

Red Porgy

Red porgy (*Pagrus pagrus*) is distributed throughout the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. In the western Atlantic, they range from New York, U.S., the Caribbean Sea, and through the Gulf of Mexico to Argentina. Their head and body are a silvery red, with many tiny blue spots. They are distinguished from other porgy species in the U.S. by having a rear nostril that is round (not slit-like). In the Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S., red porgy inhabit reefs on the middle to outer continental shelf and shelf-break out to 920 ft in depth, but commonly found between 30 and 260 ft. They are found over rock, rubble, or sand bottom, with young frequently found on seagrass beds and the continental shelf. They feed on crustaceans, fishes, and mollusks. Red porgy in the northwestern Atlantic are thought to constitute a single stock, but are separate from the northeastern and southwestern Atlantic. Red porgy are protogynous winter spawners (November to May), with the peak spawning season in November through March.

Notable plasticity in the growth as well as reproductive parameters, such as size and age at female maturity and size and age at transition, has been documented. The oldest reported age is 14 years with sizes upwards of 20 inches. In the Atlantic waters off the southeast U.S., red porgy is managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council under the Snapper Grouper FMP and is subject to annual catch limits, size and bag limits, trip limits, gear restrictions, and a spawning season closure. They are caught by both commercial and recreational fishers, with hook and line gear being the most common gear.

Table 3.2.1.3. South Atlantic red porgy commercial landings and ACLs in lbs gutted weight (gw), and percent of the ACL landed, 2020-2024. Fishing year is January 1-April 30 (Season 1) and May 1-December 31 (Season 2).

Year	Landings (lbs gw)	ACL (lbs gw)	% ACL landed
2021 Season 1	21,239	49,200	43.0
2021 Season 2	54,250	114,800	47.3
2022 Season 1	17,328	49,200	35.2
2022 Season 2	44,546	114,800	38.8
2023 Season 1	6,497	12,907	54.1
2023 Season 2	15,989	28,039	57.0
2024 Season 1	6,104	12,907	47.3
2024 Season 2	13,499	30,116	44.8

Hogfish

Hogfish (*Lachnolaimus maximus*) occur in the Western Atlantic from Nova Scotia (Canada) to northern South America, including the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea, although it is most commonly found in the Caribbean. Hogfish are primarily found in warm subtropical and tropical waters. Genetic analysis indicates there are three stocks in U.S. waters, which include the Gulf of Mexico, Florida/Florida Keys, and Carolinas. In U.S. waters, hogfish are most commonly found in the Florida Keys. Hogfish are usually found in loose aggregations around hard-bottom areas, such as coral reefs, rocky ledges and wrecks. They occur at depths of 10 to 98 ft over open bottom or coral reef; however, hogfish have occasionally been captured by the MARMAP program at depths ranging from 75 to 174 ft and have been observed during submersible dives off South Carolina at depths of 171 ft. Hogfish primarily eat mollusks, but also feed on crabs and sea urchins. Maximum reported size is 36 inches in length (male) and 22 lbs. Maximum reported age in the eastern Gulf of Mexico is 23 years and 13 years in the Florida Keys. Hogfish are protogynous. Spawning aggregations have been documented to occur in water deeper than 52 ft off La Parguera, Puerto Rico from December through April. It is reported that Hogfish spawn off Cuba during May through July. Peak spawning of hogfish off Puerto Rico is during December through April. Off the Florida Keys, spawning occurs from September to April with a February and March peak. Off the southern coast of NC, spawning occurs from April through July. Hogfish in the Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S. are managed by the South Atlantic

Fishery Management Council in the Snapper Grouper FMP. They are primarily taken by spear and hook and line gear.

Table 3.2.1.4. South Atlantic hogfish commercial landings (Georgia through North Carolina) and ACLs in lbs whole weight (ww), and percent of the ACL landed, 2021-2024. Fishing year is January 1- December 31.

Year	Landings (lbs ww)	ACL (lbs ww)	% ACL landed
2021	23,595	23,456	100.6
2022	17,510	23,456	74.7
2023	17,375	23,456	74.1
2024	17,031	23,456	72.61

Red Grouper

Red grouper (*Epinephelus morio*) is a protogynous serranid that is associated with reef habitat, especially the adults, in the Western Atlantic from Massachusetts through the Gulf of Mexico and south to Brazil, with a disjunct distribution off the Atlantic coast. They are commonly caught off North Carolina, northern South Carolina and southern Florida but are rare from southern South Carolina to northern Florida. Red grouper are reported to occur at depths of 80 - 400 ft. Red grouper inhabits ledges, crevices, and caverns of rocky limestone reefs, and also lower-profile, live-bottom areas. They are also known to be important ecosystem engineers due to their creation of large depressions in the sea floor which become habitat for various species. Red grouper can live to over 25 years, with older fish reaching a size of 33 inches in length and 25 lbs. Red grouper are protogynous hermaphrodites transitioning from female to male at an age of about 8 years and a length of about 28 inches. Female red grouper mature at an age of about 3 years, when they are about 20 inches in length. Red grouper spawning season is from February through June, with a peak in April. Females can spawn multiple times during the spawning season and can release over 1.5 million pelagic eggs in a season. The larvae remain at the surface for 30 - 40 days before settling to the bottom. In the Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S., red grouper is managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council under the Snapper Grouper FMP and is subject to annual catch limits, size and bag limits, trip limits, gear restrictions, and a spawning season closure. It is targeted by recreational and commercial fishers using a variety of hook and line gear, including snapper reels and spear guns.

Table 3.2.1.5. South Atlantic red grouper commercial landings and ACLs in lbs whole weight (ww), and percent of the ACL landed, 2021-2024. Fishing year is January 1-December 31.

Year	Landings (lbs ww)	ACL (lbs ww)	% ACL landed
2021	24,248	71,280	34.0
2022	18,106	71,280	25.4
2023	19,285	71,280	27.1
2024	37,518	71,280	52.6

Gray Triggerfish

Gray triggerfish (*Balistes capriscus*) is a warm-temperate species in the family Balistidae that is found throughout the Atlantic Ocean, including the Mediterranean Sea. Gray triggerfish occur in coastal waters of the western Atlantic from Nova Scotia (Canada) to Argentina, including the Gulf of Mexico and Bermuda. Throughout this distribution they generally are found at depths to 330 ft, though they are commonly found between 40 and 140 ft among reefs and hard-bottom habitat, such as wrecks and rock outcroppings. The most common items in their diet are small mussels, sea urchins and barnacles, which they dislodge and crush with their teeth. Gray triggerfish is a gonochorist that can reach a maximum age of 15 years and length of 22 inches. Males grow larger and live longer than females. Female gray triggerfish begin maturing at or before 1 year of age and around 6 inches in length. Spawning occurs off-shore from April-September, with gray triggerfish having demersal eggs that are deposited in guarded nests. Typically, a single male guards a territory that houses several nests belonging to several females in a harem-like system. Females can spawn up to 12 times a season. In the Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S., gray triggerfish is managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council under the Snapper Grouper FMP and is subject to annual catch limits, size and bag limits, trip limits, and gear restrictions. They are caught by both commercial and recreational fishers, with hook and line gear being the most common gear.

Table 3.2.1.6. South Atlantic gray triggerfish commercial landings and ACLs in lbs whole weight (ww), and percent of the ACL landed, 2021-2024. Fishing year is January 1-June 30 (Season 1) and July 1-December 31 (Season 2).

Year	Landings (lbs ww)	ACL (lbs ww)	% ACL landed
2021 Season 1	83,664	156,612	53.6
2021 Season 2	121,522	156,612	77.8
2022 Season 1	92,002	156,612	58.9
2022 Season 2	143,970	156,612	92.2
2023 Season 1	84,470	156,612	54.1
2023 Season 2	114,225	156,612	73.1
2024 Season 1	53,435	156,612	34.2
2024 Season 2	74,512	156,612	47.7

Golden Tilefish

Golden tilefish (*Lopholatilus chamaeleonticeps*) is a long-lived, slow-growing deepwater demersal member of the family Malacanthidae distributed along the outer continental shelf of North America from Nova Scotia to the northern shoreline to Campeche Bank, Mexico including the Gulf of Mexico. Golden tilefish is also found throughout continental Caribbean and off South America from Venezuela to Suriname. Tilefish move little as adults and occupy burrows within clay bottoms or scour depressions around boulders or rubble piles in depths of 250 to 1,500 ft and water temperatures of about 50° to 60° F. Tilefish can reach a length of 38 inches

and 40 years of age. Females are smaller than males, although whether the species displays hermaphroditism is still under investigation. Sexual maturity is reached when fish are about 27 inches long, 3 years of age, and weigh about 9 lbs. Females spawn from March through November with a spawning peak occurring between April and June. Males have also been observed in spawning condition from March through November, however, most spawning activity occurred from April through June. Golden tilefish feed during the day on the bottom on crustaceans, clams, snails, worms, anemones and sea cucumbers. In the Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S., golden tilefish is managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council under the Snapper Grouper FMP and is subject to annual catch limits, bag limits, and gear restrictions. They are caught by both commercial and recreational fishers. Hook and line is the most common gear used by recreational fishers, while snapper reels and longlines are the gear used most by commercial fishers. The action in this amendment only applies to the golden tilefish hook and line sector.

Table 3.2.1.7. South Atlantic golden tilefish hook and line commercial landings and ACLs in lbs gutted weight (gw), and percent of the ACL landed, 2021-2024. Fishing year is January 1-December 31.

Year	Landings (lbs gw)	ACL (lbs gw)	% ACL landed
2021	82,279	82,935	99.2
2022	89,339	82,935	107.7
2023	88,898	105,161	84.5
2024	102,003	108,304	94.2

3.2.2. Stock Status

Stock Status

Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) is the cooperative process by which stock assessment projects are conducted in the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Southeast Region. The Caribbean, Gulf, and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (Council) manage SEDAR in coordination with NMFS and the Atlantic and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commissions. SEDAR was initiated to improve planning and coordination of stock assessment activities and to improve the quality and reliability of assessments. SEDAR strives to provide an open and transparent approach for development and review of the scientific information on fish stocks that is critical to management decision-making. Detailed information about the SEDAR process is available at www.sedarweb.org.



Stock status and the most recent stock assessment (if available) are listed for all species being considered for commercial trip limit increases in Table 3.2.2.1. Stock status information for other snapper grouper species is available at [reference most recent national status report] and the SEDAR website.

Table 3.2.2.1. Most recent stock assessments and stock statuses for species being considered for commercial trip limit increases. Statuses are based on the most recent (March 2026) Stock Status Report from the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Species	Most Recent Stock Assessment (Year)	Stock Status (Overfished Status/Overfishing Status)
Greater Amberjack	SEDAR 59 (2020)	Not Overfished/Not Experiencing Overfishing
Vermilion Snapper	SEDAR 55 (2018)	Not Overfished/Not Experiencing Overfishing
Red Porgy	SEDAR 60 (2020)	Overfished/Not Experiencing Overfishing
Hogfish (GA-NC)	SEDAR 37 (2013)	Unknown/Unknown
Red Grouper	SEDAR 53 (2017)	Overfished/Not Experiencing Overfishing
Gray Triggerfish	NA	Unknown/ Not Experiencing Overfishing
Golden Tilefish	SEDAR 89 (2025)	Not Overfished/Not Experiencing Overfishing

Red porgy and red grouper are currently overfished and in rebuilding plans. Red porgy is in year 5 of its plan (established through Snapper Grouper Amendment 50) and is expected to be rebuilt by 2047. Red grouper is in year 8 of its plan (established through Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 30) and is expected to be rebuilt by 2028.

3.2.3. Protected Species

NMFS manages marine protected species in the Southeast region under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). There are 29 ESA-listed species or Distinct Population Segments (DPS) of marine mammals, sea turtles, fish, and corals managed by NMFS that may occur in federal waters of the South Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico.

There are 91 stocks of marine mammals managed within the Southeast region plus the addition of the stocks such as North Atlantic right whales (NARW), and humpback, sei, fin, minke, and blue whales that regularly or sometimes occur in Southeast region managed waters for a portion of the year (Hayes et al. 2017). All marine mammals in U.S. waters are protected under the MMPA. The MMPA requires that each commercial fishery be classified by the number of marine mammals they seriously injure or kill. NMFS's List of Fisheries (LOF)³ classifies U.S. commercial fisheries into three categories based on the number of incidental mortality or serious injury they cause to marine mammals.

Five of the marine mammal species (sperm, sei, fin, blue, and NARW) protected by the MMPA, are also listed as endangered under the ESA. In addition to those five marine mammals, six species or DPSs of sea turtles [green (the North Atlantic DPS and the South Atlantic DPS), hawksbill, Kemp's ridley, leatherback, and the Northwest Atlantic DPS of loggerhead]; nine species or DPSs of fish (the smalltooth sawfish; five DPSs of Atlantic sturgeon; Nassau grouper; oceanic whitetip shark, and giant manta ray); and seven species of coral (elkhorn coral, staghorn coral, rough cactus coral, pillar coral, lobed star coral, mountainous star coral, and boulder coral) are also protected under the ESA and occur within the action area of the snapper grouper fishery. Portions of designated critical habitat for NARW, the Northwest Atlantic DPS of loggerhead sea turtles, and Acropora corals occur within the Council's jurisdiction.

NMFS completed a formal consultation and resulting biological opinion (Bi-Op) on the conservation regulations under the ESA and the authorization of the South Atlantic snapper

grouper fishery in federal waters under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, including the fishery managed by the Snapper Grouper FMP, on threatened and endangered species and designated critical habitat dated December 1, 2016. NMFS concluded that the activities addressed in the consultation are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any threatened or endangered species.

Since completing the December 2016 Bi-Op, NMFS published several final rules that listed additional species and designated critical habitat. NMFS has reinitiated formal consultation to address these listings and concluded the authorization of the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery in federal waters during the re-initiation period will not violate ESA Sections 7(a)(2) or 7(d). For summary information on the protected species that may be adversely affected by the snapper grouper fishery and how they are affected refer to Section 3.2.5 in Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2019a).

3.3. Economic Environment

3.3.1. Commercial Sector

Economic information pertaining to the commercial snapper grouper fishery is provided in Amendment 59 (NMFS 2025), Amendment 51 (SAFMC & NMFS 2023), Amendment 29 (SAFMC 2020), Buck (2018), and Overstreet et al. (2018) and is incorporated herein by reference. Select updates to this information specific to the snapper grouper fishery are provided below. The major sources of data summarized in this section are the NMFS Southeast Regional Office (SERO) Permits Information Management System (PIMS) and the SEFSC's Socioeconomic Panel¹ data set. Inflation adjusted values are reported in 2024 dollars.

Permits

Any fishing vessel that harvests and sells any of the snapper group species from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone (EEZ) must have a valid South Atlantic snapper grouper commercial permit, which is a limited access permit. After such a permit expires, it can be renewed or transferred (with restrictions) up to one year after the date of expiration. A vessel with a Snapper Grouper Unlimited (SG1) permit can harvest up to the full commercial trip limits for all snapper grouper species, excluding wreckfish, per trip. The Snapper Grouper 225-lb Trip-limited (SG2) permit limits the harvest of snapper grouper species to 225 pounds combined per trip and this permit can only be transferred onto a different vessel owned by the same entity. In 2024, the total number of SG1 and SG2 permits was 581 as shown in Table 3.3.1.1. Some fishing businesses only own one permitted vessel, some hold or own multiple permits and vessels. The total number of snapper grouper permits has decreased steadily over time, in large part due to the requirement, in most circumstances, to exchange two such permits for one new permit when requesting a permit transfer (Table 3.3.1.1)². Overall the decline in total valid snapper grouper permits from 2020-2024 has been 18%.

¹ This dataset is compiled by the SEFSC Social Science Research Group from Federal Logbook System data, supplemented by average prices calculated from the Accumulated Landings System. Because these landings are self-reported, they may diverge slightly from dealer-reported landings presented elsewhere.

² Exceptions to this requirement are specified in CFR Section 622.171, paragraphs (b)(1)(i) and (ii).

Table 3.3.1.1. Number of valid South Atlantic snapper grouper permits, 2020-2024.

Vessels, Landings, and Revenue

Not all holders of South Atlantic commercial permits for snapper grouper are active each year. The information in Tables 3.3.1.2 and 3.3.1.3 describe the landings and revenue for vessels which, during the 2020-2024 timeframe, possessed a valid or renewable commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper permit and were actively fishing. The tables show the landings and revenue from all snapper grouper, other jointly landed species, and non-jointly landed species. Additionally, landings of species harvested in the Gulf by these vessels are shown to provide a full accounting of the commercial fishing activity of commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper permitted vessels.

The number of permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels actively fishing declined 14% between 2020 and 2024 (Table 3.3.1.2). Total landings of snapper grouper species also declined during this period, by 21%. Landings of jointly caught species on snapper grouper trips (i.e., trips that harvested any snapper grouper species) declined 40% during this period. In addition, total landings of all species by permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels declined by 28% from 2020-2024. On average from 2020-2024, snapper grouper species accounted for nearly two-thirds (64%) of total landings by permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels.

Table 3.3.1.2. Number of vessels and landings (lbs. gw), by year for permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels.

Year	Number of Vessels	Snapper Grouper Species Landings	Other Jointly Caught Species	Other SATL Landings	Other Gulf Landings	Total Landings
2020	516	3,827,146	418,446	1,590,005	564,001	6,399,598
2021	465	3,581,262	354,903	1,392,889	515,310	5,844,364
2022	453	3,813,288	285,900	1,576,168	363,871	6,039,227
2023	442	3,495,483	298,983	1,083,146	189,550	5,067,163
2024	446	3,042,265	247,093	1,056,240	239,200	4,584,798
Average	464	3,551,889	321,065	1,339,690	374,386	5,587,030

Source: Source: Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) Social Science Research Group (SSRG) Socioeconomic Panel (Jan 2025 version)

Overall, dockside revenue of snapper grouper species landed by permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels was variable 2020-2024 (Table 3.3.1.3). Revenue from snapper grouper landings decreased 16% during this time period, with a peak in 2022. Revenue from jointly caught species on South Atlantic snapper grouper trips and from other South Atlantic species not caught on snapper grouper trips also declined. Total revenue by permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels declined by 20% overall. The maximum total revenue earned by a single vessel from snapper grouper landings during this period was approximately \$502,575 (2024 dollars). On average, from 2020-2024, snapper grouper species accounted for 76% of the total revenue by permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels and the average price per pounds was \$4.71 (2024 dollars).

Table 3.3.1.3. Number of vessels and revenues (2024 dollars) by year for permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels.

Year	Number of Vessels	Snapper Grouper Species Revenue	Jointly Caught Species Revenue	Other SATL Landings Revenue	Other Gulf Landings Revenue	Average Revenue per Vessel
2020	516	\$17,390,484	\$1,022,741	\$3,550,736	\$1,923,827	\$46,295
2021	465	16,412,945	928,328	3,033,371	1,933,849	47,976
2022	453	18,765,334	827,494	3,668,920	1,273,746	54,162
2023	442	16,421,681	847,541	2,584,542	704,654	46,512
2024	446	14,558,069	701,847	2,786,183	972,189	42,642
Average	464	\$16,709,702	\$865,590	\$3,124,750	\$1,361,667	47,517

Source: Source: Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) Social Science Research Group (SSRG) Socioeconomic Panel (Jan 2025 version)

This proposed regulatory action would modify the commercial trip limit for several snapper grouper species. The estimates in Table 3.3.1.4 provide insight into the economic significance of these proposed trip limit increases. As shown in Table 3.3.1.4, vessels harvesting red porgy and golden tilefish are most affected by their respective trip limits, with 43.8% of red porgy trips and **32.0%** of golden tilefish of trips are reaching or exceeding 90% of the current commercial trip limit for these species. Average revenue for the red porgy landings on these trips is relatively low, but the total revenue for those same trips is much higher, suggesting that these fish are a key component of a broader multi-species commercial harvesting effort.

Table 3.3.1.4 also shows that trips for hogfish and gray triggerfish do not typically land at or near the current respective trip limit for these species, however, the total revenue generated on those specific trips is \$11,743 for hogfish and \$8,581 for gray triggerfish. This indicates that when these species are encountered in high volumes, they are part of high-value trips. This could be an indication of current trip limits resulting in inefficient discarding. Vermilion snapper, on average from 2020-2024, had 12.3% of trips likely constrained by the current trip limit. The proposed increase to the vermilion snapper commercial trip limit would likely provide for greater trip efficiency and economic profitability as total revenue for these trips is high. Overall, Table 3.3.1.4 shows that the proposed commercial trip limit increases these specific snapper grouper species will allow fishermen to retain more of these species on existing high-value trips where multiple species are landed.

Table 3.3.1.4. Landings, revenues, and trip limited revenues for specific species with proposed trip limit increases (2024 dollars).

Species	Avg. landings (lb gw) of species per trip	Avg. revenue of species per trip	% of trips at NTL*	Avg. species revenue from NTL trips	Avg. total revenue from NTL trips
Golden Tilefish	598	\$3,067	32.0%	\$8,045	\$9,055
Gray Triggerfish	131	\$421	0.8%	\$3,059	\$8,581
Greater Amberjack	277	\$606	4.3%	\$2,456	\$5,052
Hogfish	51	\$289	2.0%	\$2,960	\$11,743
Red Grouper	37	\$230	2.1%	\$1,782	\$8,660
Red Porgy	43	\$117	43.8%	\$229	\$5,520
Vermilion Snapper	332	\$1,527	12.3%	\$4,812	\$7,997

Source: Source: Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) Social Science Research Group (SSRG) Socioeconomic Panel (Jan 2025 version)

Economic Values

Estimates of economic returns are available for commercial vessels that participated in the snapper grouper fishery as a whole. Liese (2023)³ generated annual vessel-level estimates of costs (as a percentage of revenue) and net revenue from operations for vessels that harvested snappers and groupers in the South Atlantic.

Estimates of producer surplus (PS) can be calculated from the cost information contained in Liese (2023) in conjunction with estimates of annual revenue from the SEFSC-SSRG Socioeconomic Panel. PS is total annual revenue minus the costs for fuel, other supplies, hired crew, and the opportunity cost of an owner's time as captain. Net revenue from operations, which most closely represents economic profits to the owner(s), is total annual revenue minus the costs for fuel, other supplies, hired crew, vessel repair and maintenance, insurance, overhead, and the opportunity cost of an owner's time as captain, as well as the vessel's depreciation. According to Liese (2023), PS for commercial vessels that harvested South Atlantic snapper grouper was approximately 37.7% of their annual gross revenue, on average, from 2014 through 2018. Net revenue from operations was 8.2% of their annual gross revenue, on average, during this period.

Applying these percentages to the results provided in Table 3.3.1.3 would result in an estimated per vessel average annual PS of \$13,588 (2024 dollars) and an average annual net revenue from operations of \$1,114 per year. Liese (2023) also provides annual trip-level estimates of costs (as a percentage of trip revenue) and trip net revenue for vessels that harvested snappers and groupers in the South Atlantic. According to Liese (2023), labor, including both hired and owner's time, consumed 48.4% of trip revenue and fuel and supplies consumed 26%, leaving a trip net revenue margin of 25.6%, on average, from 2014 through 2018.

³ This report is available at: <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/56480>

Dealers

Commercial harvest of snapper grouper species in the EEZ may only be sold to dealers with a valid federal South Atlantic and Gulf dealer permit. The information in Table 3.3.1.5 illustrates the purchasing activities of dealers that bought South Atlantic snapper grouper landings from permitted vessels during 2020 through 2024. Like vessels, dealer participation in particular fisheries is fluid, and not all dealers purchased grouper in each year during this time. On average, from 2020 through 2024, snapper grouper purchases comprised approximately 3% of all purchases made by these dealers (Table 3.3.1.4). The average annual value of total purchases per snapper grouper dealer was fairly stable from 2021 through 2024, with a 5-year low in 2020.

Table 3.3.1.5. Purchase statistics for dealers that bought snapper grouper landings (thousands of 2024 dollars).

Year	Number of Dealers	Snapper Grouper Purchases	Other South Atlantic Purchases	Gulf Purchases	Total
2020	257	\$4,605	\$118,777	\$33,970	\$157,352
2021	266	4,633	139,903	43,170	187,707
2022	263	5,419	131,306	48,333	185,058
2023	265	4,519	122,518	51,416	178,453
2024	283	4,608	125,466	41,763	171,836
Average	267	4,757	\$127,594	43,730	176,081

Source: SEFSC Fishing Communities Web Query Tool, Version 1. Accessed 03/10/2026.

Imports

Imports of foreign seafood products compete in the domestic seafood market and have dominated many segments of the domestic seafood market. Imports aid in determining the price for domestic seafood products and tend to set the price in the market segments in which they dominate. Seafood imports can have downstream effects on the local fish market. At the harvest level, imports can affect ex-vessel prices fishermen receive for landings. As substitutes to domestic production, imports tend to cushion the adverse economic effects on consumers resulting from a reduction in domestic landings. Imports that directly compete with domestic snapper grouper are described in this section.

Snappers

According to NMFS' foreign trade data⁴, South Atlantic snapper species are not exported from the U.S. to other countries. Imports of fresh and frozen snapper products, which directly compete with domestic harvest of snapper species, are described in this section. As shown in Table 3.3.1.6, imports of fresh snapper products were 30.5 million pounds product weight (pw) in 2024. Between 2020 and 2024, they peaked at 36.0 million pounds pw in 2021. Total revenue from snapper imports increased to a five-year high of \$169.0 million in 2021 (2024 dollars). The average price per pound for fresh snapper products was \$4.48 from 2020-2024. Although not shown in Table 3.3.1.6, imports of fresh snapper products primarily originated in Mexico, Nicaragua, or Panama, entering the U.S. through the port of Miami.

⁴ <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/foss/f?p=215:2>

Table 3.3.1.6. Annual pounds, value, and price per pound of fresh snapper imports, 2020-2024 (2024 dollars)

Year	Total Pounds (thousands)	Total value (thousand dollars)	Price per Pound
2020	32,394	\$129,402	\$3.99
2021	35,970	\$169,003	\$4.70
2022	32,180	\$150,938	\$4.69
2023	32,108	\$142,592	\$4.44
2024	30,475	\$139,495	\$4.58
Average	32,626	\$146,286	\$4.48

Source: NOAA Foreign Trade Query Tool, accessed 10/20/24.

As shown in Table 3.3.1.7, total revenue from imports of frozen snapper increased from \$55.2 million (2024 dollars) in 2020 to a five-year high of \$75.7 million in 2022, followed by a 44% decrease in 2023. The average price per pound for frozen snapper products 2020-2024 was \$3.86. Although not shown in Table 3.3.1.7, imports of frozen snapper product imports primarily originated in Brazil and Suriname, entering through the port of Miami.

Table 3.3.1.7. Annual pounds, value, and price per pound of frozen snapper imports, 2020-2024 (2024 dollars)

Year	Total Pounds (thousands)	Total Value (thousand dollars)	Price per Pound
2020	15,874	\$55,209	\$3.48
2021	18,225	\$75,715	\$4.15
2022	16,941	\$70,812	\$4.18
2023	11,701	\$42,501	\$3.64
2024	14,837	\$57,207	\$3.86
Average	15,516	\$60,289	\$3.86

Source: NOAA Foreign Trade Query Tool, accessed 10/20/24.

Grouper

According to NMFS' foreign trade data⁵, grouper are not exported. Imports of fresh and frozen grouper products, which also directly compete with domestic harvest of snapper grouper species, are described in this section. As shown in Table 3.3.1.8, between 2020 and 2024 imports of fresh grouper products peaked in 2023. Total value of fresh grouper imports has been increasing in recent years and averaged \$63.1 million annually. The average price per pound for fresh grouper products was \$5.32 from 2020-2024. Although not shown in Table 3.3.1.8, imports of fresh grouper products primarily originated from Mexico, Panama and Brazil.

Table 3.3.1.8. Annual pounds and value of fresh grouper imports, 2020-2024 (2024 dollars).

⁵ <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/foss/f?p=215:2>

Year	Total Pounds (thousands)	Total Value (thousand dollars)	Price per Pound
2020	10,450	\$46,395	\$4.43
2021	12,247	\$65,450	\$5.34
2022	11,700	\$66,946	\$5.72
2023	12,628	\$68,237	\$5.41
2024	11,995	\$68,346	\$5.70
Average	11,804	\$63,075	\$5.32

Source: NOAA Foreign Trade Query Tool, accessed 10/20/24.

As shown in Table 3.3.1.9, imports of frozen grouper products peaked at 2.2 million pounds pw in 2021 from to a low of 0.8 million pounds pw in 2020. Total revenue from frozen grouper increased from 2020 to 2021, but decreased each year thereafter to \$2.5 million in 2024. The average price per pound for frozen grouper products was \$2.30 from 2020-2024. Although not shown in Table 3.3.1.9, imports of frozen grouper products primarily originated in Brazil, Suriname, and Indonesia.

Table 3.3.1.9. Annual pounds and value of frozen grouper imports, 2020-2024 (2024 dollars).

Year	Total Pounds (thousands)	Total Value (thousand dollars)	Price per Pound
2020	814	\$1,718	\$2.10
2021	2,190	\$5,819	\$2.66
2022	1,340	\$2,943	\$2.20
2023	1,154	\$2,676	\$2.31
2024	1,098	\$2,460	\$2.24
Average	1,319	\$3,123	\$2.30

Source: NOAA Foreign Trade Query Tool, accessed 10/20/24.

Business Activity

The commercial harvest and subsequent sales and consumption of fish generates business activity as fishermen expend funds to harvest the fish and consumers spend money on goods and services, such as grouper purchased at a local fish market and served during restaurant visits. These expenditures spur additional business activity in the region(s) where the harvest and purchases are made, such as jobs in local fish markets, grocers, restaurants, and fishing supply establishments. In the absence of the availability of a given species for purchase, consumers would spend their money on substitute goods, such as other finfish or seafood products, and services, such as visits to different food service establishments. As a result, the analysis presented below represents a distributional analysis that only shows how economic impacts may be distributed through regional markets. It should not be interpreted to represent the impacts if these species are not available for harvest or purchase.

Economic impact models can be used to determine the sources of the impacts. Each impact can be broken down into direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts. “Direct” economic impacts are the results of the money initially spent in the study area (e.g., country, region, state, or community) by the fishery or industry being studied. This includes money spent to pay for labor, supplies, raw materials, and operating expenses. The direct economic impacts from the initial spending create additional activity in the local economy, i.e., “indirect” economic impacts.

Indirect economic impacts are the results of business-to-business transactions indirectly caused by the direct impacts. For example, businesses initially benefiting from the direct impacts will subsequently increase spending at other local businesses. The indirect economic impact is a measure of this increase in business-to-business activity, excluding the initial round of spending which is included in the estimate of direct impacts. “Induced” economic impacts are the results of increased personal income caused by the direct and indirect economic impacts. For example, businesses experiencing increased revenue from the direct and indirect impacts will subsequently increase spending on labor by hiring more employees, increasing work hours, raising salaries/wage rates, etc. In turn, households will increase spending at local businesses. The induced impact is a measure of this increase in household-to-business activity.

Estimates of the U.S. average annual business activity associated with the commercial harvest of all South Atlantic snapper grouper species were derived using the model developed for and applied in NMFS (2024)⁶ and are provided in Table 3.1.1.10. Specifically, these impact estimates reflect the expected impacts from average annual gross revenues generated by landings of all South Atlantic snapper grouper species from 2020 through 2024. This business activity is characterized as jobs (full- and part-time equivalents), income impacts (wages, salaries, and self-employed income), value-added impacts (the difference between the value of goods and the cost of materials or supplies), and output impacts (gross business sales). Income impacts should not be added to output (sales) impacts because this would result in double counting. The results provided should be interpreted with caution. These results are based on average relationships developed through the analysis of many fishing operations that harvest many different species. Separate models specific to individual species are not available. Between 2020 and 2024, landings of all South Atlantic snapper grouper species resulted in approximately \$16.7 million dollars (2024 dollars) in gross revenue on average. In turn, this revenue generated 1,760 jobs, \$60.9 million in income, \$86.0 million value-added, and output impacts of \$165.7 million per year, on average.

Table 3.3.1.10. Average annual economic impacts from the commercial harvest of snappers and groupers in the South Atlantic. All monetary estimates are in thousands of 2024 dollars, and employment is measured in full-time equivalent jobs.

⁶ A detailed description of the input/output model is provided in NMFS (2011).

Industry Sector	Direct	Indirect	Induced	Total
Harvesters				
Employment impacts	307	48	63	418
Income impacts	\$9,022	\$1,675	\$4,050	\$14,747
Total value added impacts	\$9,617	\$6,030	\$6,930	\$22,577
Output impacts	\$16,710	\$13,595	\$13,454	\$43,758
Primary dealers/processors				
Employment impacts	64	26	44	134
Income impacts	\$2,944	\$2,713	\$2,566	\$8,222
Total value added impacts	\$3,138	\$3,461	\$4,831	\$11,430
Output impacts	\$9,474	\$7,136	\$9,443	\$26,053
Secondary wholesalers/distributors				
Employment impacts	30	7	29	65
Income impacts	\$1,754	\$522	\$1,844	\$4,120
Total value added impacts	\$1,869	\$875	\$3,150	\$5,895
Output impacts	\$4,697	\$1,713	\$6,127	\$12,536
Grocers				
Employment impacts	127	14	28	170
Income impacts	\$3,607	\$1,199	\$1,811	\$6,617
Total value added impacts	\$3,845	\$1,931	\$3,065	\$8,842
Output impacts	\$6,165	\$3,137	\$6,018	\$15,320
Restaurants				
Employment impacts	792	53	129	974
Income impacts	\$14,471	\$4,389	\$8,289	\$27,148
Total value added impacts	\$15,425	\$7,845	\$13,966	\$37,235
Output impacts	\$28,205	\$12,276	\$27,558	\$68,039
Harvesters and Seafood industry				
Employment impacts	1,320	147	294	1,760
Income impacts	\$31,797	\$10,497	\$18,560	\$60,853
Total value added impacts	\$33,894	\$20,143	\$31,942	\$85,979
Output impacts	\$65,251	\$37,857	\$62,599	\$165,707

3.4. Social Environment

This section describes select aspects of the social context associated with commercial fishing of species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery in the South Atlantic. The section provides descriptive

context for social effects analysis provided in Chapter 4, with an emphasis on identifying communities that are expected to be primarily affected by the actions in this amendment.

Community level data are presented whenever possible to meet the requirements of National Standard 8 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act , which requires consideration of the importance of fishery resources to human communities when changes to fishing regulations are considered.

The analyses included in this section include a brief discussion of the current distribution of Snapper Grouper species commercial landings. The section also provides an overview of the current permit distribution (at a state and community level) of the Snapper Grouper Commercial Unlimited Permits (SG1). The section then considers the local importance of the specific species for which changes to trip limits are proposed. This section concludes by discussing the commercial fishing engagement, commercial fishing reliance, and social vulnerability scores for the communities that are expected to be affected by these actions.

The most recent data available has been utilized in the following section; however, the year range or date presented may not match what is included elsewhere because some sources of data are not available at the community or state level.

3.4.1. Commercial Landings

Florida dominates the commercial landings of the species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery, with nearly 59% of the total landings (averaged over 2020-2024) (ACL Database). North Carolina and South Carolina follow, with roughly 23 and 18% of the total landings across the fishery (averaged over 2020-2024). Over this period, commercial fishers in Georgia landed less than 1% of the total.

3.4.2. Permits

There are 493 active Snapper Grouper Unlimited Commercial (SG1) permits, issued to entities, including individuals and businesses, with mailing addresses in Florida (66%), North Carolina (23%), and South Carolina (8%). Less than 2% of permit holders list mailing addresses in Georgia (SERO permit office, April 28, 2026). Other entities holding SG1 permits are located in Virginia, Texas, New Jersey, and New York.

Entities with mailing addresses in 141 communities hold commercial SG1 permits. Communities with the highest number of SG1 permits are located in Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina (Table 3.4.2.1). These permits are concentrated in Key West (9.7%), Jacksonville (7.1%), and Winter Springs (4.9%), all in Florida.

Table 3.4.2.1. Top communities by number of SG1 Permits.

State	Community	Snapper Grouper 1
FL	Key West	48
FL	Jacksonville	35

State	Community	Snapper Grouper 1
FL	Winter Springs	24
FL	Rockledge	16
FL	Miami	15
FL	Summerland Key	15
FL	Tavernier	12
FL	Lake Mary	11
NC	Southport	11
NC	Sneads Ferry	10
FL	Fort Lauderdale	9
FL	Marathon	9
SC	Murrells Inlet	9
FL	Big Pine Key	8
FL	Hialeah	8

Source: SERO permit office, April 28, 2026.

3.4.3. Regional Quotient

The actions propose to improve efficiency by reducing trip limits for specific species. To identify relevant communities where the impact of this amendment might be felt, this section presents the results of Regional Quotient (RQ) calculations for these identified species. The RQ is the proportion of the relevant species landed by that community out of the total amount of that species landed within the Southeast region. The RQ utilizes the dealer's facility address to identify the community of landing. These RQs are presented to highlight communities where the species affected by the actions are of relatively greater importance. The communities are rank-ordered based on landings averaged over the time-series

To save space, the calculations are not shown. The communities listed below in Table 3.4.3.1 are the top ranked communities for each RQ calculation.

Table 3.4.3.1. Top-Ranked Communities for Share of Regional Landings of Snapper Grouper Species .

Species with Proposed Trip Limit Changes	Top 5 Communities, by RQ
Golden Tilefish	Fort Lauderdale, FL Port Orange, FL McClellanville, SC Daytona Beach, FL Titusville, FL
Gray Triggerfish	Atlantic Beach, FL Murrells Inlet, SC McClellanville, SC Supply, NC Jacksonville, FL

Greater Amberjack	Key Largo, FL Morehead City, NC Atlantic Beach, FL Wilmington, NC McClellanville, SC
Hogfish	Wrightsville Beach, NC; Murrells Inlet, SC; Rocky Point, NC; Supply, NC; Sanford, FL
Red Grouper	Key West, FL; Miami, FL; Key Largo, FL; Madeira Beach, FL; Hollywood, FL
Red Porgy	McClellanville, SC; Murrells Inlet, SC; Atlantic Beach, FL; Little River, SC; Charleston, SC
Vermillion Snapper	Atlantic Beach, FL; McClellanville, SC; Murrells Inlet, SC; Little River, SC; Jacksonville, FL

(Source: FCI Database)

3.4.4. Commercial Engagement and Reliance:

Figures 3.4.4.1 and 3.4.4.2 depict measures of engagement and reliance among South Atlantic communities holding the greater number of SG1 permits or communities with the highest RQ, as discussed in the preceding section. NOAA created indices using secondary data from permit and landings information for the commercial sector (Jepson and Colburn 2013, Jacob et al. 2013). Fishing engagement is primarily based on the absolute numbers of permits, landings, and value. The analysis used the number of vessels designated commercial by homeport and owner address, value of landings, and total number of commercial permits for each community. Fishing reliance includes the same variables as fishing engagement divided by population to give an indication of the per capita influence of this activity. In addition to the RQ, the engagement and reliance measures are useful for indicating where the prospective effects of any implemented management actions will possibly be experienced.

The figures below show factor scores for both engagement and reliance for commercial fishing at a community level. Two thresholds of one and one-half standard deviation (SD) above the mean are plotted onto the graphs to help determine a threshold for significance. The factor scores are standardized; therefore, a score above one is also above one SD. A score above one-half SD is considered engaged or reliant, with anything above one SD to be very engaged or reliant.

As seen in the figures below, most of the communities identified in this section exceed either the one-half or one SD threshold for fishing engagement. Several communities would be considered highly engaged in commercial fishing activity. This includes the Florida communities of Key West, Marathon, Miami, Atlantic Beach, Big Pine Key, Fort Lauderdale, Key Largo and Jacksonville. Outside of Florida, Morehead City, Wilmington, Sneads Ferry, and Southport in NC, and Charleston, McClellanville, and Murrells Inlet, SC, are all highly engaged in commercial fishing activity. Most of the other communities mentioned in this analysis demonstrate a moderate level of fishing engagement. Only Hialeah and Rockledge, Florida, and Rocky Point, NC, fall below the one-half SD, suggesting that they are relatively less engaged in commercial fishing activity (compared to other communities in this analysis).

In terms of commercial fishing reliance, there are fewer communities that meet or exceed the one SD threshold to be considered having a high reliance on commercial fishing. This includes Sneads Ferry, NC, and McClellanville, SC. Key West, Madeira Beach, Marathon, and Tavernier (all in Florida) classify as moderately reliant on commercial fishing activity, as they all meet or exceed one-half SD from the mean.

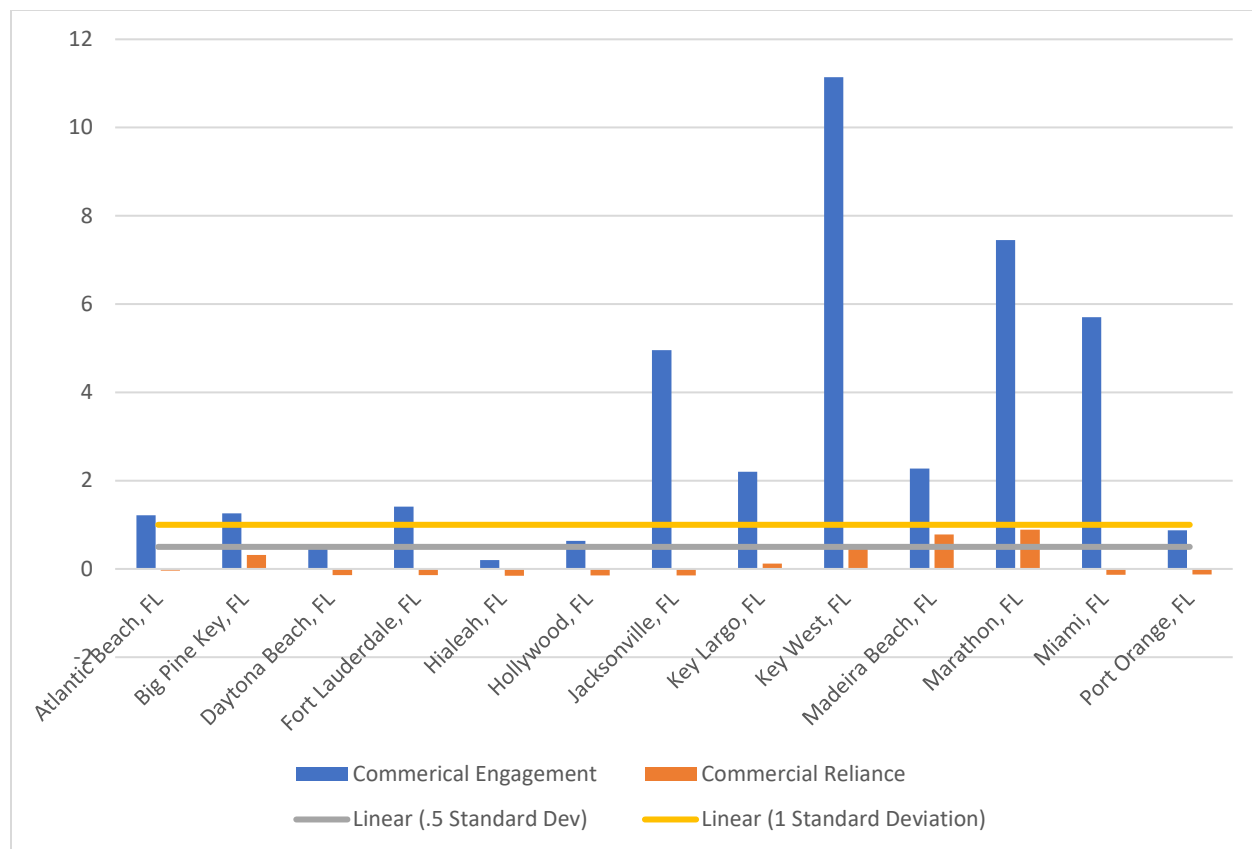


Figure 3.4.4.1. Commercial fishing engagement and reliance for top South Atlantic communities.

Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database 2022.

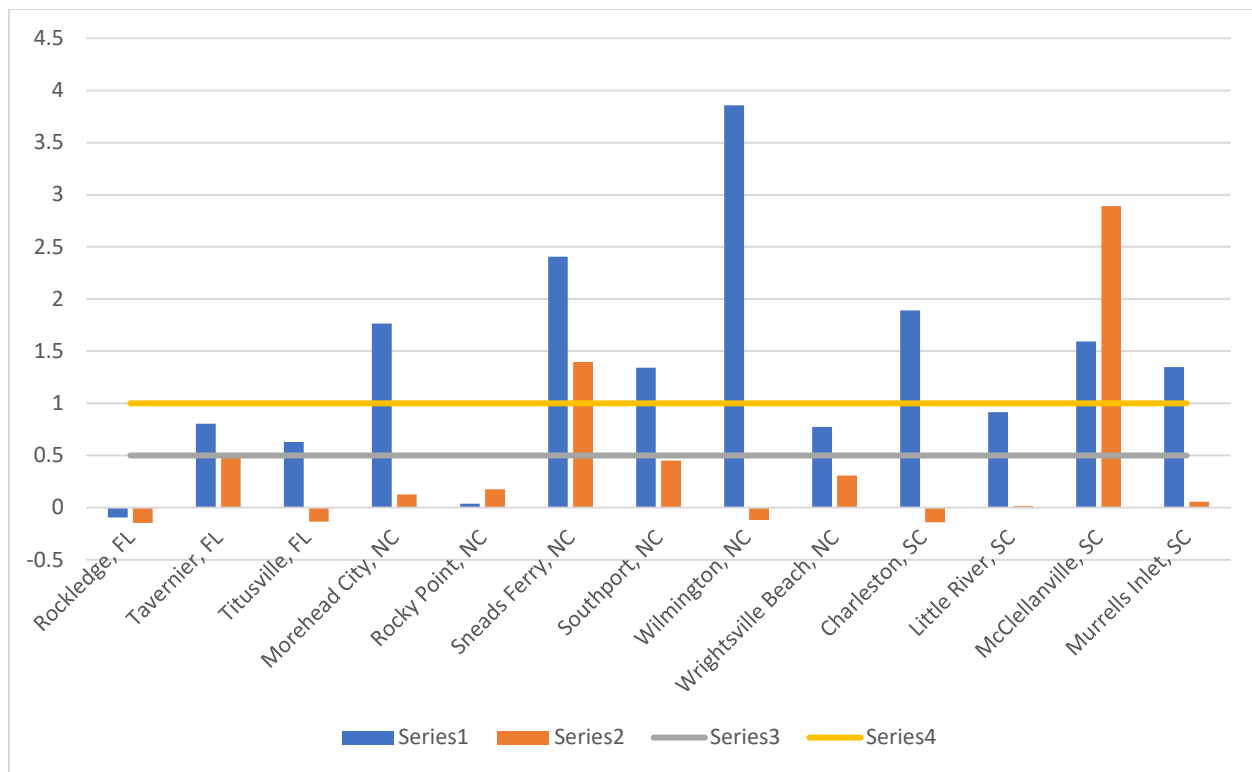


Figure 3.4.4.2. Commercial fishing engagement and reliance for top Gulf communities.

Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database 2022.

3.4.5. Social Vulnerability

NOAA NMFS created a suite of indices using census data to examine the social vulnerability of coastal communities. The three indices are poverty, population composition, and personal disruption. The variables included in each of these indices have been identified through the literature as being important components that contribute to a community's vulnerability. Poverty includes poverty rates for different groups; population composition includes more single female-headed households, households with children under the age of five, minority populations, and those that speak English less than well; and personal disruption includes disruptions such as higher separation rates, higher crime rates, and unemployment. Increased rates in the indicators are signs of populations experiencing vulnerabilities. As above, these scores are standardized. For those communities that exceed the thresholds of one-half or one SD, it would be expected that they would exhibit vulnerabilities to sudden changes or social disruption that might accrue from regulatory change.

Figures 3.4.5.1 and 3.4.5.2 provide social vulnerability rankings for place-based communities identified in Section 3.4 as important to commercial snapper grouper fishing or marine fishing in general. Several communities exceed the threshold of one standard deviation above the mean for at least one of the indices (Hialeah, FL; Hollywood, FL; Miami, FL; Rocky Point, NC). These communities may be the most likely to exhibit vulnerabilities to social or economic disruption resulting from regulatory changes. Negative scores, like the scores in several of the communities

in North and South Carolina, suggest lower vulnerability index scores, relative to other communities in the region and relatively less vulnerability to economic or social disruptions.

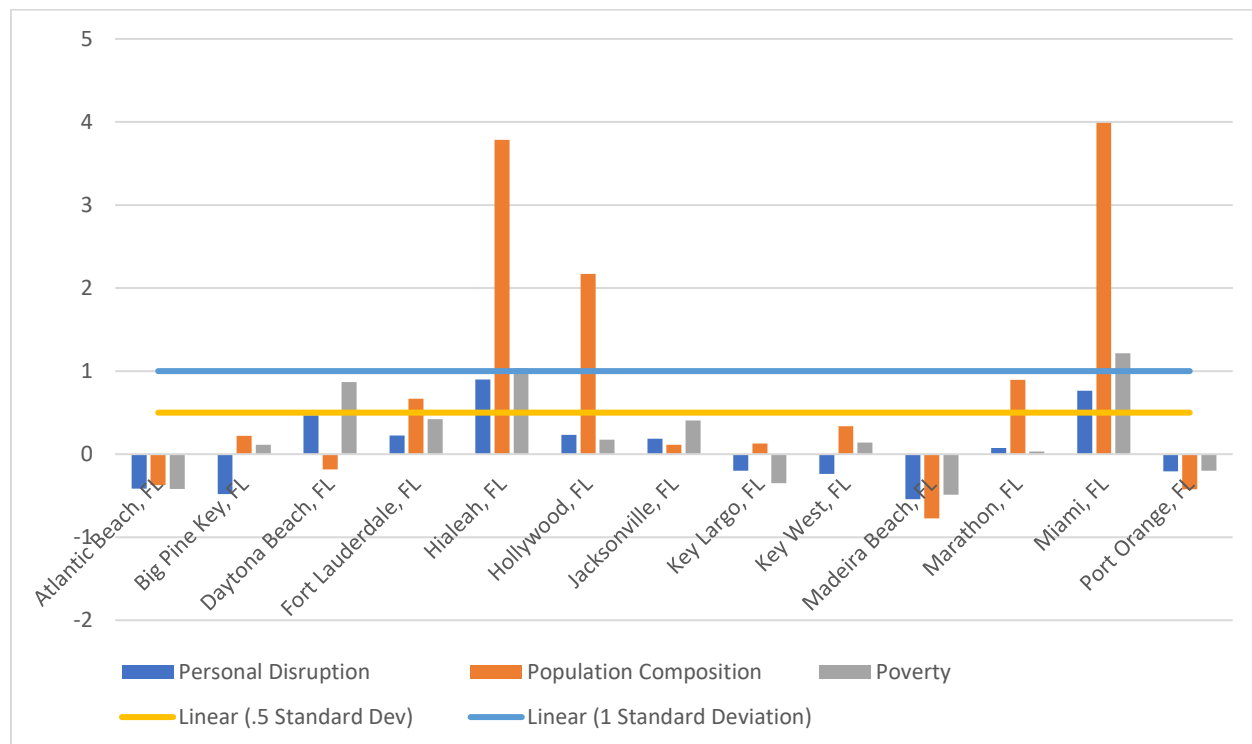


Figure 3.4.5.1. Social vulnerability indices for top commercial Snapper Grouper communities in the South Atlantic

Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database 2022.

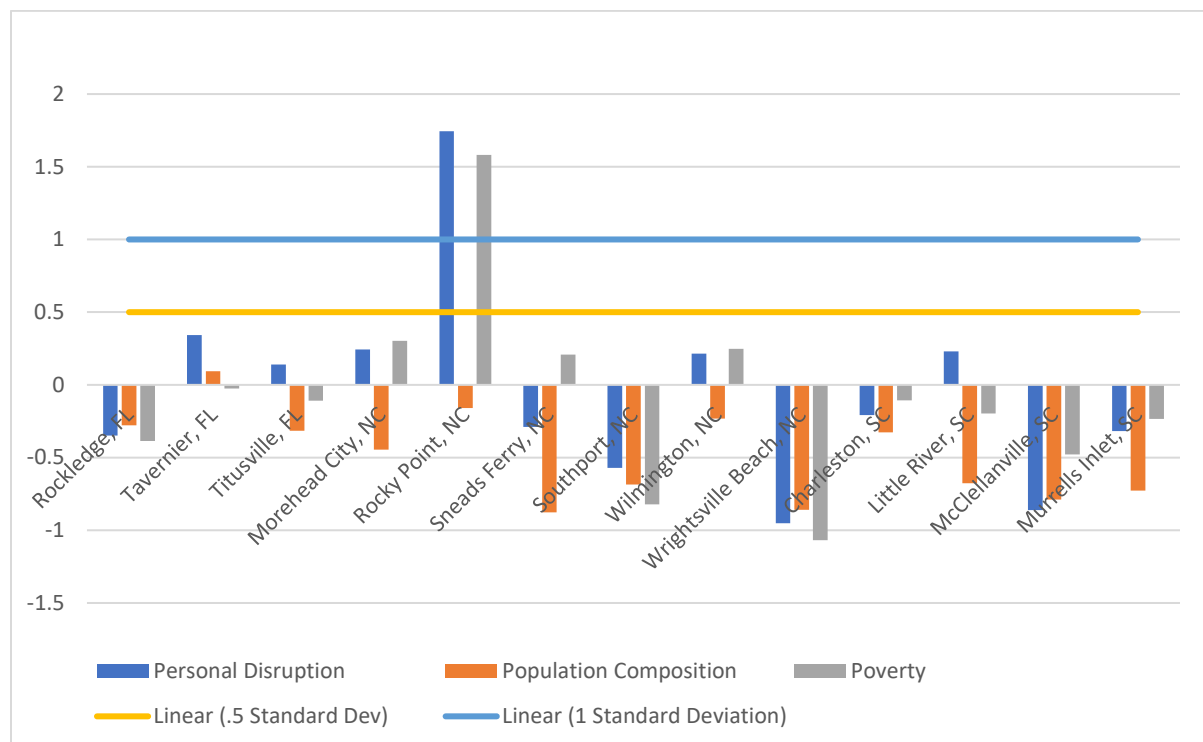


Figure 3.4.5.2. Social vulnerability indices for top commercial Snapper Grouper communities in the South Atlantic.

Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database 2022.

The description of fishing activities presented here highlights which communities may be most involved in commercial fishing in the snapper grouper fishery and the subset of species identified in these proposed actions. It is expected that the impacts from the regulatory actions in this amendment, whether positive or negative, will most likely affect those communities identified above.

3.5. Administrative Environment

3.5.1. Federal Fishery Management

Federal fishery management is conducted under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. §§ 1801 et seq.), originally enacted in 1976 as the Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Magnuson-Stevens Act claims sovereign rights and exclusive fishery management authority over most fishery resources within the EEZ, an area extending 200 nm from the seaward boundary of each of the coastal states, and authority over U.S. anadromous species and continental shelf resources that occur beyond the U.S. EEZ.

To assist the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) in fishery management, the Magnuson-Stevens Act established eight regional fishery management councils that represent the expertise and interests of constituent states. Each council has a scientific and statistical committee (SSC) that provides ongoing scientific advice to that council for fishery management decisions, as well as advisory panels (AP) to assist the council in carrying out its functions under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Councils, SSCs and APs conduct their business in public meetings, pursuant to procedures prescribed by the Magnuson-Stevens Act and written procedures established by each council. NMFS, with the advice of the regional councils, manages fisheries needing conservation and management within each council's jurisdiction. The Secretary is responsible for collecting and providing the data necessary for the councils to prepare fishery management plans, and the Secretary is responsible for promulgating regulations to implement approved fishery management plans and amendments after ensuring that management measures are consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and with other applicable laws (Appendix A). In most cases, the Secretary has delegated this authority to NMFS.

The Council is responsible for conservation and management of fishery resources in federal waters of the U.S. South Atlantic. These waters extend from 3 to 200 miles offshore from the seaward boundary of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida to Key West. The Council has thirteen voting members: one from NMFS; one each from the state fishery agencies of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida; and eight public members appointed by the Secretary. On the Council, there are two public members from each of the four South Atlantic States. Non-voting members include representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), State Department, and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. For the Council's Snapper-Grouper Committee, the Council has adopted procedures whereby the non-voting members serving on the Council Committees have full voting rights at the Committee level but not at the full Council level. Council members serve

three-year terms and are recommended by state governors and appointed by the Secretary from lists of nominees submitted by state governors. Appointed members may serve a maximum of three consecutive terms.

Public interests also are involved in the fishery management process through participation on Advisory Panels and through council meetings, which, with few exceptions for discussing personnel and legal matters, are open to the public. The Council uses its SSC to review the data and science being used in assessments and fishery management plans/amendments. In addition, the regulatory process is in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, usually in the form of “notice and comment” rulemaking.

3.5.2. State Fishery Management

The state governments of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida have the authority to manage fisheries that occur in waters extending three nautical miles from their respective shorelines. North Carolina’s marine fisheries are managed by the Marine Fisheries Division of the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality. The Marine Resources Division of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources manages South Carolina’s marine fisheries. Georgia’s marine fisheries are managed by the Coastal Resources Division of the Department of Natural Resources. The Division of Marine Fisheries Management of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is responsible for managing Florida’s marine fisheries. Each state fishery management agency has a designated seat on the Council. The purpose of state representation at the Council level is to ensure state participation in federal fishery management decision-making and to promote the development of compatible regulations in state and federal waters.

The South Atlantic states are also involved through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) in management of marine fisheries. This commission was created to coordinate state regulations and develop management plans for interstate fisheries. It has significant authority, through the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act and the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act, to compel adoption of complementary state regulations to conserve coastal species. The ASFMC is also represented at the Council but does not have voting authority at the Council level.

NMFS’s State-Federal Fisheries Division is responsible for building cooperative partnerships to strengthen marine fisheries management and conservation at the state, inter-regional, and national levels. This division implements and oversees the distribution of grants for two national (Inter-jurisdictional Fisheries Act and Anadromous Fish Conservation Act) and two regional (Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act and Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act) programs. Additionally, it works with the ASMFC to develop and implement cooperative State-Federal fisheries regulations.

3.5.3. Enforcement

Both the NMFS Office for Law Enforcement (NOAA/OLE) and the USCG have the authority and the responsibility to enforce Council regulations. NOAA/OLE agents, who specialize in living marine resource violations, provide fisheries expertise and investigative support for the

overall fisheries mission. The USCG is a multi-mission agency, which provides at sea patrol services for the fisheries mission.

Neither NOAA/OLE nor the USCG can provide a continuous law enforcement presence in all areas due to the limited resources of NOAA/OLE and the priority tasking of the USCG. To supplement at sea and dockside inspections of fishing vessels, NOAA entered into Cooperative Enforcement Agreements with all but one of the states in the Southeast Region (North Carolina), which granted authority to state officers to enforce the laws for which NOAA/OLE has jurisdiction. In recent years, the level of involvement by the states has increased through Joint Enforcement Agreements, whereby states conduct patrols that focus on federal priorities and, in some circumstances, prosecute resultant violators through the state when a state violation has occurred.

The NOAA Office of General Counsel Penalty Policy and Penalty Schedule is available online at <http://www.gc.noaa.gov/enforce-office3.html>.

Chapter 4. Environmental Effects and Comparison of Alternatives

4.1. Action 1. Remove the Two-for-One Requirement for the Snapper Grouper Commercial Unlimited Permit

4.1.1. Biological Effects

Retention (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**) or removal (**Alternative 2**) of the two-for-one requirement for transferring snapper grouper commercial unlimited (SG 1)

permits would be expected to have neutral direct biological effects, as changes in permit accessibility do not directly result in changes to fishing-related mortality (harvest and dead discards).

Potential indirect biological effects are dependent on the resultant behavior of the fishery, in terms of number of participants, effort, and harvest. These metrics could also be impacted by other actions in this amendment, notably the increase of commercial trip limits for several species (Actions 3-9). Overall, if removal of the two-for-one requirement results in increased harvest, this could result in increased probability of negative effects on snapper grouper stocks, due to increased fishing-related mortality. However, potential negative effects are constrained by other regulations, such as annual catch limits (ACL) and accountability measures (AM), such that the increased mortality would not be expected to result in overfishing.

Under **Alternative 2**, the removal of the 2-for-1 requirement reduces the barrier to entry for those that do not currently hold an SG 1 permit, including those that currently hold 225-lb trip limited (SG 2) permits. This could lead to a slight increase in the number of active (those that produce landings) SG 1 permits if more active participants are able to acquire SG 1 permits. An increased number of active SG 1 permits would be expected to result in greater catches of snapper grouper species that have not recently been limited by their ACLs. Species that have recently been limited by their ACLs would be expected to continue to be limited by their ACLs, with potentially shorter seasons due to more active participants and greater amounts of commercial catch per day. However, the magnitude of potential change is limited due to the limited number of permits and the small number of transfers that have historically occurred (even factoring in some amount of increase in the number of transfers). High prices for permits are likely to continue and limit the number of new SG 1 permit holders per year.

4.1.2. Economic Effects

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, the “two for one” provision for commercial SG 1 permits would remain in place indefinitely. There would continue to be a reduction in the number of available commercial SG 1 permits as new entrants come into the fishery and two individually

Alternatives

1. (No Action). Retain the two for one requirement for commercial SG 1 permits.
2. Remove the two for one requirement for commercial SG 1 permits.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

owned permits are exchanged for a single new permit. Under this alternative, the acquisition cost of obtaining a SG 1 permit would likely remain elevated compared to **Alternative 2** and would create distributional economic effects amongst existing permit holders and new entrants. The higher permit acquisition cost under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would represent a relative cost to new entrants but also a relative benefit for some permit holders.

Removing the “two for one” provision for commercial SG 1 permits under **Alternative 2** would help reduce the rate of attrition for permits by removing the mandated consolidation mechanism when new entrants come into the fishery. This alternative may also increase permit accessibility and lower the cost of SG 1 permits. Lowering the permit costs would create distributional economic effects amongst existing permit holders and new entrants. The lower permit acquisition cost under **Alternative 2** would represent a relative benefit to new entrants but also a relative cost for some permit holders.

The increase in permit availability under **Alternative 2** would likely also lead to increased effort in comparison to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. This increased effort could lead to potentially meeting annual catch limits faster and shortening of fishing seasons. While there would be a benefit for new entrants in the fishery from a new revenue stream, this may come at a decrease in available catch per vessel and thus decreased available revenue for existing fishery participants.

4.1.3. Social Effects

When compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** the proposed alternative (**Alternative 2**) would be less restrictive for fishermen looking to enter the commercial snapper grouper fishery. Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, effort in the snapper grouper fishery will continue to be reduced over time as new entrants to the fishery must purchase two permits and exchange them for one. **Alternative 2** would allow easier access to the commercial snapper grouper fishery, only requiring purchase of one permit for access, but would not result in expansion of the fishery as the limited access program would remain in place.

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** new snapper grouper fishermen would require significant capital to acquire permits from other fishermen who must be willing to sell their permit(s), a significant barrier to entry. This can limit opportunities for younger or less-established fishermen and concentrate access among those with greater financial resources, reducing the flexibility of fishing communities to adapt over time. In some cases, it may also contribute to the consolidation of permits into fewer hands, potentially weakening the economic diversity and resilience of the fishing communities. Additionally, if snapper grouper permit numbers decline too far, the fishery may struggle to achieve optimum yield, leaving available resources underutilized and diminishing the social benefits associated with harvest. Alternatively, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** provides meaningful social benefits *if* the snapper grouper fishery remains overcapitalized by actively reducing fishing capacity. Fewer permits can help ensure that total harvest levels remain within annual catch limits, which is especially critical for snapper grouper species that are considered overfished or undergoing overfishing.

Alternative 2 would lower barriers to entry and make it more feasible for younger or new fishermen to participate in the snapper grouper fishery, addressing the concern of the “greying of the fleet”. Easier entry into the commercial snapper grouper fishery would likely improve

generational turnover, support the continuity of fishing communities, and broaden access to opportunities tied to the fishery. It may also reduce the concentration of permits among a smaller group of operators, helping to maintain a more diverse and locally rooted fleet. Alternatively, this could place additional pressure on already constrained stocks and make it more challenging to maintain harvest levels within sustainable limits.

The social effects between **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Alternative 2** can vary greatly between individual communities and regions depending on the relative importance of improving access to the snapper grouper fishery versus ensuring that participation does not undermine the long-term stability of the resource.

4.1.4. Administrative Effects

The administrative effects of removing the 2-for-1 requirement are expected to be beneficial for both the managing agency and the participants. Under **Alternative 2**, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Permits Office would no longer be required to verify and "retire" two existing permits to issue a single new transferable permit. This could eventually simplify the tracking and processing of transfers within the permits database. While there may be a minor initial increase in transfer applications as 225-lb trip-limited permit holders seek to upgrade, the long-term administrative oversight of the snapper grouper fishery is not expected to change significantly.

4.2. Action 2. Revise bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species that may be harvested while gear is on board and stowed

4.2.1. Biological Effects

Revision of bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species possession regulations for vessels with longline gear on board is not expected to directly result in overall changes to catch or effort directed at snapper grouper species. Therefore, direct biological effects are expected to be neutral.

Potential indirect biological effects are dependent on the resultant behavior of the fishery, in terms of the number of fishermen that choose to change their behavior in response to additional flexibility afforded by this action, effective effort, and harvest. Overall, if fishermen being allowed to retain additional snapper grouper species while having bottom longline gear on board (**Alternatives 2-4**) results in additional fishing-related mortality, then there could be increased probability of negative effects to some snapper grouper stocks (notably, wreckfish or mid-depth and shallower water species that are not allowed to be possessed with bottom longline gear on board under the current species restriction). However, potential negative effects are constrained by other regulations, such as ACLs and AMs, such that the increased mortality would not be expected to result in overfishing.

Effects of this action are expected to be limited, as not all commercial vessels in the snapper grouper fishery use bottom longline gear. Fisheries that the Council and Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) have noted may take advantage of the potential added flexibility include the short bottom longline shark fishery (managed under NMFS Highly Migratory Species) and the golden tilefish longline component. The true number of potentially affected vessels is unclear. Therefore, specific impacts on discard mortality or localized depletion cannot be precisely determined. Regardless of the gear used or the combination of species harvested, total landings are restricted by ACLs and AMs to ensure the stock remains at sustainable levels.

Alternatives

- 1 (No Action). A commercial vessel with bottom longline gear on board may possess only snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish.
2. Allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than those currently allowed may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed.
3. Allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than those currently allowed may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip must submit a notification at sea, prior to switching to switching gears.
4. Allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than those currently allowed may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip must carry an active vessel monitoring system on board.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

4.2.2. Economic Effects

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, commercial vessels with bottom longline gear onboard would continue to be limited in the number of snapper grouper species that may be harvested. This constraint restricts potential harvest for these vessels, thereby leading to foregone economic benefits due to lower trip revenue.

Alternative 2 would allow the possession of additional snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline onboard, thereby allowing such vessels to increase landings and associated trip revenue. This would result in increased economic benefits for these vessels. There would be an opportunity cost stemming from the time and effort taken to satisfy the new stowage requirements, but presumably this cost would be outweighed by additional revenue received from increased landings of snapper grouper species on trips where bottom longline gear is onboard, thus leading to an overall increase in net economic benefits.

The economic effects of **Alternative 3** would be similar to **Alternative 2**. **Alternative 3** would allow for similar increased net economic benefits for vessels with bottom longline gear onboard but would have a higher opportunity cost due to requiring a notification prior to departure. In terms of an increase in net economic benefits, **Alternative 2** would be the most beneficial for vessels with bottom longline gear onboard, followed by **Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

4.2.3. Social Effects

In general, management measures that increase the number of fish a commercial vessel can land during a given trip are expected to be beneficial to fishermen and fishing communities by increasing access to the resource, so long as overharvest is not occurring to negatively affect the stock in the long term. Allowing possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board and harvest if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed is anticipated to result in direct positive social effects to fishermen and communities that operate in the fishery utilizing bottom longline gear (**Alternatives 2 through 5**).

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** fishermen with bottom longline gear on board their vessels may not possess or harvest snapper grouper species (other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish) despite encountering these species during their trip. Allowing harvest when bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed would increase their access to the snapper grouper fishery (**Alternative 2, Alternative 3, and Alternative 4**) and is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to these commercial fishing businesses in the form of increased revenue and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased fish available to the market or for personal consumption. The social benefits are likely to be highest in communities with high participation in the snapper grouper fishery utilizing bottom longline gear.

Requiring vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip to submit notification at sea prior to shifting gears (**Alternative 3**) or must have an active VMS onboard (**Alternative 4**) may result in positive or negative social effects when compared to **Alternative 2**

depending on how individual fishing business must change their practices to account for the additional requirement. Providing notice of switching gear to or from bottom longline would take additional time when on a fishing trip when the captain and/or crew may traditionally have been completing other tasks. VMS would result in one time and occurring costs associated with purchase and maintenance of the technology as well as a time burden to learn how to properly install and utilize the technology.

4.2.4. Administrative Effects

The administrative effects of revising bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species possession regulations vary depending on the chosen alternative, ranging from neutral to an increased operational burden for the managing agency. **Alternative 2** (which would require gear stowage) is expected to have a minor impact, as it relies on routine at-sea visual inspections by the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) to verify that longline hooks are unbaited and off the deck. However, **Alternative 3** would introduce a substantial recurring administrative burden, requiring the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to establish and maintain a 24/7 toll-free call service center script and web-based database to process mandatory at-sea gear-switching notifications and relay them to enforcement personnel. **Alternative 4** would represent the highest administrative burden to the agency through the development of a vessel monitoring system program, which would include review and approval of vessel monitoring systems (VMS). Additionally, the OLE would need to monitor the additional streams of data.

4.3. Action 3. Increase commercial trip limits for greater amberjack

4.3.1. Biological Effects

Currently, greater amberjack as trip limits of 1,200 lbs gw or ww, for both Season 1 (March-August) and Season 2 (September-February) (**Alternative 1, No Action**). The most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic greater amberjack (SEDAR 59, 2020) indicated the stock is not overfished and is not undergoing overfishing. Recent commercial landings have consistently not met the annual catch limit (ACL).

The commercial greater amberjack fishery has been managed with a split season and two separate commercial quotas since the implementation of Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 27 in 2020. This management structure was designed to ensure harvest opportunities are available during both the spring/summer and fall/winter periods, preventing a single early-year closure.

Commercial logbook data from 2020 to 2024 were used to conduct a commercial trip limit analysis (**Appendix F**). Overall landings for greater amberjack have remained relatively flat and significantly below the commercial ACL in both seasons. Season 1 landings saw a notable drop in 2019 and have remained stagnant, rarely approaching the current ACL of 538,933 lb gw. Season 1 includes a month-long harvest closure in April to protect the stock during peak spawning. During Season 2, landings were flat oscillating between 100,000 and 200,000 lb gw over the last ten years.

Because current harvest is far below the ACL in both seasons, increasing trip limits could allow the fishery to move closer to its ACL without undermining the original goal of the split season. However, the analysis shows that trip limits would need to be significantly increased in Season 1 and Season 2 to achieve the ACL.

About 6% of trips in Season 1 and less than 2% in Season 2 reached the current 1,200 lb limit. This suggests that for the vast majority of the fleet, the trip limit is not the factor preventing the ACL from being met.

The biological impacts of increasing the trip limit to 1,500 lbs, (**Sub-Alternatives 2a and 3a**) 1,750 lbs, (**Sub-Alternatives 2b and 3b**), or 2,000 lbs (**Sub-Alternatives 2c and 3c**), for either season are expected to potentially increase harvest but not to approach an unsustainable level. The stock is constrained by the ACL and even adjusting trip limits is not expected to cause the ACL to be exceeded.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 1 and Season 2 is 1,200 lbs gw.
2. Increase the greater amberjack Season 1 trip limit to:
 - 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.
 - 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.
 - 2c. 2,000 lbs gw.
3. Increase the greater amberjack Season 2 trip limit to:
 - 3a. 1,500 lbs gw.
 - 3b. 1,750 lbs gw.
 - 3c. 2,000 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

4.3.2. Economic Effects

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset to some extent by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for greater amberjack that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining greater amberjack because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least direct negative economic effects.

Increasing trip limits in **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would allow for increased revenue on trips that land greater amberjack, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue. Additionally, higher trip limits would lead to better utilization of the commercial sector ACL which would lead to increased total revenue and net economic benefits in the commercial fishery.

Higher trip limits could also likely result in the commercial AMs being triggered sooner, thus creating an earlier commercial harvest closure for the species. Conversely, lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial greater amberjack harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where greater amberjack are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL.

In terms of potential net economic benefits **Sub-Alternative 2c** and **Sub-Alternative 3c** would be highest, followed by **Sub-Alternative 2b** and **Sub-Alternative 3b**, **Sub-Alternative 2a** and **Sub-Alternative 3a**, and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above.

4.3.3. Social Effects

Alternative 2 and **Alternative 3** propose higher commercial trip limits during Season 1 and Season 2, respectively, for greater amberjack and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the

proposed increase in commercial trip limit are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of greater amberjack.

If the higher commercial trip limit for greater amberjack increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. However, landings for greater amberjack have been below the commercial ACL in recent years and none of the trip limits proposed in **Sub-Alternative 2a**, **Sub-Alternative 2b**, or **Sub-Alternative 2c**, are anticipated to result in a closure. Similarly, for season two, trip limits proposed under **Sub-Alternative 3a**, **Sub-Alternative 3b**, or **Sub-Alternative 3c**, are not anticipated to result in a closure.

4.3.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to Alternative 1 (No Action), none of the alternatives under consideration to modify commercial trip limits would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Greater amberjack is currently managed under a commercial trip limit of 1,200 pounds during Season 1 and Season 2. Revising the commercial trip limits will require administrative effort with rulemaking. However, **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** and the associated sub-alternatives, are not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are effective under **Alternative 1**. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

4.4. Action 4. Increase commercial trip limits for vermilion snapper

4.4.1. Biological Effects

The most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic vermilion snapper (SEDAR 55, 2018) indicated the stock is not overfished and is not undergoing overfishing. Commercial landings have historically been high, often approaching or meeting the ACL. The fishery is managed with a split season: Season 1 (January–June) and Season 2 (July–December).

Commercial logbook data from 2020 to 2024 were used to conduct a commercial trip limit analysis (Appendix F). Current landings in Season 1 range between 40,000–60,000 lb ww monthly, while Season 2 typically sees higher harvest rates of 50,000–75,000 lb ww. Approximately 11% of trips in Season 1 approached the trip limit of 1,000 lbs gw and 13.5% of trips in Season 2.

The biological impacts of increasing the trip limit under any of the sub-alternatives for either season are expected to potentially increase harvest but not to approach an unsustainable level. The stock is constrained by the ACL and increasing trip limits is not expected to cause the ACL to be exceeded.

Projections suggest that under high-landing scenarios, a 2,000 lb gw limit could trigger a closure towards the end of fishing season 1 (June 26) and 2 (December 12).

4.4.2. Economic Effects

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset to some extent by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for vermilion snapper that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining vermilion snapper because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least amount of direct negative economic effects.

Increasing trip limits in **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would allow for increased revenue on trips that land vermilion snapper, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue. Additionally, higher trip limits would lead to better

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 1 and Season 2 is 1,000 lbs gw. No process for temporarily adjusting the commercial trip limit is in place.
2. Increase the Season 1 trip limit to:
 - 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.
 - 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.
 - 2c. 2,000 lbs gw
3. Increase the Season 2 trip limit to:
 - 3a. 1,250 lbs gw.
 - 3b. 1,500 lbs gw.
 - 3c. 1,750 lbs gw.
 - 3d. 2,000 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

utilization of the commercial sector ACL which would lead to increased total revenue and net economic benefits in the commercial fishery.

Higher trip limits could also likely result in the commercial AMs being triggered sooner, thus creating an earlier commercial harvest closure for the species. Conversely, lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial vermilion snapper harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where vermilion snapper are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL.

In terms of potential net economic benefits **Sub-Alternative 2c** and **Sub-Alternative 3c** would be highest, followed by **Sub-Alternative 2b** and **Sub-Alternative 3b**, **Sub-Alternative 2a** and **Sub-Alternative 3a**, and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above.

4.4.3. Social Effects

Alternative 2 and **Alternative 3** propose higher commercial trip limits during season one and season two, respectively, for vermilion snapper and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the proposed increase in commercial trip limits are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of vermilion snapper.

If the higher commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. Landings for vermilion snapper have been below the commercial ACL in recent years and none of the trip limits proposed in **Sub-Alternative 2a** or **Sub-Alternative 2b** are anticipated to result in a closure. Similarly, for season two, trip limits proposed under **Sub-Alternative 3a** or **Sub-Alternative 3b** are not anticipated to result in a closure. **Sub-Alternative 2c** and **Sub-Alternative 3c** may result in slightly early closures (June 26 and December 12, respectively) but only under a high-landings scenario. Social effects from the potential closures are expected to be minimal.

4.4.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to Alternative 1 (No Action), none of the actions alternatives under consideration to modify commercial trip limits would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Vermilion snapper is currently managed under a commercial trip limit of 1,000 pounds during season 1 and season 2. Revising the commercial trip limits will require administrative effort with rulemaking. However, **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** and the associated sub-alternatives, are not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are effective under **Alternative 1**. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Alternatives 2** and **Alternative 3** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

4.5. Action 5. Increase commercial trip limits for red porgy

4.5.1. Biological Effects

The South Atlantic red porgy stock is currently overfished and undergoing overfishing (SEDAR 60, 2020), and is currently under a rebuilding plan. In 2020, a split season was implemented for commercial red porgy with Season 1 (January–April) and Season 2 (May–December).

Commercial logbook data from 2020 to 2024 were used to conduct a commercial trip limit analysis (Appendix F). Despite the stock's status, recent landings have been exceptionally low, consistently failing to meet the small rebuilding ACLs (12,907 lb gw for Season 1; 32,886 lb gw for Season 2).

Approximately 45% of trips in Season 1 and 38% in Season 2 landed more than 10 fish, but the current 15-fish limit is not the primary constraint.

The biological impacts of increasing the trip limit to 30 fish under **Sub-Alternative 2a** or **Sub-alternative 3a** or 45 fish (**Sub-Alternative Alt 2b** or **Sub-Alternative 3b**) are expected to be minimal. Because landings are projected to remain well below the rebuilding ACL even at higher trip limits, the biological risk to the recovery of the stock is low. The proposed increases are intended to reduce discards by allowing fishermen to retain more of the fish they are already encountering.

4.5.2. Economic Effects

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset to some extent by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for red porgy that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining red porgy because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least direct negative economic effects.

Increasing trip limits in **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would allow for increased revenue on trips that land red porgy, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue. Additionally, higher trip limits would lead to better utilization of the

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for red porgy during Season 1 and Season 2 is 15 fish.
2. Increase the Season 1 trip limit to:
Sub-Alt 2a. 30 fish.
Sub-Alt 2b. 45 fish.
3. Increase the Season 2 trip limit to:
Sub-Alt 3a. 30 fish.
Sub-Alt 3b. 45 fish.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

commercial sector ACL which would lead to increased total revenue and net economic benefits in the commercial fishery.

Higher trip limits could also likely result in the commercial AMs being triggered sooner, thus creating an earlier commercial harvest closure for the species. Conversely, lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial red porgy harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where red porgy are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL.

In terms of potential net economic benefits **Sub-Alternative 2b** and **Sub-Alternative 3b** would be highest, followed by **Sub-Alternative 2a** and **Sub-Alternative 3a**, and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above.

4.5.3. Social Effects

Alternative 2 and **Alternative 3** propose higher commercial trip limits during Season 1 and Season 2, respectively, for red porgy and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the proposed increase in commercial trip limit are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of red porgy.

If the higher commercial trip limit for red porgy increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. However, landings for red porgy have been well below the commercial ACL in recent years the trip limits proposed in **Sub-Alternative 2a** or **Sub-Alternative 2b** would cause landings to reach the ACL and trigger a closure. Similarly, for season two, trip limits proposed under **Sub-Alternative 3a** or **Sub-Alternative 3b** are not anticipated to result in a closure.

4.5.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, none of the actions alternatives under consideration to modify commercial trip limits would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Red porgy is currently managed under a commercial trip limit of 15 fish during

season 1 and season 2. Revising the commercial trip limits will require administrative effort with rulemaking. However, **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** and the associated sub-alternatives, are not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are effective under **Alternative 1**. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Alternatives 2** and **Alternative 3** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

4.6. Action 6. Increase commercial trip limit for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina)

4.6.1. Biological Effects

The status of the hogfish stock off North Carolina through Georgia is officially unknown, per the most recent assessment (SEDAR 37, 2014). However, the fishery is managed under a commercial ACL of 23,456 lb ww.

Commercial logbook data from 2020 to 2024 were used to conduct a commercial trip limit analysis (**Appendix F**). The fishery is year-round, but effort is highly seasonal, with the highest landings occurring during the warmer months (May–August). Landings decline in the later months of the year (September–December). Only about 6% of trips are currently reaching or approaching the 500 lb ww limit.

Increasing the trip limit to 750 lbs ww (**Alternative 2**) or 1,000 lbs ww (**Alternative 3**) is expected to increase harvest efficiency. Biological impacts are expected to be neutral because harvest is constrained by the ACL and the considered increases to trip limits are not expected to cause the ACL to be exceeded.

4.6.2. Economic Effects

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset to some extent by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for hogfish that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining hogfish because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least amount of direct negative economic effects.

Increasing trip limits via **Alternative 2** or **Alternative 3** would allow for increased revenue on trips that land hogfish, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue. Additionally, higher trip limits would lead to better utilization of the commercial sector ACL which would lead to increased total revenue and net economic benefits in the commercial fishery.

Higher trip limits could also likely result in the commercial AMs being triggered sooner, thus creating an earlier commercial harvest closure for the species. Conversely, lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial hogfish harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where hogfish are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for GA-NC hogfish is 500 lbs ww.
2. Increase the trip limit to 750 lbs ww.
3. Increase the trip limit to 1,000 lbs ww.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

In terms of potential net economic benefits **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 2** would result in higher economic benefits compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above.

4.6.3. Social Effects

Alternative 2 and **Alternative 3** propose higher commercial trip limits for hogfish off North Carolina through Georgia and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limits proposed are anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the proposed increase in commercial trip limit are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of hogfish.

If the higher commercial trip limit for hogfish increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. However, landings for hogfish have been well below the commercial ACL in recent years and the trip limits proposed in **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** are not anticipated to result in a closure except under an extremely high landing scenario (**Alternative 3**, October 20).

4.6.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, none of the actions alternatives under consideration to modify commercial trip limits would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Hogfish is currently managed under a commercial trip limit of 500 pounds. Revising the commercial trip limits will require administrative effort with rulemaking. However, **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** are not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are effective under **Alternative 1**. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Alternatives 2** and **Alternative 3** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

4.7. Action 7. Increase commercial trip limit for red grouper

4.7.1. Biological Effects

South Atlantic Red Grouper is currently overfished and undergoing overfishing (SEDAR 53, 2017) and is in the final years of a rebuilding plan. The fishery is closed from January through April in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off Florida and Georgia and from January through May in the EEZ off South Carolina and North Carolina each year to protect shallow-water groupers during their spawning season.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for red grouper is 200 lbs gw.
2. Increase the red grouper trip limit to 300 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

Commercial logbook data from 2020 to 2024 were used to conduct a commercial trip limit analysis (Appendix F). Since 2016, landings have remained well below the ACL of 71,280 lb ww, oscillating between 25,000 and 50,000 lbs. The highest landings occur in May, immediately after the 4-month closure. After May, the landings decline throughout the year with a spike in landings in December.

Based on recent landings, only 2% of trips currently approach the 200 lb gw limit.

Consequently, the biological impacts of increasing the limit to 300 lb gw (**Alternative 2**) are expected to be negligible. This modest increase is unlikely to alter fishing behavior or increase effort to a degree that would jeopardize rebuilding. The biological impacts to the stock would be expected to remain neutral as the catch is constrained by the overarching ACL and the seasonal spawning season closure.

4.7.2. Economic Effects

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset to some extent by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for red grouper that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining red grouper because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least amount of direct negative economic effects.

Increasing trip limits in **Alternative 2** would allow for increased revenue on trips that land red grouper, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue. Additionally, higher trip limits would lead to better utilization of the commercial sector ACL which would lead to increased total revenue and net economic benefits in the commercial fishery.

Higher trip limits could also likely result in the commercial AMs being triggered sooner, thus creating an earlier commercial harvest closure for the species. Conversely, lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial red grouper harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where red grouper are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL.

In terms of potential net economic benefits **Alternative 2** would provide higher economic benefits than **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above.

4.7.3. Social Effects

Alternative 2 proposes higher commercial trip for red grouper off North Carolina through Georgia and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the proposed increase in commercial trip limit are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of red grouper.

If the higher commercial trip limit for red grouper increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. However, landings for red grouper have been well below the commercial ACL in recent years and the trip limit proposed in **Alternative 2** is not anticipated to result in a closure.

4.7.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, none of the actions alternatives under consideration to modify commercial trip limits would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Red grouper is currently managed under a commercial trip limit of 200 pounds. Revising the commercial trip limits will require administrative effort with rulemaking. However, **Alternative 2** is not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are effective under **Alternative 1**. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Alternative 2** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

4.8. Action 8. Increase commercial trip limits for gray triggerfish

4.8.1. Biological Effects

The stock status of South Atlantic gray triggerfish is currently unknown. Commercial logbook data from 2020 to 2024 were used to conduct a commercial trip limit analysis (Appendix F).

Based on recent landings, less than 1 % of trips currently approach the 1000 lbs ww limit.

Consequently, shifting the daily trip limit from 1,000 lbs gw (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**) to either 1,200 lbs gw (**Alternative 2**) or 1,400 lbs gw (**Alternative 3**) is projected to result in a minimal change in total landings across the South Atlantic states. The biological impacts to the stock would be expected to remain neutral as the catch is constrained by the overarching ACL.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for gray triggerfish is 1,000 lbs ww.
2. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,200 lbs ww.
3. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,400 lbs ww.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

4.8.2. Economic Effects

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset to some extent by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for gray triggerfish that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining gray triggerfish because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least amount of direct negative economic effects.

Potentially increasing trip limits in **Alternative 2** or **Alternative 3** would allow for increased revenue on trips that land gray triggerfish, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue. Additionally, higher trip limits would lead to better utilization of the commercial sector ACL which would lead to increased total revenue and net economic benefits in the commercial fishery.

Higher trip limits could also likely result in the commercial AMs being triggered sooner, thus creating an earlier commercial harvest closure for the species. Conversely, lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial gray triggerfish harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where gray triggerfish are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL.

In terms of potential net economic benefits, **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would provide higher economic benefits than **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above.

4.8.3. Social Effects

Alternative 2 and **Alternative 3** propose higher commercial trip for gray triggerfish and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the proposed increase in commercial trip limit are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of gray triggerfish. If the higher commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities.

4.8.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, none of the actions alternatives under consideration to modify commercial trip limits would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Gray triggerfish is currently managed under a commercial trip limit of 1,000 pounds. Revising the commercial trip limits will require administrative effort with rulemaking. However, **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** are not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are effective under **Alternative 1**. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Alternatives 2** and **Alternative 3** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

4.9. Action 9. Increase commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line only)

4.9.1. Biological Effects

The biological effects of increasing the commercial trip limit for the golden tilefish hook-and-line component are expected to be neutral. However, increasing the commercial trip limits may result in early closures. Approximately 15% of historical hook-and-line trips from 2020 to 2024 caught more than 450 lbs gw, indicating the existing 500 lbs gw limit (Alternative 1) actively restricts a notable portion of the fleet. Increasing the commercial trip limit to 600 lbs gw (Alternative 2) or 750 lbs gw (Alternative 3) is expected to result in reaching the ACL earlier in the season.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line only) is 500 lbs gw.
2. Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 600 lbs gw.
3. Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 750 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

Using average landing histories, closures are predicted on October 16 for **Alternative 1**, to September 21 under **Alternative 2**, and as early as August 27 under **Alternative 3**. When using average landings +1 standard error, these closure dates begin in late June. Despite the shortened seasons, the biological impacts to the stock would be expected to remain neutral as the catch is constrained by the overarching ACL.

4.9.2. Economic Effects

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset to some extent by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for golden tilefish that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining golden tilefish because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least amount of direct negative economic effects.

Potentially increasing trip limits in **Alternative 2** or **Alternative 3** would allow for increased revenue on trips that land golden tilefish, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue. Additionally, higher trip limits would lead to better utilization of the commercial sector ACL which would lead to increased total revenue and net economic benefits in the commercial fishery.

Higher trip limits could also likely result in the commercial AMs being triggered sooner, thus creating an earlier commercial harvest closure for the species. Conversely, lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial golden tilefish harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where golden tilefish

are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL.

In terms of potential net economic benefits, **Alternative 2** or **Alternative 3** would provide higher economic benefits than **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above.

4.9.3. Social Effects

Alternative 2 and **Alternative 3** propose higher commercial trip for golden tilefish harvested using hook and line gear and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the proposed increase in commercial trip limit are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of golden tilefish. If the higher commercial trip limit for golden tilefish increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities.

4.9.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, none of the actions alternatives under consideration to modify commercial trip limits would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Golden tilefish (hook and line) is currently managed under a commercial trip limit of 500 pounds. Revising the commercial trip limits will require administrative effort with rulemaking. However, **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** are not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are effective under **Alternative 1**. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Alternatives 2** and **Alternative 3** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

Chapter 5. Council’s Choice for the Preferred Alternative

5.1. Action 1. Remove the 2-for-1 Requirement for the Snapper Grouper Commercial Unlimited Permit

5.1.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.1.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.1.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.1.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process. Will include dates for scoping and public comment hearings and provide links to comment pages.

5.1.5. Council Rationale

Will be completed later in the development process. Will reference National Standards and FMP Goals and Objectives addressed by the action.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). Retain the two for one requirement for commercial SG 1 permits.
2. Remove the two for one requirement for commercial SG 1 permits.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.2. Action 2. Revise bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species that may be harvested while gear is on board and stowed

5.2.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.2.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.2.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.2.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process. Will include dates for scoping and public comment hearings and provide links to comment pages.

5.2.5. Council Rationale

Will be completed later in the development process. Will reference National Standards and FMP Goals and Objectives addressed by the action.

Alternatives

1 (No Action). A commercial vessel with bottom longline gear on board may possess only snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish.

2. Allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than those currently allowed may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed.

3. Allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than those currently allowed may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip must submit a notification at sea, prior to switching to switching gears.

4. Allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than those currently allowed may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip must carry an active vessel monitoring system on board.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.3. Action 3. Increase commercial trip limits for greater amberjack

5.3.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.3.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.3.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.3.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process. Will include dates for scoping and public comment hearings and provide links to comment pages.

5.3.5. Council Rationale

Will be completed later in the development process. Will reference National Standards and FMP Goals and Objectives addressed by the action.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 1 and Season 2 is 1,200 lbs gw.
2. Increase the greater amberjack Season 1 trip limit to:
 - 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.
 - 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.
 - 2c. 2,000 lbs gw.
3. Increase the greater amberjack Season 2 trip limit to:
 - 3a. 1,500 lbs gw.
 - 3b. 1,750 lbs gw.
 - 3c. 2,000 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.4. Action 4. Increase commercial trip limits for vermilion snapper

5.4.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.4.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.4.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.4.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process. Will include dates for scoping and public comment hearings and provide links to comment pages.

5.4.5. Council Rationale

Will be completed later in the development process. Will reference National Standards and FMP Goals and Objectives addressed by the action.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 1 and Season 2 is 1,000 lbs gw. No process for temporarily adjusting the commercial trip limit is in place.
2. Increase the Season 1 trip limit to:
 - 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.
 - 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.
 - 2c. 2,000 lbs gw
3. Increase the Season 2 trip limit to:
 - 3a. 1,250 lbs gw.
 - 3b. 1,500 lbs gw.
 - 3c. 1,750 lbs gw.
 - 3d. 2,000 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.5. Action 5. Increase commercial trip limits for red porgy

5.5.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.5.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.5.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.5.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process. Will include dates for scoping and public comment hearings and provide links to comment pages.

5.5.5. Council Rationale

Will be completed later in the development process. Will reference National Standards and FMP Goals and Objectives addressed by the action.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for red porgy during Season 1 and Season 2 is 15 fish.
2. Increase the Season 1 trip limit to:
Sub-Alt 2a. 30 fish.
Sub-Alt 2b. 45 fish.
3. Increase the Season 2 trip limit to:
Sub-Alt 3a. 30 fish.
Sub-Alt 3b. 45 fish.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.6. Action 6. Increase commercial trip limit for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina)

5.6.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.6.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.6.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.6.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process. Will include dates for scoping and public comment hearings and provide links to comment pages.

5.6.5. Council Rationale

Will be completed later in the development process. Will reference National Standards and FMP Goals and Objectives addressed by the action.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for GA-NC hogfish is 500 lbs ww.
2. Increase the trip limit to 750 lbs ww.
3. Increase the trip limit to 1,000 lbs ww.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.7. Action 7. Increase commercial trip limit for red grouper

5.7.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.7.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for red grouper is 200 lbs gw.
2. Increase the red grouper trip limit to 300 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.7.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.7.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process. Will include dates for scoping and public comment hearings and provide links to comment pages.

5.7.5. Council Rationale

Will be completed later in the development process. Will reference National Standards and FMP Goals and Objectives addressed by the action.

5.8. Action 8. Increase commercial trip limits for gray triggerfish

5.8.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.8.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for gray triggerfish is 1,000 lbs ww.
2. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,200 lbs ww.
3. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,400 lbs ww.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.8.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.8.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process. Will include dates for scoping and public comment hearings and provide links to comment pages.

5.8.5. Council Rationale

Will be completed later in the development process. Will reference National Standards and FMP Goals and Objectives addressed by the action.

5.9. Action 9. Increase commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line only)

5.9.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.9.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.9.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.9.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process. Will include dates for scoping and public comment hearings and provide links to comment pages.

5.9.5. Council Rationale

Will be completed later in the development process. Will reference National Standards and FMP Goals and Objectives addressed by the action.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line only) is 500 lbs gw.
2. Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 600 lbs gw.
3. Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 750 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

Chapter 6. Cumulative Effects

This chapter will be completed later in the amendment development process.

Chapter 7. List of Preparers

Name	Agency/Division	Title
Mike Schmidtke	SAFMC	Fishery Scientist/IPT Lead
Myra Brouwer	SAFMC	Deputy Director for Management
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Kathleen Howington	SAFMC	Habitat and Ecosystem Scientist
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Jessica Stephen	SERO/SF	LAPP/DM Branch Chief
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IPT = Interdisciplinary Planning Team, SAFMC = South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, SERO = Southeast Regional Office, SF = Sustainable Fisheries Division, PR = Protected Resources Division, HC = Habitat Conservation Division, NOAA=National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, GC = General Counsel, OLE = Office of Law Enforcement, SEFSC = Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

Chapter 8. Agencies and Persons Consulted

Responsible Agencies

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List of Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Consulted

SAFMC Law Enforcement Advisory Panel
SAFMC Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel
SAFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee
North Carolina Coastal Zone Management Program
South Carolina Coastal Zone Management Program
Georgia Coastal Zone Management Program
Florida Coastal Zone Management Program
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Georgia Department of Natural Resources
South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries
North Carolina Sea Grant
South Carolina Sea Grant
Georgia Sea Grant
Florida Sea Grant
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
National Marine Fisheries Service
-Washington Office
-Office of Ecology and Conservation
-Southeast Regional Office
-Southeast Fisheries Science Center

Chapter 9. References

This chapter will be completed later in the amendment development process.

Liese, C. 2023. Economics of the U.S. South Atlantic Snapper-Grouper Fishery -2018. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-SEFSC-774. 118 p. <https://doi.org/10.25923/b4k8-1890>

NMFS. 2024a. Fisheries Economics of the United States, 2022. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, NOAA. Tech. Memo. NMFS-F/SPO-248A, 28 p

Appendix A. Other Applicable Law

A.1. Administrative Procedure Act (APA)

All federal rulemaking is governed under the provisions of the APA (5 U.S.C. Subchapter II), which establishes a “notice and comment” procedure to enable public participation in the rulemaking process. The APA also establishes a 30-day wait period from the time a final rule is published until it takes effect, with some exceptions. This amendment, issued under section 304(c)(1)(A) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), complies with the APA.

A.2. Information Quality Act (IQA)

The IQA (Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law 106-443)) which took effect October 1, 2002, directed the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to issue government-wide guidelines that “provide policy and procedural guidelines to federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information disseminated by federal agencies.” OMB directed each federal agency to issue its own guidelines, establish administrative mechanisms allowing affected persons to seek and obtain correction of information that does not comply with OMB guidelines, and report periodically to OMB on the number and nature of complaints. The NOAA Section 515 Information Quality Guidelines require a series of actions for each new information product subject to the IQA. This environmental assessment uses the best scientific information available and the document is in compliance with the IQA.

A.3. Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA)

Section 307(c)(1) of the federal CZMA of 1972 requires that all federal activities that directly affect the coastal zone be consistent with approved state coastal zone management programs to the maximum extent practicable. NMFS has determined that the actions in this amendment are consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the Coastal Zone Management Plans of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. Pursuant to Section 307 of the CZMA, this determination was been submitted to the responsible state agencies who administer the approved Coastal Zone Management Programs in the States of Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, and North Carolina. NMFS has responded to any state objections as required under the CZMA and its implementing regulations.

A.4. Executive Order 12612: Federalism

Executive Order (E.O.) 12612 requires agencies to be guided by the fundamental federalism principles when formulating and implementing policies that have federalism implications. The purpose of the Order is to guarantee the division of governmental responsibilities between the federal government and the states, as intended by the framers of the Constitution. No federalism issues have been identified relative to the proposed action and associated regulations. Therefore, preparation of a Federalism assessment under E.O. 12612 is not necessary.

A.5. Executive Order 12962: Recreational Fisheries

E.O. 12962 requires federal agencies, in cooperation with states and tribes, to improve the quantity, function, sustainable productivity, and distribution of U.S. aquatic resources for increased recreational fishing opportunities through a variety of methods. Additionally, the Order establishes a seven-member National Recreational Fisheries Coordination Council responsible for, among other things, ensuring that social and economic values of healthy aquatic systems that support recreational fisheries are considered by federal agencies in the course of their actions, sharing the latest resource information and management technologies, and reducing duplicative and cost-inefficient programs among federal agencies involved in conserving or managing recreational fisheries. The National Recreational Fisheries Coordination Council also is responsible for developing, in cooperation with federal agencies, states and tribes, a Recreational Fishery Resource Conservation Plan to include a five-year agenda. Finally, the Order requires NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a joint agency policy for administering the ESA.

The alternatives considered in this document are consistent with the directives of E.O. 12962.

A.6. Executive Order 13089: Coral Reef Protection

E.O. 13089, signed by President William Clinton on June 11, 1998, recognizes the ecological, social, and economic values provided by the Nation's coral reefs and ensures that federal agencies are protecting these ecosystems. More specifically, the Order requires federal agencies to identify actions that may harm U.S. coral reef ecosystems, to utilize their program and authorities to protect and enhance the conditions of such ecosystems, and to ensure that their actions do not degrade the condition of the coral reef ecosystem.

The alternatives considered in this document are consistent with the directives of E.O. 13089.

A.7. Executive Order 13158: Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

E.O. 13158 was signed on May 26, 2000, to strengthen the protection of U.S. ocean and coastal resources through the use of MPAs. The E.O. defined MPAs as "any area of the marine environment that has been reserved by federal, state, territorial, tribal, or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein." It directs federal agencies to work closely with state, local and non-governmental partners to create a comprehensive network of MPAs "representing diverse U.S. marine ecosystems, and the Nation's natural and cultural resources."

The alternatives considered in this document are consistent with the directives of E.O. 13158.

A.8. National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA)

Under the NMSA (also known as Title III of the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act of 1972), as amended, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce is authorized to designate National Marine Sanctuaries to protect distinctive natural and cultural resources whose protection and

beneficial use requires comprehensive planning and management. The National Marine Sanctuary Program is administered by the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries within NOAA. The NMSA provides authority for comprehensive and coordinated conservation and management of these marine areas. The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries serves as the trustee for a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 629,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington state to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. The network includes a system of 15 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments. These sites include significant coral reef and kelp forest habitats, and breeding and feeding grounds of whales, sea lions, sharks, and sea turtles. The three sanctuaries in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone are the USS Monitor, Gray's Reef, and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuaries.

The alternatives considered in this document are not expected to have any adverse impacts on the resources managed by the National Marine Sanctuaries Program.

A.9. Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA)

The purpose of the PRA is to minimize the burden on the public. The PRA is intended to ensure that the information collected under the proposed action is needed and is collected in an efficient manner (44 U.S.C. 3501 (1)). The authority to manage information collection and record keeping requirements is vested with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). This authority encompasses establishment of guidelines and policies, approval of information collection requests, and reduction of paperwork burdens and duplications. The PRA requires NMFS to obtain approval from the OMB before requesting most types of fishery information from the public.

The actions in this document are not expected to affect PRA.

A.10.Small Business Act (SBA)

Enacted in 1953, the SBA requires that agencies assist and protect small-business interests to the extent possible to preserve free competitive enterprise. The objectives of the SBA are to foster business ownership by individuals who are both socially and economically disadvantaged; and to promote the competitive viability of such firms by providing business development assistance including, but not limited to, management and technical assistance, access to capital and other forms of financial assistance, business training, and counseling, and access to sole source and limited competition federal contract opportunities, to help firms achieve competitive viability. Because most businesses associated with fishing are considered small businesses, NMFS, in implementing regulations, must make an assessment of how those regulations will affect small businesses.

A.11.Public Law 99-659: Vessel Safety

Public Law 99-659 amended the Magnuson-Stevens Act to require that an FMP or FMP amendment must consider, and may provide for, temporary adjustments (after consultation with the U.S. Coast Guard and persons utilizing the fishery) regarding access to a fishery for vessels that would be otherwise prevented from participating in the fishery because of safety concerns

related to weather or to other ocean conditions. No vessel would be forced to participate in South Atlantic fisheries under adverse weather or ocean conditions as a result of the imposition of management regulations proposed in this amendment.

Appendix B. Regulatory Impact Review

This appendix will be completed later in the amendment development process.

Appendix C. Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis

This appendix will be completed later in the amendment development process..

Appendix D. Essential Fish Habitat and Move to Ecosystem Based Management

D.1. EFH and EFH-HAPC Designations and Cooperative Habitat Policy Development and Protection

D.1.1. Summary

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requires federal fishery management councils and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to designate essential fish habitat (EFH) for species managed under federal fishery management plans (FMP). Federal regulations that implement the EFH program encourage fishery management councils and NMFS to designate subsets of EFH to highlight priority areas for conservation and management. These subsets of EFH are called EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (EFH-HAPCs or HAPCs) and are designated based on ecological importance, susceptibility to human-induced environmental degradation, susceptibility to stress from development, or rarity of the habitat type.

Information supporting EFH and EFH-HAPC designations was updated (pursuant to the EFH Final Rule) in Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) II (SAFMC 2018). Additional detailed information supporting the EFH designations appears in FEP I (SAFMC 2009a), individual FMPs, general information on the EFH provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and its implementing regulations (50 CFR 900 Subparts J and K), and the [EFH User Guide \(SAFMC 2024\)](#).

In addition to implementing regulations to protect habitat from degradation due to fishing activities, the Council cooperates with NMFS to comment on non-fishing projects or policies that may impact EFH. The Council established a Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel (AP) and adopted a comment and policy development process that was recently revised in the Habitat Blueprint (SAFMC 2023). Members of the AP serve as the Council's habitat contacts and professionals in the field and have guided the Council's development of the policy statements. To access these policy statements, refer to the habitat website: <https://safmc.net/fishery-management-plans/habitat/>.

D.1.2. Habitat Conservation

The Council has been proactive in advancing habitat conservation through extensive fishing gear restrictions in all Council FMPs and by directly managing habitat and fisheries affecting those habitats through two FMPs: the FMP for Coral, Coral Reefs and Live/Hard Bottom Habitat of the South Atlantic Region (Coral FMP; SAFMC 1984) and the FMP for the Sargassum Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (SAFMC 2003).

D.1.3. Ecosystem Approach to Conservation and Management of Deep-water Ecosystems

Building on the long-term conservation approach, the Council facilitated the evolution of the Habitat Plan into FEP and FEP II to assemble information on the physical, biological, and human/institutional context of ecosystems within which fisheries are managed. These two documents were intended to initiate the transition from single species management to Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management (EBFM) in the region. To support this, the South Atlantic Council adopted broad goals: (1) maintaining or improving ecosystem structure and function; (2) maintaining or improving economic, social, and cultural benefits from resources; and (3) maintaining or improving biological and cultural diversity.

Through Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1 (CE-BA 1; SAFMC 2009b), Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 2 (SAFMC 2011), and Coral Amendment 8 (SAFMC 2013), the South Atlantic Council established and expanded deep-water coral HAPCs (CHAPCs) and co-designated them as EFH-HAPCs.

D.2. EFH for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP

EFH for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP includes coral reefs, live/hard bottom, submerged aquatic vegetation, artificial reefs and medium to high profile outcroppings on and around the shelf break zone from shore to at least 183 meters (m) (but to at least 610 m for wreckfish) where the annual water temperature range is sufficiently warm to maintain adult populations of members of this largely tropical complex. EFH includes the spawning area in the water column above the adult habitat and the additional pelagic environment, including *Sargassum*, required for larval survival and growth, up to and including settlement. In addition, the Gulf Stream is an EFH because it provides a mechanism to disperse snapper grouper species larvae.

For specific life stages of estuarine dependent and nearshore snapper grouper species, EFH includes areas inshore of the 31 m contour, such as attached macroalgae; submerged rooted vascular plants (seagrasses); estuarine emergent vegetated wetlands (saltmarshes, brackish marsh); tidal creeks; estuarine scrub/shrub (mangrove fringe); oyster reefs and shell banks; unconsolidated bottom (soft sediments); artificial reefs; and coral reefs and live/hard bottom.

D.3. HAPC for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP

EFH-HAPC for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP include medium to high profile offshore hard bottoms where spawning normally occurs; localities of known or likely periodic spawning aggregations; nearshore hard bottom areas; The Point, The Ten Fathom Ledge, and Big Rock (North Carolina); The Charleston Bump (South Carolina); mangrove habitat; seagrass habitat; oyster/shell habitat; all coastal inlets; all state-designated nursery habitats of particular importance to snapper grouper (e.g., Primary and Secondary Nursery Areas designated in North Carolina); pelagic and benthic *Sargassum*; Hoyt Hills for wreckfish; the Oculina Bank HAPC; all hermatypic coral habitats and reefs; manganese outcroppings on the Blake Plateau; and Council-designated Special Management Zones (SMZ). Areas that meet the

criteria for EFH-HAPCs include habitats required during each life stage (including egg, larval, post-larval, juvenile, and adult stages).

EFH-HAPCs for Golden Tilefish includes irregular bottom comprised of troughs and terraces intermingled with sand, mud, or shell hash bottom. Mud-clay bottoms in depths of 150-300 m are HAPC. Golden tilefish are generally found in 80-540 m, but most commonly found in 200 m depths. EFH-HAPC for Blueline Tilefish includes irregular bottom habitats along the shelf edge in 45-65 m depth; shelf break; or upper slope along the 100-fathom contour (150-225 m); hard bottom habitats characterized as rock overhangs, rock outcrops, manganese-phosphorite rock slab formations, or rocky reefs in the South Atlantic Bight; and the Georgetown Hole (Charleston Lumps) off Georgetown, South Carolina.

EFH-HAPCs for the Snapper Grouper complex include the following deep-water marine protected areas (MPA) as designated in Amendment 14 to the Snapper Grouper FMP: Snowy Grouper Wreck MPA, Northern South Carolina MPA, Edisto MPA, Charleston Deep Artificial Reef MPA, Georgia MPA, North Florida MPA, St. Lucie Hump MPA, and East Hump MPA.

The Council established the Special management Zone (SMZ) designation process in 1983 in the Snapper Grouper FMP, and SMZs have been designated in federal waters off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida since that time. The purpose of the original SMZ designation process, and the subsequent specification of SMZs, was to protect snapper grouper populations at the relatively small, permitted artificial reef sites and “create fishing opportunities that would not otherwise exist.” Thus, the SMZ designation process was centered on protecting the relatively small habitats, which are known to attract desirable snapper grouper species.

In CE-BA 1 (SAFMC 2009b), the Council determined that SMZs met the criteria to be EFH-HAPCs for species included in the Snapper Grouper FMP. Since CE-BA 1, the Council has designated additional SMZs in the Snapper Grouper FMP including Spawning SMZs. The SMZ and EFH-HAPC designations serve similar purposes in identifying and protecting valuable and unique habitat for the benefit of fish populations, which are important to both fish and fishers. Therefore, the Council determined that a designated SMZ meets the criteria for an EFH-HAPC designation, and the Council intends that all SMZs designated under the Snapper Grouper FMP also be designated as EFH-HAPCs under the Snapper Grouper FMP.

D.4. References

GMFMC (Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 1984. [FMP for Coral, Coral Reefs of the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic \(Coral FMP\)](#). Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council 4107 W Spruce St #200, Tampa, FL 33607 and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2003. [Fishery Management Plan for the Sargassum Fishery of the South Atlantic Region](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2009a. [Fishery Ecosystem Plan I of the South Atlantic Region](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2009b. [Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1 for the South Atlantic Region](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201; North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2011. [Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 2 for the South Atlantic Region](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201; North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2013. [Amendment 8 to the Fishery Management Plan for Coral, Coral Reefs, and Live/Hardbottom Habitats of the South Atlantic Region](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201; North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2018. [Fishery Ecosystem Plan II of the South Atlantic Region](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2023. [South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Habitat Program Evaluation and Blueprint](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2024. [Users Guide to Essential Fish Habitat Designations by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

Appendix E. Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

This appendix will be completed later in the amendment development process.

Appendix F. Data Analyses

This appendix will be completed later in the amendment development process.

Appendix G. Bycatch Practicability Analysis

This appendix will be completed later in the amendment development process.

Appendix H. Fishery Impact Statement

This appendix will be completed later in the amendment development process.