



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Snapper Grouper Amendment 60

Commercial Sub-Committee

Discussion Document, September 2025

Background

In March 2024, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) established the Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee) and tasked them with identifying and developing potential management responses to issues in the commercial sector of the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. Through its discussions, the Sub-Committee has identified two major objectives to be addressed through an amendment: 1) commercial SG 1 permit issues, and 2) increasing commercial trip efficiency.

Last Meeting (June 2025)

In June 2025 ([Sub-Committee Report](#); [Snapper Grouper Committee Report](#)), the Sub-Committee reviewed updated commercial trip and landings analyses, and discussed information to be included in scoping of Amendment 60. The Sub-Committee identified several potential actions to be scoped, as well as questions to pose to stakeholders to elicit feedback that would be helpful for the development of the amendment.

Objectives for this Meeting (September 2025)

- Review additional analyses of commercial catch and trips (*Attachment 1a* in the September 2025 Briefing Book).
- Review scoping comments.
- Direct staff on actions and ranges of alternatives to initially develop in the amendment.
- Identify necessary information for any known outstanding Council discussions.
- Review the amendment timeline and revise as necessary.

Scoping

Online scoping was conducted from July 25 through 5pm on August 8, 2025. A [scoping summary](#) and accompanying [informational video](#) were posted on the Council's website and advertised to solicit public comment. Written comments were received from fourteen individuals through the Council's online public comment form or via email (some comments submitted through the online form were duplicated or referred to emailed comments). Emailed comments are included in the September 2025 Council Meeting Briefing Book. Comments submitted via the online form are viewable [HERE](#).

Commenters included commercial, wholesale/dealer/retail, private recreational, for-hire, and other fishery stakeholders from Florida and North Carolina, as well as one non-government organization (NGO). Concepts supported by multiple stakeholders are summarized below.

SG 1 Permits

Three comments (NC) discussed the great difficulty that is created by the 2 for 1 SG 1 permit policy for new entrants to the fishery.

Two comments (NC) were against removal of the 2 for 1 policy. The following reasons were provided for this position:

- Plenty of permits are available for lease, and there are a number of idle permits that are not used to their potential.
- Removal of the policy would lower the value of permits. Permit holders have planned for and depend upon this value.

Five comments (NC, NGO) supported removal of the 2 for 1 policy. The following reasons were provided for this position:

- Permits are likely to maintain value as there are a limited number and consumers value fresh, quality, domestic products.
- Permits need to be accessible for young fishermen entering the fishery.
- The commercial fleet is getting older without enough younger fishermen who have the high start-up costs necessary to invest in two permits.
- Leasing an SG 1 permit happens at a high cost and is a significant barrier to profitability.

Three comments (NC) supported some level of activity/participation requirement to acquire or retain a permit if the 2 for 1 policy is removed. One comment noted that a requirement should not be so high that a legitimate fisherman cannot easily reach it. One comment supported an owner/operator requirement for purchase of unincorporated permits. One comment proposed a pool of permits set aside for new/recent entrants, who would transition to permanent permits with continued activity in the fishery.

Two comments (NC) were against a landings or income requirement to retain their SG 1 permit in the absence of the 2 for 1 policy.

Trip Efficiency

Two comments (NC) stated that current trip limits, especially lower limits, restrict their harvests. Trip limits were specifically identified to be limiting for the following species: gag, red snapper, and hogfish.

Seven comments (NC, NGO) supported the use of dynamic trip limits in some capacity. One comment specifically noted that dynamic trip limits would be effective for red snapper and gag. One comment noted that stepping up or stepping down should vary by how the fishery uses that species. One comment supported the use of step-downs, but also noted that regulations should be as simple and clear as possible. Two comments supported stepping up trip limits as the season progresses. One comment stated that red porgy and red snapper fisheries would benefit from a higher initial trip limit followed by a step-down.

Three comments (NC, NGO) expressed some level of support for a non-target or out-of-season allowance for commercial harvest. One comment specifically noted that the fishery would benefit from an incidental harvest allowance for red snapper.

Two comments (NC) were opposed to requirements for hail-in/hail-out or VMS.

Three comments (NC, FL) supported allowance of multi-day trips to retain multiple trip limits. Two comments noted multi-day trips would be useful for harvest of vermilion snapper.

Three comments (NC, NGO) supported changing gear requirements to allow transitioning between gear types and fishing for multiple species during a trip. One comment stated such a change would be consistent with Executive Orders 14276 and 14192 to strengthen the American seafood industry and eliminate unnecessarily burdensome regulations.

Other

Two comments (FL) discussed the enforcement of trip limits, noting that for areas where fish houses are open for limited hours on weekends, fishermen are not able to sell their harvest each day. Because they can only sell one trip limit per day, they miss out on being able to fish and generate income on days when dealers are unable to buy their harvest.

Potential Commercial Management Actions

The following objectives and draft actions were compiled based on previous Sub-Committee discussions. These do not necessarily represent comprehensive language for actions in Amendment 60, as some of the actions may require sub-components to address specific regulatory needs. However, these draft actions are intended to capture the main objectives being addressed through Amendment 60.

*Draft Actions may change as the Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT) discusses how to best accomplish the Council's directions given at this meeting.

Draft Action 1. Revise the 2-for-1 snapper grouper commercial unlimited permit policy

- **Outstanding Council discussion related to this action:** Should the 2-for-1 policy continue for a specific time period or until a threshold maximum number of permits has been met?
 - If the 2-for-1 policy continues, what are appropriate evaluation criteria to determine when this policy is no longer needed and should be removed (this may be more appropriately addressed through economic analysis by the SEFSC)?
 - What are appropriate definitions/thresholds for overcapacity?
 - **Information to Request:**
 - The number SG1 permits that are owned but may be latent due to having acquired 1 but not 2 permits; understand potential effort that will return to the fishery
 - The time limit for purchasing a second permit after 1 has been acquired
 - If the 2-for-1 policy is removed, should it be replaced by any other requirements to acquire or maintain an SG 1 permit?
 - Reference state participation requirements in developing a range of alternatives.
 - The [June 2025 Discussion Document](#) includes examples of income or activity requirements that have previously been considered for other South Atlantic fisheries.
 - Include discussion about how any new requirements contribute to seafood competitiveness.

Draft Action 2. Establish a framework for dynamic trip limits that vary throughout the season, based on the tracked catch and the time remaining in the season.

- Alternative approaches discussed thus far:
 - Step-ups: Lower trip limit to start the season is increased if landings have not reached a threshold level by a specified time in the season
 - Step-downs: Higher trip limit to start the season is decreased if landings exceed a threshold percentage of the annual catch limit
- Framework/general policy that is applicable to much of the snapper grouper commercial fishery.
- Note that harvest at or below the ACL is sustainable, even if within a rebuilding plan

Draft Action 3. Establish multi-day trip limits for a subset of snapper grouper species

- **Outstanding Council discussion related to this action:**
 - What are the criteria for determining applicable species?
 - Should a maximum number of trip limits (higher than one) be established for multi-day trips?
 - How will law enforcement be able to verify the length of the trip?

Draft Action 4. Establish an incidental or out-of-season allowance for harvest.

- **Outstanding Council discussion related to this action:** Should this policy be species-specific, or a general (i.e., multispecies) poundage limit?
 - Should a sub-group of allowable out-of-season species be identified?

- Alternatives should be developed to allow retention of incidental catch but not to motivate out-of-season targeting.
- Out-of-season catches would need to be estimated when monitoring in-season landings or establishing annual seasons (i.e., seasons may be shortened to allow out-of-season harvest to occur and not exceed the annual catch limit). In any circumstance, catch must be limited to the ACL.

Draft Action 5. Revise existing stowage requirements for gear on board.

- Not an expansion of allowable gear; but enabling fishermen to more easily stow one gear and switch to another form of fishing during the same trip.
- **Outstanding Council discussion related to this action:** How can law enforcement verify which fish were caught using which gear?

Sub-Committee Action

Review draft actions and scoping comments. Direct staff on the actions and ranges of alternatives that should be developed in a draft amendment. Direct staff on any information that is needed to have outstanding discussions during a future meeting.

Potential Amendment Timeline

March 2025	Amendment 60 initiated
June 2025	Review initial actions and consider approval for scoping
July 5-August 8, 2025	Scoping
September 2025	Review scoping comments; provide direction for actions and alternatives
December 2025	Review available analyses and draft action and alternative language
March 2026	Consider approval for public hearings
Spring 2026	Public hearings
June 2026	Review public comment and approve all actions
September 2026	Final Council approval

Summer/Fall 2027	Regulations effective
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Sub-Committee Action

Review the amendment timeline and edit as necessary.