

Allocations: An Intro to a Tough Topic

*This story was made with [Esri's Story Map Journal](#).
Read the interactive version on the web at <https://arcg.is/19ybGG>.*



This story map will help you navigate the history of allocations in the South Atlantic (NC, SC, GA, & East FL through the Keys) and will introduce some considerations as discussions surrounding this difficult topic begin to resurface at the Council table.

The information provided here might be a review for some, but stick with us as we walk through the material step by step, addressing topics ranging from scientific calculations to stakeholder concerns.

What's an Allocation



An **allocation** is defined as an amount or portion of a resource assigned to a particular recipient.

For a trusted example, we can always turn to cake. Your allocation at your friend's birthday party is however big your slice might be.

Keep reading to find out how we ended up having to apply allocations in fisheries management.

History of South Atlantic Allocations



When the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act was reauthorized in 2007, the Councils were required to specify annual catch limits (ACLs) at a level that would prevent overfishing and would not exceed the recommendations of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) or other established peer review processes.

By 2011, Fishery Management Plans for all fisheries, except fisheries for species with annual life cycles, would have to meet these requirements.

The South Atlantic Council had already applied allocations to some of the species they managed by the time the Magnuson Act required Annual Catch Limits. For the remaining species, the Council began work on the Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment.

Notable allocation amendments in the South Atlantic:

- [Snapper Grouper Amendment 13c \(link available only in online story\)](#) (black sea bass)
- [Snapper Grouper Amendment 16 \(link available only in online story\)](#) (vermillion snapper)
- [Snapper Grouper Amendment 17b \(link available only in online story\)](#) (overfished stocks)

& golden tilefish)

- Snapper Grouper Amendment 24 (link available only in online story) (red grouper)
- Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 13 (link available only in online story) (MRFS to MRIP)
- Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment (link available only in online story)
- Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 8 (link available only in online story)
- Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 1 (link available only in online story) (king mackerel)
- Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 2 (link available only in online story) (spanish mackerel)
- Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 4 (link available only in online story) (spanish mackerel)
- Coastal Migratory Pelagics 1998 Framework Amendment (spanish mackerel)

You can also take a look at this [comprehensive spreadsheet](https://safmc.net/download/Allocation-Table-202001141.pdf) (link: <https://safmc.net/download/Allocation-Table-202001141.pdf>) to see how allocations have been addressed over the years.

Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment



COMPREHENSIVE ANNUAL CATCH LIMIT (ACL) AMENDMENT FOR THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

AMENDMENT 2 TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE DOLPHIN WAHOO

FISHERY OF THE ATLANTIC

AMENDMENT 2 TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR PELAGIC SARGASSUM

HABITAT OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

AMENDMENT 5 TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE GOLDEN CRAB

FISHERY OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

AMENDMENT 25 TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE SNAPPER GROUPER

FISHERY OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

(INCLUDING A FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT, REGULATORY FLEXIBILITY ACT
ANALYSIS, REGULATORY IMPACT REVIEW, AND SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT/FISHERY IMPACT
STATEMENT)

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When you introduce finite numbers, like an annual catch limit (the total number of fish or pounds of fish that can be removed from a stock in a year), you must establish how those fish will be portioned out to the different stakeholders. How big a slice will everybody get? As a result, the Council allocated percentages of the total Annual Catch Limit for each species to the commercial sector and the recreational sector (includes charter/headboats and private fishermen).

The Allocation Formula:

The formula was used to calculate allocations in the Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment.

For most species, the **formula** (link available only in online story) uses historical landings data, as well as landings information that was current at the time. The historic period was addressed using landings from 1986 - 2008. The current period, at the time, was addressed using landings from 2006 - 2008.

The Time Series:

Some of you might be wondering why allocations were calculated using landings data from 1986 to 2008.

- Why didn't the time series go further back in history?

NOAA Fisheries began collecting landings data from commercial and headboat fishermen in the early 1970s and from private recreational anglers in 1981. Initially, some data sets lumped species together (example: all jack species were recorded as jacks - no additional individual species data was collected for them). By 1986 most landings were being reported at the species level, allowing for a much more comprehensive look at what allocations might best suit each sector. As a result, the Council used the time series beginning in 1986.

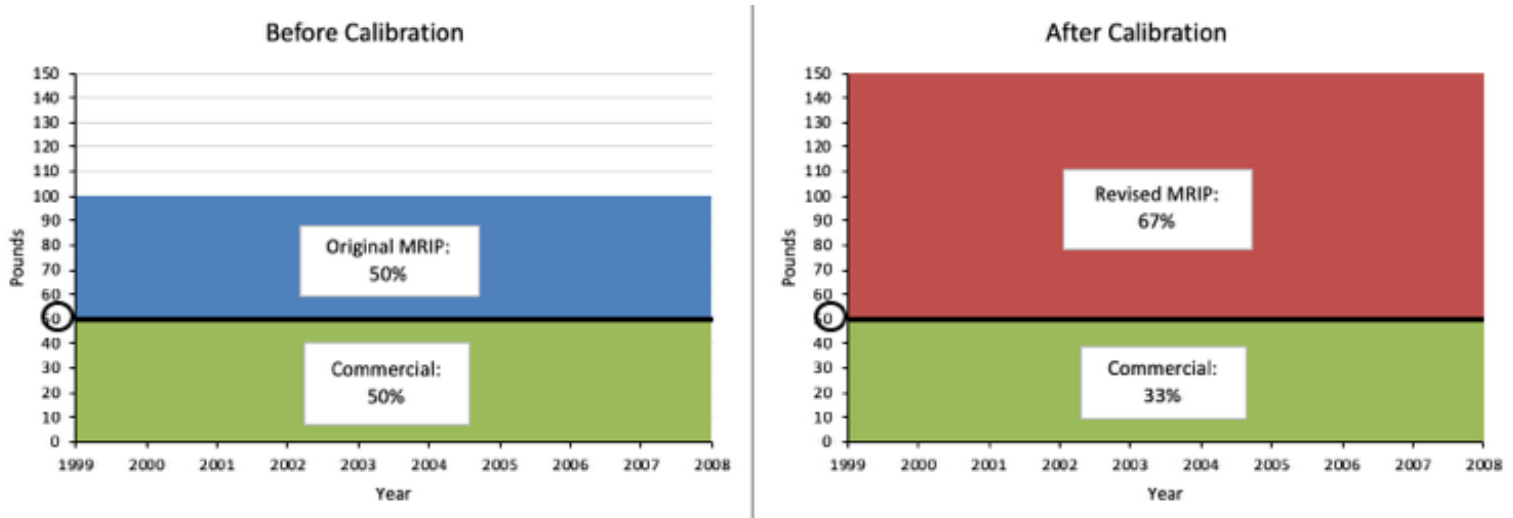
Stakeholder Concern: This choice of time series has been a concern to commercial fishing representatives both past and present. Commercial data have been considered a more reliable source since data collection efforts began well before recreational information was collected (note: commercial fishermen and dealers are required to report their catch). But, in order to effectively set allocations, it's critical that the Council have data from both sectors when considering portioning amounts of fish to different stakeholder groups.

- Why hasn't the Council included more recent landings data since 2008?

It is difficult to use landings from recent years to determine allocations because the current allocations and management actions have affected those landings. Since closures likely disrupt how the fishery would otherwise operate, and closures might occur for one sector and not the other, we would see some biases in the landings data and ultimately the allocations too. Also note that there was an economic downturn in 2009 that had significant impacts on the fishing community, both commercial and recreational. Using data from the years where the economy was performing poorly could also introduce biases in the data, further miscalculating allocations for the fishery into the future.

So, the Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment used the formula and time series mentioned earlier to allocate portions of stocks in the South Atlantic. Again, the Council made those decisions back in 2011 and we still operate under most of those allocations today. Now, with new catch estimates to be considered, it might be time for the Council to begin having these challenging conversations again.

Revised MRIP Estimates



So why are we revisiting this allocation conversation now?

NOAA Fisheries collects data on recreational landings via the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). MRIP has undergone some recent changes, most notably the survey design for estimating fishing effort (in simplest terms - the number of trips people take to fish). You can learn more about some of these changes from articles in our [Spring 2018 Newsletter](http://safmc.net/download/Spring2018SAUpdate.pdf) (link: <http://safmc.net/download/Spring2018SAUpdate.pdf>). Additionally, it might be helpful to visit [MRIP's website](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/recreational-fishing-data) (link: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/recreational-fishing-data>).

The revised MRIP estimates adjusted our original view of just how much recreational fishermen have been catching. The amount of fish landed for some species turns out to be a whole lot more than we originally thought. What you see to the right is a way to simply visualize that.

Our view of fisheries is changing. The recreational sector isn't dipping into any of the allocation set for commercial. Notice in our hypothetical example to the right that the amount of fish the commercial sector is being allocated remains the same, it's just the percentage of the total that changes. Instead, the recreational sector is being allocated what they've been catching all along (something that just wasn't captured in the data before).

Recreational estimates for most species have been revised, but have yet to be adopted pending the outcome of the Council's allocation discussions.

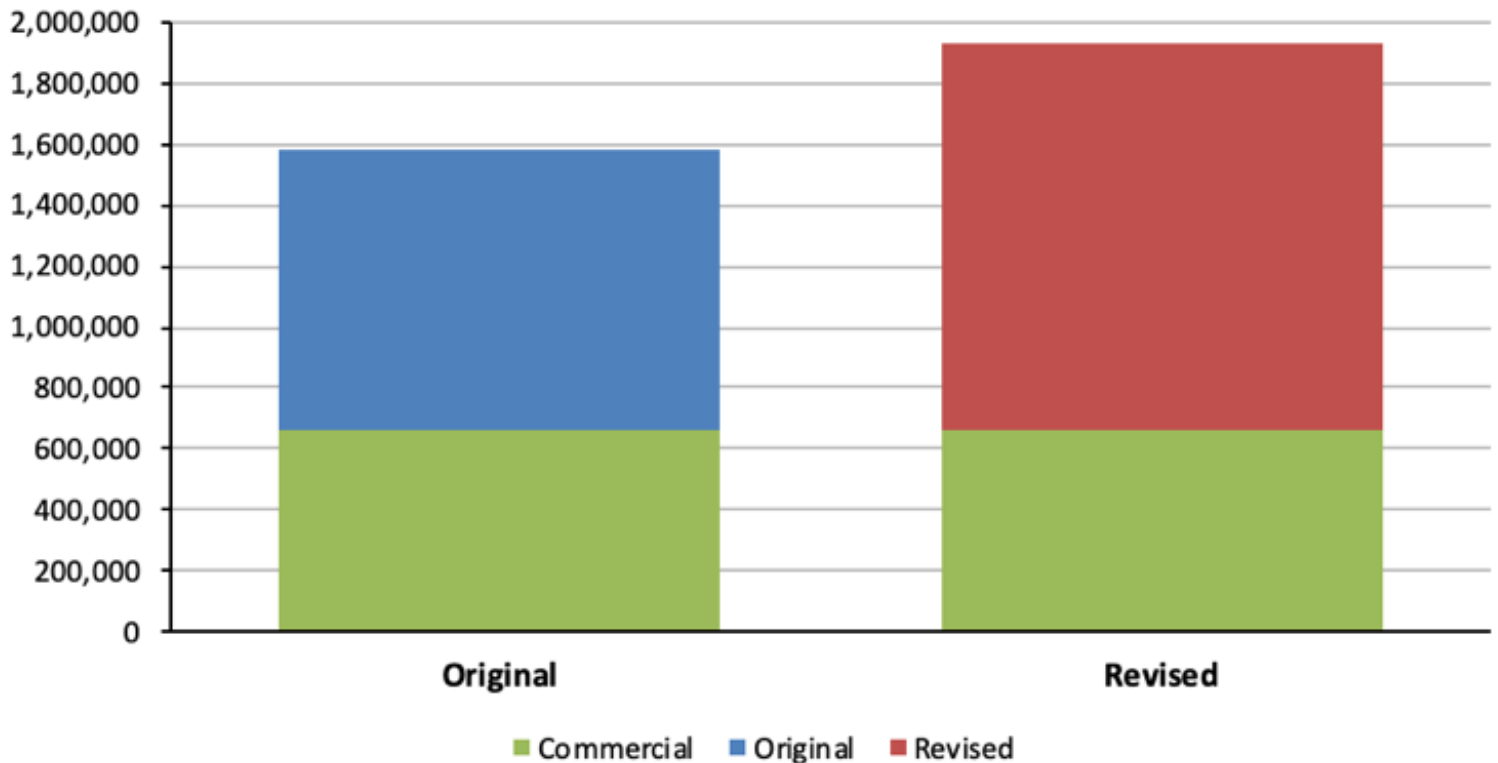
Species Under a Current Amendment Addressing Allocation:

- [dolphin](#)
- [wahoo](#)

Allocations for some species were set under the Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment; however, many have had their allocations changed since then. The important thing to take away here is that these MRIP revisions might warrant allocation changes.

Black Sea Bass

Black Sea Bass
Average Landings, 1986-2008



So what does this graph tell us?

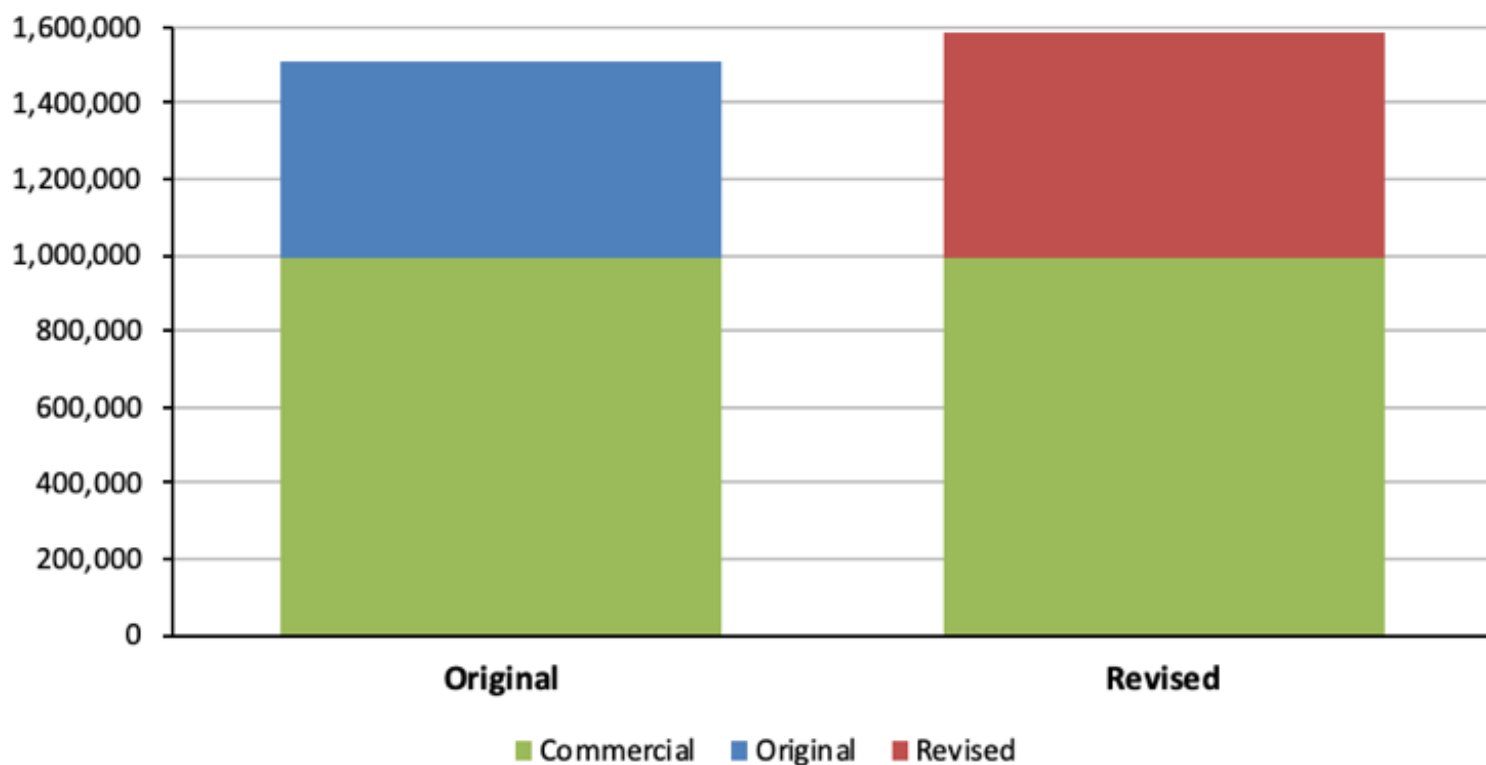
Previous MRIP numbers underestimated how much black sea bass had been caught recreationally.

Note: the larger the difference is between the original and revised data, the larger the effect on allocations if the allocation formula (the way in which the allocations have been calculated in the past) remains the same.

If you want to see the detail for each year, [click here \(link available only in online story\).](#)

Vermilion Snapper

**Vermilion Snapper
Average Landings, 1986-2005**

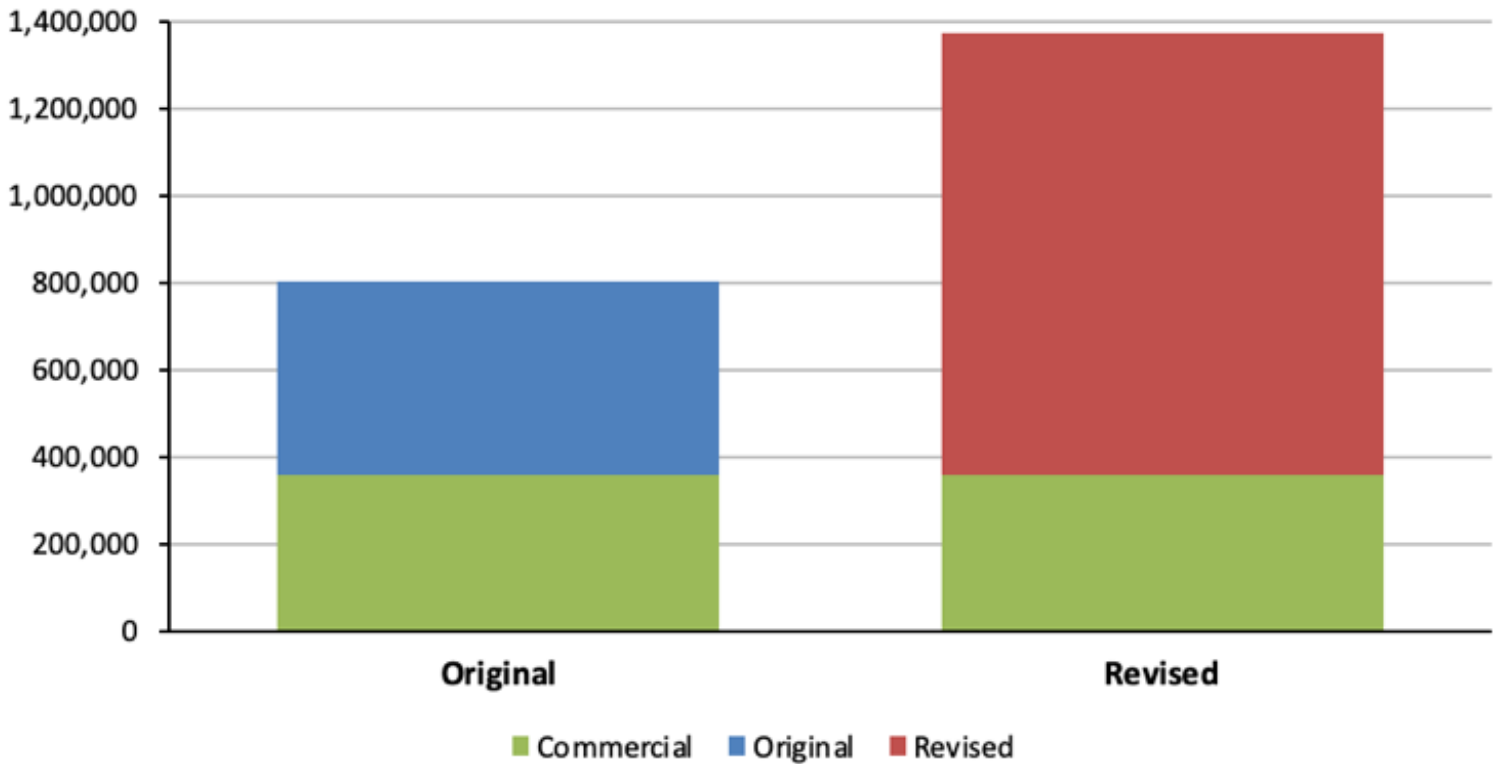


Previous MRIP numbers underestimated how much vermilion had been caught recreationally.

If you want to see the detail for each year, [click here \(link available only in online story\).](#)

Red Grouper

Red Grouper
Average Landings, 1986-2008

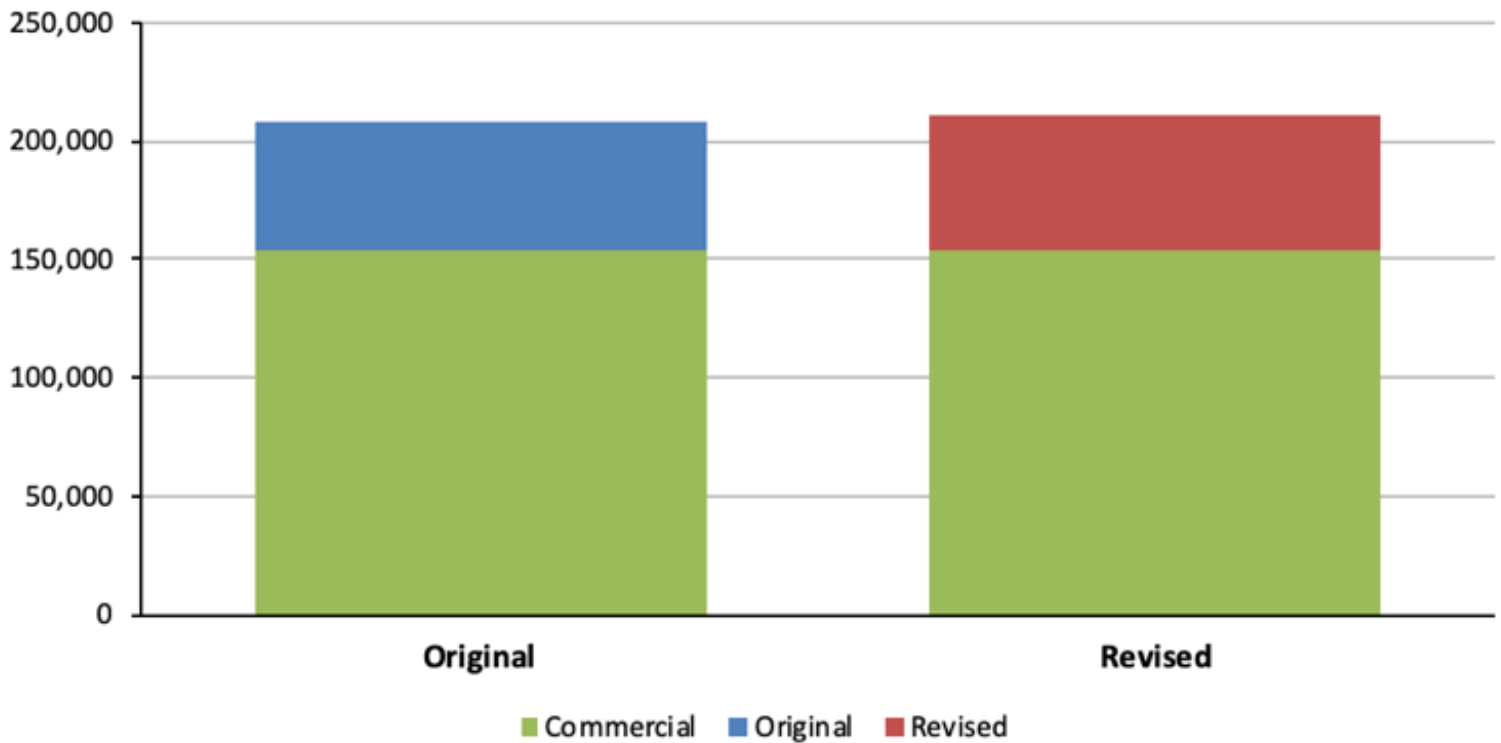


Previous MRIP numbers underestimated how much red grouper had been caught recreationally.

If you want to see the detail for each year, [click here \(link available only in online story\)](#).

Blueline Tilefish

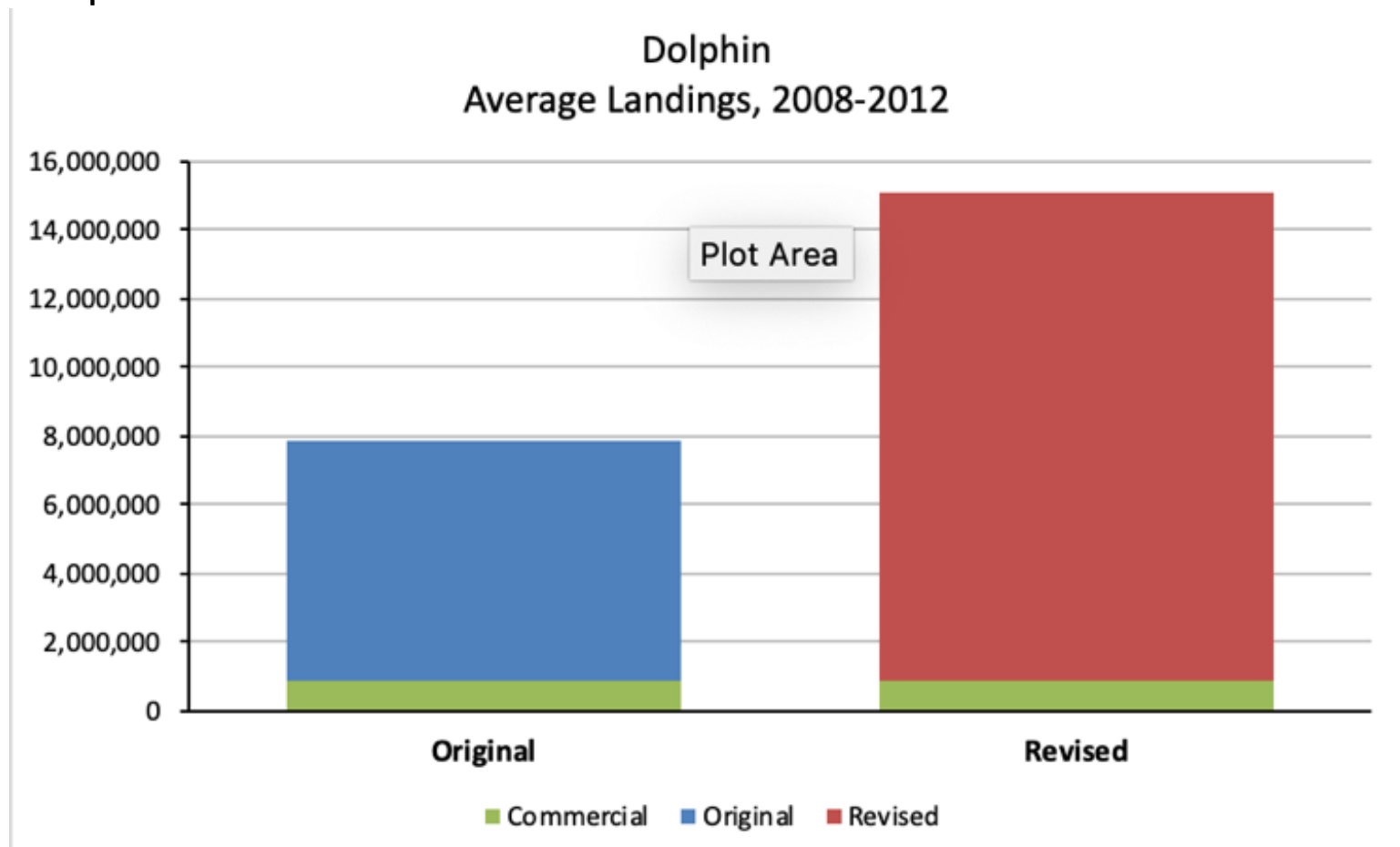
Blueline Tilefish
Average Landings, 1986-2008



Notice how close the original and revised numbers are in this graph. If the allocation formula is to remain the same when future allocations are determined, then the allocation for blueline tilefish will not experience much change.

If you want to see the detail for each year, [click here \(link available only in online story\).](#)

Dolphin

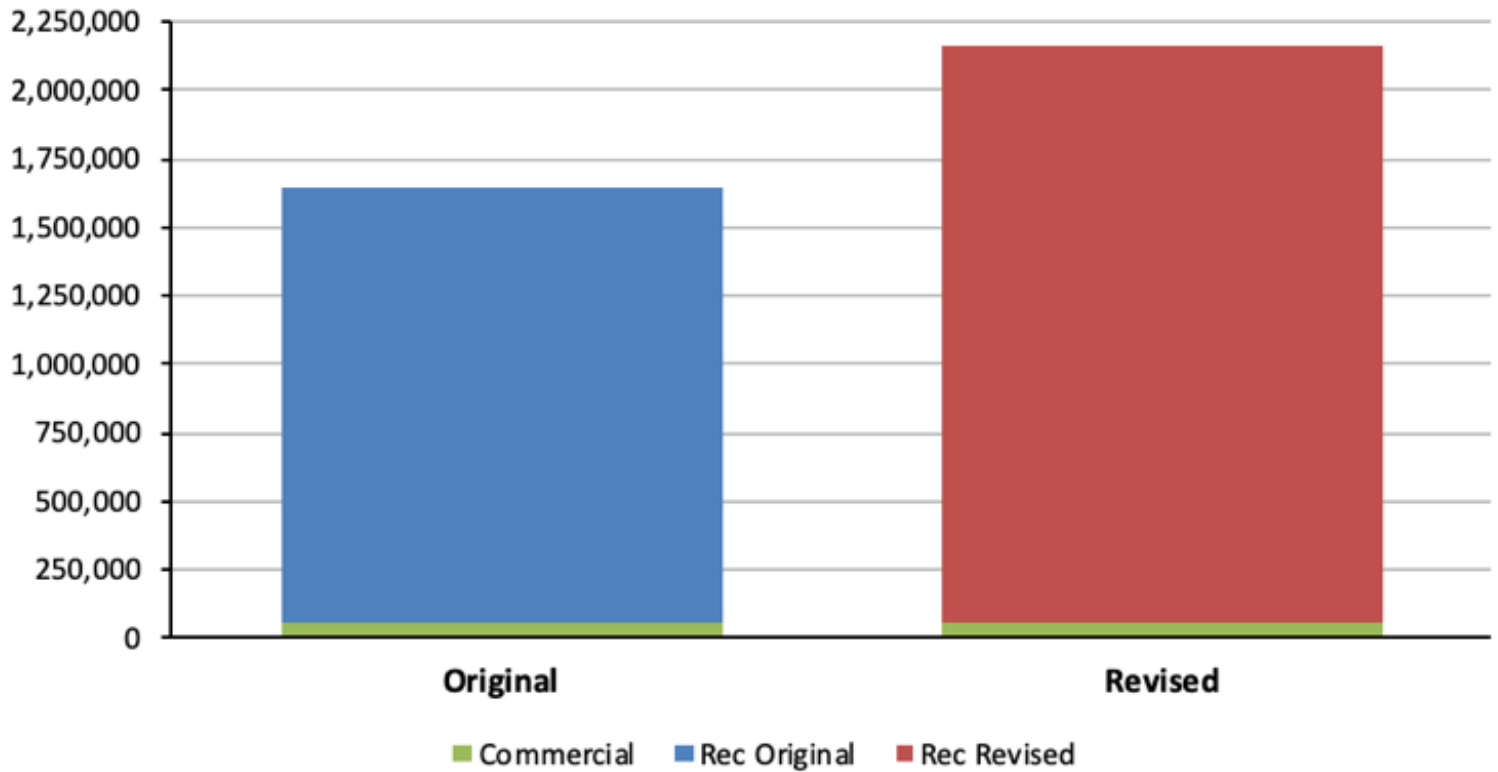


Previous MRIP numbers underestimated how much dolphin had been caught recreationally.

If you want to see the detail for each year, [click here \(link available only in online story\)](#).

Wahoo

Wahoo
Average Landings, 1999-2008



Previous MRIP numbers underestimated how much wahoo had been caught recreationally.

If you want to see the detail for each year, [click here \(link available only in online story\).](#)

Back to the Future



Many folks walked into this discussion thinking that annual catch limits for all species would go up as a result of these new data. That might not be the case depending on updated stock status from assessments. As abundances change, stock assessments will follow suit, resulting in changes to catch levels, like Allowable Biological Catch and Annual Catch Limits.

And as stock assessments continue to occur for South Atlantic managed species, we must be prepared for those situations where the cake, pie, or whatever analogy you feel most comfortable with, might not actually get bigger. In some cases, it might stay the same. In others, maybe it'll get smaller.

Now that we have new numbers from the Marine Recreational Information Program, the Council will begin conversations about allocations. The new numbers might require the Council to reallocate and there's much to consider when making those decisions.

The fisheries that the South Atlantic Council manages are incredibly diverse - we're dealing with

unique life histories, market values, social needs, and economic concerns. Some species might be harvested in similar ways while others might require unique and specialized gear. These differences require additional attention when determining allocations to sectors operating in the fishery.

So What Now?



Moving forward, the Council will discuss ways they might want to consider again approaching allocations.

How can we include landings data from recent years now that Annual Catch Limits have been in place and some fisheries have experienced closures? (*these closures certainly impact landings...and*

ultimately the allocations that would be calculated using that information)

During the Visioning Process, the Council came up with a laundry list of ways to address allocation issues. These suggestions came from stakeholders across the region and are included in the **Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery** (link available only in online story). Are these still relevant today and should any be prioritized?

Can other information, aside from landings, be used to help guide allocation decisions?

Qualitative Data - It's Not Just a Feeling



Up until now we've been discussing quantitative, or numerical, data such as pounds landed and trips taken. However, qualitative, or non-numerical, data such as interviews, texts, or videos, can also be used to gain a deeper understanding of fishery trends and the role they have played in coastal communities.

The **general scientific process still applies** (link available only in online story)!

What qualitative data sources already exist for fisheries?

- Fishery Performance Reports
- Voices from the Fisheries, oral history interviews
- Public comment, both current and past
- Historical documents and records
- Peer reviewed and gray literature studies
- Hypertext (social media, blogs, news articles)

What things are not qualitative?

- My personal opinion
- Your personal opinion
- The experiences of only one individual
- "This one time..."

Key Takeaway:

Objectivity is important. Be aware of how personal experiences, opinions, and values influence what you want to see vs. what is really out there.

So, aside from MRIP Revisions and this new snapshot we now have of the fishery, the Council can consider these qualitative resources as well. It further complicates the analytical process, but it certainly could get us even closer to a more accurate depiction of fisheries in the South Atlantic.

Modern Fish Act



The Modern Fish Act (link: <https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/s1520/BILLS-115s1520enr.xml>) was recently signed at the very end of 2018 and won't necessarily directly impact allocation discussions at this time, but it could in the future.

What we should note is that the Act requires the **Government Accountability Office** (link available only in online story) to initiate a study of mixed-use fisheries in the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. The study will consult stakeholders, including the Councils and their respective Scientific & Statistical Committees, state fisheries commissions, recreational fishermen, commercial fishermen, charter fishermen, and others.

The final report is expected in March 2020. It's possible that Congress will then decide to act on the findings of the study and direct the Councils accordingly. However, the Council doesn't have to wait for Congress. It can decide to act on any report recommendation when it receives them.

Wrapping Up



We know this was a lot of information and we hope it has been helpful. There is still much to do about allocations moving forward, and there will be ample opportunity for stakeholders to participate in the process.

As always, public comment forms are available during each Council Meeting and folks who are interested in allocations are always encouraged to provide their recommendations to the Council.

Stay tuned for more information and updates!

If you have any questions about the information in this story map, please don't hesitate to reach out to Cameron Rhodes (cameron.rhodes@safmc.net (link: <mailto:cameron.rhodes@safmc.net>) or 843-725-7577).