



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Snapper Grouper Amendment 60

Law Enforcement Advisory Panel

Discussion Document, January 2026

PG: AVH

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.

Objectives for this Meeting (December 2025)

- Review the proposed actions and Council’s initial purposes for each action.
- Provide comments on any foreseeable enforcement difficulties.
- Recommend any changes or considerations that could aid enforcement while also accomplishing the Council’s objectives for each action.

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	Review available analyses and draft action and alternative language
June 2026	Consider approval for public hearings
Summer 2026	Public hearings
September 2026	Review public comment and approve all actions
December 2026	Final Council approval
Fall 2027	Regulations effective

Draft Actions

*Draft Actions may change as the Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT) discusses how to best accomplish the Council’s intents. The IPT will meet in early January, prior to the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel (LE AP), but after the deadline for LE AP meeting materials. Staff will update the LE AP with any relevant discussions from the IPT meeting.

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

Purpose of Action: Facilitate new entry into the snapper grouper commercial sector by removing the 2-for-1 regulation 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 permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper, a person must obtain and exchange two such permits for one new permit.

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

Discussion

- This action does not consider any change to the use of limited access for the snapper grouper commercial sector.

- After one 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 system until both permits are exchanged.
- The Council has stated that the current number of permits is appropriate and may include guidance in this amendment to inform when the number of permits should be considered for increase or decrease in the future.

Advisory Panel Discussion

- Are there any significant, foreseeable enforcement difficulties that may result from this action?
- Are there any recommendations that should be considered as this action is further developed?

Action 2. Revise commercial trip limits and establish dynamic trip limits for snapper grouper species

Purpose of Action: Increase efficiency of the commercial sector in harvesting optimum yield annually by considering changes to trip limits, increasing trip limits when the sector is not on track to harvest the annual catch limit (step-up), and decreasing trip limits when the sector is on track to harvest the annual catch limit before the end of the fishing season (step-down).

- The Council will consider whether trip limit changes, step-ups, or step-downs should be implemented in management of the following species: black sea bass, blueline tilefish, gag, golden tilefish, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, hogfish, mutton snapper, red grouper, red porgy, red snapper, scamp/yellowmouth grouper, snowy grouper, and vermilion snapper.
- The Council will not necessarily consider all types of changes (trip limit, step-up, step-down) for every species listed.
- Development approach:
 - Staff is developing alternatives and analyses to evaluate all types of changes for vermilion snapper, for Council review in March.
 - The Council can make any changes to these alternatives and direct staff to use vermilion snapper as a template and develop similar alternatives and analyses for other species, as appropriate.

[EXAMPLE] Sub-Action 2a. Revise trip limits for vermilion snapper **[EXAMPLE]**

NOTE: THE FOLLOWING ALTERNATIVES ARE ONLY EXAMPLES TO SHOW THE POTENTIAL STRUCTURE OF ALTERNATIVES AND SUB-ALTERNATIVES FOR THIS ACTION. THE RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES UNDER CONSIDERATION WILL BE DEVELOPED BY THE IPT FOR COUNCIL REVIEW AT THE MARCH 2026 MEETING.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not revise trip limits. Current trip limit: 1,000 lbs gw

Alternative 2. Increase the vermilion snapper trip limit to:

Sub-Alternative 2a. 1,500 lbs gw

... Other trip limit alternatives

Alternative 3. (Step-Up) If commercial landings of vermilion snapper are below 40% of the commercial annual catch limit for the entire year (this is the entire ACL rather than split season ACLs) before July 1, the commercial trip limit will be increased for the remainder of the fishing year by:

Sub-Alternative 3a. 100 lbs gw

Sub-Alternative 3b. 10%

... Other increase amounts

Alternative 4. (Step-Down) If commercial landings of vermilion snapper are above 75% of the commercial annual catch limit for the entire year (this is the entire ACL rather than split season

ACLs) before August 1, the commercial trip limit will be decreased for the remainder of the fishing year by:

Sub-Alternative 4a. 100 lbs gw

Sub-Alternative 4b. 10%

... Other decrease amounts

A process for implementing timely increases or decreases of trip limits for step-up/step-down situations would be defined for this action. The Council is considering a more specifically-defined process with less discretion to allow quicker implementation of in-season trip limit changes.

Table 1. Species-specific commercial trip limits 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
Black Sea Bass	1,000 lbs gw H&L (Jan-Apr): 300 lbs gw	20.1%	25.9%	30.4%
Blueline Tilefish	Jan-Apr: 100 lbs gw May-Dec: 300 lbs gw	98.7% (8/8/2024)	95.0% (8/2/2023; Re- opened 9/11- 9/16/2023)	102.8% (9/3/2022)
Gag	300 lbs gw	99.4% (6/30/2024)	176.4%* (10/23/2023)	46.5%
Golden Tilefish (H&L)	500 lbs gw	94.2%	84.5%* (10/31/2023; Re-opened 12/7/2023)	107.7% (7/6/2022)
Golden Tilefish (Longline)	4,000 lbs gw	100.7% (6/8/2024; Re-opened 7/24 - 7/31/2024)	85.6%* (2/26/2023; Re-opened 4/4-4/6/2023; Re-opened 12/7/2023)	102.2% (3/16/2022; Re-opened 4/11- 4/16/2022)
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%
Greater Amberjack	1,200 lbs ww or gw	Mar-Aug: 45.4% Sept-Feb: 33.1%	Mar-Aug: 66.5% Sept-Feb: 59.0%*	Mar-Aug: 69.0% Sept-Feb: 61.9%
Hogfish (GA-NC)	500 lbs ww	72.6%	74.1%	74.7%
Hogfish (EFL/FLK)	25 lbs ww	20.5%	24.8%	37.1%

Mutton Snapper	Jan-Mar & Jul-Dec: 500 lbs ww Apr-Jun: 5 fish/person/day or trip	47.4%	59.3%	55.3%
Red Grouper	200 lbs gw	52.6%	27.1%	25.4%
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%
Red Snapper	75 lbs gw	112.7% (8/6/2024)	100.1% (8/18/2023; Re-opened 10/6- 10/9/2023)	99.0% (8/31/2022)
Scamp/Yellowmouth Grouper (ACL %s for scamp only)	None; Am 55 establishes a 300 lbs gw trip limit for an aggregate of both species	22.0%	19.5%	20.1%
Snowy Grouper	200 lbs gw	Jan-Jun: 89.6% (6/4/2024) Jul-Dec: 95.9% (9/29/2024)	Jan-Jun: 60.4% Jul-Dec: 74.5%	Jan-Jun: 70.6% Jul-Dec: 90.4%
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](#)

*Management change became effective during this year/season

Advisory Panel Discussion

- Are there any significant, foreseeable enforcement difficulties that may result from this action?
- Are there any recommendations that should be considered as this action is further developed?

Action 3. Revise the bottom longline species limitation and specify gear stowage requirements

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip efficiency by allowing commercial vessels with bottom longline gear on board the ability to harvest the full array of snapper grouper species using other allowable gear types, as long as the bottom longline gear is stowed while fishing for species that are not already allowed to be possessed under the longline endorsement. This action is not intended to expand the gear that may be used to fish for snapper grouper species, but to allow fishermen to more easily stow one gear and switch to another form of fishing during the same trip.

Alternative 1 (No Action). A vessel that has on board a valid Federal commercial permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper, excluding wreckfish, 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 bottom longline species limitation 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 hooks are not baited and are not on the deck of the vessel.

The Council has also discussed the possibility of a call-in system that would inform law enforcement that a trip will use multiple gears or is switching from longline gear to another gear. Further discussion is needed to define how this system could work and how much time is necessary for it to be implemented.

Advisory Panel Discussion

- Are there any significant, foreseeable enforcement difficulties that may result from this action?
- Are there any recommendations that should be considered as this action is further developed?
- What are appropriate stowage requirements that would make longline gear obviously unusable while fishing for snapper grouper species that are not currently allowed to be possessed with longline gear on board?
 - Council suggestions included:
 - Hooks not baited
 - Removal of hooks
 - Stowage of spool below deck