



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Snapper Grouper Amendment 61

Evaluation of the Fishery Management Unit

January 2026

Background

Amendment 61 seeks to evaluate species managed under the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU) to better align the FMU with management obligations required under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). This amendment will potentially remove species from the FMU or designate appropriate species as ecosystem component (EC) species where full federal management measures are not necessary. This amendment is intended to reduce regulatory burden and free up capacity to dedicate to other species that need federal conservation and management. Through this amendment, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) will determine which species will:

- Remain regulated under full federal management provisions where appropriate (e.g., annual catch limits (ACLs), accountability measures (AMs), or size limits),
- Be removed from the FMU and no longer be subject to federal measures, or
- Be designated as EC species, which would allow some federal measures to remain in place such as a permit and reporting requirements but there would be no management measures (e.g., no ACLs or AMs).

In December 2024, the Council requested information to begin evaluating the need for federal conservation and management of species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU). Since then, the Council has identified 17 species to examine more in-depth to determine whether the species should be removed from the FMU or designated as EC species. The amendment was approved for scoping at the September 2025 Council meeting, with scoping occurring in the fall 2025.

Potential amendment timing

Timing	Council Action
December 2024	Council began to review species to include in AM 61
September 2025	Reviewed decision document and approved for scoping.
Fall 2025	Scoping (online).
December 2025	Reviewed scoping comments and provided guidance on draft actions and alternatives.
March 2026	Review requested information and draft actions and alternatives.
June 2026	Review analyses and draft actions and alternatives.
September 2026	Review draft amendment, select initial preferred alternatives, and approve for public hearings.
Fall 2026	Public hearings.
December 2026	Review public comment and approve all actions.
March 2027	Approve for Secretarial review.
Late 2027 or early 2028	Regulation changes effective.

Objectives for this meeting (January 2026)

- Provide feedback and recommendations for the Council to consider when evaluating whether to remove the selected 17 species from federal management (either removal from the FMU or designated as EC species).

Species being considered in Amendment 61

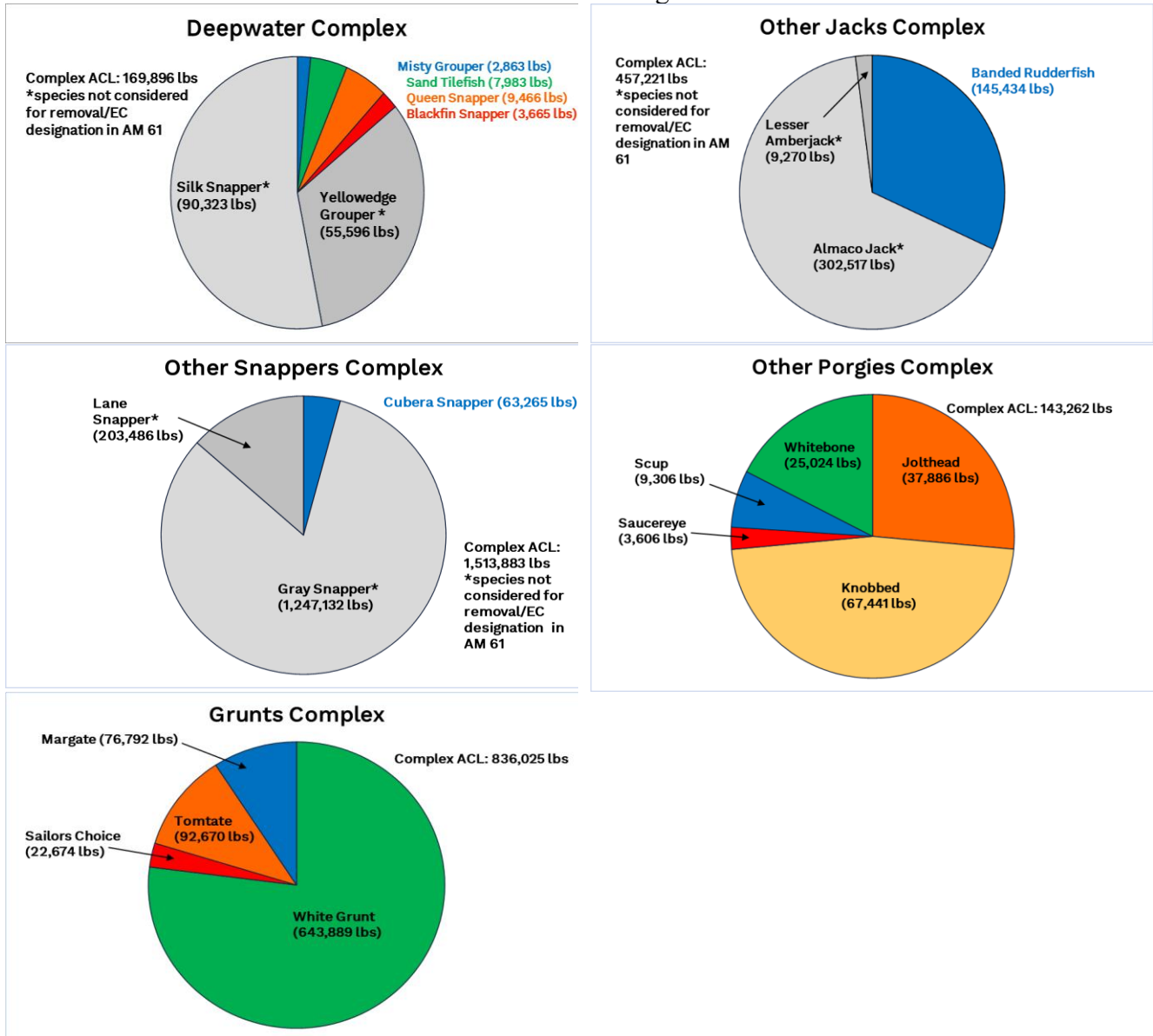
The species being considered for evaluation of the need for federal conservation and management are listed with their sector annual catch limits (ACLs) in Table 1. Species that are part of a complex are listed with their complex sector ACLs as well. Species in each complex that are not being considered for further evaluation are shaded in gray and provided for context. Complexes are managed under a single, collective ACL for all species in the complex. Commercial and recreational ACLs for individual species within complexes are shown in italics to indicate expected distributions of catch within complexes at the time that the ACLs were set. Figure 1 is included to help visualize the proportion of a complex ACL that is accounted for by each species in Table 1.

Table 1. Sector and total ACLs for Snapper Grouper species selected by the Council for further evaluation of the need for conservation and management*.

Complex/Species	Com ACL (lbs ww)	Rec ACL (CHTS lbs ww)	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Percent of Total Complex ACL
Atlantic Spadefish	150,552	661,926	812,478	-
Bar Jack	13,228	49,021	62,249	-
Deepwater Complex	131,268	38,628	169,896	-
Misty Grouper	2,388	475	2,863	1.7%
Sand Tilefish	1,770	6,213	7,983	4.7%
Queen Snapper	8,756	710	9,466	5.6%
Blackfin Snapper	1,096	2,569	3,665	2.2%
Yellowedge Grouper	50,464	5,132	55,596	32.7%
Silk Snapper	66,794	23,529	90,323	53.2%
Other Jacks Complex	189,422	267,799	457,221	-
Banded Rudderfish	37,829	107,605	145,434	31.8%
Almaco Jack	147,322	155,195	302,517	66.2%
Lesser Amberjack	4,270	5,000	9,270	2.0%
Other Snappers Complex	344,575	1,169,308	1,513,883	-
Cubera Snapper	12,381	50,884	63,265	4.2%
Gray Snapper	302,180	944,852	1,247,132	82.4%
Lane Snapper	30,014	173,472	203,486	13.4%
Other Porgies Complex	36,348	106,914	143,262	-
Jolthead Porgy	1,571	36,315	37,886	26.4%
Knobbed Porgy	34,515	32,926	67,441	47.1%
Saucereye Porgy	0	3,606	3,606	2.5%
Scup	0	9,306	9,306	6.5%
Whitebone Porgy	262	24,762	25,024	17.5%
Grunts Complex	217,903	618,122	836,025	-
White Grunt	203,405	440,484	643,889	77.0%
Sailor's Choice	0	22,674	22,674	2.7%
Tomtate	0	92,670	92,670	11.1%
Margate	14,498	62,294	76,792	9.2%

* Species in each complex that are not being considered for further evaluation are shaded in gray and provided for context.

Figure 1. Complex ACLs for snapper grouper species requested by the Council for further evaluation of the need for federal conservation and management.



What does removal from federal management entail and what does the Council consider when making such a determination?

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) section 302(h)(1) requires that a Council prepare a FMP for each fishery under its authority that requires conservation and management. Not every fishery, species, or stock requires federal management. Stocks that are predominately caught in federal waters and are overfished or subject to overfishing, or likely to become overfished or subject to overfishing, are considered to require conservation and management (50 CFR § 600.305(c)(1)). Beyond such stocks, Councils may determine that additional stocks require “conservation and management.”

If the Council determines that a species is no longer in need of federal conservation and management, the species may be removed from the federal FMP all together. In this scenario, all previously existing federal regulations (e.g., possession limits, permit requirements, reporting requirements, ACLs, etc.) would no longer apply. States would be able to implement regulations for the species if they decided to do so and the state regulations could be extended into federal waters. If states did not take up management of the species removed from federal management, no regulations or management measures would apply for that species in federal waters (3 to 200 miles offshore).

Alternatively, the species could remain within the FMP but be designated an EC species. Since EC species by definition are no longer in need of federal conservation and management (see next section), then most federal regulations and management measures for the species such as ACLs, restrictive trip or bag limits, and size limits would be removed in federal waters. Some non-restrictive measures could remain in place such as permitting and reporting requirements and there could potentially be aggregate possession limits put in place that are relatively non-restrictive (i.e., a notably high poundage- or number-based limit).

Parameters for designating EC species

Per the National Standard Guidelines ([50 C.F.R §600 Subpart-D](#)), Councils have the option to establish EC species within a federal FMP if they determine that the species do not require conservation and management, but should be listed in a federal FMP in order to achieve ecosystem management objectives. In such a case, the NS Guidelines provide some guidance on factors that a Council should consider when determining whether species need federal conservation and management as well as whether species can be considered as ECs. The following descriptions provide information on the definition of EC species.

What are ecosystem component species?

EC species are defined as “*stocks that a Council or the Secretary has determined do not require conservation and management, but desire to list in an FMP in order to achieve ecosystem management objectives*” (50 C.F.R §600.305(d)(13)).

How can a Council designate species as ecosystem components?

Under National Standards General guidelines, “*Councils may choose to identify stocks within their FMPs as ecosystem component (EC) species...if a Council determines that the stocks do not require conservation and management based on the considerations and factors in paragraph (c)(1) of this section (see Appendix 2). EC species may be identified at the species or stock level, and may be grouped into complexes. Consistent with National Standard 9¹, MSA section 303(b)(12)², and other applicable MSA sections, management measures can be adopted in order to, for example, collect data on the EC species, minimize bycatch or bycatch mortality of EC species, protect the associated role of EC species in the ecosystem, and/or to address other ecosystem issues*” (50 C.F.R §600.305(c)(5)).

¹ National Standard 9 covers bycatch.

² From MSA 303(b)(12) when discussing discretionary provisions of an FMP: “include management measures in the plan to conserve target and non-target species and habitats, considering the variety of ecological factors affecting fishery populations.”

Measures considered in Amendment 61 and requested AP feedback

A summary of potential measures considered in Amendment 61 is provided in Table 2. The Council has approved these measures for scoping in the Fall 2025.

Table 2. Potential measures that could be taken for removing species from the Snapper Grouper FMU or listing as EC species in the Snapper Grouper FMP.

Potential Measures	Description	Comments
Alternative 1 (No Action)	Leave species in the FMU and within existing complexes.	Species will continue to have ACLs, AMs, and other measures where appropriate.
Alternative 2	Species would be removed from the FMU and federal management altogether.	States would be able to implement measures that extend into federal waters if there is interest. The ability, mechanism, and desire to manage species would vary by state.
Alternative 3. Designate species as ecosystem component species		
Sub-Alternative 3a <i>EC – no regs</i>	Do not implement or retain regulations.	The Council has 5 EC species in the Snapper Grouper FMP with no associated regulations.
Sub-Alternative 3b <i>EC + reporting req</i>	Retain reporting requirement for EC species on logbooks and dealer reports.	No changes needed to current reporting requirements.
Sub-Alternative 3c <i>EC + permit req</i>	Retain permit requirements for landing the species.	May need to add an option for a commercial permit that is not limited entry.
Sub-Alternative 3d <i>EC + agg. trip limit</i>	Implement an aggregate trip limit based on total amount or percentage of total trip landings.	Would need to specify possession limits by sector. Limits would likely need to be relatively unrestrictive since the species would no longer be in need of federal conservation and management.

AP Discussion Questions: Gathering AP Insight

- 1) Are there potential law enforcement concerns for removing any of the selected 17 species from the Snapper Grouper FMU?
 - a. Please include both a federal and state waters perspective.

Note: See Table 3 below for a reminder on which species are being considered in Amendment 61.

- 2) Are there potential benefits from this action from a law enforcement perspective?
 - a. Please include both a federal and state waters perspective.

- 3) Would your comments change if these species are listed as ecosystem component species rather than completely removed from the FMU, potentially with the inclusion of a permit requirement, reporting requirement, or aggregate trip limit?

Table 3. Species being considered for removal from federal management in AM 61

Complex	Species
NA	Atlantic Spadefish
NA	Bar Jack
Other Jacks Complex	Banded Rudderfish
Other Snappers Complex	Cubera Snapper
Deepwater Complex	Misty Grouper
	Sand Tilefish
	Queen Snapper
	Blackfin Snapper
Other Porgies Complex (entire complex)	Jolthead Porgy
	Knobbed Porgy
	Saucereye Porgy
	Scup
	Whitebone Porgy
Grunts Complex (entire complex)	White Grunt
	Sailor's Choice
	Tomtate
	Margate

Appendix 1. State Regulations

Table A2-1. State waters regulations currently in place for the species that are being considered in Amendment 61 as of September 2025.

	North Carolina	South Carolina	Georgia	Florida
Atlantic Spadefish	no more than 10 within the 20 fish/person aggregate bag limit Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	14-inch TL 30 fish/vessel/day Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	No size limit Default recreational bag limit of 100lbs or 2 fish per day, whichever is more
Bar Jack	no more than 10 within the 20 fish/person aggregate bag limit Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	20 fish/person/day aggregate (All Other Snapper-Grouper Species) with no more than 10 of any single species Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	No size limit Default recreational bag limit of 100lbs or 2 fish per day, whichever is more
Sand Tilefish	3 fish/person/day within the 3-grouper aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	3 fish/person/day within the 3-grouper aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	No size limit Default recreational bag limit of 100lbs or 2 fish per day, whichever is more
Misty Grouper	3 fish/person/day within the 3-grouper aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	3 fish/person/day within the 3-grouper aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	3 fish/person/day within the 3-grouper aggregate Descending device or venting tool (rigged and ready) required on board a vessel when harvesting or attempting to harvest reef fish
Blackfin Snapper	10 fish/person/day within the 10-snapper aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	10 fish/person/day within the 10-snapper aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	Up to 10 fish/person/day within the 10-snapper aggregate Descending device or venting tool (rigged and ready) required on board a vessel when harvesting or attempting to harvest reef fish
Queen Snapper	10 fish/person/day within the 10-snapper aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	10 fish/person/day within the 10-snapper aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	Up to 10 fish/person/day within the 10-snapper aggregate Descending device or venting tool (rigged and ready) required on board a vessel when harvesting or attempting to harvest reef fish

	North Carolina	South Carolina	Georgia	Florida
Cubera Snapper	10 fish/person/day within the 10-snapper aggregate 12-inch TL Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	10 fish/person/day within the 10-snapper aggregate 12-inch TL Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	10 fish/person/day within the 10-snapper aggregate 12-inch TL No more than 2 over 30"/person or vessel/day 30" or larger fish are not included in the 10/person snapper aggregate bag limit Descending device or venting tool (rigged and ready) required on board a vessel when harvesting or attempting to harvest reef fish
Banded Rudderfish	10 fish/person/day within the 20-fish aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	20 fish/person/day aggregate (All Other Snapper-Grouper Species) with no more than 10 of any single species Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	5 fish/person/day within the 5-fish aggregate 14-inch min size, 22-inch max size Descending device or venting tool (rigged and ready) required on board a vessel when harvesting or attempting to harvest reef fish
Jolthead Porgy	10 fish/person/day within the 20-fish aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	20 fish/person/day aggregate (All Other Snapper-Grouper Species) with no more than 10 of any single species Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	Default recreational bag limit of 100lbs or 2 fish per day, whichever is more
Knobbed Porgy	10 fish/person/day within the 20-fish aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	20 fish/person/day aggregate (All Other Snapper-Grouper Species) with no more than 10 of any single species Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	Default recreational bag limit of 100lbs or 2 fish per day, whichever is more
Saucereye Porgy	10 fish/person/day within the 20-fish aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	20 fish/person/day aggregate (All Other Snapper-Grouper Species) with no more than 10 of any single species Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	Default recreational bag limit of 100lbs or 2 fish per day, whichever is more

	North Carolina	South Carolina	Georgia	Florida
Scup	10 fish/person/day within the 20-fish aggregate south of Cape Hatteras Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	20 fish/person/day aggregate (All Other Snapper-Grouper Species) with no more than 10 of any single species Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	Default recreational bag limit of 100lbs or 2 fish per day, whichever is more
Whitebone Porgy	10 fish/person/day within the 20-fish aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	20 fish/person/day aggregate (All Other Snapper-Grouper Species) with no more than 10 of any single species Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	Default recreational bag limit of 100lbs or 2 fish per day, whichever is more
White Grunt	10 fish/person/day within the 20-fish aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	20 fish/person/day aggregate (All Other Snapper-Grouper Species) with no more than 10 of any single species Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	Default recreational bag limit of 100lbs or 2 fish per day, whichever is more
Sailor's Choice	10 fish/person/day within the 20-fish aggregate Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	20 fish/person/day aggregate (All Other Snapper-Grouper Species) with no more than 10 of any single species Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	Default recreational bag limit of 100lbs or 2 fish per day, whichever is more
Tomtate	No bag or size limit Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No bag or size limit Gear and descending device requirements consistent with federal regulations	No State Management	Default recreational bag limit of 100lbs or 2 fish per day, whichever is more