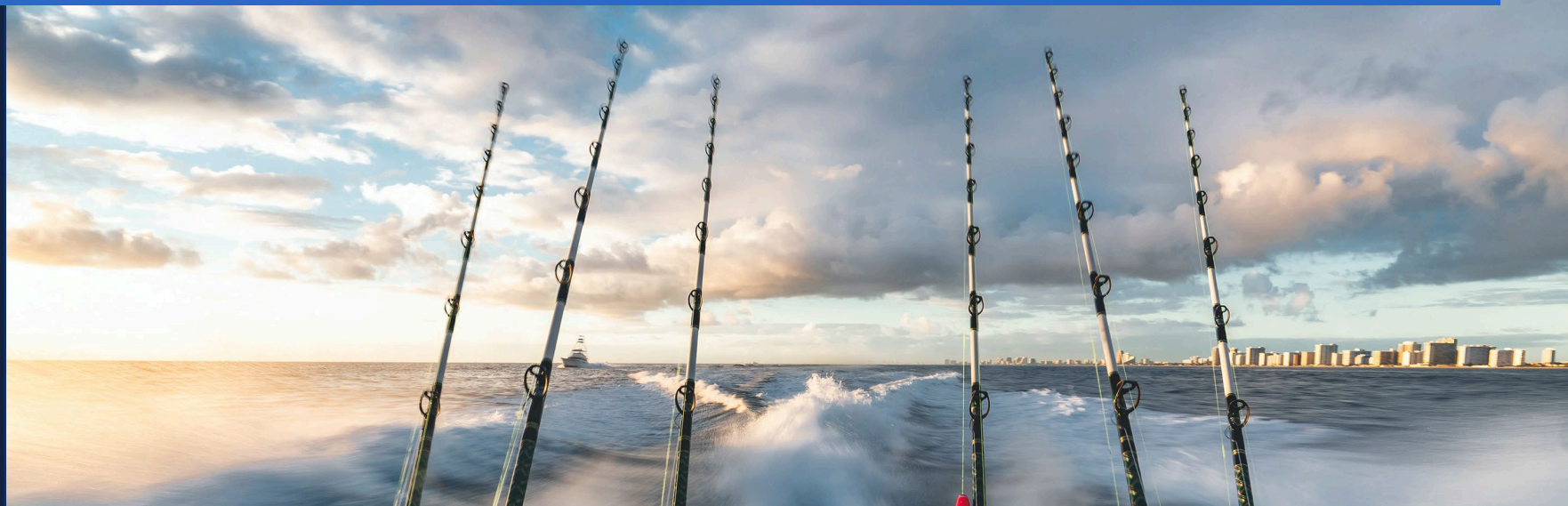




Law Enforcement Advisory Panel



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Council Staff

Potential Regulations for South Atlantic Headboats

January 2026





Background

In March 2024, the Council requested that the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel provide general recommendations on how *catch limits per trip or per day for recreational vessels should be applied to headboats*.

The AP offered general comments and recommendations and specific ones for gag and black grouper for Regulatory Amendment 36.

Snapper Grouper AP Recommendation for Regulatory Amendment 36

Regulatory Amendment 36 was submitted to NMFS in March 2025 and is undergoing rulemaking. If approved, the amendment would implement a vessel limit of 2 fish (gag or black grouper) for private and for-hire vessels.





Snapper Grouper AP Recommendations

- General

- Consider vessel limit in proportion to number of anglers (e.g. anglers/6) for federally permitted headboats.
- Consider:
 - This type of measure would benefit vessels larger than 6-pack charters (~7-20 anglers) as well as larger headboats (20+).
 - How headboat-specific regulations have been implemented in the Gulf.
 - Four fish for 10-30 passengers; six fish for 30 passengers; 30% of passenger count, maximum of 10 fish per vessel.



Snapper Grouper AP Recommendation - - For Regulatory Amendment 36

- Add an alternative to action 1 for *recreational for-hire vessels that are federally inspected and permitted to carry more than 6 passengers*, to have an aggregate gag and black grouper vessel limit of 2 fish for every 6 passengers on board, not to exceed a maximum number of fish per vessel per trip, ranging from 6-12 fish, not to include captain and crew limits.
- Select alternative 2 (private), alternative 3 (for-hire) modified with the removal of the headboat component, and the new alternative recommended for the headboat component as preferred for action 1.



Recent Council Discussion

- In December 2024, the Council requested additional information to begin discussing potential management changes that better reflect the needs of the headboat component.
- In June 2025, staff presented [highlights from a report](#) prepared by the SEFSC and directed the Snapper Grouper Committee to continue discussion focusing on snapper grouper species.
- In September 2025 the Council directed staff to investigate vessel limits and current catch rates per every six passengers for [black grouper, gag, scamp, and snowy grouper](#); and *define and explain the requirements to be considered a headboat.*

Headboat definition

Headboat means a vessel that holds a valid Certificate of Inspection (COI) issued by the USCG to carry more than six passengers for hire.

- (1) A headboat with a commercial vessel permit is considered to be operating as a headboat when it carries a passenger who pays a fee or
 - (i) In the case of persons aboard fishing for or possessing South Atlantic snapper-grouper, when there are more persons aboard than the number of crew specified in the vessel's COI; or
 - (ii) In the case of persons aboard fishing for or possessing coastal migratory pelagic fish, when there are more than three persons aboard, including operator and crew.



Request for the AP

Please provide feedback on enforceability of establishing vessel limits for every 6 passengers for certain snapper grouper species and any other enforcement issues that could arise.

