

---

## Reef Fish Amendment 61

---

**From** Ben Hartig <mackattackben@att.net>

**Date** Mon 2/16/2026 12:58 AM

**To** John Hadley <john.hadley@safmc.net>; John Carmichael <John.Carmichael@safmc.net>; McCawley, Jessica <jessica.mccawley@myfwc.com>; James Hull Jr <hullsseafood@aol.com>

Hi John, hope you are doing well. Just saw the amendment and support the council's effort to remove some of the reef fish from the management plan. I would urge the council not to remove banded rudderfish from the plan. Different species become important as you move from north to south in the SA region. For instance vermillion snapper is critically important for NC, SC and northern Florida and yellowtail snapper drives the reef fish production predominately in the Keys. The area off SE Florida has no significant fishery for either of those species. We are dependent primarily on greater amberjack, banded rudderfish and to a lesser degree gag grouper and mutton snapper. For gag we have about a 10 day window before the remaining gag that make their spawning migration to south Florida make their way back north. Mutton snapper are hit and miss each year as their abundance depends upon migration to our area from the Keys. If we have significant cold water upwellings in the summer months they never make it to our area. Banded rudderfish have a dependable spawning migration to our area starting in late March and lasting to about the end of May. It is an important commercial and recreational fishery that is an important part of our commercial portfolio during that time frame. Additionally, Greater amberjack is closed in April as well as gag grouper and both spanish and king mackerel have left the area during this time as well. King mackerel will return on their spawning migration between the last week of April and the second week of May. As you can see banded rudderfish becomes an important target species and there are about 6 of us that catch the 500 pound trip limit on a regular basis during this time frame. And none of the fishermen I have talked to want this species removed from federal management and the fishery occurs primarily in federal waters.

I know the council approved the 500 pound trip limit while I was on the council as I made the motion to make that regulatory change. The regulations by species says that there is no trip limit so what are the regulations? Also the trip limit was proposed by observations that indicated that the fishery in our area was showing signs of decreased abundance which is another reason this species should not be removed from the reef fish plan as it has specific management needs.. Fishermen in our area are abiding by the 500 pound trip limit which has increased the price for a more regulated landing structure. Having a chart that shows the landings by state over the past 10 years would be informative and when those landings occur would also help. Banded rudderfish are an enigma in the reef fish complex as they make their spawning migration in the spring up and down the coast but are rarely encountered by fisheries outside of this time. I have talked with a number of fishermen throughout the SA region and their observations are the same as ours. The hypothesis is that they may move out to the Lophelia reefs where little effort occurs and I have seen a submersal video in that area that showed a school of rudderfish I will try and have additional comments on the other species on the public comment form before the next meeting.