



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Snapper Grouper

Evaluation of the Fishery Management Unit

March 2025

Background

In December 2024, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) requested information to begin evaluating the need for conservation and management of species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU). The FMU composition is relevant to several ongoing Council considerations, and any changes to the FMU need to be identified to advance other Council projects.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 46 (Recreational Permitting and Education Requirement)

Amendment 46 considers which snapper grouper species should require a federal (or designated equivalent) permit for recreational harvest. The Council is also considering whether and how state licenses or endorsements could be deemed equivalent alternatives to a federal permit, and how species designated for the state licenses or endorsements should align with those requiring a federal permit.

Designation of Key Stocks for Future Stock Assessment Planning

The Council and Southeast Fisheries Science Center are considering a transition in stock assessment planning to designation of “key stocks” that would receive more regular and frequent stock assessments. It is acknowledged that stock assessments would not be developed for most species in the FMU, as the expectation is that the health of the key stocks would indicate the health of the fishery overall. Without any intention of stock assessments being developed for some species currently in the FMU, the question has been raised whether such species need to continue to be included.

For-Hire Reporting

The Council is developing an amendment to improve reporting for the charter/headboat component of the recreational fishery. If the Council considers changes to the Snapper Grouper FMU, this could affect the number of species that would need to be reported.

Evaluation Criteria

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) section 302(h)(1) requires that a council prepare a fishery management plan (FMP) for each fishery under its authority that requires conservation and management. Not every fishery requires federal management. Any 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.” (see Magnuson-Stevens Act definition at 16 U.S.C. 1802(5)). Based on this definition, and other relevant provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, a council should consider the following non-exhaustive list of factors when deciding whether additional stocks require conservation and management:

1. The stock is an important component of the marine environment.
2. The stock is caught by the fishery.
3. Whether an FMP can improve or maintain the condition of the stock.
4. The stock is a target of a fishery.
5. The stock is important to commercial, recreational, or subsistence users.
6. The fishery is important to the Nation or to the regional economy.
7. The need to resolve competing interests and conflicts among user groups and whether an FMP can further that resolution.
8. The economic condition of a fishery and whether an FMP can produce more efficient utilization.
9. The needs of a developing fishery, and whether an FMP can foster orderly growth.
10. The extent to which the fishery is already adequately managed by states, by state/federal programs, or by federal regulations pursuant to other FMPs or international commissions, or by industry self-regulation, consistent with the requirements of the MSA and other applicable law.

Previous Work

The Council most recently discussed the need for conservation and management of snapper grouper species in December 2020. During this meeting, the Council used a [Shiny tool](#) to evaluate species against the factors listed above. Ultimately, the Council decided to continue to include blackfin snapper, coney, cubera snapper, margate, misty grouper, silk snapper, saucereye porgy, yellowedge grouper, or yellowfin grouper in the management unit.

If requested, staff can update the previous tool with a new group of species and current data for review at a future meeting.

Objective for this Meeting (March 2025)

Review the Snapper Grouper FMU and decide whether any changes to the FMU should be further evaluated.

List of Snapper Grouper Species

All species included in the FMU are listed with their sector annual catch limits (ACL) in Tables 1 (single-species ACLs) and 2 (complex ACLs). The most recent stock assessments and statuses for snapper grouper species are shown in Table 3. Per the MSA requirements listed above, any species that are overfished or experiencing overfishing (highlighted yellow in Table 3) would not be eligible to be considered for removal from the FMU or designation as ecosystem component species.

Table 1. Single-species sector annual catch limits (ACL) for the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit during 2024 (or 2023-2024).

Snapper Grouper Species	Commercial ACL	Commercial Unit	Recreational ACL	Recreational Unit
Atlantic Spadefish	150,552	lbs ww	661,926	CHTS lbs ww
Bar Jack	13,228	lbs ww	49,021	CHTS lbs ww
Black Grouper	96,844	lbs ww	165,750	MRFSS lbs ww
Black Sea Bass	276,490	lbs ww	366,510	CHTS lbs ww
Blueline Tilefish	117,148	lbs ww	116,820	CHTS lbs ww
Gag	62,922	lbs gw	133,075	FES lbs gw
Golden Tilefish	433,218	lbs gw	2,635	FES numbers
Goliath Grouper	0	lbs ww	0	MRFSS lbs ww
Gray Triggerfish	312,324	lbs ww	404,675	CHTS lbs ww
Greater Amberjack	1,088,129	lbs gw	2,101,450	FES lbs ww
Hogfish (GA-NC)	23,456	lbs ww	988	CHTS numbers
Hogfish (FLK/EFL)	12,677	lbs ww	41,934	CHTS numbers
Mutton Snapper	111,354	lbs ww	127,115	CHTS numbers
Nassau Grouper	0	lbs ww	0	MRFSS lbs gw
Red Grouper	71,280	lbs ww	90,720	CHTS lbs ww
Red Porgy	43,023	lbs gw	40,631	FES lbs ww
Red Snapper	85,268	lbs ww	21,167	CHTS numbers
Scamp	219,375	lbs ww	116,369	CHTS lbs ww
Snowy Grouper	106,174	lbs gw	1,691	FES numbers
Speckled Hind	0	lbs ww	0	MRFSS lbs ww
Vermilion Snapper	908,480	lbs ww	427,520	CHTS lbs ww
Warsaw Grouper	0	lbs ww	0	MRFSS lbs ww
Wreckfish	369,645	lbs ww	19,455	CHTS lbs ww
Yellowtail Snapper	1,596,510	lbs ww	1,440,990	MRFSS lbs ww

NOTE: Upon implementation of Amendment 55, scamp and yellowmouth grouper would be combined to form a new complex.

Table 2. Species complex sector annual catch limits (ACL) for the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit during 2024 (or 2023-2024). Species 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.

Snapper Grouper Complex/Species	Commercial ACL	Commercial Unit	Recreational ACL	Recreational Unit
Deep-water Complex	131,268	lbs ww	38,628	CHTS lbs ww
Yellowedge Grouper	<i>50,464</i>		<i>5,132</i>	
Silk Snapper	<i>66,794</i>		<i>23,529</i>	
Misty Grouper	<i>2,388</i>		<i>475</i>	
Sand Tilefish	<i>1,770</i>		<i>6,213</i>	
Queen Snapper	<i>8,756</i>		<i>710</i>	
Blackfin Snapper	<i>1,096</i>		<i>2,569</i>	
Other Shallow Water Grouper Complex	55,542	lbs ww	48,648	CHTS lbs ww
Red Hind	<i>24,350</i>		<i>8,734</i>	
Rock Hind	<i>22,833</i>		<i>14,660</i>	
Yellowmouth Grouper	<i>44</i>		<i>3,995</i>	
Yellowfin Grouper	<i>4,879</i>		<i>4,379</i>	
Coney	<i>665</i>		<i>2,053</i>	
Graysby	<i>2,771</i>		<i>14,827</i>	
Other Jacks Complex	189,422	lbs ww	267,799	CHTS lbs ww
Almaco Jack	<i>147,322</i>		<i>155,195</i>	
Lesser Amberjack	<i>37,829</i>		<i>107,605</i>	
Banded Rudderfish	<i>4,270</i>		<i>5,000</i>	
Other Snappers Complex	344,575	lbs ww	1,169,308	CHTS lbs ww
Gray Snapper	<i>302,180</i>		<i>944,952</i>	
Lane Snapper	<i>30,014</i>		<i>173,472</i>	
Cubera Snapper	<i>12,381</i>		<i>50,884</i>	
Other Porgies Complex	36,348	lbs ww	106,914	CHTS lbs ww
Jolthead Porgy	<i>1,571</i>		<i>36,315</i>	
Knobbed Porgy	<i>34,515</i>		<i>32,926</i>	
Saucereye Porgy	<i>0</i>		<i>3,606</i>	
Scup	<i>0</i>		<i>9,306</i>	
Whitebone Porgy	<i>262</i>		<i>24,762</i>	
Grunts Complex	217,903	lbs ww	618,122	CHTS lbs ww
White Grunt	<i>203,405</i>		<i>440,484</i>	
Sailor's Choice	<i>0</i>		<i>22,674</i>	
Tomtate	<i>0</i>		<i>92,670</i>	
Margate	<i>14,498</i>		<i>62,294</i>	
Ecosystem Component Species	No ACL		No ACL	
Cottonwick, Longspine Porgy, Bank Sea Bass, Rock Sea Bass, Ocean Triggerfish				

Table 3. The most recent operational stock assessments and stock statuses for South Atlantic Snapper Grouper species.

Snapper Grouper Species	Most Recent Operational Stock Assessment	Biomass Status	Exploitation Status
Black Grouper	SEDAR 19 (2009)	Not Overfished	Not Overfishing
Black Sea Bass	SEDAR 76 (2023)	Not Overfished*	Not Overfishing
Blueline Tilefish	SEDAR 50 (2016)	Not Overfished	Overfishing**
Gag	SEDAR 71 (2020)	Overfished	Overfishing
Golden Tilefish	SEDAR 89 (2024)	Not Overfished	Not Overfishing
Greater Amberjack	SEDAR 59 (2018)	Not Overfished	Not Overfishing
Hogfish (FLK/EFL)	SEDAR 37 (2014)	Overfished	Overfishing
Mutton Snapper	SEDAR 15A Update (2015)	Not Overfished	Not Overfishing
Red Grouper	SEDAR 53 (2016)	Overfished	Overfishing
Red Porgy	SEDAR 60 (2018)	Overfished	Overfishing
Red Snapper	SEDAR 73 (2020)	Overfished	Overfishing
Scamp & Yellowmouth Grouper	SEDAR 68 (2022)	Overfished	Not Overfishing
Snowy Grouper	SEDAR 36 Update (2019)	Overfished	Overfishing
Vermilion Snapper	SEDAR 55 (2017)	Not Overfished	Not Overfishing
Wreckfish	2014	Not Overfished	Not Overfishing
Yellowtail Snapper	SEDAR 64 Interim Analysis (2022)	Not Overfished	Not Overfishing
Status Unknown (Last assessment listed if available)			
Atlantic Spadefish, Bar Jack, Gray Triggerfish (SEDAR 82 [2024] research track), Hogfish GA-NC (SEDAR 37 [2014]), Speckled Hind, Warsaw Grouper, Goliath Grouper, Nassau Grouper, Yellowedge Grouper, Silk Snapper, Misty Grouper, Sand Tilefish, Queen Snapper, Blackfin Snapper, Almaco Jack, Banded Rudderfish, Lesser Amberjack, Gray Snapper, Lane Snapper, Cubera Snapper, White Grunt, Sailor's Choice, Tomtate, Margate, Red Hind, Rock Hind, Yellowfin Grouper, Coney, Graysby, Jolthead Porgy, Knobbed Porgy, Saucereye Porgy, Scup, Whitebone Porgy, Bank Sea Bass, Rock Sea Bass, Longspine Porgy, Ocean Triggerfish, Cottonwick			

*Reference points recommended by the stock assessment scientists, which are different than those currently in effect, indicate that the stock is overfished.

**Overfishing status based on harvest above the OFL for multiple years; not through stock assessment.

Committee Action

Provide guidance on whether any species in the Snapper Grouper FMU should be further evaluated for removal or designation as ecosystem component species. Provide guidance on any other changes to the composition of the FMU that should be considered.