



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Snapper Grouper

Golden Tilefish Stock Assessment Response

Decision Document, March 2025

Background

[SEDAR 89](#) (2024) included data through 2022 and indicated that the golden tilefish stock in the South Atlantic is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing.

In December 2024, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) received a presentation on the assessment from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) and catch level recommendations from the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). Council staff also presented the [Fishery Overview](#) for golden tilefish, which contains recent assessment, catch, and fishery information. The Council initiated an amendment to incorporate catch levels based on SEDAR 89 into management for golden tilefish.

Acceptable Biological Catch

In October 2024, the SSC reviewed the stock assessment and developed acceptable biological catch recommendations, pending Council decisions about the stock risk rating. In December 2024, the Council evaluated the stock risk rating for golden tilefish, as part of the new acceptable biological catch (ABC) control rule and received recommended overfishing limit (OFL) and ABC levels from the SSC. Golden tilefish were evaluated as a high-risk stock with a moderate relative biomass level from the stock assessment, resulting in an accepted probability of overfishing (P*) of 30% to develop ABCs (Table 1). Discards of golden tilefish are estimated to be minimal, so the ABC and OFL recommendations are provided only as landings.

Table 1. Golden tilefish overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) levels recommended by the Scientific and Statistical Committee, based on projections from SEDAR 89 (2024).

OFL RECOMMENDATIONS		
Year	Landed (1000 lbs gw)	Landed (number, 1000s)
2025	495	75
2026	508	77
2027+	517	78
ABC RECOMMENDATIONS		
Year	Landed (1000 lbs gw)	Landed (number, 1000s)
2025	407	61
2026	429	64
2027+	447	67

Projections become increasingly uncertain for years further away from the terminal year. The SSC’s standard policy (as developed through the [Catch Level Projections Workgroup](#)) is to recommend ABC for no more than 5 years beyond the terminal year of data (2022 for SEDAR 89). Due to the timing of assessment completion and the time necessary to develop projections with appropriate assumptions about the future population and fishery, ABC recommendations are provided for 2025-2027. Under the current ABC recommendations, the 2027 level would remain in place until a future assessment or interim analyses supporting recommended catch levels based on more recent data can be completed.

Objectives for this Meeting (March 2025)

- Consider necessary management actions for golden tilefish at this time and provide direction on the type of amendment that should be developed.
- Approve the amendment for scoping.

Tentative Amendment Timing

The Council previously discussed different potential paths for amendment development. If the Council decides to only change catch levels, they could do so through an abbreviated framework amendment with the approximate timing outlined below. Actions other than catch level adjustments would require additional time for amendment development.

	Abbreviated Framework Amendment (adjustment of catch levels ONLY)	Plan Amendment (adjustment of catch levels and modifications to management measures)
December 2024	Council initiated amendment	
March 2025	Direct staff to begin drafting the amendment with the intent to hold a	Approve for scoping

	public hearing during the June Council Meeting	
Spring 2025		Scoping hearings
June 2025	Public hearing during the Council meeting; Review draft amendment and approve for formal review	Review scoping comments and provide guidance on draft actions and alternatives
September 2025	Review public comment and approve for formal review	Analyses and initial actions and alternatives
December 2025	NMFS conducts rulemaking	Review modifications to the amendment, select preferred alternatives, and approve for public hearings
Winter 2026	Regulations effective	Conduct public hearings
March 2026		Review public comment and approve all actions
June 2026		Approve for formal review
Early 2027		Regulations effective

Potential Management Actions

Required

The following discussions are required responses to a new stock assessment with new catch level recommendations, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) or Council policy:

1. **Revise catch levels to be within SSC recommendations based on SEDAR 89 (ABC, annual catch limit [ACL], and optimum yield [OY])**
2. **Review sector allocation percentages**
 - Required discussion per the Council’s [Allocation Review Trigger Policy](#), with the completion of a new stock assessment and revised catch level recommendations.
 - Current allocations (as adjusted through implementation of SG Amendment 52 in 2024)
 - i. Commercial: 96.70%
 - ii. Recreational: 3.30%

Table 2. Commercial (Com), recreational (Rec), and total annual catch limits (ACL), landings, and percentages of the ACL (% ACL) landed for golden tilefish from 2018-2022. Commercial and total landings and ACLs are monitored in pounds gutted weight (lbs gw), and recreational landings and ACLs are monitored in numbers of fish.

Year	Com ACL (lbs gw)	Com Landings (lbs gw)	Com % ACL	Rec ACL (# fish)	Rec Landings (# fish)	Rec % ACL	Total ACL (lbs gw)	Total Landings (lbs gw)	Total % ACL
2018	313,310	301,999	96.4%	2,187	3,112	142.3%	323,000	315,785	97.8%
2019	331,740	367,817	110.9%	2,316	15,638	675.2%	342,000	367,817	107.5%
2020	331,740	344,255	103.8%	2,316	2,894	125.0%	342,000	344,255	100.7%
2021	331,740	324,330	97.8%	2,316	3,073	132.7%	342,000	324,330	94.8%
2022	331,740	343,536	103.6%	2,316	2,357	101.8%	342,000	343,536	100.4%

Source: NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit Monitoring Website (2/2025)

Other Potential Actions

The following actions are not required, but may be considered based on previous Council and AP discussions:

3. Accountability measures

- Currently, accountability measures do not include post-season reductions if an ACL overage occurs while the stock is not overfished (the current status). Therefore, neither sector is eligible to carry over unharvested ACL under the ABC Control Rule.
- If the Council would like either sector to be eligible for carry-over, the accountability measures for that sector would need to be revised to include payback of annual overages.

4. Change the recreational season start date

- Currently, the recreational season begins on January 1 and the commercial season begins on January 15 (calendar fishing year for both sectors).
- The Council and Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel have had previous discussions about aligning the recreational open seasons for several of the deep water snapper grouper species. Recreational seasons open for several other deep water species later in the year (e.g. blueline tilefish and snowy grouper both open on May 1).

Committee Action

Determine which action(s) the Council wants to include in an amendment and whether to recommend approval for public scoping.

Appendix A. Summary of Regulations

Species	Golden Tilefish
OFL	543,000 (2025) 535,000 (2026+)
ABC	458,000 (2025) 466,000 (2026+) (Am 52)
Total ACL	458,000 (2025) 466,000 (2026+) (Am 52)
Commercial ACL	2025: 442,886 lbs gw; H&L (25%)=110,722 lbs gw; Longline (75%)= 332,165 lbs gw 2026+: 450,622 lbs gw; H&L (25%)=112,656 lbs gw; Longline (75%)= 337,967 lbs gw (Am 52)
Recreational ACL	2025: 2,694 fish 2026+: 2,741 fish (Am 52)
Commercial Allocation	96.70% (25% Hook and line, 75% longline) (Gear allocations - Am 18B) (Sector allocations - Am 52)
Recreational Allocation	3.30%
Commercial AM (Amendment Language)	Hook-and-line component. If commercial hook-and-line landings for golden tilefish, as estimated by the SRD, reach or are projected to reach the commercial ACL (commercial quota) specified in §622.190(a)(2)(ii), the AA will file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register to close the hook-and-line component of the commercial sector for the remainder of the fishing year. Applicable restrictions after a commercial quota closure are specified in §622.190(c). If commercial longline landings for golden tilefish, as estimated by the SRD, reach or are projected to reach the longline commercial ACL (commercial quota) specified in §622.190(a)(2)(iii), the AA will file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register to close the longline component of the commercial sector for the remainder of the fishing year. After the commercial ACL for the longline component is reached or projected to be reached, golden tilefish may not be fished for or possessed by a vessel with a golden tilefish longline endorsement. Applicable restrictions after a commercial quota closure are specified in §622.190(c).
Recreational AM (Amendment Language)	The National Marine Fisheries Service will annually announce the length of the recreational fishing season based on catch rates from the previous season. The fishing season will start on January 1 and end on the date National Marine Fisheries Service projects the recreational annual catch limit will be met, regardless if the stock is overfished, unless NMFS determines that no closure is necessary based on the best scientific information available. On and after the effective date of such a notification, the bag and possession limits for golden tilefish in or from the South Atlantic EEZ are zero.

Commercial In-season Closure?	Yes
Commercial Payback?	Yes if overfished AND total ACL has been exceeded. (Currently not overfished)
Rec In-season Closure?	No
Rec Payback?	No
Fishing year	Jan 1-Dec 31
Commercial Management Measures	Longline trip limit 4,000 lbs gw; H&L trip limit 500 lbs gw (18B). Season begins on January 15
Recreational Management Measures	Part of Aggregate Grouper Bag Limit of 3/person/day of: gag, black, snowy, misty, red grouper, scamp, yellowedge, yellowfin, yellowmouth, blueline tile, golden tile, sand tile, coney, graysby, red hind and rock hind, with a limit of 1 golden tile per person per day. Sale of recreationally caught fish prohibited.
Seasonal closures	None
Spawning season	March-July, peak in April
Size at first spawning	50% maturity between age 1 (11 in TL) and age 2 (15 in TL).