

Release Reduction for the Snapper Grouper Fishery

Council Decision Document

March 2022

Background

Red snapper have been in a rebuilding plan since 2011, with the stock scheduled to be rebuilt by 2044. The most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic red snapper, SEDAR 73 (2021) with data through 2019, determined the stock to still be overfished and undergoing overfishing. Since initial implementation of the rebuilding plan, red snapper fishing has been limited by few days of recreational harvest allowed annually and a low ACL for the commercial sector with a season beginning each year in July until the ACL is met. These measures, combined with growing effort in the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery, particularly from the recreational sector, have led to a drastic increase in the number of red snapper that must be released after being caught. The increase in releases has, in turn, led to an increase in the number of fish that die after being caught and released, despite efforts from management and fishermen to improve survival after release through best practices and use of descending devices. The number of dead red snapper releases far outnumbers fish removed from the population by harvest.

Large numbers of releases limit managers' ability to prevent overfishing and reduce the number of fish that can be landed by the fishery. Overfishing occurs when the number of total removals exceeds the overfishing limit. If more of these removals occur from fish dying after release, fewer fish may be landed.

In September 2021, the SSC recommended new ABCs for red snapper based on the results of SEDAR 73 (2021). Implementation of the recommended ABCs would initially entail an approximate one third reduction from the current ABC, further limiting the fishery and not addressing the primary source of mortality for the stock. Therefore, the Council directed work to begin on a framework amendment that would implement management measures to reduce releases of red snapper, recognizing that such a measure would necessarily affect multiple species in the snapper grouper fishery. The Council intends for this management change to also

be taken into account by the SSC in reconsidering assumptions about future management conditions in projections that support their ABC recommendation.

In December 2021, the Council directed staff to investigate several management measures and evaluate the availability and quality of information available to support changes to catch projections based on implementation of these measures. Preliminary online scoping for release-reducing measures was also conducted in February 2022.

Initial Scoping Summary

An initial public input gathering phase took place from January 18 through February 4, 2022. An online comment form was made available to solicit input (<https://safmc.wufoo.com/reports/release-mortality-reduction-red-snapper-report/>) and a brief [scoping document](#) was created.

Law Enforcement AP Input

The Law Enforcement Advisory Panel met in February 2022 and was asked for input on any enforceability issues that may present themselves as the Council explores ways to reduce discards and discard mortality through an amendment. Of the measures that the Council has discussed as potential measures to explore, the AP had the following comments:

- Enforceability of regulations pertaining to hook size would be difficult
- A per person weight limit would not be enforceable on the water as officers would need certified scales.
- Gear regulations tend to be hard to enforce and consequently need to be kept simple.
- Consider that area closures may require on-site enforcement.
- Depth-based closures are unenforceable.
- Consider requiring a VMS if area closures are to be considered for the commercial sector

The LE AP requests they have frequent input on this amendment as it is being developed to assist the Council in identifying potential enforceability issues of specific measures under consideration.

Assessment of Data Capabilities

In December 2021, the Council requested a compilation of information or analyses related to several potential management measures to inform whether a demonstrable change in recreational dead releases can be estimated from their implementation, such that it could be considered in re-estimation of the ABC for red snapper. Information on bycatch reduction for recreational gear types is limited in general, and further so when considering some of the unique aspects of the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. An initial evaluation, in the form of pros, information needs/challenges, and whether estimates of catch rate reductions would have a quantitative or qualitative basis, are shown in Table 1. Additionally, estimates of discard mortality for assessed species are provided in Table 2.

Table 1. Potential management measures to reduce releases and release mortality in the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery and pros, information needs/challenges, and types of information that could potentially be used in estimates of effectiveness in reducing catch and release rates.

<u>Type of Action</u>	<u>Pros</u>	<u>Information Needs/Challenges</u>	<u>Type of information for estimating effectiveness in reducing releases</u>
Single Hook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal impact on fishing practices and access Reduce effective effort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on current practices (how many fishermen are using multiple vs. single hooks) and effect of the change on catch rates Collecting information could be time-consuming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative
Leader Length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pacific “long leader” has numeric support to reduce catch rates for fish closer to the bottom while maintaining ability to catch fish higher in the water column (Oregon DFW Report) Moderate impact on fishing practices and access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to translate catch rate differences from Pacific groundfish species to South Atlantic snapper grouper species Gear uncommon to the region may create implementation difficulty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quantitative/Qualitative
Hook Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal impact on fishing practices and access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on current practices (most common hook sizes used now) and effect of the change on catch rates Collecting information could be time-consuming Industry standards lacking AP and public comments have indicated that hook size does not typically deter catch of red snapper Effectiveness varies by species (small mouth vs. large mouth) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative

<u>Considered Action</u>	<u>Pros</u>	<u>Information Needs/Challenges</u>	<u>Type of information for estimating effectiveness in reducing releases</u>
Lines per Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal impact on fishing practices and access • Reduce effective effort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on current practices and effectiveness of the gear change • Most fish one rod per person (personal observation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative
Prohibit electric reels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal impact on fishing practices and access • Reduce effective effort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on current practices and effectiveness of the gear change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative
Timed Openings/Seasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current data allow estimation of daily catch rates • Relatively more enforceable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May become complex if applied by species or groups • Regional differences in fishing seasons could require regional seasons • Effectiveness could be impacted by redirected effort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative
Area Closure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could use heat maps to consider reducing catch in a specific, high catch area • Relatively more enforceable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spatial resolution lacking for current catch information • Redirected effort outside of the closed area could reduce overall effectiveness • Expect significant opposition by those currently fishing in the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative/Qualitative
Depth Closure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bottom fishing closure could potentially have similar effect as long leader gear, maintain catches of some species while reducing catches of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to enforce, but potentially addressed by area definitions • Redirected effort outside of the closed area could reduce overall effectiveness • Depth resolution lacking for current catch information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative/Qualitative

<u>Considered Action</u>	<u>Pros</u>	<u>Information Needs/Challenges</u>	<u>Type of information for estimating effectiveness in reducing releases</u>
Weight Limit per Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could potentially reduce release mortality from highgrading during the fishing season • Minimal impact on fishing practices and access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would not reduce out of season encounters. • No quantification of high grading available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualitative

Table 2. Discard mortality by species and sector. Source: SG Amendment 50

Species	Fishery	Release mortality	Data Source
Black Grouper	Recreational & Commercial	20%	SEDAR 19 (2010)
Black Grouper	Commercial (Longline)	30%	SEDAR 19 (2010)
Black Sea Bass	Recreational	13.7%	SEDAR 56 (2018)
Black Sea Bass	Commercial Trap/Pot (2007- present)	48.3%	SEDAR 56 (2018)
Black Sea Bass	Commercial Vertical Line	19%	SEDAR 56 (2018)
Blueline Tilefish	Recreational	82%	SEDAR 50 (2017)
Blueline Tilefish	Commercial (H&L)	95%	SEDAR 50 (2017)
Blueline Tilefish	Commercial (Trawl)	100%	SEDAR 50 (2017)
Gag	Recreational	25%	SEDAR 10 Update (2014)
Gag	Commercial	40%	SEDAR 10 Update (2014)
Golden Tilefish	Recreational & Commercial	100%	SEDAR 25 (2011)
Gray Triggerfish	Recreational & Commercial	12.5%	SEDAR 41 (2016)
Greater Amberjack	Recreational & Commercial	20%	SEDAR 59 (2020)
Hogfish	Recreation & Commercial (H&L)	10%	SEDAR 37 (2015)
Hogfish	Recreation & Commercial (Dive)	100%	SEDAR 37 (2015)
Mutton Snapper	Recreational & Commercial	15%	SEDAR 15U (2015)
Red Grouper	Recreational & Commercial	20%	SEDAR 19 (2017)
Red Porgy	Recreational	41%	SEDAR 60 (2020)
Red Porgy	Commercial	53%	SEDAR 60 (2020)
Red Snapper	Recreational - Private	23%	SEDAR 73 (2021)
Red Snapper	Recreational - Charter & Headboat	22%	SEDAR 73 (2021)
Red Snapper	Commercial	32%	SEDAR 73 (2021)
Scamp	Recreational	26%	SEDAR 68 (2021)
Scamp	Commercial	39%	SEDAR 68 (2021)
Snowy Grouper	Recreational & Commercial	100%	SEDAR 36 (2013)
Vermilion snapper	Recreational	38%	SEDAR 55 (2018)
Vermilion snapper	Commercial	41%	SEDAR 55 (2018)
Yellowtail snapper	Recreational	15%	SEDAR 64 (2020)
Yellowtail snapper	Commercial	12.5%	SEDAR 64 (2020)