

Summary Report

Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee

June 9, 2025

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee) met on June 9, 2025 to further develop Amendment 60 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (FMP).

The Sub-Committee approved the agenda for the June 2025 meeting and minutes for the March 2025 meeting, noting some changes to be updated by staff.

1. Review of Updated Commercial Data Analyses

At the March 2025 meeting, the Sub-Committee reviewed several analyses of the commercial sector of the snapper grouper fishery. Council staff presented additional analyses describing trends in the number of commercial trips approaching trip limits, numbers of entities that reported commercial catches, as well as other analyses.

2. Discussion of Commercial Issues and Initial Prioritization

The Sub-Committee reviewed draft actions based on previous discussions. The Sub-Committee directed staff to include the actions listed below and to solicit public input using the following questions and information:

Action 1. Revise the 2-for-1 snapper grouper commercial unlimited permit policy

- Include information in scoping materials about the original reasoning/timing of the 2-for-1 policy.
 - Describe factors that are causing the Council to consider changes today, notably the difficulties for new entry.
- Clarify that this action is intended to revise the 2-for-1 policy, not the limited entry program.
- What are the benefits and barriers that fishermen have experienced due to the 2-for-1 policy?
- How would keeping or removing the 2-for-1 policy affect fishing operations?
- The Sub-Committee noted that if the 2-for-1 policy is maintained, the Council will need to develop evaluation criteria (e.g. specified time period or maximum number of permits).
 - Economic analysis may be useful in this evaluation.
 - Will need to understand the number SG1 permits that are owned but may be latent due to having acquired 1 but not 2 permits; understand the potential effort that will return to the fishery if the 2-for-1 policy is removed.
 - Council staff will follow up with NOAA Fisheries staff to learn whether there are any restrictions to owning one newly-acquired SG1 permit (that is not used) while waiting to acquire a second SG1 permit.

Action 2. Revise the requirements to acquire or retain a snapper grouper (SG1) commercial permit

- If the 2-for-1 policy is removed (this action may need to be a Sub-Action of Action 1), should there be any requirements to acquire or retain a permit?
- Future Council discussions may need to include potential income or participation requirements, as well as how any requirements contribute to seafood competitiveness.

Action 3. Establish a framework for dynamic trip limits that vary throughout the season, based on the tracked catch and the time remaining in the season.

- Staff will review the terminology and develop action language.
- Intent is for this to be a general policy, applicable to many snapper grouper species. The goal of this policy is to maximize the commercial fishery's ability to harvest its allocation of optimum yield.
- This could include an alternative to begin the season with a higher trip limit, followed by a trip limit decrease (step down), if necessary. Another alternative could initially begin the season with a lower trip limit, followed by a trip limit increase (step up), if possible.
- Annual catch limits are set as sustainable levels of catch, even within a rebuilding plan. Therefore, this policy could be applied to rebuilding species, as well.
- Question for the public:
 - Would you rather have a higher trip limit at the beginning or end of the fishing year?

Action 4. Establish a non-target or out-of-season allowance for harvest.

- Note that out-of-season catches would need to be estimated when monitoring in-season landings or establishing annual seasons (i.e., seasons may be shortened to allow out-of-season harvest to occur and not exceed the ACL).
- Implementation and enforcement could be difficult, particularly for species fished with multiple gear types (e.g. golden tilefish).
- To ensure this is 'incidental' rather than targeted catch, an alternative could require harvest of in-season species in order to retain the 'incidental' allowance (NC red drum could be a helpful example).
- One approach could be establishment of 2 different trip limits: directed and incidental, which would be applicable at different times of the fishing year.
- Another approach could be an aggregate incidental limit, possibly with a total poundage for a specified sub-group of allowable species.
- Should this policy be species-specific, or a general (i.e., multispecies) poundage limit?

Other way to improve trip efficiency:

Consider revising existing gear onboard restrictions.

- Not an expansion of the gear being allowed for fishing; just what can be allowed onboard on the same trip.
- Potential issue: enforcement; knowing what fish were caught on which gear. VMS could potentially help with catch verification, but may also complicate development of the amendment by requiring additional actions.

The Sub-Committee also discussed 2 other potential actions: 1) Establish a maximum limit on the number of permits that each entity may own, and 2) Revise commercial trip limits to allow

multiple days' worth of trip limits to be possessed on trips that last for multiple days. The Sub-Committee did not recommend either of these actions for inclusion in Amendment 60. The action limiting the number of permits was not supported due to concerns about fairness and enforcement of such a policy. The action allowing multiple days's worth of trip limits for multi-day trips was not supported due to enforcement concerns (validating the number of days) and the potential utility of this policy with a minority of trips currently reaching single snapper grouper trip limits.

MOTION 1: RECOMMEND THAT THE SNAPPER GROUPE COMMITTEE APPROVE AMENDMENT 60 FOR SCOPING.

APPROVED BY SUB-COMMITTEE

3. Discussion of Next Steps and Timeline

Council staff presented a draft amendment timeline that would result in final Council consideration for approval in September 2026. The Sub-Committee stated that they intend to continue to develop Amendment 60 primarily through the Sub-Committee, with reports out to the full Snapper Grouper Committee. The Sub-Committee stated that they intend to continue conducting their meetings in-person, likely in conjunction with Council meetings or Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel meetings to minimize travel expenses.

Pending approval for scoping by the Snapper Grouper Committee and Council, staff will conduct scoping during Summer 2025 and present comments to the Sub-Committee at their next meeting.