

Amendment 46 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

Options Paper
March 2022

Note: Words that are [underlined and in blue font](#) provide a link to other documents.

Background

At the December 2021 South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting, the Snapper Grouper Committee requested that Amendment 46 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP) be added to the agenda for discussion in March 2022. Amendment 46 was previously developed in the first half of 2018 and was approved for scoping at the [June 2018 Council meeting](#). Due to time constraints over the Council's workplan and the need to obtain more information on potential approaches for private recreational data gathering, the amendment was never scoped. From 2018 through 2020 staff focused instead on piloting the MyFishCount mobile app and portal. Other related efforts have also been underway, most notably the development of the Private Recreational Reporting Workgroup which has met five times in 2021 and 2022. The briefing materials and summary reports for these meetings can be found on the [Council's website](#).

The Council's 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery, previous amendments, and existing requirements

The 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery (Vision Blueprint) was approved in December 2015 and was intended to inform management of the snapper grouper fishery through 2020. The Vision Blueprint was intended to serve as a "living document" to help guide future management, build on stakeholder input and how the Council envisions future management of the fishery, guide the development of new amendments that address priority objectives and strategies, and illustrate actions that could be developed through the regular amendment process. The Vision Blueprint is organized into four strategic goal areas: (1)

Science, (2) Management, (3) Communication, and (4) Governance. Each goal area has a set of objectives, strategies, and actions. The actions in Amendment 46 correspond to different objectives and strategies in the Vision Blueprint.

During Vision Meetings and scoping of Amendment 43 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (catch limits for red snapper), several fishermen expressed concern with the estimates of catch resulting from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Some fishermen requested exploring a recreational stamp/permit for snapper grouper fishing and to improve recreational estimates by requiring recreational fishermen to report their catch. This recommendation has also been put forth by the Council’s Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) numerous times. Permits and reporting requirements have been implemented for the federal for-hire component of the recreational sector and the commercial sector for the snapper grouper, dolphin wahoo, and coastal migratory pelagic fisheries to improve estimates of effort or catch in the South Atlantic region. However, these requirements do not cover the private recreational component.

Currently, a coastal recreational fishing license, issued through the states, is required for private recreational anglers as part of the 2007 Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act reauthorization to improve estimates of catch and effort. There have been other federal and state efforts to further refine information gathered on the private recreational component of the recreational sector, such as the [Large Pelagics Survey](#) that covers highly migratory species and [Private Recreational Tilefish Permit](#) in the Mid-Atlantic and New England regions. The state of Florida has also developed the [State Reef Fish Survey](#) where anglers intending to fish for certain species of snappers, groupers, jacks, triggerfish, or hogfish from a private vessel must obtain an State Reef Fish Angler designation.

Objectives for this meeting

- Review potential timing of the amendment
- State the goals and intent of the amendment
- Provide guidance to staff on range of options to develop
- Provide guidance on development of Ad Hoc Advisory Panel
- Consider approving the amendment for scoping

Tentative amendment timing

March 2022	Review options paper and approve amendment for scoping (?)
Spring 2022	Conduct scoping sessions and Snapper Grouper AP provides input.
June 2022	Review scoping comments and preliminary analyses.
September 2022	Review amendment and provide guidance.
December 2022	Review modifications to the amendment, select preferred alternatives, and approve for public hearings.
Winter 2023	Conduct public hearings
March 2023	Review public hearing comments and provide guidance.
June 2023	Review final draft amendment and consider approval for formal review.
2024	Regulation changes effective.

DRAFT Purpose and Need Statements

Given the extended amount of time since Amendment 46 was last reviewed and the workgroup's discussions on improving data for the private recreational component of the recreation sector, the Committee may want to discuss what is intended to be accomplished by this amendment that would potentially implement a private recreational permit and reporting requirement. After this discussion is captured, the IPT can work on drafting a purpose and need statement that suites the Committee's intended outcomes.

Ideas for the purpose:

- Improve effort and catch estimates for the private recreational component of the recreational sector.
 - All species? Rare event species?
- Implement recommendations from the Private Recreational Reporting Workgroup
- Other?

Ideas for the need:

- Recreational data is not meeting the Council's needs for management.
- Need to improve quality of data
 - Precision?
 - Quantity?
 - Timeliness?
 - Other?

The following is the previous purpose and need for Amendment 46 as revised at the Council's June 2018 meeting:

The *purpose* is to improve information on effort and catch (landed and released) of fish in the private recreational component of the recreational sector of the snapper grouper fishery.

The *need* for the amendment is to improve the quantity, quality, and timeliness of data from the private recreational sector that targets snapper grouper species, while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

Options for Proposed Actions

1. Establish a Private Recreational Snapper Grouper Permit to Fish For, Harvest, or Possess Snapper Grouper Species in the South Atlantic Region

Discussion:

- Federal permits with reporting requirements are currently in place for the commercial and for-hire components of the snapper grouper fishery.
- Recreational anglers in other regions are required to obtain additional federal permits and endorsements in some circumstances. Endorsements or permits (issued to a vessel) are required in:
 - The Mid-Atlantic Region for blueline and golden tilefish
 - Halibut in Alaska
 - Specific areas in the Pacific Islands
 - Species managed by the NMFS Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Division. Highly migratory species include certain species of tunas, swordfish, billfishes, and sharks.
- All of the examples in **Table 1** are issued for a vessel.

Table 1. Recreational permits and endorsements issued by NMFS regional offices or HMS Division.

Region/Division	Permit	Endorsement
Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office	Tilefish	
Alaska Regional Office	Subsistence Halibut	
Pacific Islands Regional Office	Area Specific*	
Highly Migratory Species Division	HMS	Shark

*Permits include: Main Hawaiian Islands non-commercial Bottomfish, Northern Mariana Islands Bottomfish, Pacific Remote Island Areas Bottomfish, Pacific Remote Islands Areas Pelagic Troll and Handline, and Special Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishing permits, and Western and Central Pacific Convention Area Endorsement.

- Each state in the South Atlantic region has specific requirements for certain gear types, methods, or possession of certain species.
 - In Florida, there is an additional endorsement or stamp to possess reef fish (Gulf of Mexico), snook, and spiny lobster and a tag to harvest tarpon.
 - The Saltwater Information Permit is a free permit added to the freshwater fishing license in Georgia.
 - The Recreational Commercial Gear License is an additional license required to use limited amounts of commercial gear in North Carolina.
 - In South Carolina, a separate license is required to bait for shrimp.
- All of the examples in **Table 2** are issued to an individual.

Table 2. State issued permit, licenses, stamps, and tags in the South Atlantic region in addition to a coastal or freshwater recreational fishing license.

State	Permit	License	Stamp	Tag
Florida			Reef Fish, Snook, Spiny Lobster	Tarpon
Georgia	Saltwater Information Permit			
North Carolina		Recreational Commercial Gear		
South Carolina		Shrimp Baiting		

- A private recreational permit could be used to better refine the sampling unit for fishermen that target snapper grouper species and provide targeted outreach to that audience.
- During the Vision process for the Snapper Grouper FMP, stakeholders suggested requiring permitting for the private recreational sector. Similar feedback has been received from the Snapper Grouper AP as well as in public comments to the Council in recent years.
- A permit would help identify the universe of anglers or private vessels that are fishing for snapper grouper species and could help improve estimates of snapper grouper effort and harvest without substantially increasing sampling effort in MRIP (although additional targeted survey efforts or biological samples might be needed). Below is a short list of pros and cons for developing a permit for the private recreational component of the snapper grouper fishery.

Permitting for the Snapper Grouper fishery

Pros

- + Potential to improve estimate of recreational effort in the snapper grouper fishery.
- + Potential to improve estimate of recreational catch and release data.
- + Provides a defined group of recreational anglers to contact for outreach, catch and effort surveys, and socio-economic surveys.

Cons

- Increased regulatory burden on recreational fishermen, NMFS or state agency, and enforcement.
 - Potentially no additional funds to implement/operate permitting system.
- Permits and endorsements are tools that could be used to aid in the development of improved effort or catch estimates. These tools can be developed for vessels or individuals. Below is a short list of pros and cons for vessel and individual based permitting.

Permit Type for the Snapper Grouper fishery

Vessel Permit

Pros

- + Single permit would cover all anglers on the vessel.
- + Fewer permits would need to be issued.
- + Tracks with other federal efforts in the South Atlantic and elsewhere (commercial permits, for-hire permits, MA tilefish permit, etc.)

- + Vessel registration number could be used to verify offshore fishing and reporting (if required).
- + Can be used to potentially create a targeted survey.

Cons

- Social, economic, and other information not gathered for each fisherman.
- Increased regulatory burden on vessel owner/operator.
- There is no information on the total number of anglers fishing for snapper grouper species.
- Permit would be issued for a vessel and each offshore fishing vessel would need a permit.
- No information gathered on those that harvest shore-based federal species or from vessels without registration numbers.

Individual Permit

Pros

- + Information would be collected on each angler to improve social, economic, and other data.
- + Single permit for each individual would not be duplicated, if federally permitted.
- + Can be used to potentially create a targeted survey.

Cons

- Difficult to determine if anglers are fishing offshore without reporting requirements or follow-up surveys.
- Increased regulatory burden on anglers.
- Increased administrative burden on NMFS since this will result in highest number of permits.

Committee Action:

- PROVIDE GUIDANCE ON RANGE OF OPTIONS TO DEVELOP.
 - Does the Committee want to consider a recreational permit for:
 - Vessels only?
 - Anglers only?
 - Anglers fishing from vessels only?
 - Anglers and vessels?
 - What species should this permit potentially cover (at least initially)?
 - Deepwater species only?
 - misty grouper, snowy grouper, speckled hind, warsaw grouper, yellowedge grouper, wreckfish, blueline tilefish, golden tilefish, blackfin snapper, queen snapper, and silk snapper
 - A different sub-set of species?
 - Shallow water groupers
 - Florida Reef Fish Survey species (mutton snapper, yellowtail snapper, hogfish, red snapper, vermilion snapper, gag grouper, red grouper, black grouper, greater amberjack, lesser amberjack, banded rudderfish, almaco jack, gray triggerfish)

- Other specific species or sub-set
 - All SG species?

2. Implement Reporting Requirements for Private Recreational Fishermen or Vessels

Discussion:

- Electronic reporting requirements are currently in place for headboats and charter boats operating in the snapper grouper fishery.
- Requiring reporting could improve data on the private angler component of the recreational sector especially when landings are confined to a short time period, infrequently sampled, or are rare events.
- For many species in the snapper grouper complex, there are few intercepts for individual species. Electronic data reporting systems can be developed to allow anglers to report varying levels of information.
- Reporting can be targeted for a specific species or group of species.
 - Example: GARFO Private Recreational Tilefish Permit requires electronic vessel trip report (eVTR) within 24 hours of returning to port for all trips the either targeted or retained golden or blueline tilefish.

Committee Action:

- PROVIDE GUIDANCE ON RANGE OF OPTIONS TO DEVELOP.
 - Should there be a reporting requirement associated with the private recreational permit at this time?
 - Could consider reporting requirement when permit is implemented or at a future time via a phased approach either in this amendment or a future amendment.
 - A reporting requirement will likely have notable impact on the time necessary to develop and implement this amendment.
 - If a reporting requirement is implemented, should it cover all species or focus on a sub-set of species?

3. Other Topics:

Ad Hoc Advisory Panel?

- At the most recent meeting of the Private Recreational Reporting Workgroup that took place on February 9, 2022, there was discussion of developing an ad hoc advisory panel that could advise the Council on the development of a recreational permit and reporting requirements that may accompany the permit.

Scoping?

- The Committee passed a motion to approve Amendment 46 for scoping at the June 2018 meeting, but this was changed at the full Council-level and scoping did not occur.

- Considering the significant amount of discussion that will likely be needed to begin development of this amendment, the Committee could approve it for scoping at this meeting or wait until additional information is available at the June meeting.

Committee Action:

- PROVIDE GUIDANCE ON DEVELOPMENT OF AN AD HOC ADVISORY PANEL AND POTENTIAL MAKEUP OF THAT PANEL.
- CONSIDER WHETHER APPROVAL FOR SCOPING IS APPROPRIATE AT THIS TIME.

DRAFT MOTION: APPROVE AMENDMENT 46 (RECREATIONAL PERMITS AND REPORTING) FOR SCOPING.

Draft list of topics to be scoped:

- Establishing a private recreational permit for the Snapper Grouper fishery
 - Vessel or individual permit?
- Establish a private recreational reporting requirement for the Snapper Grouper fishery
 - Would cover all species or sub-set of species?