

# Amendment 44

## Yellowtail Snapper



## Decision Document

September 2021

## Background

The status of the southeastern yellowtail snapper stock was assessed through the SEDAR process in 2019 (SEDAR 64), with data through 2017. Yellowtail snapper is considered a single stock distributed in the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf). The South Atlantic and Gulf SSCs met jointly in July 2020 to review the SEDAR 64 assessment and recommend catch limits for the stock. The SSCs deemed the assessment to be the best scientific information available and useful for management. As of 2017, the stock was not overfished nor undergoing overfishing. The SSCs held another joint meeting in October 2020 to recommend an ABC; the South Atlantic Council reviewed the SSCs' recommendations in December 2020. The South Atlantic Council directed staff to initiate an amendment to adjust catch levels for yellowtail snapper in coordination with the Gulf Council. In June 2021, the South Atlantic Council reviewed actions previously considered as of 2018 in Snapper Grouper Amendment 44.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 considered modifying the jurisdictional allocation of the acceptable biological catch (ABC), specifying a single annual catch limit (ACL) in the South

Atlantic and Gulf, allowing adaptive management of the ACL and revising or establishing sector allocations, revising accountability measures, and establishing a commercial trip limit.

Work on the amendment was suspended pending completion of the stock assessment and revisions to MRIP estimates. Additionally, the South Atlantic Council developed Regulatory Amendment 32 in 2018, which considered revision to the commercial accountability measure to avoid an early closure of that sector. The South Atlantic Council did not submit it to NMFS for approval based on feedback from its Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel.

In 2017, the Gulf Council directed staff to initiate a framework to adjust catch levels for yellowtail snapper. This document was also put on hold until completion of the stock assessment and further investigation into the feasibility of moving forward with a joint amendment between the Councils.

## Guidance from June SAFMC Meeting

- Important to maintain consistency in regulations between South Atlantic and Gulf.
- Timeline presented is acceptable to the Committee.
- Bring back preliminary catch level analysis, including potential closures due to changes in catch levels for review at next meeting.
- Look at any modification to management measures after looking at catch levels. May need to consider a commercial trip limit.
- IPT to develop range of alternatives for commercial trip limits and sector allocations for the South Atlantic.

## Tentative Amendment timing

December 2020	Direction to initiate plan amendment
April 2021	Obtain feedback from the Snapper Grouper AP
June 2021	South Atlantic Council reviews AP feedback and provides direction to staff
August 2021	Gulf Council reviews and provides direction to staff
<b>September 2021</b>	<b>South Atlantic Council approves for scoping</b>
October 2021	Gulf Council approves for scoping*
Fall 2021	Scoping hearings and Snapper Grouper and Reef Fish AP input, as appropriate
Winter 2021	Develop document and conduct analyses
Spring 2022	Councils approve for public hearings
Winter 2022	Councils approve document for formal review

\* Gulf incorporates scoping at Council meetings but could be more directed in this effort if needed.

# Acceptable Biological Catch

Note: In this document, “current ABC” refers to the ABC that was implemented through Regulatory Amendment 15 (2013) and based on the results of SEDAR 27A (2012). The “recommended ABC” is the ABC that was recommended by the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico SSC’s at the October 2020 meeting. “Revised landings” refers to the most recent landings, including recreational estimates from the MRIP-FES survey.

The current ACLs are based on the current ABC (Regulatory Amendment 15, 2013) and the results of the SEDAR 27A stock assessment (2012). The current yellowtail snapper ABC is 4.13 million pounds (mp) whole weight (ww) (landings plus dead discards) based on yield at  $P^* = 0.40$  and equilibrium maximum sustainable yield (MSY) for the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic combined. That ABC was split 75% to the South Atlantic and 25% to the Gulf of Mexico (Comprehensive ACL Amendment, 2011). The jurisdictional allocation is based on 50% of average landings from 1993-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008 using Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey data. **The current South Atlantic ABC is 3,037,500 pounds whole weight (lbs ww) and the current Gulf of Mexico ABC is 1,012,500 pounds lbs ww.**

In October 2020, the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico SSCs revised their ABC recommendation (Table 1) based on the latest stock assessment (SEDAR 64 2019). Landings information used in the assessment incorporated revised recreational estimates based on the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP)’s Fishing Effort Survey (FES).

**Table 1.** Annual combined (South Atlantic and Gulf) recommended ABCs for yellowtail snapper. Values are in millions of pounds whole weight (mp ww) and MRIP-FES units. Recommended ABCs are based on  $P^* = 37.5\%$ .

Year	ABC (mp ww)
2021	4.655
2022	4.242
2023	3.991
2024	3.836
2025	3.736

Note: ABC reflects the calendar year. Fishing year for yellowtail snapper is August 1 through July 31.

# Potential Actions for the South Atlantic Council

## 1. Modify the allocation for yellowtail snapper between the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils' Jurisdictions

**Note:** For both options below, landings from Monroe County, Florida, are attributed to the South Atlantic.

**Option 1 (No Action).** Do not modify the jurisdictional allocation for yellowtail snapper between the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils' jurisdictions. **The current jurisdictional allocation between the South Atlantic and the Gulf is 75% and 25% of the ABC, respectively.** The allocation was established using the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey data and based on 50% of average landings from 1993-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008.

**Option 2.** Modify the jurisdictional allocation for yellowtail snapper between the South Atlantic and Gulf using Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey data and based on 50% of average landings from 1993-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008. **The resulting allocations would be 81% of the ABC to the South Atlantic and 19% to the Gulf.**

### Discussion:

**Option 1** would retain the current jurisdictional allocation percentages between the South Atlantic and the Gulf as 75% and 25% of the ABC, respectively. The jurisdictional allocation is based on 50% of average landings from 1993-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008 and was applied to landings as of 2011 (when the Councils implemented changes to address the Reauthorized MSA) to obtain the current ABC allocation in weight of fish. Therefore, recreational landings estimates for the current allocation used data from the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS). Annual ABCs for the South Atlantic and Gulf under Option 1 are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Annual yellowtail snapper ABCs for the South Atlantic and Gulf based on current jurisdictional allocation percentages and recommended ABC (with revised landings). Values are in millions of pounds whole weight and MRIP-FES units.

Year	Total ABC	South Atlantic ABC (75%)	Gulf ABC (25%)
2021	4.655	3.491	1.164
2022	4.242	3.182	1.061
2023	3.991	2.993	0.998
2024	3.836	2.877	0.959
2025	3.736	2.802	0.934

**Option 2** would use the **current allocation formula** but apply it to the **revised landings** that incorporate the Marine Recreational Information Program’s (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES) methodology. Annual ABCs for the South Atlantic and Gulf under Option 2 are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Annual yellowtail snapper ABCs for the South Atlantic and Gulf based on current jurisdictional allocation **formula** and recommended ABC (with revised landings). Values are in millions of pounds whole weight and MRIP-FES units.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total ABC</b>	<b>South Atlantic ABC (81%)</b>	<b>Gulf ABC (19%)</b>
2021	4.655	3.789	0.866
2022	4.242	3.453	0.789
2023	3.991	3.248	0.743
2024	3.836	3.122	0.714
2025	3.736	3.041	0.695

## **2. Revise the yellowtail snapper total annual catch limits (ACL) and annual optimum yield (OY) in the South Atlantic**

**Option 1 (No Action).** The total ACL and annual OY for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic is equal to the **current South Atlantic ABC**. The current ABC for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic is 3,037,500 pounds whole weight (lbs ww).

**Option 2.** The total ACL and annual OY for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic is **equal to the recommended ABC based on the 75% South Atlantic allocation**

**Option 3.** The total ACL and annual OY for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic is **equal to the recommended ABC based on the 81% South Atlantic allocation**

**Option 4.** The total ACL and annual OY for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic is **90% of the recommended ABC based on the 81% South Atlantic allocation.**

**Option 5.** The total ACL and annual OY for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic is **80% of the recommended ABC based on the 81% South Atlantic allocation.**

### **Discussion:**

**Option 1** would continue to specify catch levels for yellowtail snapper based on data that is no longer considered the best scientific information available (BSIA).

**Option 2** corresponds to the Council retaining the jurisdictional allocation **percentages** and retaining the 75% South Atlantic allocation.

**Options 3-5** are based on a jurisdictional allocation to the South Atlantic of 81% of the recommended ABC as a result of applying the current allocation **formula**.

**Option 3** would set the total ACL and annual OY at the same level as the ABC, whereas **Options 4 and 5** would allow for 10% and 20% buffers, respectively.

Table 4 summarizes the total ACLs and annual OYs in the South Atlantic **by fishing year** (Aug-Jul) **based on the 81% South Atlantic allocation**. The total ACL and annual OY for the 2025/2026 fishing year would remain in place until modified.

**Table 4.** Total ACL and annual OY for yellowtail snapper for the South Atlantic based on options above and applied to the updated South Atlantic ABC from Option 2 of Action 1 (81% of the ABC). Values are in pounds whole weight and MRIP-FES units.

Year	Option 2 Total ACL/Annual OY = ABC (75%)	Option 2 Total ACL/Annual OY = ABC (81%)	Option 4 Total ACL/Annual OY = 90% ABC (81%)	Option 5 Total ACL/Annual OY = 80% ABC (81%)
2021/2022	3,491,250	3,789,000	3,410,100	3,031,200
2022/2023	3,181,500	3,453,000	3,107,700	2,762,400
2023/2024	2,993,250	3,248,000	2,923,200	2,598,400
2024/2025	2,877,000	3,122,000	2,809,800	2,497,600
2025/2026+	2,802,000	3,041,000	2,736,900	2,432,800

### 3. Revise South Atlantic sector allocations

**Note:** Landings data used to calculate sector allocations include revised landings from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP)’s Fishing Effort Survey (FES), and include landings from Monroe County, FL consistent with the current sector allocation established in the Comprehensive ACL Amendment.

**Option 1 (No Action).** Retain the existing sector allocation **percentages** (52.56% commercial and 47.44% recreational) for yellowtail snapper for the South Atlantic and apply to the **updated South Atlantic total ACL**. The allocation is based on 50% of average landings from 1986-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008 using recreational landings estimates from the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Program.

**Option 2.** Revise the sector allocations for yellowtail snapper for the South Atlantic. The commercial sector would be allocated 40.73% of the South Atlantic total ACL and the recreational sector would be allocated 59.27%. The allocation is based **applying the**

**existing formula** of 50% of average landings from 1986-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008 to revised landings including recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program’s Fishing Effort Survey.

**Discussion:**

Sector allocations under **Option 1** apply the current **percent** allocation to the **total ACL based on a 81% allocation** to the South Atlantic. Resulting sector allocations are shown in Table 5. The current commercial ACL is 1,596,510 lbs ww and the current recreational ACL is 1,440,990 lbs ww.

**Table 5.** Sector ACLs for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic based on current allocation percentages (52.56% commercial and 47.44% recreational) and total ACLs **based on a 81% allocation to the South Atlantic**. Values are in pounds whole weight and MRIP-FES units.

Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL (lbs ww)	*Change in Commercial ACL from current	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)
2021/2022	3,789,000	1,991,498.40	+0.394	1,797,501.60
2022/2023	3,453,000	1,814,896.80	+0.218	1,638,103.20
2023/2024	3,248,000	1,707,148.80	+0.110	1,540,851.20
2024/2025	3,122,000	1,640,923.20	+0.044	1,481,076.80
2025/2026+	3,041,000	1,598,349.60	+0.001	1,442,650.40

\*Note: A similar comparison for the recreational sector is not appropriate because of different metrics between the old MRIP CHTS and new MRIP FES methods.

**Option 2** is based on applying the **formula**: 50% of average landings from 1986-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008 to the **revised (MRIP-FES) landings**. Resulting sector allocations are in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Sector ACLs for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic based on the **current sector allocation formula** and revised time series of landings, including MRIP-FES (40.73% commercial and 59.27% recreational) and total ACLs **based on a 81% allocation to the South Atlantic**. Values are in pounds whole weigh (lbs ww) and MRIP-FES units.

Year	Total ACL	Commercial ACL (lbs ww)	*Change in Commercial ACL from current (lbs ww)	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)
2021/2022	3,789,000	1,543,260	-53,250	2,245,740
2022/2023	3,453,000	1,406,407	-190,103	2,046,593
2023/2024	3,248,000	1,322,910	-273,600	1,925,090
2024/2025	3,122,000	1,271,591	-324,919	1,850,409
2025/2026+	3,041,000	1,238,599	-357,911	1,802,401



\*Note: A similar comparison for the recreational sector is not appropriate because of different metrics between the old MRIP CHTS and new MRIP FES methods.

### Preliminary Analysis

This analysis investigates when the commercial and recreational sectors will be expected to close under the proposed sector allocation changes for Options 1 and 2 using observed landings between 2014 and 2020 for both sectors (Table 7).

**Table 7.** Commercial and recreational landings in pounds (lb) ww of yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic for fishing years 2012-2020.

<b>Yellowtail Snapper Commercial and Recreational Landings</b>			
<b>Fishing Year</b>	<b>Rec. Landings (lb ww)</b>	<b>Comm. Landings (lb ww)</b>	<b>Total Landings (lb ww)</b>
2012	1,129,915	1,439,586	2,569,501
2013	1,695,188	1,328,974	3,024,162
2014	2,122,485	1,544,038	3,666,523
2015	1,495,150	1,652,438 <sup>a</sup>	3,147,588
2016*	1,184,513	1,393,495	2,578,008
2016/2017	1,491,509	2,336,970 <sup>b</sup>	3,828,479
2017/2018	1,414,730	1,703,541 <sup>c</sup>	3,118,270
2018/2019	1,325,465	1,662,102 <sup>d</sup>	2,987,567
2019/2020	1,309,326	1,435,167	2,744,493

\*The fishing season for yellowtail snapper was modified in Regulatory Amendment 25, which took effect on August 12, 2016. For this reason, 2016 includes January through August 12, 2016 landings and 2016/17 fishing season landings are provided separately.

<sup>a</sup> In-season closure for commercial sector from October 31, 2015 to December 31, 2015.

<sup>b</sup> In-season closure for commercial sector from June 3, 2017 to July 31, 2017.

<sup>c</sup> In-season closure for commercial sector from June 5, 2018 to July 31, 2018.

<sup>d</sup> In-season closure for commercial sector from June 7, 2019 to July 31, 2019.

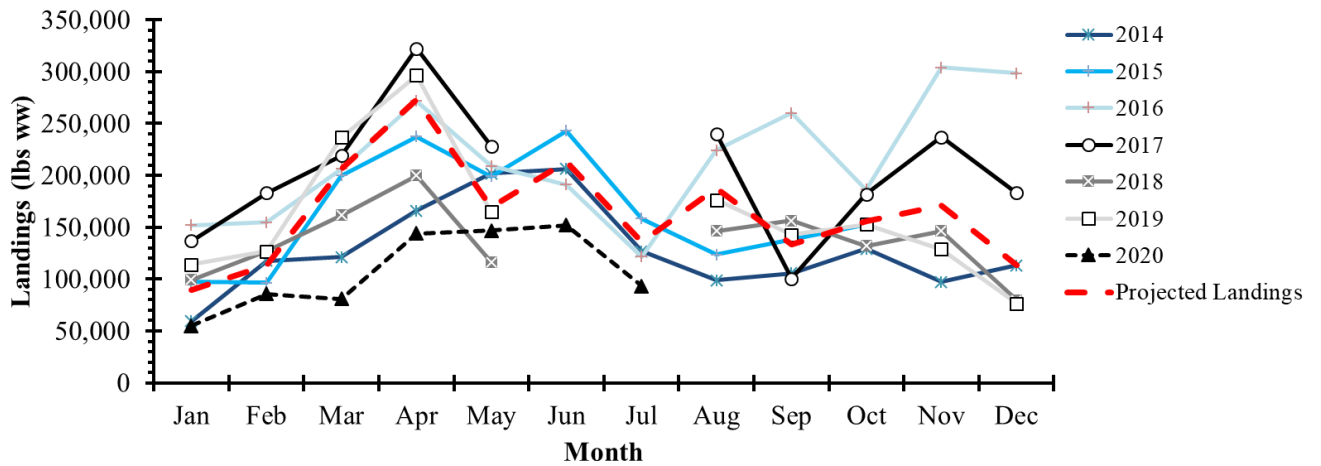
Source: SEFSC Commercial ACL Dataset (April 5, 2021) and SEFSC Recreational ACL Dataset (May 11, 2021).

### *Commercial Sector*

Monthly South Atlantic commercial yellowtail snapper landings were averaged from 2018 through 2020 to project future landings for January and February months. Due to atypical landings in response to the 2020 pandemic, future landings were projected using average landings from 2017 through 2019 for March through May and August through December. Landings from 2014 through 2016 were used to project future landings for June and July due to in-season closures in 2017 through 2019 (Figure 1). Changes to the commercial fishing year (Regulatory Amendment 25, 2013) were assumed to have minimal impact on monthly fishing behavior, and no adjustments were made to monthly landings in 2016. Monthly predicted landings were cumulative summed for the fishing year (August 1 through July 31) until the landings met the ACL.

Based on the projected future commercial landings of yellowtail snapper under the proposed commercial ACL in Options 1 and 2, the commercial sector would close as described in Table 8.

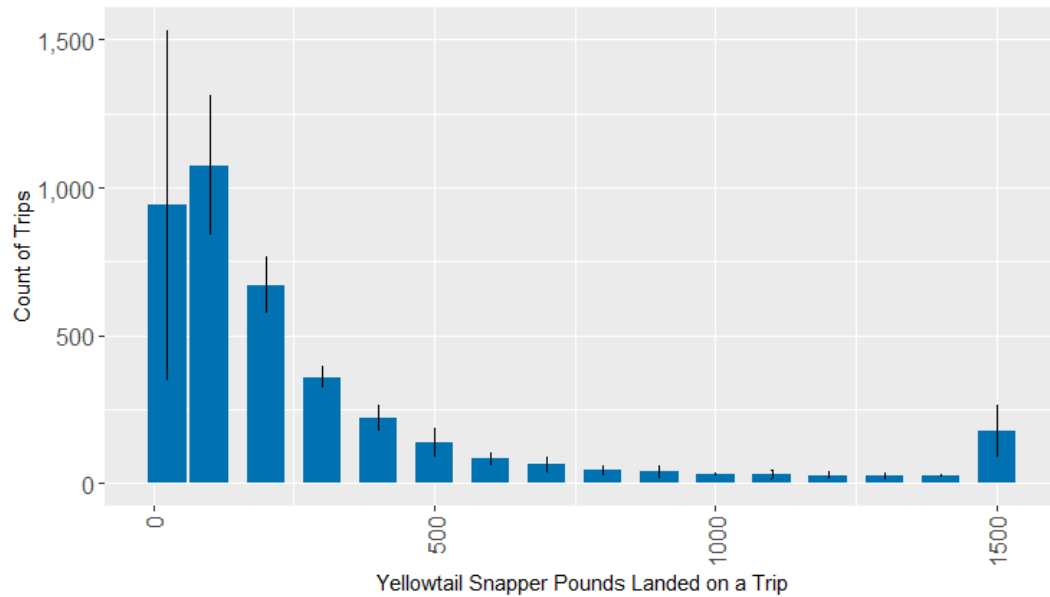
**The 2021/2022 fishing year under Option 1 sector allocations (no action) was the only proposed ACL alternative that did not result in an in-season closure.**



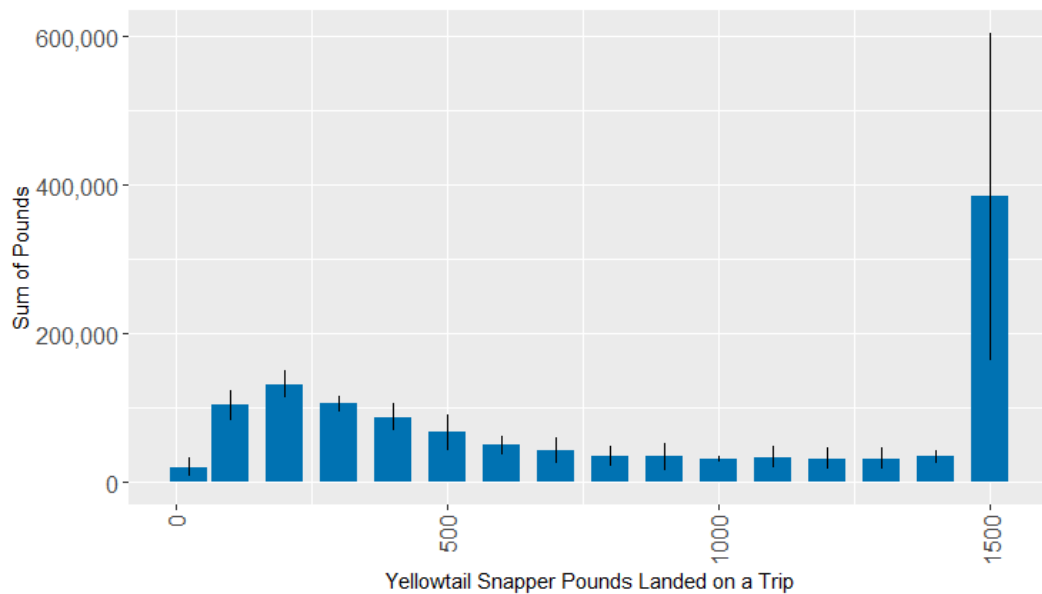
**Figure 1.** South Atlantic yellowtail snapper monthly commercial landings (lb ww) for 2014-2020, and projected future landings. Source: SEFSC Commercial ACL Dataset (April 5, 2021).

### *Commercial Trip Limits*

Figures 2 and 3 show the distribution of commercial trips in the South Atlantic for yellowtail snapper based on data from August 2014 to August 2019. Most commercial trips landed 200 pounds or less of yellowtail snapper during this period. However, a notable number of trips landed at least 1,500 pounds of yellowtail snapper (Figure 2). These trips contributed the most to the overall pounds of yellowtail snapper landed commercially from 2014 through 2019 (Figure 3) accounting for 30% of total pounds on average with a range between 21% to 38%.



**Figure 2.** Pounds per trip of yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic from July 2014 through August 2019. Data are from the satl\_ser01420\_jan21 logbook file. Error bars are  $1.96 \times$  standard deviation to represent 95% confidence interval. The first bin on the left is 1-50 lbs and then each subsequent bin represents 51-150 lbs.

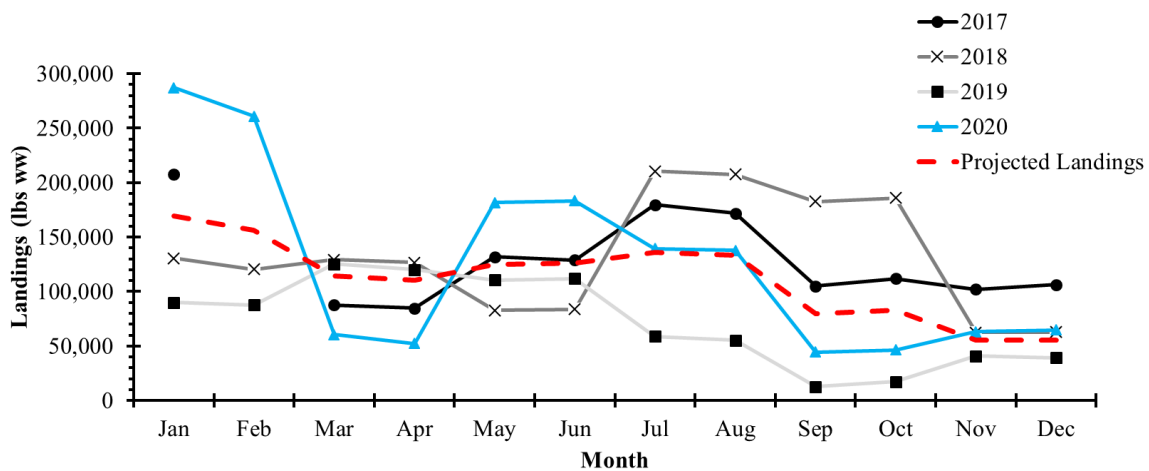


**Figure 3.** Cumulative pound of yellowtail snapper per trip in the South Atlantic from July 2014 through August 2019. Data are from the satl\_ser01420\_jan21 logbook file. Error bars are  $1.96 \times$  standard deviation to represent 95% confidence interval. The first bin on the left is 1-50 lbs and then each subsequent bin represents 51-150 lbs.

### Recreational Sector

This dataset includes landings from the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) and Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). MRIP waves were used to estimate monthly landings by assuming equal daily catch rates for months within a wave, and then SRHS landings were added back in. Average monthly landings from 2018-2020 were used as a proxy for future landings for most months, except for March and April when 2017-2019 data were used due to atypical landings in response to the 2020 pandemic (Figure 4). Changes to the recreational fishing year (Regulatory Amendment 25, 2013) were assumed to not have impacted monthly fishing behavior since the recreational sector has never reached their ACL.

**Based on the cumulatively summed projected recreational landings of yellowtail snapper, the recreational sector would not be expected to close under the proposed recreational ACLs (Table 8).**



**Figure 4.** South Atlantic yellowtail snapper monthly recreational landings (lb ww) for 2017-2020, and projected future landings. Source: SEFSC Recreational ACL Dataset (May 11, 2021).

**Table 8.** The projected South Atlantic yellowtail snapper commercial and recreational landings (mp ww) and closure dates expected with each proposed annual catch limit alternative.

<b>Option 1 (No Action): 52.56% commercial and 47.44% recreational</b>								
Year	Commercial ACL	Projected Commercial Landings	Commercial Closure Date	Recreational ACL	Projected Recreational Landings	Recreational Closure Date	Total Landings	% Combined ACL Landed
2021/2022	1.991	1.960	No Closure	1.797	1.345	No Closure	3.788	88%
2022/2023	1.815	1.815	<b>June 29</b>	1.638	1.345	No Closure	3.453	92%
2023/2024	1.707	1.707	<b>June 14</b>	1.541	1.345	No Closure	3.248	94%
2024/2025	1.641	1.641	<b>June 5</b>	1.481	1.345	No Closure	3.122	96%
2025+	1.598	1.598	<b>May 29</b>	1.443	1.345	No Closure	3.041	97%
<b>Option 2: 40.73% commercial and 59.27% recreational</b>								
Year	Commercial ACL	Projected Commercial Landings	Commercial Closure Date	Recreational ACL	Projected Recreational Landings	Recreational Closure Date	Total Landings	% Combined ACL Landed
2021/2022	1.543	1.543	<b>May 19</b>	2.246	1.345	No Closure	3.789	76%
2022/2023	1.406	1.406	<b>April 27</b>	2.047	1.345	No Closure	3.453	80%
2023/2024	1.323	1.323	<b>April 17</b>	1.925	1.345	No Closure	3.248	82%
2024/2025	1.272	1.272	<b>April 12</b>	1.851	1.345	No Closure	3.123	84%
2025+	1.238	1.238	<b>April 8</b>	1.802	1.345	No Closure	3.040	85%

## Guidance from August GFMC Meeting

Council staff briefed the Reef Fish Committee on August 24, 2021 on the joint document that will be developed between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils to address modifications to management for the southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper stock in response to the results of the SEDAR 64 stock assessment. SEDAR 64 found yellowtail snapper to be healthy; however, the model estimated the stock to be smaller than previously thought. Because the Councils share management of the stock, a joint document to amend both the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the South Atlantic Council, and the Reef Fish FMP for the Gulf Council, will expedite the development of management alternatives. The Committee will first review proposed options at the Council's October 2021 meeting in Orange Beach, Alabama.