

Yellowtail Snapper Discussion Paper



Prepared for the Snapper Grouper Committee
June 2021

Background

The status of the southeastern U.S. Yellowtail Snapper stock was assessed through the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process in 2019 (SEDAR 64 2019), with data through 2017. Yellowtail Snapper is considered a single stock and is distributed in the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. The South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSCs) met jointly in July 2020 to review the SEDAR 64 Yellowtail Snapper assessment and recommend catch limits for this stock. The SSCs deemed the assessment to be the best scientific information available and useful for management. As of 2017, the stock is estimated to be not overfished and not undergoing overfishing.

The SSCs identified issues with the assessment that made it difficult to recommend catch limits for the stock. The SSCs requested the opportunity to discuss the implications of these issues, as well as other concerns in more detail, before making catch limit recommendations for the stock. Hence, a joint meeting was held in October 2020 and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) received the recommendations at its December 2020 meeting. The South Atlantic Council directed staff to initiate a joint amendment to adjust catch levels for Yellowtail Snapper in coordination with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council). The amendment will be developed during the remainder of 2021 and into 2022 (see tentative timeline below).

Objectives for this meeting

- Review tentative amendment timing and provide guidance
- Review actions previously considered in Amendment 44 and Regulatory Amendment 32 and public and AP input
- Provide guidance on actions to develop for September 2021

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 Reef Fish AP and SA Council feedback and provides direction to staff
September 2021	South Atlantic Council approves for scoping
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.

Actions Formerly Considered

Snapper Grouper Amendment 44

Below is a summary of the actions included in Amendment 44 as of March 2017 followed by a summary of public hearing comments. Public hearings on the amendment were held in Winter 2018 in person and via listening stations.

ACTION - Modify the jurisdictional allocation of the acceptable biological catch (ABC)

Currently: 75% of ABC to the South Atlantic and 25% to the Gulf based on jurisdictional boundary between Councils
Allocation = 50% average landings 1993-2008 + 50% average landings 2006-2008

Options considered:

- Remove the jurisdictional allocation
- Modify the jurisdictional allocation using different years of landings

ACTION - Specify a single annual catch limit (ACL) in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico.

Currently: Total ACLs are specified separately for the South Atlantic and Gulf

Options considered:

- ACL = total ACL in the South Atlantic + total ACL in the Gulf of Mexico
- ACL = total ACL in the South Atlantic + jurisdictional ABC in the Gulf of Mexico

ACTION - Allow adaptive management of ACL and revise or establish sector allocations

Currently: Commercial = 52.56% of the total ACL and recreational = 47.44% of the total ACL. South Atlantic sector allocation = 50% average landings 1986-2008 + 50% average landings 2006-2008.

There are no sector allocations of the total ACL for yellowtail snapper in the Gulf of Mexico

Options considered:

- Remove sector allocations in the South Atlantic
- Modify sector allocations based on different years of landings
- Set aside a portion of the ACL (1% to 10%) as a common pool allocation
- Conditionally transfer a certain percentage of the ACL from a sector that is not landing its ACL to the other sector that is landing at least 90% of its ACL, if the landings of the donating sector are below the minimum landings threshold.

ACTION- Revise the accountability measures (AMs)

Currently: AMs are specified separately for the South Atlantic and Gulf and the SA has separate AMs for the commercial and recreational sectors.

Options considered:

- Removing in-season closures until total ACLs are met
- Different post-season AMs – reducing the length of the season the year after an overage, paybacks, trip limits to correct for overages, bag limit reductions to correct for overages
- AMs tied to common pool allocation

ACTION - Establish a commercial trip limit for yellowtail snapper.

Currently: There is no commercial trip limit in the South Atlantic or the Gulf.

Options considered:

- Trip limits during spawning months (May 15 to July 31)
- Trip limit once a percentage of the commercial ACL is met
- Multi-day commercial trip limit for yellowtail snapper.

Summary of Public Hearing Comments

Public hearings on the amendment were held in Winter 2018 in person and via listening stations. The latter were at multiple locations in Florida and the Florida Keys. Close to 250 people attended the hearings and approximately 120 comments were submitted. Below is a summary of the comments received:

- Concern over combining ABCs for the Gulf and the South Atlantic setting a precedent.
- Opposition to transfer of allocation between sectors. Not the best method to reduce closures. If considered, they should be temporary.
- Concern over the variability of recreational landings estimates. Slow Dolphin season can lead to increases in Yellowtail Snapper recreational landings.
- General opposition to reallocating or transferring recreational ACL to the commercial sector.
- Consider trip limits during spawning season and an increase in the minimum size limit (14-16 inches TL)
- Close or reduce harvest during spawning season (May-June)
- Consider a commercial trip limit with a step-down
- Keep commercial and recreational ACLs separate
- Do not change management until the next stock assessment
- August-July fishing year is working well for the fishery

In March 2018, the South Atlantic Council decided to postpone development of Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 pending expected revisions to recreational landings estimates because of changes to the MRIP methodology and to potentially account for the results of the stock assessment.

Regulatory Amendment 32

In March 2018, the Council directed staff to begin development of an amendment to address short-term management of Yellowtail Snapper to provide timely relief for commercial fishermen (in light of hurricanes in summer 2017) via a framework amendment addressing accountability measures. In December 2018, based on analyses suggesting that the South Atlantic Council's preferred option was unlikely to prevent an in-season closure of the commercial sector and on input obtained from Yellowtail Snapper fishermen, the South Atlantic Council voted to stop work on the amendment and reconsider changes in Yellowtail Snapper management after completion of the stock assessment.

Options considered:

- An in-season closure will not occur for either sector until the total ACL is met or is projected to be met.
- An in-season closure will occur for the commercial sector if the commercial ACL has been met and the total catch reaches, or is projected to reach, 80% of the total ACL.
- An in-season closure will occur for the commercial sector if the commercial ACL has been met and the total catch reaches, or is projected to reach, 70% of the total ACL.

Snapper Grouper AP Input (Fall 2018)

- The August-July fishing year was working well for the commercial sector.
- The price of yellowtail snapper typically diminishes substantially during summer months so an in-season closure during that time is not as impactful as during other times of the year when marketability is better.
- AP stated their preference to wait until after the stock assessment was completed to make any management changes.
- AP supported taking no action to allow changes in management to take hold and allow fishermen to adjust.
- AP members indicated that fishing businesses that were affected by the 2017 hurricanes had stabilized.
- AP members mentioned intentional discarding of small yellowtail snapper in the summer months by some fishermen and suggested that an in-season closure could benefit the stock by reducing the length of time that this practice takes place.

Current Regulations for Yellowtail Snapper in the South Atlantic

- Total ACL/ABC = 3,037,500 lbs ww
- Commercial ACL (52.56%) = 1,596,510 lbs ww
- Recreational ACL (47.44%) = 1,440,990 lbs ww
- Commercial accountability measures (AMs): In-season closure if ACL is reached and payback (reduction in ACL) if overfished and total ACL has been exceeded.
- Recreational AMs: In-season closure if ACL is reached and payback if ACL is exceeded two years in a row. Payback and reduction of the season are triggered if the total ACL is also exceeded during the same fishing year and the species is overfished.
- Fishing Year: Aug 1- July 31
- Minimum size: 12 inches total length (both sectors)
- Bag Limit: 10/person/day in Snappers Aggregate

Snapper Grouper AP Comments (2021)

During their April 2021 meeting, the AP received an overview of the Yellowtail Snapper Fishery and provided the following comments:

- There is an abundance of vessels interfering with commercial fishing operations. Much more difficult to catch fish commercially possibly causing commercial effort to drop dramatically.
- Offshore fishing for for-hire vessels has been bad so there is more targeting for Yellowtail.
- Discarding of Yellowtail Snapper during June and July was occurring because of in-season closures during the Mangrove Snapper spawning.
- “Bad apple practices” – discarding of small fish when fishermen encounter mixed sizes and fish are being caught very quickly. A lot of mortality of fish on deck. This practice has really diminished since 2018 (when the AP previously brought this up).
- Recommend that the Yellowtail Snapper recreational bag limit be reduced to 5 per person within the snapper aggregate. The Mangrove Snapper limit is already at 5 fish.
- Concern that abundance of Yellowtail Snapper is not what has been in years past. There are not as many fish in the upper water column where they can be targeted by commercial vessels.
- Commercial sector likely will not come close to catching the ACL this year.

- Charter industry in lower Keys would not likely support a reduction to 5 fish per person. If necessary, perhaps consider reducing for captain and crew but prefer no action.
- During pandemic in general there have been many more vessels on the water and this may be a factor in how fisheries are adjusting.

Current Regulations for Yellowtail Snapper in the Gulf

- Total ACL = 901,125 lbs ww
- No sector ACLs
- AM: In-season closure if ACL is projected to be met.
- Fishing Year: Aug 1- July 31
- Minimum size: 12 inches total length (both sectors)
- Recreational bag limit: 10/person/day in reef fish aggregate
- Commercial trip limit: none

Reef Fish AP Comments (2021)

During their February 2021 webinar meeting, the Reef Fish AP received an overview of the SEDAR 64 and unanimously passed the following motion:

- Motion: To recommend maintaining status quo fishing conditions/levels for yellowtail snapper in the Gulf of Mexico, considerate of any changes due to MRIP-FES or declining yield streams.

Recommended Catch Levels

Acceptable Biological Catch

Table 1 summarizes the recommended ABC levels for Yellowtail Snapper stock in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico in millions of pounds whole weight (lbs ww) annually from 2021 through 2025. The recommended catch levels are based on the latest stock assessment (SEDAR 64 2019) and incorporate revised recreational estimates based on the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP)' s Fishing Effort Survey (FES).

Table 1. Annual combined (South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico) ABCs for Yellowtail Snapper. Values are in millions of pounds.

Year	ABC
2021	4.655
2022	4.242
2023	3.991
2024	3.836
2025	3.736

The current jurisdictional allocation between the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico is 75% and 25% of the ABC, respectively. **The jurisdictional allocation is based on 50% average landings 1993-2008 + 50% average landings 2006-2008** and was applied to landings as of 2011 (when the Councils implemented changes to address the Reauthorized MSA).

If the same formula is applied to the revised landings (that includes the FES revisions), **81.39% of the overall ABC would be allocated to the South Atlantic Council’s jurisdiction and 18.61% to the Gulf Council’s jurisdiction.** Accordingly, the annual ABC are shown in **Table 2.**

Table 2. Annual Yellowtail Snapper ABCs for the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico based on current jurisdictional allocation formula and revised landings. Values are in pounds whole weight.

Year	Total ABC	South Atlantic ABC	Gulf ABC
2021	4,655,000	3,788,897	866,103
2022	4,242,000	3,452,739	789,261
2023	3,991,000	3,248,440	742,560
2024	3,836,000	3,122,279	713,721
2025	3,736,000	3,040,885	695,115

South Atlantic Sector Allocations

The South Atlantic’s ABC would be further allocated between the commercial and recreational sectors. The current allocation is based on **50% average landings 1986-2008 + 50% average landings 2006-2008.** If the South Atlantic Council sets the total ACL equal to the updated ABC and the same sector allocation formula is applied to the revised landings (that includes the FES revisions), **the commercial sector would be allocated 40.73% of the total ACL and the recreational sector would be allocated 59.27%.** Accordingly, the ACLs for each sector are in **Table 3.**

Table 3. Sector ACLs for Yellowtail Snapper in the South Atlantic based on current sector allocation formula and revised time series of landings. Values are in pounds whole weight (lbs ww). Current commercial ACL is 1,596,510 lbs ww and current recreational ACL is 1,440,990 lbs ww.

Year	Total ACL	Commercial ACL	Recreational ACL
2021	3,788,897	1,543,112	2,245,785
2022	3,452,739	1,406,204	2,046,535
2023	3,248,440	1,322,999	1,925,441
2024	3,122,279	1,271,617	1,850,662
2025	3,040,885	1,238,468	1,802,417

COMMITTEE ACTION:

PROVIDE GUIDANCE ON TIMELINE OF AMENDMENT DEVELOPMENT

Staff recommends a document that amends both FMPs (SG Amendment 44[?] / Reef Fish Amendment 49) similar to approach that was initiated on South Florida issues. The South Atlantic Council would be admin lead (since the majority of the stock occurs in the SAFMC jurisdiction).

PROVIDE GUIDANCE ON RANGE OF ACTIONS TO DEVELOP FOR THE COUNCILS TO REVIEW IN FALL 2021.