

Review of allocations for species meeting the time-based criterion in the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Allocation Review Trigger Policy

**South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
March 2026 Meeting**

Introduction

At the December 2023 meeting, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) approved their [Allocation Review Guidelines](#) (guidelines) and updated their [Allocation Review Trigger Policy](#) (policy). The guidelines specify how the Council's sector allocations will be reviewed and documented while the policy specifies when allocations reviews will occur. One of the criteria that the Council chose to trigger an allocation review is time-based, noting that each species will have its sector allocations reviewed at least once every seven years.

Several of the [allocations for species that the Council manages](#) currently meet the time-based criterion for review. For this meeting, the Council will review the current sector allocations for Vermilion Snapper, which is part of the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan (FMP). In accordance with the guidelines, a summary allocations report will be developed based on the Council's discussion and presented to the Council for approval at the June 2026 meeting.

Background

There is currently no new stock assessment or catch level recommendations for the species. While there will eventually be revised catch levels recommendations through a planned stock assessment and associated amendment, the Council is not likely to review assessment results or start an amendment until the latter half of 2028 at the earliest. Given this timeline, uncertainty in the assessment schedule, and that the species currently meets the time-based criterion to trigger a review of allocations, Vermilion Snapper allocations are being brought to the Council for review.

Based on the Council's guidelines, when an allocation review is triggered for reasons other than a stock assessment or change to catch level recommendations and there is not a planned FMP amendment in the near-term, the Council will be presented with the following information to determine whether a more in-depth allocation analysis is warranted or if the current allocations are sufficient:

- The appropriate FMP Goals and Objectives,
- Current allocations and rationale for setting those allocations,
- Landings and annual catch limit (ACL) usage by sector for the most recent 5 years of available data, and
- The most recent Fishery Performance Report, if available.

The recreational portion of the ACL for Vermilion Snapper is based on the Marine Recreational Information Program's (MRIP) Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) methodology rather than the more recent Fishing Effort Survey (FES) for private and charter components. Reallocation based on landings that include CHTS estimates may prove difficult since it is no longer considered best scientific information available, but potential solutions can be provided

should the Council deem reallocation is warranted at this time. The landings presented are sourced from [Southeast Region ACL Monitoring website](#) provided by the National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office.

Snapper Grouper FMP Goals and Objectives

The Council most recently updated the Goals and Objectives of the Snapper Grouper FMP through [Amendment 49](#), which became effective October 26, 2023. The Goals and Objectives can be found in Table 1 as well as on the [Council’s webpage for the Snapper Grouper FMP](#).

Table 1. Goals and objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

Goal 1 (Science): Management decisions for the snapper grouper fishery are based upon robust, defensible science that considers qualitative and quantitative data analyzed in a timely, clear, and transparent manner that builds stakeholder confidence.	
<i>Objective 1</i>	Promote collection of quality data to support management plans and programs considered by the Council.
<i>Objective 2</i>	Encourage development of mechanisms to effectively engage and collaborate with stakeholders on cooperative research, data collection and analysis.
<i>Objective 3</i>	Improve knowledge about the social and economic elements of the snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic.
<i>Objective 4</i>	Support improved and expanded monitoring and reporting programs for the snapper grouper fishery.
<i>Objective 5</i>	Promote data collection and analysis to support ecosystem and habitat considerations for the snapper grouper fishery.
Goal 2 (Management): Adopt management strategies for the snapper grouper fishery that rebuild and maintain fishery resources, adapt to regional differences in the fishery, and consider the social and economic needs of fishing communities.	
<i>Objective 1</i>	Develop management measures that consider sub-regional differences and issues within the fishery.
<i>Objective 2</i>	Develop innovative management measures that allow consistent access to the fishery for all sectors.
<i>Objective 3</i>	Ensure that management decisions help maximize social and economic opportunity for all sectors.
<i>Objective 4</i>	Develop management measures that reduce and mitigate discards.
<i>Objective 5</i>	Support management measures that incorporate ecosystem and habitat considerations for the snapper grouper fishery.
<i>Objective 6</i>	Develop management measures that support optimal sector allocations for the snapper grouper fishery.
Goal 3 (Communication): Employ interactive outreach strategies that encourage continuous participation and support two-way engagement between managers and snapper grouper fishery stakeholders while building a greater understanding of science and management.	
<i>Objective 1</i>	Develop communication approaches that provide streamlined and timely information to increase awareness and engage stakeholders.
<i>Objective 2</i>	Ensure that Council communication encourages and supports engagement with a diverse audience of stakeholders.

<i>Objective 3</i>	Improve awareness and understanding of fishery science and research and how these inform management.
<i>Objective 4</i>	Improve awareness and understanding of how social and economic issues are linked to fisheries management measures.
Goal 4 (Governance): Commit to a transparent, balanced, and timely decision-making process that allows flexible yet well-defined protocols and strategies for managing the snapper grouper fishery.	
<i>Objective 1</i>	Create an accountable and flexible decision-making process for development and evaluation of management measures.
<i>Objective 2</i>	Build capacity to streamline management efforts and better coordinate with management partners.
<i>Objective 3</i>	Improve communication with stakeholders to ensure the needs of the fishery are understood and considered throughout the Council process.



Vermilion Snapper Management Information, Landings, ACL usage, and Fishery Performance Report

Table 2. Current ACLs, sector allocations, rationale for allocations, regulations, and accountability measures for Vermilion Snapper in the South Atlantic Region.

Total ACL	Currently 1,336,000 pounds whole weight (lbs ww). This ACL put in place via Snapper Grouper (SG) Abbreviated Framework Amendment 2 (effective April 9, 2019).
Recreational Sector Allocation and ACL	32% of the Total ACL (427,520 lbs ww)
Commercial Sector Allocation and ACL	68% of the Total ACL (908,480 lbs ww)
Rationale for Allocation	Used breakdown of landings by sector from 1986-2005 (SG Amendment 16).
Recreational Retention Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 fish per person bag limit. • 12-inch total length minimum size limit. • No season.
Commercial Retention Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12-inch total length minimum size limit. • 1,000 lbs gw trip limit. • Split season (Jan – Jun and July to Dec).
Accountability Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-season closure once the sector ACL is met (applicable to both sectors). • Payback provision for an overage only if overfished and the total ACL is exceeded.

Table 3. Sector specific landings and ACL utilization for Vermilion Snapper in the South Atlantic Region, 2020-2024.

Year	Recreational Landings (lbs ww)	% of Recreational ACL Landed	Recreational Closure?	Commercial Landings (lbs ww)	% of Commercial ACL Landed	Commercial Closure?
2020	340,233	72%	No	825,955	82%	No
2021	507,090	113%	No	659,406	69%	No
2022	304,071	70%	No	693,863	75%	No
2023	360,275	84%	No	701,582	77%	No
2024	240,338	56%	No	552,899	61%	No
<i>Average</i>	350,401	79%	-	686,741	73%	-

Table 4. Total landings and ACL utilization for Vermilion Snapper in the South Atlantic Region, 2020-2024.

Year	Total Landings (lbs ww)	% of Total ACL Landed
2020	1,166,188	79%
2021	1,166,496	83%
2022	997,934	73%
2023	1,061,857	79%
2024	793,237	59%
<i>Average</i>	1,037,142	75%

Fishery Performance Report

The most recent Fishery Performance Report for Vermilion Snapper can be found on the Council’s website at the following [LINK](#). The report was compiled during the Snapper Grouper’s Advisory Panel’s (AP) November 2017 meeting. In summary, the AP noted the following:

- Stock Observations: AP members generally agreed that Vermilion Snapper are abundant throughout the region and the stock is healthy.
- Commercial Observations: Vermilion Snapper were referred to as the “meat and potatoes” of the commercial snapper grouper fishery.
- Recreational Observations: Charter captains from throughout the region agreed that Vermilion Snapper is not a species that is normally targeted by clients but it is considered a reliable catch year-round.
- Observations on Management Measures: Minimum size limits are appropriate. Try to ensure that the commercial season is open during the holiday season.
- Environmental and Ecological Observations: Major storms disrupt the commercial season region-wide and can notably impact effort. Cold water intrusions strongly affect the Vermilion Snapper catch off Florida.

Discussion Questions

- Does the Council feel that the current sector allocations for Vermilion Snapper are adequate for the fishery?
 - a. If so, why does the Council feel that these allocations are still appropriate?
 - b. If not, does the Council want to re-examine the sector allocations in an amendment to the Snapper Grouper FMP prior to the amendment that will likely begin in 2028?
 - c. If a decision cannot be made at this time, please elaborate on additional information that is needed.