Amendment 51 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan of the South Atlantic Region

Catch Level Adjustments and Allocations for Snowy Grouper

Decision Document

December 2022

Background

The update to SEDAR 36 was completed in 2020. This assessment included revised estimates for recreational catch from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) based on the Fishing Effort Survey (FES). The assessment showed that the South Atlantic snowy grouper stock is overfished and is experiencing overfishing. The Council received the results of the assessment and the Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) catch level recommendations in March 2021 and began work on a plan amendment to adjust catch levels.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) notified the Council on June 10, 2021, that management action is necessary for snowy grouper as the stock is undergoing overfishing and

remains overfished. NMFS recommended that the Council end overfishing of snowy grouper and continue stock rebuilding based on the results of SEDAR 36 Update.

Assessment Link: http://sedarweb.org/docs/suar/2020_SEDAR36U_SAR_November2020.pdf

Fishery Overview: https://safmc-shinyapps.shinyapps.io/SA_FisheryDataSnowyGrouper/

Table 1. Summary of the assessment, rebuilding plan, and amendment milestone history.

Background Overview		
SEDAR History	**Stock Status**	
Assessment	**Overfished**	**Overfishing**
SEDAR 4 (2006)	X	X
SEDAR 36 (2013)	X	
SEDAR 36 Update (2020)	X	X
Current Rebuilding Plan		
Timeframe	**Terminal Year**	
34 yrs.	2039	
Amendment Action Schedule		
Assessment results reviewed	Mar-21	
Direction to start Amendment	Mar-21	
NMFS Letter Received	June 10th, 2021	

Proposed management changes in this amendment

- Adjust catch levels (acceptable biological catch and annual catch limit) and revise annual optimum yield
- Revise sector allocations
- Modify the recreational season
- Modify the recreational accountability measures

Objectives for this meeting

- Review actions and alternatives
- Review selected preferred alternatives and rationale
- Approve amendment for formal review

Tentative amendment timing

March 2021	Reviewed SEDAR 36 Update results and direct staff to begin a plan amendment
September 2021	Review options paper and provide guidance to staff
October 2021	Obtain input from AP
December 2021	Review AP comments, review preliminary analyses, and approve for scoping
March 2022	Review scoping comments and make needed modifications
April 2022	Obtain input from AP
June 2022	Review modifications to the amendment, AP comments, select preferred alternatives, and approve for public hearings
July/August 2022	Conduct public hearings
September 2022	Review public hearing comments and approve all actions
December 2022	**Review final draft amendment and consider approval for formal review**

Council action at previous meeting

- **Purpose and Need:** Revised to remove the OFL, approved
- Approved all actions

Purpose and Need Statements

The *purpose* of this fishery management plan amendment is to set an acceptable biological catch level, revise the annual catch limits, annual optimum yield, and sector allocations for South Atlantic snowy grouper based on the results of the most recent stock assessment and modify recreational management measures and accountability measures.

The *need* for this fishery management plan amendment is to end overfishing of South Atlantic snowy grouper, continue to rebuild the stock, and achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

Proposed Actions

1. Revise the acceptable biological catch, annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper

Purpose of Action

The snowy grouper total annual catch limit (ACL) is being revised to incorporate the new acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations of the SSC, based on the SEDAR 36 (2020) stock assessment, as well as the updated recreational landings from the Marine Recreational Information Program's (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES).

Alternative 1 (No Action). The total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper are equal to the **current** acceptable biological catch level (218,848 pounds whole weight, 185,464 pounds gutted weight). The current acceptable biological catch level is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program's Coastal Household Telephone Survey.

Preferred Alternative 2. Revise the acceptable biological catch and set it equal to the most recent recommendation from the Scientific and Statistical Committee. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper and set them equal to the **recommended** acceptable biological catch. The recommended acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey.

Year	OFL (lbs gw)	ABC (lbs gw)	ACL (lbs gw)	Annual OY (lbs gw)
2023	156,844	119,654	119,654	119,654
2024	156,035	121,272	121,272	121,272
2025	155,227	122,889	122,889	122,889
2026*	151,993	122,889	122,889	122,889

Year	OFL (numbers of fish)	ABC (numbers of fish)	ACL (numbers of fish)	Annual OY (numbers of fish)
2023	20,034	15,264	15,264	15,264
2024	19,080	15,264	15,264	15,264
2025	19,080	15,264	15,264	15,264
2026*	19,080	15,264	15,264	15,264

*2026 values will remain in place until modified.

Alternative 3. Revise the acceptable biological catch and set it equal to the most recent recommendation from the Scientific and Statistical Committee. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper and set them equal to 95% of the

recommended acceptable biological catch. The recommended acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey.

Year	OFL (lbs gw)	ABC (lbs gw)	ACL (lbs gw)	Annual OY (lbs gw)
2023	156,844	119,654	113,671	113,671
2024	156,035	121,272	115,208	115,208
2025	155,227	122,889	116,745	116,745
2026*	151,993	122,889	116,745	116,745

Year	OFL (numbers of fish)	ABC (numbers of fish)	ACL (numbers of fish)	Annual OY (numbers of fish)
2023	20,034	15,264	14,501	14,501
2024	19,080	15,264	14,501	14,501
2025	19,080	15,264	14,501	14,501
2026*	19,080	15,264	14,501	14,501

*2026 values will remain in place until modified.

Alternative 4. Revise the acceptable biological catch and set it equal to the most recent recommendation from the Scientific and Statistical Committee. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper and set them equal to 90% of the **recommended** acceptable biological catch. The recommended acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey.

Year	OFL (lbs gw)	ABC (lbs gw)	ACL (lbs gw)	Annual OY (lbs gw)
2023	156,844	119,654	107,689	107,689
2024	156,035	121,272	109,145	109,145
2025	155,227	122,889	110,600	110,600
2026*	151,993	122,889	110,600	110,600

Year	OFL (numbers of fish)	ABC (numbers of fish)	ACL (numbers of fish)	Annual OY (numbers of fish)
2023	20,034	15,264	13,738	13,738
2024	19,080	15,264	13,738	13,738
2025	19,080	15,264	13,738	13,738
2026*	19,080	15,264	13,738	13,738

*2026 values will remain in place until modified.

Discussion:

- When compared to the average total landings from 2015-2019 (lbs gw, inclusive of MRIP FES recreational landings), the proposed ACLs for 2023 through 2026 from **Preferred Alternative 2** are roughly 60,000 lbs gw below average total landings (**Figure 1**).

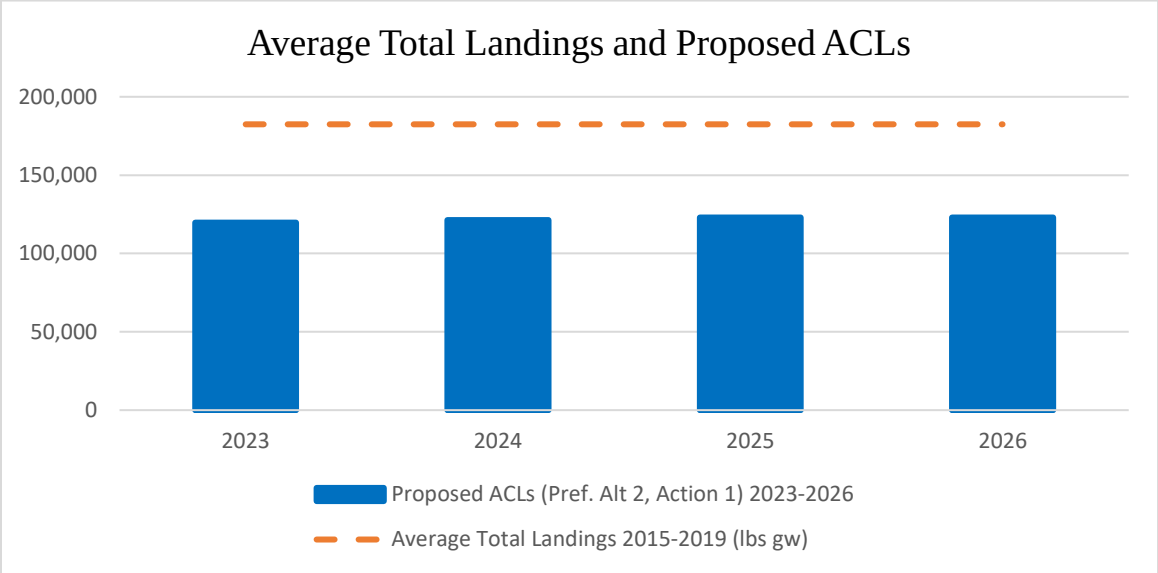

Figure 1. The comparison of the average total snowy grouper landings (inclusive of MRIP recreational MRIP FES landings) from 2015-2019 (orange) and the proposed ACLs (2023-2026) under **Preferred Alternative 2** for **Action 1** (blue).

- Historically, commercial landings have been higher than recreational landings, however in recent years commercial landings have decreased closer to recreational landings (**Figure 2**).

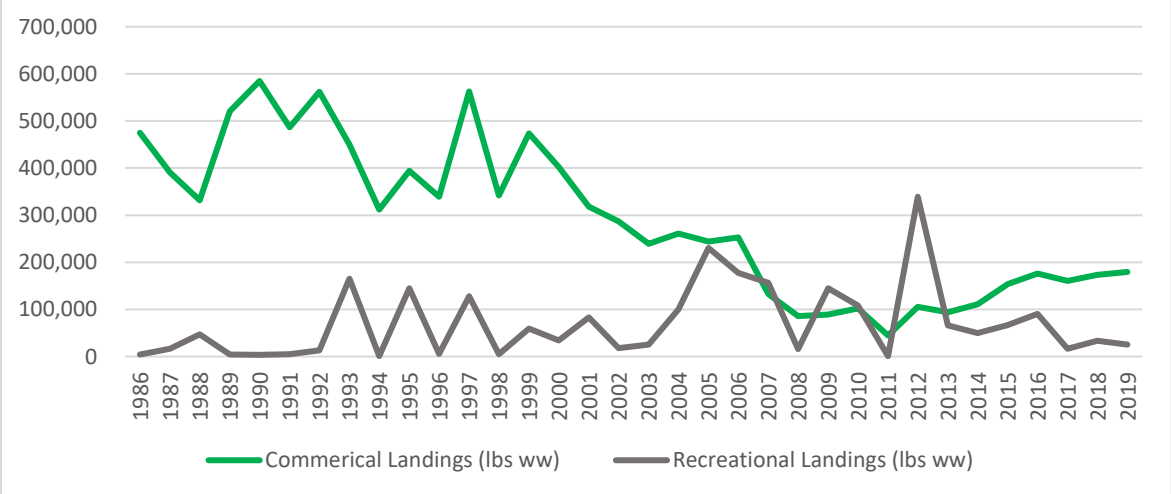

Figure 2. Commercial (green) and recreational MRIP FES (gray) landings in pounds whole weight from 1986 to 2019.

Summary of Biological Effects:

- **Alternative 1 (No Action)** is not a viable option.
- A higher buffer between ACL/OY and the ABC increases the biological benefit.
    - **Alternative 4** provides the highest buffer and therefore benefit.
    - **Preferred Alternative 2** provides no buffer and therefore the least benefit when compared to the other viable alternatives.

Summary of Economic Effects:

- All alternatives are expected to be constraining on harvest.
- **Preferred Alternative 2** has the highest ACL and therefore the highest benefit.

Table 2. Estimated change in potential net economic benefits to the recreational and commercial sectors from Action 1 (2021 $) for **Preferred Alternative 2.**

Year	Commercial	Recreational	Total
2023	-$315,716	-$309,994	-$625,710
2024	-$307,954	-$306,429	-$614,383
2025	-$300,197	-$302,979	-$603,176
2026+	-$300,197	-$302,979	-$603,176

Summary of Social Effects:

- ACLs do not directly affect resource users.
- Communities in Florida and North Carolina are most likely to be affected by this action
- Higher ACLs generally equate to higher social benefit; therefore **Preferred Alternative 2** would provide the highest social benefit.

Draft Rationale:

- Magnuson-Stevens Act does not preclude OY or ACL from being set equal to ABC, but neither can exceed the OFL.
- The Council has been frequently setting ACL and OY equal to the ABC and below the OFL.
- While snowy grouper are overfished and experiencing overfishing, the Council has decided to forego the buffer between the ACL (and OY) and ABC and rely instead on the rebuilding plan established in Amendment 15A (2008) as well as management measure modifications to prevent overfishing and ensure the stock is rebuilt within the rebuilding schedule.
- **DRAFT STATEMENT:** Are the actions/alternatives throughout this amendment sufficient to constrain harvest to the reduced, updated catch levels and how?

Committee Action:

- REVIEW ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE AND SELECTED PREFERRED
- REVIEW UPDATED EFFECTS SUMMARY
- REVIEW/MODIFY DRAFT RATIONALE

2. Revise sector allocations and sector annual catch limits for snowy grouper

Purpose of Action

Allocations need to be reviewed since the recreational landings stream changed in the new assessment (SEDAR 36). Recreational landings are now estimated using data from the Fishing Effort Survey (FES) rather than the Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS). Also, the Council's Allocation Review Trigger Policy states that sector allocations are to be reviewed following a stock assessment.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Retain the current commercial sector and recreational sector allocations as 83% and 17%, respectively, of the revised total annual catch limit for snowy grouper.

Year	Total ACL (lbs gw)	Total Commercial ACL (lbs gw) 83%	Season 1 (70%)	Season 2 (30%)
2023	119,654	99,313	69,519	29,794
2024	121,272	100,656	70,459	30,197
2025	122,889	101,998	71,399	30,599
2026*	122,889	101,998	71,399	30,599

Based on Preferred Alternative 2 from Action 1. *2026 values will remain in place until modified.

Year	Total ACL (numbers of fish)	Recreational ACL (numbers of fish)[1] 17%
2023	15,264	2,278
2024	15,264	2,309
2025	15,264	2,339
2026*	15,264	2,339

Based on Preferred Alternative 2 from Action 1. *2026 values will remain in place until modified.

Preferred Alternative 2. Allocate 87.55% of the revised total annual catch limit for snowy grouper to the commercial sector and 12.45% of the revised total annual catch limit for snowy grouper to the recreational sector.

[1] ABC/OFL recommendations in pounds whole weight are converted to pounds gutted weight using a 1.18 NMFS conversion factor. According to SEDAR 36 Update, 95.4% of total removals of snowy grouper are landings and 4.6% are dead discards. Landings recommendations have been calculated to account for dead discards. Recreational allocations in numbers of fish were determined using an average weight from 2016-2018 from SEDAR 36 Update (8.93 lbs gw).

Year	Total ACL (lbs gw)	Total Commercial ACL (lbs gw) 87.55%	Season 1 (70%)	Season 2 (30%)
2023	119,654	104,757	73,330	31,427
2024	121,272	106,174	74,322	31,852
2025	122,889	107,589	75,312	32,277
2026*	122,889	107,589	75,312	32,277

Based on Preferred Alternative 2 from Action 1. *2026 values will remain in place until modified.

Year	Total ACL (numbers of fish)	Recreational ACL (numbers of fish) 12.45%
2023	15,264	1,668
2024	15,264	1,691
2025	15,264	1,713
2026*	15,264	1,713

Based on Preferred Alternative 2 from Action 1. *2026 values will remain in place until modified.

Alternative 3. Allocate 73.36% of the revised total annual catch limit for snowy grouper to the commercial sector and 26.64% of the revised total annual catch limit for snowy grouper to the recreational sector.

Year	Total ACL (lbs gw)	Total Commercial ACL (lbs gw) 73.36%	Season 1 (70%)	Season 2 (30%)
2023	119,654	87,778	61,445	26,333
2024	121,272	88,965	62,276	26,689
2025	122,889	90,151	63,106	27,045
2026*	122,889	90,151	63,106	27,045

Based on Preferred Alternative 2 from Action 1. *2026 values will remain in place until modified.

Year	Total ACL (numbers of fish)	Recreational ACL (numbers of fish) 26.64%
2023	15,264	3,570
2024	15,264	3,618
2025	15,264	3,666
2026*	15,264	3,666

Based on Preferred Alternative 2 from Action 1. *2026 values will remain in place until modified

Discussion:

- The commercial sector has been consistently harvesting at or above the sector ACL. The recreational sector has been harvesting below its current ACL but will likely be restricted by the new sector ACL under all alternatives.

- When compared to the average commercial landings from 2015-2019 (lbs gw) the proposed commercial ACLs for 2023 through 2026 from **Preferred Alternative 2** are roughly 32,000 lbs gw below average landings (**Figure 3**).

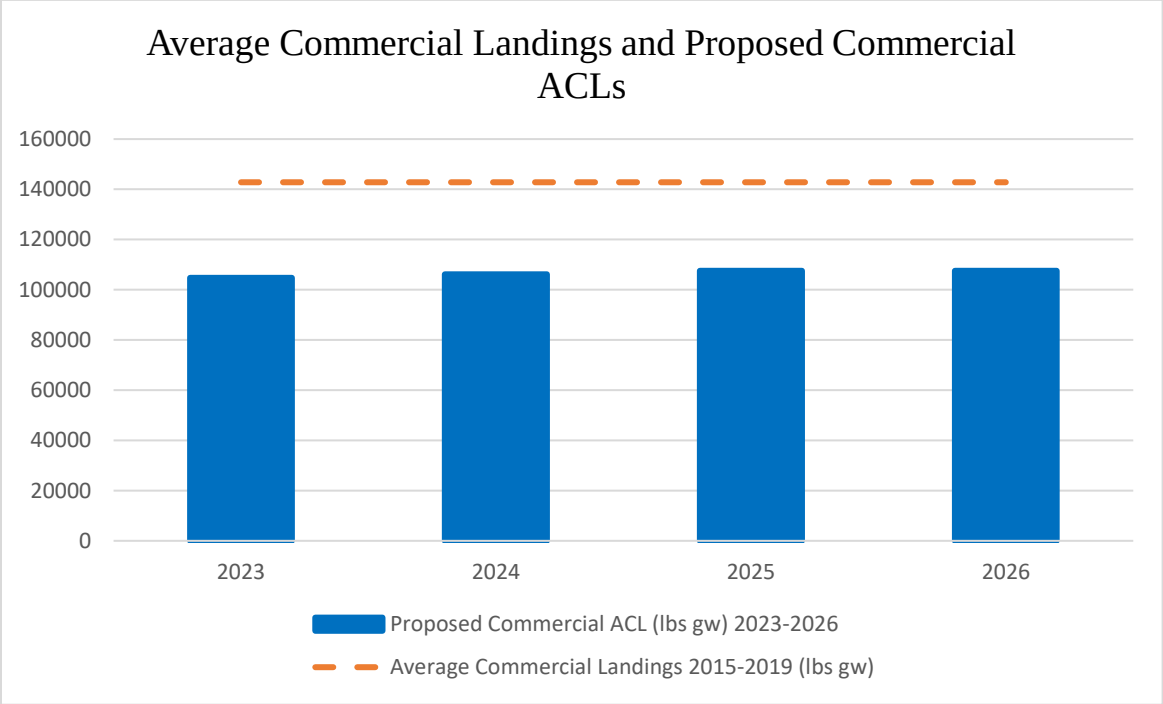

Figure 3. Average commercial landings (lbs gw) from 2015-2019 (orange) compared to the proposed commercial ACLs (blue) from **Preferred Alternative 2** from **Action 2**. Note that the updated commercial ACL is the total ACL for both season 1 and season 2.

- When compared to the average recreational landings from 2015-2019 (numbers of fish calibrated to FES) the proposed recreational ACLs for 2023 through 2027 from **Preferred Alternative 2** are roughly 3,300 fish below average landings (**Figure 4**).

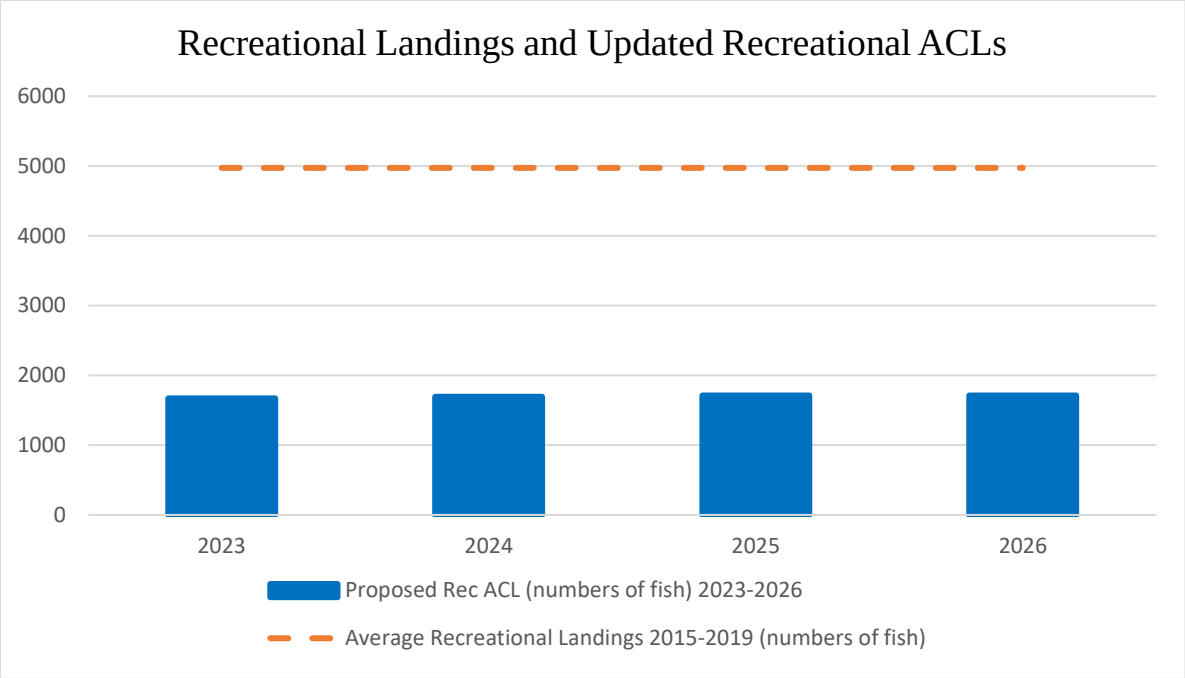

Figure 4. Average recreational landings (numbers of fish calibrated to FES) from 2015-2019 (orange) compared to the proposed recreational ACLs (blue) from **Preferred Alternative 2** from **Action 2**.

- **Alternative 1 (No Action)** allocations were developed through Regulatory Amendment 20 and uses average landings from 1986-2005, however the recreational landings that were used were CHTS estimates.

- **Preferred Alternative 2** uses the same method to allocate as used in Regulatory Amendment 20, however it incorporates recreational landings estimates from the MRIP FES

- **Alternative 3** utilizes the Comprehensive ACL Amendment's Allocation Formula:

Sector Allocation Percentage = ((sector's mean landings 2006 to 2008)*0.5) + ((sector's mean landings 1986 to 2008)*0.5)

Summary of Biological Effects:

- Biological benefits have the potential to change as a result of sector allocations if there is a notably different discard mortality rate; however, according to SEDAR 36 Update the discard mortality for both sectors is 100%.
- There is not expected to be a notable change in fishing effort or behavior as a result of the allocation alternatives considered.
- Biological effects are not expected to be substantially different between alternatives.

Summary of Economic Effects:

- Economic benefits may increase if a sector is allocated more of the total ACL and decrease if the sector ACL is reduced.
- Under **Preferred Alternative 2** the following changes in net economic benefits are expected:

Table 3. Estimated change in potential net economic benefits for the commercial sector, recreational sector, and total net benefits from **Preferred Alternative 2** compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** in **Action 2** (2021 $).

Year	Commercial	Recreational	Total
2023	$31,466	-$70,150	-$38,684
2024	$31,894	-$71,070	-$39,176
2025	$32,316	-$71,990	-$39,674
2026+	$32,316	-$71,990	-$39,674

Summary of Social Effects:

- Social benefits may increase if a sector is allocated more of the total ACL and decrease if the sector ACL is reduced.
- Both sector ACLs are expected to be constraining on harvest as a result of reduced catch levels.

Draft Rationale:

- Landings of snowy grouper have been historically higher from the commercial sector.
- Regulatory Amendment 20 used the average landings from 1986 to 2005 to determine the 83% commercial 17% recreational allocation but this was inclusive of MRIP CHTS recreational landings estimates.
- The Council decided that the average landings from 1986 to 2005 was still the best method to determine the allocations, therefore they chose **Alternative 2** as the preferred which used this method to determine allocations, but included recreational landings estimates from the MRIP FES method.
- The Council recognizes the needs of the commercial sector which historically comprises most of the snowy grouper landings and determined **Preferred Alternative 2** strikes a balance between the needs of the two sectors, making this alternative fair and equitable.
- **DRAFT STATEMENT:** Other than the historical landings of snowy grouper, what is the justification behind the commercial sector receiving a higher sector ACL?
    - Fishery occurs in deep water and therefore targeted less by the recreational sector?

Committee Action:

- REVIEW ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE AND SELECTED PREFERRED
- REVIEW UPDATED EFFECTS SUMMARY
- REVIEW/MODIFY DRAFT RATIONALE

3. Modify the snowy grouper recreational season

Purpose of Action

An approximately 43% reduction in harvest is needed to achieve the updated catch levels for snowy grouper. Modifications to the recreational season are being considered to help constrain recreational harvest to these reduced catch levels.

Alternative 1 (No Action). The recreational snowy grouper season is May 1 to August 31.

Preferred Alternative 2. Modify the recreational snowy grouper season to begin on May 1 and end on June 30.

Alternative 3. Modify the recreational snowy grouper season to begin on July 1 and end on August 31.

Discussion:

- The current recreational season for snowy grouper is May 1st through August 31st and recreational harvest is limited to one snowy grouper per vessel per day.

- The annual recreational landings of snowy grouper have been less than 10,000 fish every year from 2010 to 2019 except 2012 when landings were over 60,000 fish[2].

- It was noted in Regulatory Amendment 20 (2015) that most recreational landings, particularly in Monroe County, FL, occurred in May or June. An analysis of recent 3 years (2017-2019) of MRIP FES landings follow this trend with the exception of 2018 when recreational landings were highest in July and August. Projected landings are expected to peak in May and August (**Figure 6**).

[2] Note that the SERO ACL Monitoring webpage does not include snowy grouper landings from Monroe County, FL which were included in the landings stream as part of SEDAR 36 (2013) and SEDAR 36 Update (2020).

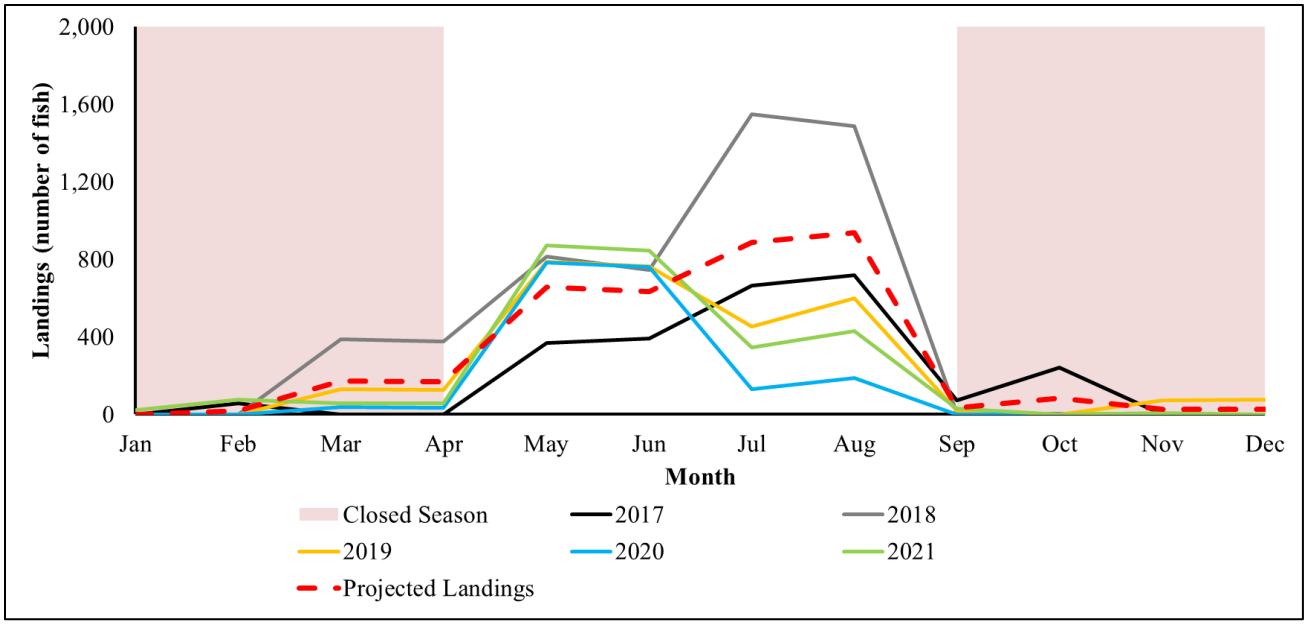

Figure 5. South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings by month from 2017-2019 and projected landings. All of the landing projections assume no landings between January 1 - April 30 and September 1 – December 31 for the season closure. Source: SEFSC MRIP FES Recreational ACL Database [March 17, 2022].

Summary of Analyses:

- Landings from 2015-2019 and 2017-2019 were used to obtain he average number of snowy grouper landed each month (**Table 4**). Based on these landings a predicted season length was determined under the preferred recreational ACL from Action 2 (**Table 5**). See Appendix G in draft document for full range of alternatives from Action 2.

- Because of the variability and uncertainty of the recreational landings data, season lengths vary depending on which historical range is analyzed.

Table 4. Average number of snowy grouper landed by the recreational sector by wave from the South Atlantic based on a three-year average (2017 to 2019) and a five-year average (2015 to 2019). Landings include trips reported from Monroe County, FL. The confidence interval was developed based on the standard deviation of the three years.

Three-year Average (2017-2019)			
Wave	**Average**	**Confidence Interval**	**Average Number Per Month**
Jan-Feb	20	0 - 598	10
Mar-Apr	342	0 - 806	11
May-Jun	**1,290**	**0 - 3,120**	**645**
Jul-Aug	**1,824**	**938 - 2,710**	**912**
Sep-Oct	116	0 - 270	58
Nov-Dec	0	0 - 126	0
Five-year Average (2015-2019)			
Wave	**Average**	**Confidence Interval**	**Average Number Per Month**
Jan-Feb	351	0 – 1,372	176
Mar-Apr	395	0 – 1,256	198
May-Jun	**2,354**	**0 – 5,520**	**1,177**
Jul-Aug	**1,674**	**138 – 3,210**	**837**
Sep-Oct	45	0 - 230	23
Nov-Dec	30	0 - 163	15

Table 5. The projected South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings (number of fish) and closure dates expected for each alternative of Action 4 using a **three-year (2017-2019)** and **five-year (2015-2019) average** recreational landings baseline. **The recreational ACL options considered here assume sector allocations of 12.45% recreational and 87.55% commercial (Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 2).** Source: SEFSC MRIP FES Recreational ACL Database [March 17, 2022].

Alternative 1 (No Action): May 1 – August 31			
Year	Recreational ACL (numbers of fish)*	**3-Year Average Baseline**	**5-Year Average Baseline**
		Waves Open	Waves Open
2023	1,668	> 2 waves (aprx. 74 days)	< 1 wave (aprx. 43 days)
2024	1,691	> 2 waves (aprx. 74 days)	< 1 wave (aprx. 43 days)
2025	1,713	> 2 waves (aprx. 75 days)	< 1 wave (aprx. 44 days)
2026	1,713	> 2 waves (aprx. 75 days)	< 1 wave (aprx. 44 days)
Preferred Alternative 2: Wave 3 Option (May 1 – June 30)			
Year	Recreational ACL (numbers of fish)*	**3-Year Average Baseline**	**5-Year Average Baseline**
		Waves Open	Waves Open
2023	1,668	~ 1 wave (aprx. 61 days)	< 1 wave (aprx. 43 days)
2024	1,691	~ 1 wave (aprx. 61 days)	< 1 wave (aprx. 43 days)
2025	1,713	~ 1 wave (aprx. 61 days)	< 1 wave (aprx. 44 days)
2026	1,713	~ 1 wave (aprx. 61 days)	< 1 wave (aprx. 44 days)
Alternative 3: Wave 4 Option (July 1 – Aug 31)			
Year	Recreational ACL (numbers of fish)*	**3-Year Average Baseline**	**5-Year Average Baseline**
		Waves Open	Waves Open
2023	1,668	slightly < 1 wave (aprx. 56 days)	~ 1 wave (aprx. 60 days)
2024	1,691	slightly < 1 wave (aprx. 57 days)	~ 1 wave (aprx. 61 days)
2025	1,713	slightly < 1 wave (aprx. 58 days)	~ 1 wave (aprx. 61 days)
2026	1,713	slightly < 1 wave (aprx. 58 days)	~ 1 wave (aprx. 61 days)

Summary of Biological Effects:

- **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** both shorten the season by the same length of time (2 months), which is expected to provide biological benefit as fishing mortality would be lower than under the current 4-month season
- **Preferred Alternative 2** would keep the recreational season open during the peaking spawning month of May (Kolmos et al. 2019) which would provide less biological benefit when compared to **Alternative 3** when considering snowy grouper spawning activity
- Discards could increase if the snowy grouper season is shortened, and fishermen continue to target blueline tilefish in areas where the two species co-occur
    - Currently the recreational seasons for blueline tilefish and snowy grouper match

- Currently under development, Amendment 52, would retain the current blueline tilefish season of May 1 – Aug 31

Summary of Economic Effects:

- Generally, a longer season results in higher economic benefits.
- **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would have lower potential economic benefits than **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Summary of Social Effects:

- **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would provide the most access, therefore the highest social benefit.
- For **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3,** social effects would be dependent on whether access was available when recreational landings have typically been highest (May and June).
    - **Preferred Alternative 2** provides access during this wave.

Draft Rationale:

- Substantial reductions in harvest are needed to achieve updated catch levels.
- Shortening the recreational season would help constrain recreational catch and contribute towards achieving reductions in catch under the new recreational ACL.
- The May – June season (**Preferred Alternative 2**) was selected because it allowed for harvest:
    - When there has been, and is predicted to be, an increase in landings during the fishing year indicating this is when most recreational fishermen need access.
    - To coincide with at least a portion of the recreational blueline tilefish season.
- **DRAFT STATEMENT:** Because of the overall reductions in catch, why are commercial management measures not being considered when this sector received a higher allocation?
    - Based on past discussion – the current in-season AM for the commercial will ensure commercial harvest is constrained and any additional management modifications would make commercial trips to inefficient and/or costly.

Committee Action:

- REVIEW ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE AND SELECTED PREFERRED
- REVIEW UPDATED EFFECTS SUMMARY
- REVIEW/MODIFY DRAFT RATIONALE

4. Modify the snowy grouper recreational accountability measures

Purpose of Action

Due to the needed reduction in catch levels, the Council is considering a revision to the recreational accountability measures (AMs). In addition, the trigger for the AMs may be revised through this action.

Alternative 1 (No Action). If recreational landings reach or are projected to reach the recreational annual catch limit, recreational harvest of snowy grouper is closed for the remainder of the fishing year, regardless of stock status, unless National Marine Fisheries Service determines that no closure is necessary based on the best scientific information available.

If recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, then during the following fishing year recreational landings will be monitored for a persistence in increased landings. If the total annual catch limit is exceeded and snowy grouper are overfished, the length of the recreational fishing season and the recreational annual catch limit are reduced by the amount of the recreational annual catch limit overage.

Alternative 2. Remove the current recreational in-season accountability measures. For the snowy grouper recreational sector, National Marine Fisheries Service will annually announce the recreational fishing season start and end dates in the *Federal Register* and by other methods, as deemed appropriate. The fishing season will start on May 1 and end on the date National Marine Fisheries Service projects the recreational annual catch limit will be met.
NOTE: The May 1 date used in this alternative is dependent on the current **Preferred Alternative 2** of **Action 3**.

Preferred Alternative 3. Remove the current recreational in-season accountability measures. If recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, reduce the length of the following year's recreational fishing season by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational annual catch limit from being exceeded in the following year. However, the length of the recreational season will not be reduced if the Regional Administrator determines, using the best scientific information available, that it is not necessary.

Alternative 4. Retain the current recreational in-season accountability measures. If recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, reduce the length of the following year's recreational fishing season by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational annual catch limit from being exceeded in the following year. However, the length of the recreational season will not be reduced if the Regional Administrator determines, using the best scientific information available, that it is not necessary.

Table 7. A summary of accountability measures within each alternative for **Action 4**.

	In-Season AM		Post Season AM	
	Triggers	**AM**	**Triggers**	**AM**
Alternative 1 (No Action)	Recreational landings reach/projected to reach recreational ACL	Current recreational season closes	• Recreational landings exceed recreational ACL • **Total ACL** exceeded • **Stock is overfished** ***All 3 must occur for AM to take effect***	• Recreational ACL for the following year reduced by the recreational overage • Recreational season for the following year is reduced by the amount of the recreational overage
Alternative 2	NMFS will annually announce the recreational fishing season start and end dates			
Preferred Alternative 3	NONE		Recreational landings exceed recreational ACL ***no longer tied to total ACL and stock status***	Recreational season for the following year is reduced by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational ACL from being exceeded
Alternative 4	Recreational landings reach/projected to reach recreational ACL	Current recreational season closes	Recreational landings exceed recreational ACL ***no longer tied to total ACL and stock status***	Recreational season for the following year is reduced by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational ACL from being exceeded

Discussion:

- Snowy grouper currently has a recreational in-season accountability measure; however, this is not effective for constraining recreational landings to the ACL due to the relatively short season length and timeline of recreational data availability. Amendment 52, which is currently in development, has selected a preferred alternative where NMFS would announce the season yearly, similar to **Alternative 2.**

Summary of Biological Effects:

- Biological benefits would be similar amongst alternatives, all alternatives contain attributes that could lead to both beneficial and adverse effects when compared to other alternatives
    - **Alternative 1 (No Action):** has both an in-season and post-season AM but may not be most effective for a short recreational season
    - **Alternative 2:** would be functional for a short season but does not have a payback if the ACL is exceeded

- **Preferred Alternative 3:** removing the in-season AM could have adverse effects but the post-season would be more effective
- **Alternative 4:** would retain the in-season closure and adopt the more effective post-season AMs

Summary of Economic Effects:

- **Alternative 1 (No Change)**: most stringent, greatest potential for short-term negative effects, long term benefit.
- **Alternative 2**: Lower potential for short-term negative effects when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, lack of in-season closure could result in short-term benefit.
- **Preferred Alternative 3:** Similar effects to **Alternative 2** but with the removal of the in-season closure there is a potential for higher harvest when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.
- **Alternative 4**: Similar to **Preferred Alternative 3** but there would be lower potential short-term benefits and long-term costs due to the in-season closure being retained.

Summary of Social Effects:

- Closures and season length/date variability can cause negative social effects, however functional AMs provide long-term social benefits as they help ensure sustainable harvest.
- All alternatives contain attributes that could lead to both beneficial and adverse effects when compared to other alternatives
    - **Alternative 1 (No Action):** Could lead to inconsistent closure dates through the payback portion of the post season AM, provides long-term benefit of helping to prevent overages and correcting them if they occur.
    - **Alternative 2:** Season lengths/dates would vary year to year and would not provide a reopening opportunity, announcement would provide time for recreational fishermen to plan trips.
    - **Preferred Alternative 3:** No in-season closure would provide for increased fishing opportunities within the current season; however, the removal of the two post-season triggers could lead to a variable season year to year if ACL overages occur.
    - **Alternative 4:** The in-season closure could result in fewer fishing opportunities within the current fishing season. The removal of the two post-season triggers could lead to a variable season year to year if ACL overages occur.

Draft Rationale:

- Accountability measures are being modified to ensure effectiveness for the short recreational season.
- Eliminating the in-season closure will be most effective because data are not available in time to implement an in-season management under the two-month season in the preferred alternative selected in Action 3.
    - **DRAFT STATEMENT:** NMFS can issue an in-season closure for short seasons using data from the previous year. Is there a reason the Council would not want to rely on this method?

- Uncoupling the total ACL, stock status, and recreational ACL in the post season accountability measures will prevent potential disruptions to the commercial sector because of post-season payback.

Committee Action:

- REVIEW ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE AND SELECTED PREFERRED
- REVIEW UPDATED EFFECTS SUMMARY
- REVIEW/MODIFY DRAFT RATIONALE

DRAFT MOTION: APPROVE THE MODIFICATIONS TO ACTION 4, ALTERNATIVE 2

DRAFT MOTION: APPROVE AMENDMENT 51 TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE SNAPPER GROUPER FISHERY OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION FOR FORMAL SECRETARIAL REVIEW AND DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT AS NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE. GIVE STAFF EDITORIAL LICENSE TO MAKE ANY NECESSARY EDITORIAL CHANGES TO THE DOCUMENT/CODIFIED TEXT AND GIVE THE COUNCIL CHAIR AUTHORITY TO APPROVE THE REVISIONS AND RE-DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT.