

Amendment 60

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

**Commercial Snapper Grouper Transferable Permits, Bottom
Longline Gear Requirements, Trip Limits, and Commercial Harvest
Sale Requirement**



**Environmental Assessment, Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis, and
Regulatory Impact Review**

September 2026 DRAFT

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
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Award Number FNA15NMF4410010

Amendment 60 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

Proposed action(s):

Remove the two-for-one requirement for snapper grouper commercial unlimited permits, revise bottom longline species limitations and stowage requirements, increase commercial trip limits, and require sale of all commercial harvest of snapper grouper.

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This environmental assessment (EA) is being prepared using the 2020 CEQ NEPA Regulations as modified by the Phase I 2022 revisions. The effective date of the 2022 revisions was May 20, 2022, and reviews begun after this date are required to apply the 2020 regulations as modified by the Phase I revisions unless there is a clear and fundamental conflict with an applicable statute. This EA began on June 8, 2023, and accordingly proceeds under the 2020 regulations as modified by the Phase I revisions.

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Summary

Why is the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council considering action?

Purpose for Action

The purpose of this amendment is to increase long-term stability of the commercial fishery by maintaining the current number of permits and to increase flexibility, adaptability, access, and economic profitability in the snapper grouper commercial sector.

Need for Action

The need for this amendment is to provide increased access by modifying limited-access commercial permit requirements, allowing greater flexibility for changing fishing gear at sea, and modifying trip limits to more consistently achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, commercial closures and other adverse social and economic effects, consistent with Executive Order 14276 – Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.

What Actions are Being Proposed in This Amendment?

Amendment 60 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region proposes the following actions:

Action 1. Remove the 2-for-1 requirement for the snapper grouper transferable (SG 1) commercial permit

Purpose of Action: Facilitate transfer of permits in the snapper grouper commercial sector by removing the two-for-one requirement for obtaining a snapper grouper transferable (SG 1) commercial permit.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not change the current permit requirements. To acquire a limited access, transferable South Atlantic snapper grouper (SG 1) commercial permit, an entity must obtain and exchange **two** such permits for one new permit.

Preferred Alternative 2. To acquire a limited access, transferable South Atlantic snapper grouper (SG 1) commercial permit, an entity must obtain and exchange **one** such permit for one new permit.

Action 2. Revise bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species that may be harvested while gear is on board and stowed

Purpose of Action: Provide additional flexibility for commercial fishermen that use bottom longline gear to be able to deploy multiple gears within a trip, improving trip efficiency, while maintaining law enforcement's ability to monitor the gear used to catch snapper grouper species.

Alternative 1 (No Action). A vessel that has on board a valid Federal commercial permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper that fishes in the EEZ on a trip with bottom longline gear on

board may possess only the following South Atlantic snapper-grouper species: snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish.

Alternative 2. Modify the regulations restricting possession of snapper grouper species to allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Appropriately stowed means longline hooks are not baited **or** are not on the deck of the vessel.

Alternative 3. Modify the regulations restricting possession of snapper grouper species to allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Appropriately stowed means longline hooks are not baited **or** are not on the deck of the vessel. **Vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip must communicate their intent to switch gears to the National Marine Fisheries Service using an approved method.**

Alternative 4. Modify the regulations restricting possession of snapper grouper species to allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Appropriately stowed means longline hooks are not baited **or** are not on the deck of the vessel. **Vessel operators who intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip are required to carry an active and approved vessel monitoring system on board and send a notification via the vessel monitoring system to the National Marine Fisheries Service before each gear change on that trip.**

Action 3. Increase commercial trip limit for greater amberjack

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip limits for greater amberjack to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest the annual catch limit (ACL).

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limits for greater amberjack. The current trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 1 (March 1 through August 31) and Season 2 (September through February) is 1,200 lbs ww or gw.

Preferred Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 1 to:

Sub-Alternative 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.

Preferred Sub-Alternative 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Preferred Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 2 to:

Sub-Alternative 3a. 1,500 lbs gw.

Preferred Sub-Alternative 3b. 1,750 lbs gw.
Sub-Alternative 3c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Action 4. Increase commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip limits for vermilion snapper to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest the ACL.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper. The current trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 1 (January through June) and Season 2 (July through December) is 1,000 lbs gw.

Preferred Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 1 to:

Preferred Sub-Alternative 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.
Sub-Alternative 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.
Sub-Alternative 2c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Preferred Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 2 to:

Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a. 1,500 lbs gw.
Sub-Alternative 3b. 1,750 lbs gw.
Sub-Alternative 3c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Action 5. Increase commercial trip limit for red porgy

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip limits for red porgy to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest the ACL.

Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for red porgy. The current trip limit for red porgy during Season 1 (January through April) and Season 2 (May through December) is 15 fish.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for red porgy during Season 1 to:

Sub-Alternative 2a. 30 fish.
Sub-Alternative 2b. 45 fish.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for red porgy during Season 2 to:

Sub-Alternative 3a. 30 fish.
Sub-Alternative 3b. 45 fish.

Action 6. Increase commercial trip limit for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina)

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip limits for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina) to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest the ACL.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina. The current trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina is 500 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina to 750 lbs ww.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina to 1,000 lbs ww.

Action 7. Increase commercial trip limit for red grouper

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip limits for red grouper to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest the ACL.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for red grouper. The current trip limit for red grouper is 200 lbs gw; 236 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for red grouper to 300 lbs gw; 354 lbs ww.

Action 8. Increase commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip limits for gray triggerfish to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest the ACL.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish. The current trip limit for gray triggerfish is 1,000 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,200 lbs ww.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,400 lbs ww.

Action 9. Increase commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line only)

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip limits for golden tilefish (hook and line component) to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest the ACL.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for the golden tilefish hook and line component. The current trip limit for the golden tilefish (hook and line) is 500 lbs gw; 560 lbs ww.

Preferred Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 600 lbs gw; 672 lbs ww.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 750 lbs gw; 840 lbs ww.

Action 10. Require sale of all snapper grouper caught on commercial trips

Purpose of Action: Improve commercial reporting accuracy and professionalize the commercial fleet.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Snapper grouper harvest from commercial trips is not required to be sold, but if sold, it must be sold to a permitted dealer.

Alternative 2. All snapper grouper harvest on commercial snapper grouper trips is required to be sold to a permitted dealer. A commercial snapper grouper trip is a trip on which a vessel that holds either snapper grouper commercial permit (SG 1 or SG 2) either: 1) harvests any snapper grouper species in an amount that exceeds the recreational bag limit for that species, or 2) sells any amount of snapper grouper species that were harvested on that trip.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. What Actions are Being Proposed?

The actions proposed in Amendment 60 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP) would remove the two-for-one requirement for snapper grouper commercial unlimited (SG 1) permits; revise species possession restrictions and stowage requirements for commercial vessels with bottom longline gear on board; increase commercial trip limits for greater amberjack, vermilion snapper, red porgy, hogfish (Georgia through North Carolina stock), red grouper, gray triggerfish, and golden tilefish (hook and line component only); and require that all commercial snapper grouper harvest is sold to a federally-permitted dealer.

1.2. Who is Proposing the Actions?

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) is responsible for managing fish stocks in the South Atlantic Region under the Snapper Grouper FMP from 3 to 200 nautical miles off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida through Key West. The Council develops the framework amendment and sends it to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), who publishes a rule to implement the framework amendment on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce. NMFS is an agency of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration within the Department of Commerce. Guided by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the Council works with NMFS, other partners, and stakeholders to assess the status of fish stocks, specify catch levels, reduce bycatch, and enforce fisheries regulations.

The Council and NMFS are also responsible for making this framework amendment available for public comment. The draft environmental assessment (EA) was combined with the framework amendment and was made available to the public during public hearings and in Council meeting briefing books. The final EA and framework amendment will be made available for public comment during the proposed rule stage of the rulemaking process. The final EA and framework amendment will be found on the Council's website at <http://www.safmc.net>.

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

- Responsible for conservation and management of fish stocks in the South Atlantic Region.
- Consists of 13 voting members and 4 non-voting members; voting members include 1 representative from each of the 4 South Atlantic state fishery management agencies, 8 members appointed by the Secretary of Commerce, and the Southeast Regional Administrator of NMFS.
- Responsible for developing fishery management plans and amendments under the Magnuson-Stevens Act; recommends actions to NMFS for implementation.
- Management area is from 3 to 200 nautical miles off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida through Key West, except for mackerel which is from New York to Florida, and dolphin and wahoo, which is from Maine to Florida.

1.3. Where is the Project Located?

Management of the federal snapper grouper fishery located off the southeastern United States (South Atlantic) in the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) (3-200 nautical miles from shore) is conducted under the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 1983) (Figure 1.3.1). The Council manages fifty-five species of snappers, groupers, and other bottom- or reef-associated fish species under the Snapper Grouper FMP.

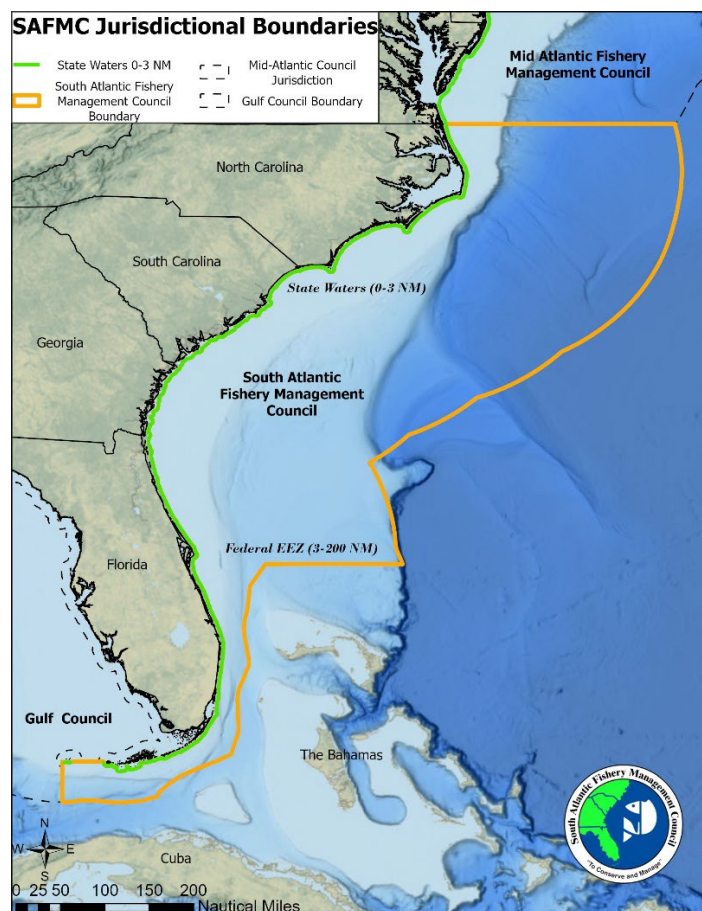


Figure 1.3.1. Jurisdictional boundaries of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council for the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

1.4. Why is the Council Considering Action? (Purpose and Need)

Purpose: The purpose of this amendment is to increase long-term stability of the commercial fishery by maintaining the current number of permits and increase flexibility, accessibility (i.e. lowering the barrier to entry), adaptability, and economic profitability in the snapper grouper commercial sector.

Need: The need for this amendment is to modify commercial snapper grouper permit requirements to maintain the current number of commercial participants, improve monitoring of commercial catches, allow flexibility for changing fishing gear at sea, modify trip limits to more consistently achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, commercial

closures and other adverse social and economic effects, consistent with Executive Order 14276 – Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.

Background

Through Amendment 60, the Council intends to increase access and efficiency for the commercial sector of the snapper grouper fishery.

To acquire a limited access, transferable South Atlantic snapper grouper unlimited permit (SG1), an entity must obtain and exchange **two** such permits for one new permit. By removing the two for one requirement for SG 1 permits (Action 1), the Council intends to maintain the current number of SG 1 permits while allowing an easier process by which current permits may be transferred. By revising species possession restrictions and stowage requirements for bottom longline gear (Action 2), the Council intends to allow increased efficiency for commercial trips through added flexibility to change to or from bottom longline gear while at sea. By increasing commercial trip limits for several species (Actions 3-9), the Council intends to allow commercial fishermen greater ability to take advantage of opportunities when species are being effectively harvested, increasing the potential for annual harvests to optimized. Finally, by requiring that all commercial harvest be sold, the Council intends to improve commercial reporting accuracy and professionalize the commercial fleet.

In developing Actions 2-9, the Council recognizes the mixed species and multi-faceted nature of commercial fishing in the South Atlantic region. Under current regulatory and economic conditions, many fishermen need multiple permits or multiple target species to sustain their businesses. Additionally, fishermen have expressed the need to be able to switch between fishing methods or target species within trips to be efficient with fuel and other fishing-associated costs. Increased flexibility and increased trip limits are not expected to result in trip limits for all available species being met on most trips. However, such changes will enable fishermen to maximize harvests for species that are available and being caught during a trip.

Finally, through Action 10, the Council recognizes that making commercial permits more accessible through Action 1 may necessitate requirements that to ensure that commercial permits are being used as intended by the Council, for harvest of snapper grouper with the intent to sell. The Council has expressed some concern about individuals purchasing commercial snapper grouper permits to fish at higher commercial limits and during times when the recreational season is not open but having no intention of selling the fish caught under those conditions. This also presents issues in monitoring of the commercial catch. Requiring sale of commercially-harvested snapper grouper would enable commercial regulations and flexibilities to be used exclusively for commercial purposes.

1.5. Are These Actions Within the Bounds of the Scientific Recommendations?

Federal fisheries management under the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the use of annual catch limits (ACL) to prevent overfishing. All actions considered in this amendment would occur under current ACLs, which are at or below the respective species' acceptable biological catch (ABC) levels. Harvest at or below the ABC is recommended as a sustainable level of annual harvest by the Scientific and Statistical Committee. For species-specific discussions supporting

current ABCs and ACLs, reference the FMP amendment that established the current ABC and ACL for each species, listed under Section 1.6 or on the Council website.

1.6. What is the Management History for the Snapper Grouper Fishery?

The snapper grouper fishery is highly regulated and regulations have been in place since the initial development of the Snapper Grouper FMP in 1983. More information on management for all species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit may be found at <https://safmc.net/fishery-management-plans/snapper-grouper/>. Stock assessment information can be found at www.sedarweb.org and Section 3.2.2.

Below are select amendments to the Snapper Grouper FMP that are relevant to consideration of the SG 1 permit two-for-one requirement, species restrictions gear stowage requirements for commercial vessels with bottom longline gear on board, and current trip limits for greater amberjack, vermilion snapper, red porgy, hogfish (Georgia through North Carolina stock), red grouper, gray triggerfish, and golden tilefish.

Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 1983)

The Snapper Grouper FMP included provisions to prevent growth overfishing in 13 species in the snapper grouper complex and established a procedure for preventing overfishing in other species; established minimum size limits for several snapper grouper species.

Amendment 4 (SAFMC 1991)

Amendment 4 to the Snapper Grouper FMP prohibited various gears, including fish traps, entanglement nets, bottom longlines inside of 50 fathoms (300 feet), the use of bottom longlines specifically for wreckfish, and powerheads in special management zones off South Carolina. The 50-fathom longline restriction was established to protect vulnerable nearshore reef habitats, reduce overfishing and bycatch of shallow-water species, and minimize gear conflicts with recreational and vertical-line fishermen. Additionally, it established bag limits and minimum size limits for several species; required commercial and for-hire permits along with specified data collection regulations; and mandated that all snapper grouper species possessed in the South Atlantic EEZ have heads and fins intact through landing.

Amendment 8 (SAFMC 1997)

Amendment 8 to the Snapper Grouper FMP established a limited access program for the snapper grouper commercial sector. Two types of permits were established. Transferable unlimited (SG 1) permits were issued for vessels with at least 1,000 pounds of snapper grouper species in any year from 1993-1996 and that had a valid snapper grouper permit at any time between February 11, 1996, and February 11, 2027. Non-transferable 225-pound (SG-2) permits were issued for vessels that had landings that were greater than zero but less than 1,000 pounds of snapper grouper species in any year and that had a valid snapper grouper permit during the previously stated time periods. Vessels with an SG 1 permit did not have an overall limit of snapper grouper species per trip. Vessels with an SG 2 permit were limited to 225 pounds of snapper grouper species per trip.

Amendment 8 also established the two-for-one requirement for SG 1 permits. For an SG 1 permit transfer to occur to any entity that is not an immediate family member or family corporation comprised solely of the transferee's parents, siblings, children, or spouse, two SG 1 permits must be exchanged for one SG 1 permit. The Council established this requirement to reduce the number of commercial fishing vessels for snapper grouper in the South Atlantic, because at the time, the fishery was characterized as having excess capacity and several stocks that were overfished or near the overfished status.

Amendment 9 (SAFMC 1998)

Amendment 9 to the Snapper Grouper FMP specified that vessels with longline gear aboard may only possess snowy grouper, warsaw grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish. The Council's intent stated in the amendment is that all longline vessels (i.e., pelagic and bottom longlines) would be subject to this measure.

Amendment 18B (SAFMC 2012)

Amendment 18B to the Snapper Grouper FMP established the commercial longline endorsement for golden tilefish, separating this component from the hook and line component. This amendment established a commercial trip limit for the hook and line component of 500 lbs gw. This amendment also specified the commercial ACL for the golden tilefish commercial hook and line component of the fishery.

Regulatory Amendment 18 (SAFMC 2013)

Regulatory Amendment 18 to the Snapper Grouper FMP reduced the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper to 1,000 lbs gw. This amendment also specified ACLs for vermilion snapper and red porgy.

Amendment 29 (SAFMC 2014)

Amendment 29 to the Snapper Grouper FMP established commercial split seasons (Season 1: January-June; Season 2: July-December) and a commercial trip limit (for both seasons) of 1,000 lbs ww for gray triggerfish. This amendment also established (Georgia – North Carolina) and revised (east Florida) the minimum size limits for gray triggerfish.

Amendment 37 (SAFMC 2016)

Amendment 37 to the Snapper Grouper FMP specified the management of hogfish into two separate stocks, one for the EEZ off east Florida and the other for the EEZ off Georgia through North Carolina (GA-NC). This amendment established a commercial trip limit for GA-NC hogfish of 500 lbs ww. This amendment also established status determination criteria, annual catch limits, minimum size limits, and accountability measures for both stocks of hogfish.

Regulatory Amendment 27 (SAFMC 2019)

Regulatory Amendment 27 to the Snapper Grouper FMP established commercial split seasons for greater amberjack (Season 1: March-August; Season 2: September-February) and red porgy (Season 1: January-April; Season 2: May-December). This amendment also established or revised commercial trips for the following species: greater amberjack (Season 1: 1,200 lbs ww or gw; Season 2: 1,000 lbs ww or gw), red porgy (Season 1: 60 fish; Season 2: 120 fish), vermilion snapper (1,000 lbs gw for both seasons; trip limit reductions when 75% of the seasonal quota

was met were removed). This amendment also reduced the commercial minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in the EEZ off the east coast of Florida.

Regulatory Amendment 30 (SAFMC 2019)

Regulatory Amendment 30 to the Snapper Grouper FMP established a commercial trip limit for red grouper of 200 lbs gw. This amendment also revised the rebuilding timeframe for red grouper and modified the seasonal spawning closure for red grouper in waters off South Carolina and North Carolina.

Amendment 49 (SAFMC 2023)

Amendment 49 to the Snapper Grouper FMP increased the September-February commercial trip limit for greater amberjack to 1,200 lbs whole weight (ww) or gutted weight (gw). This amendment also specified annual catch limits (ACL), revised sector allocations, reduced the commercial minimum size limit, and revised the April spawning closure for greater amberjack.

Amendment 50 (SAFMC 2023)

Amendment 50 to the Snapper Grouper FMP decreased the commercial trip limit for red porgy during both of its seasons (Season 1: January-April; Season 2: May-December) to 15 fish. This amendment also established a rebuilding plan, specified ACLs, and revised sector allocations for red porgy.

Chapter 2. Proposed Actions

2.1. Action 1. Remove the two-for-one requirement for the snapper grouper transferable (SG 1) commercial permit

2.1.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not change the current permit requirements. To acquire a limited access, transferable South Atlantic snapper grouper (SG 1) commercial permit, an entity must obtain and exchange **two** such permits for one new permit.

Preferred Alternative 2. To acquire a limited access, transferable South Atlantic snapper grouper (SG 1) commercial permit, an entity must obtain and exchange **one** such permit for one new permit.

Discussion

Action 1 addresses the two-for-one requirement to obtain a limited access South Atlantic snapper grouper unlimited (SG 1) permit. Under either of the alternatives considered under Action 1, the SG 1 permit would continue to be a limited access permit, with no new permits being created. This action only addresses requirements to transfer existing SG 1 permits.

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, after one unlimited (SG 1) permit has been acquired, the new owner has one year after the expiration date of that permit to acquire a second SG 1 permit to exchange the two permits for a new SG 1 permit. Ownership of each permit is not transferred in the federal permits system until both permits are exchanged. **Preferred Alternative 2** proposes removal of the requirement for two permits to be exchanged, allowing permits to be transferred on a one-for-one basis. A letter was mailed to SG 1 permit holders in January 2026, informing them that the Council is considering a change from the two-for-one requirement. All other current snapper-grouper limited access transferable permit and transfer requirements will remain in place.

During the development process for this amendment, the Council received information on limited access permit pools, and decided not to consider a permit pool at this time.

2.1.2. Comparison of Alternatives

For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

- For current SG 2 permit holders that desire a larger role in the snapper grouper commercial fishery, under **Preferred Alternative 2**, there could be some decline in SG 2 permits due to these fishermen acquiring and switching to an SG 1 permit (only one snapper grouper permit can be on a vessel).
- **Preferred Alternative 2** could have effects on the cost of SG 1 permits, though there would still be easier acquisition of SG 1 permits by only needing to find one permit holder to transfer, rather than two.

- If easier acquisition of SG 1 permits reduces latency under **Preferred Alternative 2**, increased effort could make the commercial sector more likely to reach ACLs, increase revenue, as well as diminish the risk of closures.
- There would be some administrative benefit under **Preferred Alternative 2** as the Permits Office would no longer need to verify and “retire” two existing permits to issue a new SG 1 permit, which could simplify permit-tracking and transfer processing.

2.2. Action 2. Revise bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species that may be harvested while gear is on board and stowed

2.2.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). A vessel that has on board a valid Federal commercial permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper that fishes in the EEZ on a trip with bottom longline gear on board may possess only the following South Atlantic snapper-grouper species: snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish.

Alternative 2. Modify the regulations restricting possession of snapper grouper species to allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Appropriately stowed means longline hooks are not baited **or** are not on the deck of the vessel.

Alternative 3. Modify the regulations restricting possession of snapper grouper species to allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Appropriately stowed means longline hooks are not baited **or** are not on the deck of the vessel. **Vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip must communicate their intent to switch gears to the National Marine Fisheries Service using an approved method.**

Alternative 4. Modify the regulations restricting possession of snapper grouper species to allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Appropriately stowed means longline hooks are not baited **or** are not on the deck of the vessel. **Vessel operators who intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip are required to carry an active and approved vessel monitoring system on board and send a notification via the vessel monitoring system to the National Marine Fisheries Service before each gear change on that trip.**

Discussion

Action 2 would allow commercial fishermen who use bottom longline gear to have additional flexibility by allowing them to retain species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish during trips when they use bottom longline gear to target other species. Currently, under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, if bottom longline gear is on board, the species above are the only snapper grouper species that may be retained on that trip. Therefore, switching to or from bottom longline gear to target other snapper grouper species within a trip is not allowed. Similarly, using bottom longline gear to

target non-snapper grouper species (e.g., sharks) and then switching gear to target snapper grouper species (other than those listed above) within a trip is not allowed.

The species restriction for longline gear was established through Snapper Grouper Amendment 9 (SAFMC 1998). This action was intended to prevent targeting overfished snapper grouper species that were not in the deepwater complex and to prevent the use of longlines on Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). At the time of Amendment 9's development, longlines were already only allowed in waters deeper than 50 fathoms, only north of St. Lucie Inlet, Florida, and only for species other than wreckfish. At that time, reports had also surfaced which indicated that fishermen were landing with a species composition that would only be caught in waters less than 50 fathoms. The species restriction was implemented to increase enforcement of the depth and area restrictions for longline gear.

Since implementation of the species restriction, the makeup of the snapper grouper commercial sector has changed, with more vessels needing a 'portfolio' approach to fishing that entails targeting multiple species or using multiple gears to harvest enough fish to profit from a trip. This has been driven by a combination of increased restrictions on some species, as well as increased economic costs to operate commercial fishing businesses in the South Atlantic region.

Under all Action 2 alternatives, harvest restrictions are maintained, such that the only snapper grouper species that may be harvested using bottom longline gear are snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish.

Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 would all allow fishermen to switch to or from bottom longline gear and be able to target and retain all snapper grouper species within the same trip. To ensure bottom longline gear is not being used to harvest snapper grouper species for which it is not a legal gear (all snapper grouper species except snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish), when fishing for other snapper grouper species, the longline gear must be stowed off the deck of the vessel or, if stowed on the deck of the vessel, must have no bait on the longline hooks.

Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 require effective communication between fishermen and law enforcement for the desired flexibility to be exercised without opening (or re-opening) methods of harvest that are not currently allowed for each species. These alternatives all seek to allow similar fishing flexibility, but differ in the type of required communication with law enforcement.

Alternative 2 has the lowest communication burden for fishermen, but provides the least amount of information for law enforcement. **Alternative 2** would not require any additional communication with law enforcement, and enforcement of regulations under this alternative would be most dependent on on-the-water interactions between fishermen and law enforcement officers.

Alternative 3 has a higher communication burden for fishermen and more information for law enforcement through advanced notice of a vessel switching to or from bottom longline gear, but provides some flexibility in the potential modes of communication, as approved by NMFS.

Alternative 3 would require that before switching to or from bottom longline gear, fishermen must submit a notification, alerting law enforcement of their intent to switch gear, using a

communication method approved by NMFS. Such notifications would only be necessary during trips when fishermen are switching to or from bottom longline gear and harvesting snapper grouper species.

Alternative 4 has a higher and more specific communication burden, requiring notification through a vessel monitoring system (VMS) of gear changes to or from bottom longline gear. VMS would also provide law enforcement with location information, making **Alternative 4** the most informative for law enforcement. This information would be used to verify fishing activities and associated catch. **Alternative 4** would have a higher burden to fishermen, as they would incur costs of installing (although these may be reimbursable through federal programs) and maintaining active VMS subscriptions. Snapper grouper commercially permitted vessels that will not switch to or from bottom longline gear and harvest snapper grouper within the same trip would not be required to have a VMS.

Any additional communication or equipment requirements from **Alternative 3** or **Alternative 4** would only apply for snapper grouper permitted vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear within a trip. These requirements would not apply to vessels that only fish bottom longline gear or that do not use bottom longline gear. Therefore, for example, if **Alternative 4** were implemented, a commercial snapper grouper vessel that only uses hook and line gear would not need to install or maintain a VMS.

2.2.2. Comparison of Alternatives

For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

- Expected effects depend on the number of snapper grouper commercial fishermen that would participate in switching to or from bottom longline gear within a trip.
 - Most discussion of fisheries that would use this flexibility has centered around the bottom longline fisheries for shark and golden tilefish.
 - 40 vessels have directed shark permits and either an SG 1 or an SG 2 permit. This does not necessarily mean that all of these vessels fish for shark using bottom longline.
 - 22 vessels have golden tilefish longline endorsements.
 - These numbers likely represent an overestimate of the number of vessels that would be impacted by selection of **Alternatives 2** through **4**, as owning the permit/endorsement does not directly translate to usage of that permit/endorsement in the specific way that would benefit from this action (switching to/from bottom longline gear within a trip).
- **Alternatives 2** through **4** could result in additional fishing mortality for snapper grouper species, but negative effects from this would be mitigated by catch being limited to the ACL.
- **Alternatives 2** through **4** could have economic or social benefits from increased harvests and more efficient commercial trips, potentially lowering overall fuel costs for commercial fishermen.
- Requirements for notification (**Alternatives 3** and **4**) could have mixed effects, with costs of installing and learning any new, required equipment, but benefits of improved communication with law enforcement and access to additional flexibility on the water.

- **Alternatives 3 or 4** would have substantial administrative effects, as federal reporting systems would need to be established or adjusted and maintained to include the required reporting methods.

2.3. Action 3. Increase commercial trip limit for greater amberjack

2.3.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limits for greater amberjack. The current trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 1 (March 1 through August 31) and Season 2 (September through February) is 1,200 lbs ww or gw.

Preferred Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 1 to:

Sub-Alternative 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.

Preferred Sub-Alternative 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Preferred Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 2 to:

Sub-Alternative 3a. 1,500 lbs gw.

Preferred Sub-Alternative 3b. 1,750 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Discussion

When the commercial split season and associated trip limits for greater amberjack were established through Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 27 (SAFMC 2019), the trip limits were specified in units of pounds whole weight (lbs ww) or gutted weight (lbs gw). Council discussions during this amendment process recognized that landings are monitored on the NMFS website in pounds gutted weight, and that the unit for the trip limit should match the unit used to monitor the landings. Therefore, all sub-alternatives under **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** only use pounds gutted weight as the unit.

Table 2.3.1.1. Commercial regulations for greater amberjack in the most recent fishing year (2025-2026).

Season	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Trip Limit	Minimum Size Limit (total length)	Seasonal Closure
March-August	544,990 lbs gw	1,200 lbs ww or gw	34 inches	No harvest in April
September-February	363,327 lbs gw*	1,200 lbs ww or gw	34 inches	None

*If the March-August ACL is not met, unused ACL from this season is added to the September-February ACL. Unused ACL from September-February is not added to a future season.

Table 2.3.1.2. Greater amberjack commercial trip limit and recent (2021/2022-2023/2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL). September-February percentages are relative to the ACL for that season, not including any rollover from the March-August season.

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)
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		2023/2024 (Preliminary)	2022/2023	2021/2022
Greater Amberjack	1,200 lbs ww or gw	Mar 2023-Aug 2023: 45.4% Sept 2023-Feb 2024: 33.1%	Mar 2022-Aug 2022: 66.5% Sept 2022-Feb 2023: 59.0%*	Mar 2021-Aug 2021: 69.0% Sept 2021-Feb 2022: 61.9%

Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

*Management change became effective during this year/season

2.3.2. Comparison of Alternatives

For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

- No closures are predicted under any of the considered trip limits, assuming average landings.
- Because the stock is not overfished, harvest increases below the ACL are not expected to impact stock status, resulting in relatively neutral biological effects among the considered trip limits.
- Some economic and social benefits are expected under the higher trip limits.

2.4. Action 4. Increase commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper

2.4.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper. The current trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 1 (January through June) and Season 2 (July through December) is 1,000 lbs gw.

Preferred Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 1 to:

Preferred Sub-Alternative 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Preferred Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 2 to:

Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a. 1,500 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3b. 1,750 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Discussion

The northern part of the region (South Carolina and North Carolina) has a wider variety of species available during Season 2, making the fishery relatively less dependent on vermilion snapper in that area for that time of year. The Council has expressed some concern for the northern part of the region (South Carolina and North Carolina) about the effects of upcoming reductions to black sea bass catch levels and possible switching of effort toward vermilion snapper in that area. Data show that Georgia is particularly dependent on vermilion snapper throughout the year.

Table 2.4.1.1. Commercial regulations for vermilion snapper in the most recent fishing year (2025).

Season	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Trip Limit	Minimum Size Limit (total length)	Seasonal Closure
January-June	454,240 lbs ww	1,000 lbs gw	12 inches	None
July-December	454,240 lbs ww*	1,000 lbs gw	12 inches	None

*If the January-June ACL is not met, unused ACL from this season is added to the July-December ACL. Unused ACL from July-December is not added to a future season.

Table 2.4.1.2. Vermilion snapper commercial trip limit and recent (2022-2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL). July-December percentages are relative to the ACL for that season, not including any rollover from the January-June season.

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)		
		2024 (Preliminary)	2023	2022

Vermilion Snapper	1,000 lbs gw	Jan-Jun: 65.3% Jul-Dec: 56.4%	Jan-Jun: 61.9% Jul-Dec: 92.6%	Jan-Jun: 61.7% Jul-Dec: 88.2%
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Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

2.4.2. Comparison of Alternatives

For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

- December closures are predicted for the highest trip limits considered for Season 2, assuming average landings. However, these analyses do not include unused ACL that is carried over from Season 1 to Season 2. Including carry-over ACL, Season 2 closures are unlikely.
- Because the stock is not overfished, harvest increases below the ACL are not expected to impact stock status, resulting in relatively neutral biological effects among the considered trip limits.
- Some economic and social benefits are expected under the higher trip limits.

2.5. Action 5. Increase commercial trip limit for red porgy

2.5.1. Alternatives

Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for red porgy. The current trip limit for red porgy during Season 1 (January through April) and Season 2 (May through December) is 15 fish.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for red porgy during Season 1 to:

Sub-Alternative 2a. 30 fish.

Sub-Alternative 2b. 45 fish.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for red porgy during Season 2 to:

Sub-Alternative 3a. 30 fish.

Sub-Alternative 3b. 45 fish.

Discussion

Average weight for commercially landed red porgy, estimated as the terminal 3-year (2015-2017) average weight from SEDAR 60 (2020), is 1.62 lbs ww.

Table 2.5.1.1. Commercial regulations for red porgy in the most recent fishing year (2025).

Season	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Trip Limit	Minimum Size Limit (total length)	Seasonal Closure
January-April	13,500 lbs gw	15 fish	14 inches	None
May-December	31,501 lbs gw*	15 fish	14 inches	None

*If the January-April ACL is not met, unused ACL from this season is added to the May-December ACL. Unused ACL from May-December is not added to a future season.

Table 2.5.1.2. Red porgy commercial trip limit and recent (2022-2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL). May-December percentages are relative to the ACL for that season, not including any rollover from the January-April season.

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)		
		2024 (Preliminary)	2023	2022
Red Porgy	15 fish	Jan-Apr: 47.3% May-Dec: 44.8%	Jan-Apr: 54.1%* May-Dec: 57.0%	Jan-Apr: 35.2% May-Dec: 38.8%

Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

*Management change became effective during this year/season

2.5.2. Comparison of Alternatives

For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

- No closures are predicted under any of the considered trip limits, assuming average landings.

- Because the stock is overfished, current trip limits and annual harvests may facilitate faster rebuilding than higher trip limits and annual harvests.
 - Red porgy rebuilding is more dependent on improved recruitment, so while low trip limits and resultant harvests may provide the best biological scenario, that action alone would not be expected to rebuild the stock.
 - The difference in predicted annual harvests under the considered trip limits is small, so the biological differences among trip limit alternatives are likely small, as well.
- Some economic and social benefits are expected under the higher trip limits.

2.6. Action 6. Increase commercial trip limit for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina)

2.6.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina. The current trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina is 500 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina to 750 lbs ww.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina to 1,000 lbs ww.

Discussion

Table 2.6.1.1. Commercial regulations for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina) in the most recent fishing year (2025).

Season	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Trip Limit	Minimum Size Limit (fork length)	Seasonal Closure
January-December	23,456 lbs ww	500 lbs ww	17 inches	None

Table 2.6.1.2. Hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina) commercial trip limit and recent (2022-2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL).

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)		
		2024 (Preliminary)	2023	2022
Hogfish (GA-NC)	500 lbs ww	72.6%	74.1%	74.7%

Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

2.6.2. Comparison of Alternatives

For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

- No closures are predicted under any of the considered trip limits, assuming average landings.
- Because the stock is not overfished, harvest increases below the ACL are not expected to impact stock status, resulting in relatively neutral biological effects among the considered trip limits.
- Some economic and social benefits are expected under the higher trip limits.

2.7. Action 7. Increase commercial trip limit for red grouper

2.7.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for red grouper. The current trip limit for red grouper is 200 lbs gw; 236 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for red grouper to 300 lbs gw; 354 lbs ww.

Discussion

Table 2.7.1.1. Commercial regulations for red grouper in the most recent fishing year (2025).

Season	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Trip Limit	Minimum Size Limit (total length)	Seasonal Closure
January-December	71,280 lbs ww	200 lbs ww	20 inches	No harvest January-May off NC and SC; No harvest January-April off GA and FL

Table 2.7.1.2. Red grouper commercial trip limit and recent (2022-2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL).

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)		
		2024 (Preliminary)	2023	2022
Red Grouper	200 lbs gw	52.6%	27.1%	25.4%

Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

2.7.2. Comparison of Alternatives

For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

- No closures are predicted under any of the considered trip limits, assuming average landings.
- Because the stock is overfished, current trip limits and annual harvests may facilitate faster rebuilding than higher trip limits and annual harvests.
 - Red grouper rebuilding is more dependent on improved recruitment, so while low trip limits and resultant harvests may provide the best biological scenario, that action alone would not be expected to rebuild the stock.
 - The difference in predicted annual harvests under the considered trip limits is small, so the biological differences among trip limit alternatives are likely small, as well.
- Some economic and social benefits are expected under the higher trip limits.

2.8. Action 8. Increase commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish

2.8.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish. The current trip limit for gray triggerfish is 1,000 lbs ww.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,200 lbs ww.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,400 lbs ww.

Discussion

Table 2.8.1.1. Commercial regulations for gray triggerfish in the most recent fishing year (2025).

Season	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Trip Limit	Minimum Size Limit (total length)	Seasonal Closure
January-June	156,162 lbs ww	1,000 lbs ww	12 inches	None
July-December	156,162 lbs ww*	1,000 lbs ww	12 inches	None

*If the January-June ACL is not met, unused ACL from this season is added to the July-December ACL. Unused ACL from July-December is not added to a future season.

Table 2.8.1.2. Gray triggerfish commercial trip limit and recent (2022-2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL). July-December percentages are relative to the ACL for that season, not including any rollover from the January-June season.

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)		
		2024 (Preliminary)	2023	2022
Gray Triggerfish	1,000 lbs ww	Jan-Jun: 34.2% Jul-Dec: 47.7%	Jan-Jun: 54.1% Jul-Dec: 73.1%	Jan-Jun: 58.9% Jul-Dec: 92.2%

Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

2.8.2. Comparison of Alternatives

For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

- No closures are predicted under any of the considered trip limits, assuming average landings.
- Stock status for gray triggerfish is unknown. Therefore, there may be some biological benefit to not increasing trip limits and annual harvests. However, the difference in predicted annual harvests under the considered trip limits is small, so the biological differences among trip limit alternatives are likely small, as well.
- Some economic and social benefits are expected under the higher trip limits.

2.9. Action 9. Increase commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line only)

2.9.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for the golden tilefish hook and line component. The current trip limit for the golden tilefish (hook and line) is 500 lbs gw; 560 lbs ww.

Preferred Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 600 lbs gw; 672 lbs ww.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 750 lbs gw; 840 lbs ww.

Discussion

Table 2.9.1.1. Commercial regulations for golden tilefish (hook and line) in the most recent fishing year (2025).

Season	Annual Catch Limit (ACL)	Trip Limit	Minimum Size Limit	Seasonal Closure
January-December	110,722 lbs gw	500 lbs gw	None	None

Table 2.9.1.2. Golden tilefish (hook and line) commercial trip limit and recent (2022-2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL).

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)		
		2024 (Preliminary)	2023	2022
Golden Tilefish (H&L)	500 lbs gw	94.2%	84.5%* (10/31/2023; Re-opened 12/7/2023)	107.7% (7/6/2022)

Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

*Management change became effective during this year/season

2.9.2. Comparison of Alternatives

For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

- Closures are predicted under all trip limits considered.
 - **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (500 lbs gw trip limit) is expected to result in a closure on October 16.
 - **Preferred Alternative 2** (600 lbs gw trip limit) is expected to result in a closure on September 21.
 - **Alternative 3** (750 lbs gw trip limit) is expected to result in a closure on August 27.

- Golden tilefish is not overfished. Under all trip limits considered, the ACL is predicted to be harvested, and the fishery would be closed. Because annual harvest is the same and at a sustainable level under all scenarios, biological effects are neutral under all trip limits considered.
- Some economic and social benefits are expected under the higher trip limits, through greater revenue per golden tilefish trip. Since the higher trip limits are also expected to result in earlier closures, there is a possibility for negative effects if golden tilefish are in-demand and unavailable to be harvested after a closure.

2.10. Action 10. Require sale of all snapper grouper caught on commercial trips

2.10.1. Alternatives

Alternative 1 (No Action). Snapper grouper harvest from commercial trips is not required to be sold, but if sold, it must be sold to a permitted dealer.

Alternative 2. All snapper grouper harvest on commercial snapper grouper trips is required to be sold to a permitted dealer. A commercial snapper grouper trip is a trip on which a vessel that holds either snapper grouper commercial permit (SG 1 or SG 2) either: 1) harvests any snapper grouper species in an amount that exceeds the recreational bag limit for that species, or 2) sells any amount of snapper grouper species that were harvested on that trip.

Discussion

This regulation only applies to species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit. For non-snapper grouper species caught on the same trip, any sale requirements would be determined by the applicable management plan.

For example, if gag and king mackerel are caught on the same commercial trip, **Alternative 2** would require that all gag caught on that trip must be sold to a federally-permitted dealer. Any requirements for sale of the king mackerel would be determined by the Fishery Management Plan for Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources in the Gulf and Atlantic Region.

Commercial vessels can still be used as recreational vessels as long as: 1) all harvest of snapper grouper species is within recreational bag limits, and 2) none of the snapper grouper harvested on that trip are sold.

Further Council discussions will address how to record fish that are harvested but not sold due to being rejected by the dealer.

2.10.2. Comparison of Alternatives

For current analyses of effects, see Chapter 4.

- This action is not expected to have any biological effects on snapper grouper populations. With **Alternative 2** providing more comprehensive reporting that accounts for fish kept for personal consumption, there may be some increase in the numbers in dealer reports. This should not necessarily be perceived as an increase in harvest.
 - The number of fish caught on commercial trips, kept for personal consumption, and not currently reported is not known, but is expected to be minimal.
- Minimal economic benefit from **Alternative 2** by requiring catch that previously was not sold to be sold to dealers.
- Potential social effects for fishermen that harvest commercial quantities but do not sell their fish. More accurate reporting and a more professionalized commercial fleet is expected to have long-term social benefits.

Chapter 3. Affected Environment

This section describes the affected environment in the proposed project area. The affected environment is divided into five major components:

- **Habitat Environment** (Section 3.1)
- **Biological and Ecological Environment** (Section 3.2)
- **Economic Environment** (Sections 3.3)
- **Social Environment** (Section 3.4)
- **Administrative Environment** (Section 3.5)

3.1. Habitat Environment

Information on the habitat utilized by species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP is included in Volume II of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP II; SAFMC 2018) and in the [SAFMC EFH User Guide](#) (SAFMC, 2024), which are incorporated here by reference. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council)-designated essential fish habitat (EFH) and EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC) are described in the [SAFMC EFH User Guide](#) and spatial representations of these and other habitat-related layers are in within the Council's [SAFMC EFH Mapper](#).

3.1.1. Essential Fish Habitat

For current EFH information for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP information, refer to Appendix D.

3.1.2. Habitat Areas of Particular Concern

For current HAPC information for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP, refer to Appendix D.

3.2. Biological and Ecological Environment

3.2.1. Life History and Landings

The species addressed in this amendment represent key components of the South Atlantic snapper-grouper multi-species complex and inhabit a diverse range of marine environments across the continental shelf and upper continental slope. Comprehensive biological profiles, life history assessments, and detailed descriptions of the ecological roles for these managed species

are documented in Volume II of the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP II; SAFMC 2018) and the SAFMC Essential Fish Habitat User Guide (SAFMC 2024), which are incorporated herein by reference.

Greater Amberjack

Greater amberjack, *Seriola dumerili*, is a pelagic species in the jacks family (Carangidae) (Manooch and Potts 1997). This species occurs in the Indo-West Pacific, and in the Western and Eastern Atlantic Oceans. In the Western Atlantic, it occurs as far north as Nova Scotia, Canada, southward to Brazil, including the Gulf of Mexico (Carpenter 2002, Manooch and Potts 1997). Primary food items include fishes, such as bigeye scad, and invertebrates (Paxton et al. 1989). Greater amberjack are typically found in 60 to 240 feet of water and juveniles may occur in water less than 30 feet deep (FWC). South Atlantic greater amberjack are estimated to have a low release mortality rate of 20% (sensitivity range: 10-30%) (SEDAR 15 2008 and SEDAR 59 2020). Spawning in the South Atlantic region occurs from January through June, with a peak in April and May. Harris et al. (2007) caught fish in spawning condition from North Carolina through the Florida Keys; however, spawning appears to occur primarily off south Florida and the Florida Keys (Harris et al. 2007). Greater amberjack in spawning condition were found in different depths, although the bulk of samples were from the shelf break. Tagging data indicated that greater amberjack are capable of extensive movement that might be related to spawning activity. Greater amberjack tagged off South Carolina have been recaptured off Georgia, east Florida, Florida Keys, west Florida, Cancun Mexico, Cuba, and the Bahamas (Marine Resources Monitoring, Assessment, and Prediction [MARMAP], unpublished data). This species is the largest jack with a maximum reported size of 190 cm (75 in) and 80.6 kg (177.7 lbs) (Paxton et al. 1989). Female greater amberjack are generally larger at age than males (Harris et al. 2007). The maximum reported age is 17 years (Manooch and Potts 1997). According to Harris et al. (2007), the size at which 50% of males are mature is 644 mm FL (25 in), whereas all males are mature at 29.5-31 in and age six. Based on data used in the most recent stock assessment, age at 53% maturity for females was 1 year and all females were mature by 32.1 inches fork length and age four (SEDAR 59 2020).

Greater amberjack are included in the Snapper Grouper FMP and are managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Recreational fishing for greater amberjack began in the early 1950s, but there was no targeted fishery until the 1970s.

Table 3.2.1.1. South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings and ACLs in lbs gutted weight (gw), and percent of the ACL landed, 2020-2024. Fishing year is March 1-August 30 (Season 1) and September 1-end of February (Season 2).

Year	Landings (lbs gw)	ACL (lbs gw)	% ACL landed
2020-2021 Season 1	251,635	461,633	54.5
2020-2021 Season 2	201,100	307,755	65.3
2021-2022 Season 1	318,628	461,633	69.0
2021-2022 Season 2	190,558	307,755	61.9
2022-2023	306,855	461,633	66.5

Season 1			
2022-2023 Season 2	181,607	307,755	59.0
2023-2024 Season 1	296,202	652,817	45.4
2023-2024 Season 2	143,924	435,212	33.1

Vermilion Snapper

Vermilion snapper, *Rhomboplites aurorubens*, occur in the Western Atlantic, from North Carolina to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The species is most abundant off the southeastern United States and in the Gulf of Campeche, Mexico (Hood and Johnson 1999). Vermilion snapper are bottom-dwelling, commonly found over rock, ledges, live-bottom, gravel, or sand bottoms near the edge of the continental and island shelves (Froese and Pauly 2003). The species occurs at depths from 18 to 122 meters (59 to 400 feet) but is most abundant at depths less than 76 meters (250 feet). Individuals often form large schools. This species spawns in aggregations (Lindeman et al. 2000). The spawning season extends from April through late September in the southeastern United States with a peak in June-August (Cuellar et al. 1996; Zhao et al. 1997; Sedberry et al. 2006; Farmer et al. 2017). Vermilion snapper do not change sex during their lifetime. Very few immature vermilion snapper have been collected in the South Atlantic region (Cuellar et al. 1996, Zhao and McGovern 1997, SEDAR 17 2008). Based on the information available, most vermilion snapper are mature by age one (80%) and all are mature by age two (SEDAR 17 2008). The size of maturity is unclear since most fish are mature when they are collected. However, the smallest mature male sampled was 5.6 inches TL and the smallest female sampled was 7.1 inches (Zhao and McGovern 1997). The maximum size of vermilion snapper is 24.2 inches (61.5 centimeters) TL (SEDAR 17 2008). Maximum reported age in the South Atlantic is 19 years (SEDAR 17 2008). This species preys on fishes, shrimp, crabs, polychaete worms, and other bottom-dwelling invertebrates, as well as cephalopods and planktonic organisms (Allen 1985). Sedberry and Cuellar (1993) reported that small crustaceans (especially copepods), sergestid decapods, barnacle larvae, stomatopods, and decapods dominated the diets of small (< 2 inches standard length (50 millimeters)) vermilion snapper off the southeastern United States. Larger decapods, fishes, and cephalopods are more important in the diet of larger vermilion snapper.

This species has been targeted by commercial and recreational fishers for decades. In the Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S., vermilion snapper is managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council under the Snapper Grouper FMP and is subject to annual catch limits, size and bag limits, trip limits, and gear restrictions. They are caught by both commercial and recreational fishers, with hook and line gear being the most common gear.

Table 3.2.1.2. South Atlantic vermilion snapper commercial landings and ACLs in lbs whole weight (ww), and percent of the ACL landed, 2020-2024. Fishing year is January 1-June 30 (Season 1) and July 1-December 31 (Season 2).

Year	Landings (lbs ww)	ACL (lbs ww)	% ACL landed
2020 Season 1	333,855	502,520	66.44

2020 Season 2	492,100	502,250	97.93
2021 Season 1	270,724	478,720	56.6
2021 Season 2	388,682	478,720	81.2
2022 Season 1	285,574	463,080	61.7
2022 Season 2	408,289	463,080	88.2
2023 Season 1	281,137	454,240	61.9
2023 Season 2	420,445	454,240	92.6
2024 Season 1	296,702	454,240	65.3
2024 Season 2	256,197	454,240	56.4

Red Porgy

Red porgy, *Pagrus pagrus*, are distributed throughout the Atlantic Ocean at depths of 18 to 280 m (Manooch and Hassler 1978). In the South Atlantic region, red porgy is commonly associated with “live bottom” habitat with rocky outcrops and rocky ledges (Manooch and Hassler 1978, Grimes et al. 1982). Red porgy are protogynous, meaning they begin life as female and change to male later. Therefore, most of the smaller fish are females, but males occur in all age groups (SEDAR 1 2002). In the Northeast Gulf of Mexico, red porgy appear to be pair spawners (do not form aggregations), and change sex over a wide range of sizes and ages (DeVries 2006). Spawning occurs from November through May, with peak spawning in March and April (Manooch 1976, Farmer et al. 2017). Red porgy grow slowly and live relatively long (an 18-year-old specimen is the oldest on record), but maturity occurs at younger ages. Roumillat and Waltz (1993) collected red porgy along the continental shelf between Cape Fear, North Carolina, and Cape Canaveral, Florida. The study determined the vast majority of females were mature by age two.

In the Atlantic waters off the southeast U.S., red porgy is managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council under the Snapper Grouper FMP and is subject to annual catch limits, size and bag limits, trip limits, gear restrictions, and a spawning season closure. They are caught by both commercial and recreational fishers, with hook and line gear being the most common gear.

Table 3.2.1.3. South Atlantic red porgy commercial landings and ACLs in lbs gutted weight (gw), and percent of the ACL landed, 2020-2024. Fishing year is January 1-April 30 (Season 1) and May 1-December 31 (Season 2).

Year	Landings (lbs gw)	ACL (lbs gw)	% ACL landed
2021 Season 1	21,239	49,200	43.0
2021 Season 2	54,250	114,800	47.3

2022 Season 1	17,328	49,200	35.2
2022 Season 2	44,546	114,800	38.8
2023 Season 1	6,497	12,907	54.1
2023 Season 2	15,989	28,039	57.0
2024 Season 1	6,104	12,907	47.3
2024 Season 2	13,499	30,116	44.8

Hogfish

Hogfish occur in tropical, subtropical and warm temperate waters of the Atlantic Ocean (Brazil to Bermuda), and throughout the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea. After a planktonic larval phase (30-40 days), juvenile hogfish settle nearshore in estuaries, seagrass beds or shallow reef habitats (Davis 1976, Colin 1982, Ault et al. 2003), and gradually move offshore with growth (Collins and McBride 2011). Adults are typically associated with hard bottom, reef habitats, and individuals have been observed as deep as 65 m (Collins and McBride 2011). Hogfish are visual predators that feed primarily during daylight hours on benthic invertebrates (Randall and Warmke 1967), so their depth range is likely limited by light availability and food sources.

Hogfish are protogynous where all fish mature as females first, and eventually become male if they live long enough. A single male maintains harems of 5 to 15 females (Colin 1982, Munoz et al. 2010) during extended spawning seasons that last for months. Hogfish are pair spawners (Davis 1976, Colin 1982), and spawning occurs daily during the spawning season (McBride and Johnson 2007, Collins and McBride 2008, Munoz et al. 2010). The size (197-727 mm FL) and age (1-11 yr) range at which sexual transition occurs indicates that transition is socially mediated (Collins and McBride 2011). Sex change can take several months (McBride and Johnson 2007), so removal of the dominant male has the potential to significantly affect harem stability and decrease reproductive potential (Munoz et al. 2010).

Peak spawning activity for this species in the Florida Keys and greater Caribbean region has been repeatedly demonstrated to occur during the winter and spring months (Davis 1976, Colin 1982, Claro et al. 1989, McBride and Johnson 2007, Collins and McBride 2008, Munoz et al. 2010). These studies have demonstrated that spawning activity occurs predominantly during the months of December through April, and begins (and ends) slightly earlier in the Florida Keys than on the West Florida shelf (Davis 1976, McBride et al. 2008). Off the Carolinas, preliminary data suggest hogfish spawn from April through July with peak activity in May and June (Scott Van Sant, SEFSC, Personal Communication).

Additional life history, biological characteristics, and stock status information for hogfish may be found the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) report, SEDAR 37 (2014), which is available on the SEDAR web site <http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/> and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Hogfish in the Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S. are managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council in the Snapper Grouper FMP. They are primarily taken by spear and hook and line gear.

Table 3.2.1.4. South Atlantic hogfish commercial landings (Georgia through North Carolina) and ACLs in lbs whole weight (ww), and percent of the ACL landed, 2021-2024. Fishing year is January 1- December 31.

Year	Landings (lbs ww)	ACL (lbs ww)	% ACL landed
2021	23,595	23,456	100.6
2022	17,510	23,456	74.7
2023	17,375	23,456	74.1
2024	17,031	23,456	72.61

Red Grouper

Life history, biological characteristics, and stock status information for red grouper may be found in the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) report, SEDAR 53 (2017), which is available on the SEDAR web site <http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/> and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Red grouper, *Epinephelus morio*, is primarily a continental species, mostly found in broad shelf areas (Jory and Iversen 1989). Red grouper is distributed in the Western Atlantic, from North Carolina to southeastern Brazil, including the eastern Gulf of Mexico and Bermuda, but can occasionally be found as far north as Massachusetts (Heemstra and Randall 1993). The red grouper is uncommon around coral reefs; it generally occurs over flat rock perforated with solution holes (Bullock and Smith 1991), and is commonly found in the caverns and crevices of limestone reef in the Gulf of Mexico (Moe 1969). It also occurs over rocky reef bottoms (Moe 1969). These fish eat a wide variety of fishes, octopuses, and crustaceans, including shrimp, lobsters, and stomatopods (Bullock and Smith 1991; Heemstra and Randall 1993). There is no significant genetic differentiation among red grouper populations in the southeastern U.S. Atlantic coast and in the Gulf of Mexico; however, there is evidence suggesting that the red grouper stock off North Carolina and South Carolina may constitute geographically isolated subpopulations, and therefore, life history parameters may differ from other areas.

Adult red grouper are sedentary fish that are usually found at depths of 5- 300 meters (16-984 feet). Off North Carolina and South Carolina, spawning occurs during February-June with a peak in April (Burgos et al., 2007; McGovern et al., 2002). Spawning males were observed between November and August, although they occurred more frequently between January and March (Burgos et al., 2007). Off east Florida, spawning occurs from January through May (McGovern et al., 2002). In the Gulf of Mexico, spawning occurs during February through June, with a peak spawning period during March, April and May (Biggs et al. 2018). Based on the presence of ripe adults (Moe 1969) and larval red grouper (Johnson and Keener 1984), spawning occurs offshore. Coleman et al. (1996) found groups of spawning red grouper at depths of 21-110 meters (70-360 feet). Red grouper do not appear to form spawning aggregations or spawn at specific sites (Coleman et al. 1996). They are reported to spawn in depths of 30-90 meters (98-295 feet) off the Southeast Atlantic coast (Burgos et al., 2007; McGovern et al. 2002).

Red grouper are protogynous, meaning they function as a female first and later transition to males. The proportion of males in the population increases with age. Off North Carolina, red grouper first become males at 50.9 centimeters (20.1 inches) total length (TL) and males dominate size classes greater than 70 centimeters (27.8 inches) TL. Most females transform to males between ages seven and 14. Burgos et al., (2007) reported that 50% of the females caught off North Carolina are undergoing sexual transition at age 8. Maximum age reported by Heemstra and Randall (1993) was 25 years. Burgos et al., (2007) and McGovern et al., (2002) indicated that red grouper live for at least 20 years in the Southeast Atlantic and a maximum age of 26 years has been reported for red grouper in the Gulf of Mexico (L. Lombardi, NMFS Panama City, personal communication).

In the Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S., red grouper is managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council under the Snapper Grouper FMP and is subject to annual catch limits, size and bag limits, trip limits, gear restrictions, and a spawning season closure. It is targeted by recreational and commercial fishers using a variety of hook and line gear, including snapper reels and spear guns.

Table 3.2.1.5. South Atlantic red grouper commercial landings and ACLs in lbs whole weight (ww), and percent of the ACL landed, 2021-2024. Fishing year is January 1-December 31.

Year	Landings (lbs ww)	ACL (lbs ww)	% ACL landed
2021	24,248	71,280	34.0
2022	18,106	71,280	25.4
2023	19,285	71,280	27.1
2024	37,518	71,280	52.6

Gray Triggerfish

According to Kolmos et al. (2014) and references therein, gray triggerfish, *Balistes capriscus*, is distributed in coastal waters of the western Atlantic Ocean from Nova Scotia (Canada) to Argentina, including the Gulf of Mexico and off Bermuda at depths of 0-100 m. Gray triggerfish are gonochorists (separate sexes), building nests and exhibiting biparental care. Little is known about female reproductive potential or spawning frequency. Kolmos et al. (2014) found that 50% of females were mature at 177 mm (7 inches) FL. Mature gonads were present in 68% of females at age zero, 83% at age one, 97% at age two, 99% at age three, and 100% above age three. The authors found that 50% of male gray triggerfish were mature at 179 mm (7 inches) fork length. Mature gonads were present in 64% of males at age zero, 84% at age one, 97% at age two, and 100% at and above age three. The results of all modeling indicate that a large portion (> 60% for males and females) of gray triggerfish reach sexual maturity before age one.

In the Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S., gray triggerfish is managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council under the Snapper Grouper FMP and is subject to annual catch limits, size and bag limits, trip limits, and gear restrictions. They are caught by both commercial and recreational fishers, with hook and line gear being the most common gear.

Table 3.2.1.6. South Atlantic gray triggerfish commercial landings and ACLs in lbs whole weight (ww), and percent of the ACL landed, 2021-2024. Fishing year is January 1-June 30 (Season 1) and July 1-December 31 (Season 2).

Year	Landings (lbs ww)	ACL (lbs ww)	% ACL landed
2021 Season 1	83,664	156,612	53.6
2021 Season 2	121,522	156,612	77.8
2022 Season 1	92,002	156,612	58.9
2022	143,970	156,612	92.2

Season 2			
2023 Season 1	84,470	156,612	54.1
2023 Season 2	114,225	156,612	73.1
2024 Season 1	53,435	156,612	34.2
2024 Season 2	74,512	156,612	47.7

Golden Tilefish

Life history, biological characteristics, and stock status information for golden tilefish may be found the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) report, SEDAR 66 Update (2021), which is available on the SEDAR web site and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Golden tilefish are distributed throughout the Western Atlantic, occurring as far north as Nova Scotia, to southern Florida, and in the eastern Gulf of Mexico (Robins and Ray 1986). According to Dooley (1978), golden tilefish occur at depths of 80-540 meters (263-1,772 feet). Robins and Ray (1986) report a depth range of 82-275 meters (270-900 feet) for golden tilefish. It is most commonly found at about 200 meters (656 feet), usually over mud or sand bottom but, occasionally, over rough bottom (Dooley 1978). Maximum reported size is 125 centimeters (50 inches) total length and 30 kilograms (66 pounds) (Dooley 1978; Robins and Ray 1986). Maximum reported age is 40 years (Harris et al. 2001). Radiocarbon aging indicates golden tilefish may live for at least 50 years (P. Harris, personal communication). Golden tilefish spawn off the southeast coast of the United States (U.S.) from March through late July, with a peak in April (Harris et al. 2001). Grimes et al. (1988) indicate peak spawning occurs from May through September in waters north of Cape Canaveral. Golden tilefish primarily prey upon shrimp and crabs, but also eat fishes, squid, bivalves, and holothurians (Dooley 1978).

In the Atlantic waters off the southeastern U.S., golden tilefish is managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council under the Snapper Grouper FMP and is subject to annual catch limits, bag limits, and gear restrictions. They are caught by both commercial and recreational fishers. Hook and line is the most common gear used by recreational fishers, while snapper reels and longlines are the gear used most by commercial fishers. The action in this amendment only applies to the golden tilefish hook and line sector.

Table 3.2.1.7. South Atlantic golden tilefish hook and line commercial landings and ACLs in lbs gutted weight (gw), and percent of the ACL landed, 2021-2024. Fishing year is January 1-December 31.

Year	Landings (lbs gw)	ACL (lbs gw)	% ACL landed
2021	82,279	82,935	99.2
2022	89,339	82,935	107.7
2023	88,898	105,161	84.5
2024	102,003	108,304	94.2

3.2.2. Stock Status

Stock Status

Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) is the cooperative process by which stock assessment projects are conducted in the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Southeast Region. The Caribbean, Gulf, and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (Council) manage SEDAR in coordination with NMFS and the Atlantic and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commissions. SEDAR was initiated to improve planning and coordination of stock assessment activities and to improve the quality and reliability of assessments. SEDAR strives to provide an open and transparent approach for development and review of the scientific information on fish stocks that is critical to management decision-making. Detailed information about the SEDAR process is available at www.sedarweb.org.



Stock status and the most recent stock assessment (if available) are listed for all species being considered for commercial trip limit increases in Table 3.2.2.1. Stock status information for other snapper grouper species is available at [reference most recent national status report] and the SEDAR website.

Table 3.2.2.1. Most recent stock assessments and stock statuses for species being considered for commercial trip limit increases. Statuses are based on the most recent (March 2026) Stock Status Report from the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Species	Most Recent Stock Assessment (Year)	Stock Status (Overfished Status/Overfishing Status)
Greater Amberjack	SEDAR 59 (2020)	Not Overfished/Not Experiencing Overfishing
Vermilion Snapper	SEDAR 55 (2018)	Not Overfished/Not Experiencing Overfishing
Red Porgy	SEDAR 60 (2020)	Overfished/Not Experiencing Overfishing
Hogfish (GA-NC)	SEDAR 37 (2013)	Unknown/Unknown
Red Grouper	SEDAR 53 (2017)	Overfished/Not Experiencing Overfishing
Gray Triggerfish	NA	Unknown/ Not Experiencing Overfishing
Golden Tilefish	SEDAR 89 (2025)	Not Overfished/Not Experiencing Overfishing

Red porgy and red grouper are currently overfished and in rebuilding plans. Red porgy is in year 5 of its plan (established through Snapper Grouper Amendment 50) and is expected to be rebuilt by 2047. Red grouper is in year 8 of its plan (established through Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 30) and is expected to be rebuilt by 2028.

3.2.3. Protected Species

NMFS manages marine protected species in the Southeast region under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). There are 29 ESA-listed species or Distinct Population Segments (DPS) of marine mammals, sea turtles, fish, and corals managed by NMFS that may occur in federal waters of the South Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico.

There are 91 stocks of marine mammals managed within the Southeast region plus the addition of the stocks such as North Atlantic right whales (NARW), and humpback, sei, fin, minke, and

blue whales that regularly or sometimes occur in Southeast region managed waters for a portion of the year (Hayes et al. 2017). All marine mammals in U.S. waters are protected under the MMPA. The MMPA requires that each commercial fishery be classified by the number of marine mammals they seriously injure or kill. NMFS's List of Fisheries (LOF)³ classifies U.S. commercial fisheries into three categories based on the number of incidental mortality or serious injury they cause to marine mammals.

Five of the marine mammal species (sperm, sei, fin, blue, and NARW) protected by the MMPA, are also listed as endangered under the ESA. In addition to those five marine mammals, six species or DPSs of sea turtles [green (the North Atlantic DPS and the South Atlantic DPS), hawksbill, Kemp's ridley, leatherback, and the Northwest Atlantic DPS of loggerhead]; nine species or DPSs of fish (the smalltooth sawfish; five DPSs of Atlantic sturgeon; Nassau grouper; oceanic whitetip shark, and giant manta ray); and seven species of coral (elkhorn coral, staghorn coral, rough cactus coral, pillar coral, lobed star coral, mountainous star coral, and boulder coral) are also protected under the ESA and occur within the action area of the snapper grouper fishery. Portions of designated critical habitat for NARW, the Northwest Atlantic DPS of loggerhead sea turtles, and *Acropora* corals occur within the Council's jurisdiction.

NMFS completed a formal consultation and resulting biological opinion (Bi-Op) on the conservation regulations under the ESA and the authorization of the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery in federal waters under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, including the fishery managed by the Snapper Grouper FMP, on threatened and endangered species and designated critical habitat dated December 1, 2016. NMFS concluded that the activities addressed in the consultation are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any threatened or endangered species.

Since completing the December 2016 Bi-Op, NMFS published several final rules that listed additional species and designated critical habitat. NMFS has reinitiated formal consultation to address these listings and concluded the authorization of the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery in federal waters during the re-initiation period will not violate ESA Sections 7(a)(2) or 7(d). For summary information on the protected species that may be adversely affected by the snapper grouper fishery and how they are affected refer to Section 3.2.5 in Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2019a).

3.3. Economic Environment

3.3.1. Commercial Sector

Economic information pertaining to the commercial snapper grouper fishery is provided in Amendment 59 (NMFS 2025), Amendment 51 (SAFMC & NMFS 2023), Amendment 29 (SAFMC 2020), Buck (2018), and Overstreet et al. (2018) and is incorporated herein by reference. Select updates to this information specific to the snapper grouper fishery are provided below. The major sources of data summarized in this section are the NMFS Southeast Regional

Office (SERO) Permits Information Management System (PIMS) and the SEFSC's Socioeconomic Panel¹ data set. Inflation adjusted values are reported in 2024 dollars.

Permits

Any fishing vessel that harvests and sells any of the snapper grouper species from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone (EEZ) must have a valid South Atlantic snapper grouper commercial permit, which is a limited access permit. After such a permit expires, it can be renewed or transferred (with restrictions) up to one year after the date of expiration. A vessel with a Snapper Grouper Unlimited (SG1) permit can harvest up to the full commercial trip limits for all snapper grouper species, excluding wreckfish, per trip. The Snapper Grouper 225-lb Trip-limited (SG2) permit limits the harvest of snapper grouper species to 225 pounds combined per trip and this permit can only be transferred onto a different vessel owned by the same entity. In 2024, the total number of SG1 and SG2 permits was 581 as shown in Table 3.3.1.1. Some fishing businesses only own one permitted vessel, some hold or own multiple permits and vessels. The total number of snapper grouper permits has decreased steadily over time, in large part due to the requirement, in most circumstances, to exchange two such permits for one new permit when requesting a permit transfer (Table 3.3.1.1)². Overall the decline in total valid snapper grouper permits from 2020-2024 has been 18%.

Table 3.3.1.1. Number of valid South Atlantic snapper grouper permits, 2020-2024.

Year	SG1 Permits	SG2 Limited Permits	Total Permits
2020	602	104	706
2021	525	81	606
2022	506	85	591
2023	514	88	602
2024	506	75	581

Source: NMFS SERO Sustainable Fisheries (SF) Access permits database. Accessed 3/31/26.

Vessels, Landings, and Revenue

Not all holders of South Atlantic commercial permits for snapper grouper are active each year. The information in Tables 3.3.1.2 and 3.3.1.3 describe the landings and revenue for vessels which, during the 2020-2024 timeframe, possessed a valid or renewable commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper permit and were actively fishing. The tables show the landings and revenue from all snapper grouper, other jointly landed species, and non-jointly landed species. Additionally, landings of species harvested in the Gulf by these vessels are shown to provide a full accounting of the commercial fishing activity of commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper permitted vessels.

The number of permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels actively fishing declined 14% between 2020 and 2024 (Table 3.3.1.2). Total landings of snapper grouper species also declined during this period, by 21%. Landings of jointly caught species on snapper grouper

¹ This dataset is compiled by the SEFSC Social Science Research Group from Federal Logbook System data, supplemented by average prices calculated from the Accumulated Landings System. Because these landings are self-reported, they may diverge slightly from dealer-reported landings presented elsewhere.

² Exceptions to this requirement are specified in CFR Section 622.171, paragraphs (b)(1)(i) and (ii).

trips (i.e., trips that harvested any snapper grouper species) declined 40% during this period. In addition, total landings of all species by permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels declined by 28% from 2020-2024. On average from 2020-2024, snapper grouper species accounted for nearly two-thirds (64%) of total landings by permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels.

Table 3.3.1.2. Number of vessels and landings (lbs. gw), by year for permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels.

Year	Number of Vessels	Snapper Grouper Species Landings	Other Jointly Caught Species	Other SATL Landings	Other Gulf Landings	Total Landings
2020	516	3,827,146	418,446	1,590,005	564,001	6,399,598
2021	465	3,581,262	354,903	1,392,889	515,310	5,844,364
2022	453	3,813,288	285,900	1,576,168	363,871	6,039,227
2023	442	3,495,483	298,983	1,083,146	189,550	5,067,163
2024	446	3,042,265	247,093	1,056,240	239,200	4,584,798
Average	464	3,551,889	321,065	1,339,690	374,386	5,587,030

Source: Source: Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) Social Science Research Group (SSRG) Socioeconomic Panel (Jan 2025 version)

Overall, dockside revenue of snapper grouper species landed by permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels was variable 2020-2024 (Table 3.3.1.3). Revenue from snapper grouper landings decreased 16% during this time period, with a peak in 2022. Revenue from jointly caught species on South Atlantic snapper grouper trips and from other South Atlantic species not caught on snapper grouper trips also declined. Total revenue by permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels declined by 20% overall. The maximum total revenue earned by a single vessel from snapper grouper landings during this period was approximately \$502,575 (2024 dollars). On average, from 2020-2024, snapper grouper species accounted for 76% of the total revenue by permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels and the average price per pounds was \$4.71 (2024 dollars).

Table 3.3.1.3. Number of vessels and revenues (2024 dollars) by year for permitted commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper vessels.

Year	Number of Vessels	Snapper Grouper Species Revenue	Jointly Caught Species Revenue	Other SATL Landings Revenue	Other Gulf Landings Revenue	Average Revenue per Vessel
2020	516	\$17,390,484	\$1,022,741	\$3,550,736	\$1,923,827	\$46,295
2021	465	16,412,945	928,328	3,033,371	1,933,849	47,976
2022	453	18,765,334	827,494	3,668,920	1,273,746	54,162
2023	442	16,421,681	847,541	2,584,542	704,654	46,512
2024	446	14,558,069	701,847	2,786,183	972,189	42,642
Average	464	\$16,709,702	\$865,590	\$3,124,750	\$1,361,667	47,517

Source: Source: Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) Social Science Research Group (SSRG) Socioeconomic Panel (Jan 2025 version)

This proposed regulatory action would modify the commercial trip limit for several snapper grouper species. The estimates in Table 3.3.1.4 provide insight into the economic significance of these proposed trip limit increases. As shown in Table 3.3.1.4, vessels harvesting red porgy and golden tilefish are most affected by their respective trip limits, with 43.8% of red porgy trips and 32.0% of golden tilefish of trips are reaching or exceeding 90% of the current commercial trip limit for these species. Average revenue for the red porgy landings on these trips is relatively low, but the total revenue for those same trips is much higher, suggesting that these fish are a key component of a broader multi-species commercial harvesting effort.

Table 3.3.1.4 also shows that trips for hogfish and gray triggerfish do not typically land at or near the current respective trip limit for these species, however, the total revenue generated on those specific trips is \$11,743 for hogfish and \$8,581 for gray triggerfish. This indicates that when these species are encountered in high volumes, they are part of high-value trips. This could be an indication of current trip limits resulting in inefficient discarding. Vermilion snapper, on average from 2020-2024, had 12.3% of trips likely constrained by the current trip limit. The proposed increase to the vermillion snapper commercial trip limit would likely provide for greater trip efficiency and economic profitability as total revenue for these trips is high. Overall, Table 3.3.1.4 shows that the proposed commercial trip limit increases these specific snapper grouper species will allow fishermen to retain more of these species on existing high-value trips where multiple species are landed.

Table 3.3.1.4. Landings, revenues, and trip limited revenues for specific species with proposed trip limit increases (2024 dollars).

Species	Avg. landings (lb gw) of species per trip	Avg. revenue of species per trip	% of trips at NTL*	Avg. species revenue from NTL trips	Avg. total revenue from NTL trips
Golden Tilefish	598	\$3,067	32.0%	\$8,045	\$9,055
Gray Triggerfish	131	\$421	0.8%	\$3,059	\$8,581
Greater Amberjack	277	\$606	4.3%	\$2,456	\$5,052
Hogfish	51	\$289	2.0%	\$2,960	\$11,743
Red Grouper	37	\$230	2.1%	\$1,782	\$8,660
Red Porgy	43	\$117	43.8%	\$229	\$5,520
Vermilion Snapper	332	\$1,527	12.3%	\$4,812	\$7,997

Source: Source: Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) Social Science Research Group (SSRG) Socioeconomic Panel (Jan 2025 version)

Economic Values

Estimates of economic returns are available for commercial vessels that participated in the snapper grouper fishery as a whole. Liese (2023)³ generated annual vessel-level estimates of costs (as a percentage of revenue) and net revenue from operations for vessels that harvested snappers and groupers in the South Atlantic.

Estimates of producer surplus (PS) can be calculated from the cost information contained in Liese (2023) in conjunction with estimates of annual revenue from the SEFSC-SSRG Socioeconomic Panel. PS is total annual revenue minus the costs for fuel, other supplies, hired crew, and the opportunity cost of an owner's time as captain. Net revenue from operations, which most closely represents economic profits to the owner(s), is total annual revenue minus the costs for fuel, other supplies, hired crew, vessel repair and maintenance, insurance, overhead, and the opportunity cost of an owner's time as captain, as well as the vessel's depreciation. According to Liese (2023), PS for commercial vessels that harvested South Atlantic snapper grouper was approximately 37.7% of their annual gross revenue, on average, from 2014 through 2018. Net revenue from operations was 8.2% of their annual gross revenue, on average, during this period.

Applying these percentages to the results provided in Table 3.3.1.3 would result in an estimated per vessel average annual PS of \$13,588 (2024 dollars) and an average annual net revenue from operations of \$1,114 per year. Liese (2023) also provides annual trip-level estimates of costs (as a percentage of trip revenue) and trip net revenue for vessels that harvested snappers and groupers in the South Atlantic. According to Liese (2023), labor, including both hired and owner's time, consumed 48.4% of trip revenue and fuel and supplies consumed 26%, leaving a trip net revenue margin of 25.6%, on average, from 2014 through 2018.

Dealers

Commercial harvest of snapper grouper species in the EEZ may only be sold to dealers with a valid federal South Atlantic and Gulf dealer permit. The information in Table 3.3.1.5 illustrates the purchasing activities of dealers that bought South Atlantic snapper grouper landings from permitted vessels during 2020 through 2024. Like vessels, dealer participation in particular fisheries is fluid, and not all dealers purchased grouper in each year during this time. On average, from 2020 through 2024, snapper grouper purchases comprised approximately 3% of all purchases made by these dealers (Table 3.3.1.4). The average annual value of total purchases per snapper grouper dealer was fairly stable from 2021 through 2024, with a 5-year low in 2020.

Table 3.3.1.5. Purchase statistics for dealers that bought snapper grouper landings (thousands of 2024 dollars).

Year	Number of Dealers	Snapper Grouper Purchases	Other South Atlantic Purchases	Gulf Purchases	Total
2020	257	\$4,605	\$118,777	\$33,970	\$157,352
2021	266	4,633	139,903	43,170	187,707

³ This report is available at: <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/56480>

2022	263	5,419	131,306	48,333	185,058
2023	265	4,519	122,518	51,416	178,453
2024	283	4,608	125,466	41,763	171,836
Average	267	4,757	\$127,594	43,730	176,081

Source: SEFSC Fishing Communities Web Query Tool, Version 1. Accessed 03/10/2026.

Imports

Imports of foreign seafood products compete in the domestic seafood market and have dominated many segments of the domestic seafood market. Imports aid in determining the price for domestic seafood products and tend to set the price in the market segments in which they dominate. Seafood imports can have downstream effects on the local fish market. At the harvest level, imports can affect ex-vessel prices fishermen receive for landings. As substitutes to domestic production, imports tend to cushion the adverse economic effects on consumers resulting from a reduction in domestic landings. Imports that directly compete with domestic snapper grouper are described in this section.

Snappers

According to NMFS' foreign trade data⁴, South Atlantic snapper species are not exported from the U.S. to other countries. Imports of fresh and frozen snapper products, which directly compete with domestic harvest of snapper species, are described in this section. As shown in Table 3.3.1.6, imports of fresh snapper products were 30.5 million pounds product weight (pw) in 2024. Between 2020 and 2024, they peaked at 36.0 million pounds pw in 2021. Total revenue from snapper imports increased to a five-year high of \$169.0 million in 2021 (2024 dollars). The average price per pound for fresh snapper products was \$4.48 from 2020-2024. Although not shown in Table 3.3.1.6, imports of fresh snapper products primarily originated in Mexico, Nicaragua, or Panama, entering the U.S. through the port of Miami.

Table 3.3.1.6. Annual pounds, value, and price per pound of fresh snapper imports, 2020-2024 (2024 dollars)

Year	Total Pounds (thousands)	Total value (thousand dollars)	Price per Pound
2020	32,394	\$129,402	\$3.99
2021	35,970	\$169,003	\$4.70
2022	32,180	\$150,938	\$4.69
2023	32,108	\$142,592	\$4.44
2024	30,475	\$139,495	\$4.58
Average	32,626	\$146,286	\$4.48

Source: NOAA Foreign Trade Query Tool, accessed 10/20/24.

As shown in Table 3.3.1.7, total revenue from imports of frozen snapper increased from \$55.2 million (2024 dollars) in 2020 to a five-year high of \$75.7 million in 2022, followed by a 44% decrease in 2023. The average price per pound for frozen snapper products 2020-2024 was \$3.86. Although not shown in Table 3.3.1.7, imports of frozen snapper product imports primarily originated in Brazil and Suriname, entering through the port of Miami.

⁴ <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/foss/f?p=215:2>

Table 3.3.1.7. Annual pounds, value, and price per pound of frozen snapper imports, 2020-2024 (2024 dollars)

Year	Total Pounds (thousands)	Total Value (thousand dollars)	Price per Pound
2020	15,874	\$55,209	\$3.48
2021	18,225	\$75,715	\$4.15
2022	16,941	\$70,812	\$4.18
2023	11,701	\$42,501	\$3.64
2024	14,837	\$57,207	\$3.86
Average	15,516	\$60,289	\$3.86

Source: NOAA Foreign Trade Query Tool, accessed 10/20/24.

Groupers

According to NMFS' foreign trade data⁵, grouper are not exported. Imports of fresh and frozen grouper products, which also directly compete with domestic harvest of snapper grouper species, are described in this section. As shown in Table 3.3.1.8, between 2020 and 2024 imports of fresh grouper products peaked in 2023. Total value of fresh grouper imports has been increasing in recent years and averaged \$63.1 million annually. The average price per pound for fresh grouper products was \$5.32 from 2020-2024. Although not shown in Table 3.3.1.8, imports of fresh grouper products primarily originated from Mexico, Panama and Brazil.

Table 3.3.1.8. Annual pounds and value of fresh grouper imports, 2020-2024 (2024 dollars).

Year	Total Pounds (thousands)	Total Value (thousand dollars)	Price per Pound
2020	10,450	\$46,395	\$4.43
2021	12,247	\$65,450	\$5.34
2022	11,700	\$66,946	\$5.72
2023	12,628	\$68,237	\$5.41
2024	11,995	\$68,346	\$5.70
Average	11,804	\$63,075	\$5.32

Source: NOAA Foreign Trade Query Tool, accessed 10/20/24.

As shown in Table 3.3.1.9, imports of frozen grouper products peaked at 2.2 million pounds pw in 2021 from to a low of 0.8 million pounds pw in 2020. Total revenue from frozen grouper increased from 2020 to 2021, but decreased each year thereafter to \$2.5 million in 2024. The average price per pound for frozen grouper products was \$2.30 from 2020-2024. Although not shown in Table 3.3.1.9, imports of frozen grouper products primarily originated in Brazil, Suriname, and Indonesia.

Table 3.3.1.9. Annual pounds and value of frozen grouper imports, 2020-2024 (2024 dollars).

⁵ <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/foss/f?p=215:2>

Year	Total Pounds (thousands)	Total Value (thousand dollars)	Price per Pound
2020	814	\$1,718	\$2.10
2021	2,190	\$5,819	\$2.66
2022	1,340	\$2,943	\$2.20
2023	1,154	\$2,676	\$2.31
2024	1,098	\$2,460	\$2.24
Average	1,319	\$3,123	\$2.30

Source: NOAA Foreign Trade Query Tool, accessed 10/20/24.

Business Activity

The commercial harvest and subsequent sales and consumption of fish generates business activity as fishermen expend funds to harvest the fish and consumers spend money on goods and services, such as grouper purchased at a local fish market and served during restaurant visits. These expenditures spur additional business activity in the region(s) where the harvest and purchases are made, such as jobs in local fish markets, grocers, restaurants, and fishing supply establishments. In the absence of the availability of a given species for purchase, consumers would spend their money on substitute goods, such as other finfish or seafood products, and services, such as visits to different food service establishments. As a result, the analysis presented below represents a distributional analysis that only shows how economic impacts may be distributed through regional markets. It should not be interpreted to represent the impacts if these species are not available for harvest or purchase.

Economic impact models can be used to determine the sources of the impacts. Each impact can be broken down into direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts. “Direct” economic impacts are the results of the money initially spent in the study area (e.g., country, region, state, or community) by the fishery or industry being studied. This includes money spent to pay for labor, supplies, raw materials, and operating expenses. The direct economic impacts from the initial spending create additional activity in the local economy, i.e., “indirect” economic impacts. Indirect economic impacts are the results of business-to-business transactions indirectly caused by the direct impacts. For example, businesses initially benefiting from the direct impacts will subsequently increase spending at other local businesses. The indirect economic impact is a measure of this increase in business-to-business activity, excluding the initial round of spending which is included in the estimate of direct impacts. “Induced” economic impacts are the results of increased personal income caused by the direct and indirect economic impacts. For example, businesses experiencing increased revenue from the direct and indirect impacts will subsequently increase spending on labor by hiring more employees, increasing work hours, raising salaries/wage rates, etc. In turn, households will increase spending at local businesses. The induced impact is a measure of this increase in household-to-business activity.

Estimates of the U.S. average annual business activity associated with the commercial harvest of all South Atlantic snapper grouper species were derived using the model developed for and applied in NMFS (2024)⁶ and are provided in Table 3.1.1.10. Specifically, these impact estimates reflect the expected impacts from average annual gross revenues generated by landings

⁶ A detailed description of the input/output model is provided in NMFS (2011).

of all South Atlantic snapper grouper species from 2020 through 2024. This business activity is characterized as jobs (full- and part-time equivalents), income impacts (wages, salaries, and self-employed income), value-added impacts (the difference between the value of goods and the cost of materials or supplies), and output impacts (gross business sales). Income impacts should not be added to output (sales) impacts because this would result in double counting. The results provided should be interpreted with caution. These results are based on average relationships developed through the analysis of many fishing operations that harvest many different species. Separate models specific to individual species are not available. Between 2020 and 2024, landings of all South Atlantic snapper grouper species resulted in approximately \$16.7 million dollars (2024 dollars) in gross revenue on average. In turn, this revenue generated 1,760 jobs, \$60.9 million in income, \$86.0 million value-added, and output impacts of \$165.7 million per year, on average.

Table 3.3.1.10. Average annual economic impacts from the commercial harvest of snappers and groupers in the South Atlantic. All monetary estimates are in thousands of 2024 dollars, and employment is measured in full-time equivalent jobs.

Industry Sector	Direct	Indirect	Induced	Total
Harvesters				
Employment impacts	307	48	63	418
Income impacts	\$9,022	\$1,675	\$4,050	\$14,747
Total value added impacts	\$9,617	\$6,030	\$6,930	\$22,577
Output impacts	\$16,710	\$13,595	\$13,454	\$43,758
Primary dealers/processors				
Employment impacts	64	26	44	134
Income impacts	\$2,944	\$2,713	\$2,566	\$8,222
Total value added impacts	\$3,138	\$3,461	\$4,831	\$11,430
Output impacts	\$9,474	\$7,136	\$9,443	\$26,053
Secondary wholesalers/distributors				
Employment impacts	30	7	29	65
Income impacts	\$1,754	\$522	\$1,844	\$4,120
Total value added impacts	\$1,869	\$875	\$3,150	\$5,895
Output impacts	\$4,697	\$1,713	\$6,127	\$12,536
Grocers				
Employment impacts	127	14	28	170
Income impacts	\$3,607	\$1,199	\$1,811	\$6,617
Total value added impacts	\$3,845	\$1,931	\$3,065	\$8,842
Output impacts	\$6,165	\$3,137	\$6,018	\$15,320
Restaurants				
Employment impacts	792	53	129	974
Income impacts	\$14,471	\$4,389	\$8,289	\$27,148
Total value added impacts	\$15,425	\$7,845	\$13,966	\$37,235
Output impacts	\$28,205	\$12,276	\$27,558	\$68,039
Harvesters and Seafood industry				
Employment impacts	1,320	147	294	1,760
Income impacts	\$31,797	\$10,497	\$18,560	\$60,853
Total value added impacts	\$33,894	\$20,143	\$31,942	\$85,979
Output impacts	\$65,251	\$37,857	\$62,599	\$165,707

3.4. Social Environment

This section describes select aspects of the social context associated with commercial fishing of species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery in the South Atlantic. The section provides descriptive

context for social effects analysis provided in Chapter 4, with an emphasis on identifying communities that are expected to be primarily affected by the actions in this amendment.

Community level data are presented whenever possible to meet the requirements of National Standard 8 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, which requires consideration of the importance of fishery resources to human communities when changes to fishing regulations are considered.

The analyses included in this section include a brief discussion of the current distribution of Snapper Grouper species commercial landings. The section also provides an overview of the current permit distribution (at a state and community level) of the Snapper Grouper Commercial Unlimited Permits (SG1). The section then considers the local importance of the specific species for which changes to trip limits are proposed. This section concludes by discussing the commercial fishing engagement, commercial fishing reliance, and social vulnerability scores for the communities that are expected to be affected by these actions.

The most recent data available has been utilized in the following section; however, the year range or date presented may not match what is included elsewhere because some sources of data are not available at the community or state level.

3.4.1. Commercial Landings

Florida dominates the commercial landings of the species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery, with nearly 59% of the total landings (averaged over 2020-2024) (ACL Database). North Carolina and South Carolina follow, with roughly 23% and 18% of the total landings across the fishery (averaged over 2020-2024), respectively. Over this period, commercial fishers in Georgia landed less than 1% of the total.

3.4.2. Permits

There are 493 active Snapper Grouper Unlimited Commercial (SG1) permits, issued to entities, including individuals and businesses, with mailing addresses in Florida (66%), North Carolina (23%), and South Carolina (8%). Less than 2% of permit holders list mailing addresses in Georgia (SERO permit office, April 28, 2026). Other entities holding SG1 permits are located in Virginia, Texas, New Jersey, and New York.

Entities with mailing addresses in 141 communities hold commercial SG1 permits. Communities with the highest number of SG1 permits are located in Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina (Table 3.4.2.1). These permits are concentrated in Key West (9.7%), Jacksonville (7.1%), and Winter Springs (4.9%), all in Florida.

Table 3.4.2.1. Top communities by number of SG1 Permits.

State	Community	Snapper Grouper 1
FL	Key West	48
FL	Jacksonville	35

State	Community	Snapper Grouper 1
FL	Winter Springs	24
FL	Rockledge	16
FL	Miami	15
FL	Summerland Key	15
FL	Tavernier	12
FL	Lake Mary	11
NC	Southport	11
NC	Sneads Ferry	10
FL	Fort Lauderdale	9
FL	Marathon	9
SC	Murrells Inlet	9
FL	Big Pine Key	8
FL	Hialeah	8

Source: SERO permit office, April 28, 2026.

3.4.3. Regional Quotient

The actions propose to improve efficiency by reducing trip limits for specific species. To identify relevant communities where the impact of this amendment might be felt, this section presents the results of Regional Quotient (RQ) calculations for these identified species. The RQ is the proportion of the relevant species landed by that community out of the total amount of that species landed within the Southeast region. The RQ utilizes the dealer's facility address to identify the community of landing. These RQs are presented to highlight communities where the species affected by the actions are of relatively greater importance. The communities are rank-ordered based on landings averaged over the time-series

To save space, the calculations are not shown. The communities listed below in Table 3.4.3.1 are the top ranked communities for each RQ calculation.

Table 3.4.3.1. Top-Ranked Communities for Share of Regional Landings of Snapper Grouper Species .

Species with Proposed Trip Limit Changes	Top 5 Communities, by RQ
Golden Tilefish	Fort Lauderdale, FL Port Orange, FL McClellanville, SC Daytona Beach, FL Titusville, FL
Gray Triggerfish	Atlantic Beach, FL Murrells Inlet, SC McClellanville, SC Supply, NC Jacksonville, FL

Greater Amberjack	Key Largo, FL Morehead City, NC Atlantic Beach, FL Wilmington, NC McClellanville, SC
Hogfish	Wrightsville Beach, NC; Murrells Inlet, SC; Rocky Point, NC; Supply, NC; Wilmington, NC
Red Grouper	Key West, FL; Miami, FL; Key Largo, FL; Madeira Beach, FL; Hollywood, FL
Red Porgy	McClellanville, SC; Murrells Inlet, SC; Atlantic Beach, FL; Little River, SC; Charleston, SC
Vermilion Snapper	Atlantic Beach, FL; McClellanville, SC; Murrells Inlet, SC; Little River, SC; Jacksonville, FL

(Source: FCI Database)

3.4.4. Commercial Engagement and Reliance:

Figures 3.4.4.1 and 3.4.4.2 depict measures of engagement and reliance among South Atlantic communities holding the greater number of SG1 permits or communities with the highest RQ, as discussed in the preceding section. NOAA created indices using secondary data from permit and landings information for the commercial sector (Jepson and Colburn 2013, Jacob et al. 2013). Fishing engagement is primarily based on the absolute numbers of permits, landings, and value. The analysis used the number of vessels designated commercial by homeport and owner address, value of landings, and total number of commercial permits for each community. Fishing reliance includes the same variables as fishing engagement divided by population to give an indication of the per capita influence of this activity. In addition to the RQ, the engagement and reliance measures are useful for indicating where the prospective effects of any implemented management actions will possibly be experienced.

The figures below show factor scores for both engagement and reliance for commercial fishing at a community level. Two thresholds of one and one-half standard deviation (SD) above the mean are plotted onto the graphs to help determine a threshold for significance. The factor scores are standardized; therefore, a score above one is also above one SD. A score above one-half SD is considered engaged or reliant, with anything above one SD to be very engaged or reliant.

As seen in the figures below, most of the communities identified in this section exceed either the one-half or one SD threshold for fishing engagement. Several communities would be considered highly engaged in commercial fishing activity. This includes the Florida communities of Key West, Marathon, Miami, Atlantic Beach, Big Pine Key, Fort Lauderdale, Key Largo and Jacksonville. Outside of Florida, Morehead City, Wilmington, Sneads Ferry, and Southport in NC; and Charleston, McClellanville, and Murrells Inlet, SC, are all highly engaged in commercial fishing activity. Most of the other communities mentioned in this analysis demonstrate a moderate level of fishing engagement. Only Hialeah and Rockledge, Florida, and

Rocky Point, NC, fall below the one-half SD, suggesting that that are relatively less engaged in commercial fishing activity (compared to other communities in this analysis).

In terms of commercial fishing reliance, there are fewer communities that meet or exceed the one SD threshold to be considered having a high reliance on commercial fishing. This includes Sneads Ferry, NC, and McClellanville, SC. Key West, Madeira Beach, Marathon, and Tavernier (all in Florida) classify as moderately reliant on commercial fishing activity, as they all meet or exceed one-half SD from the mean.

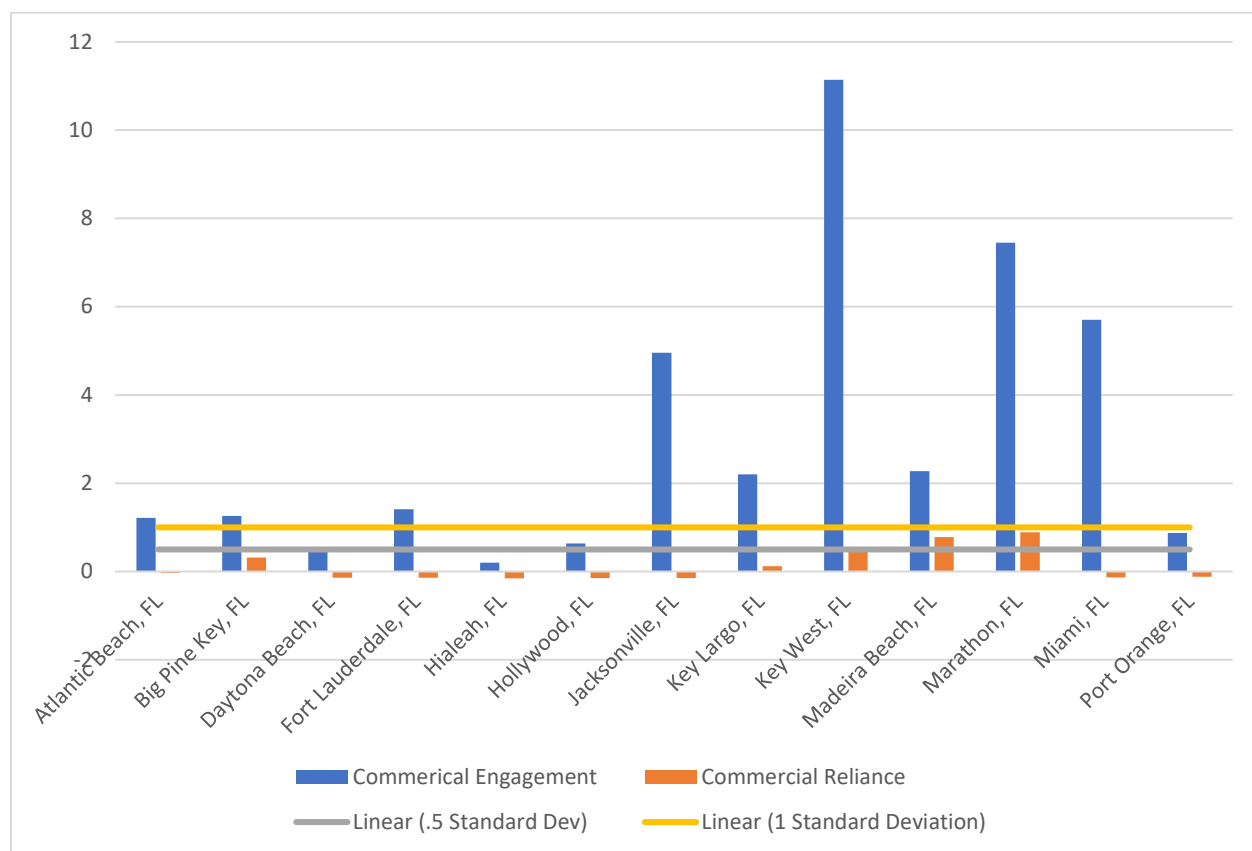


Figure 3.4.4.1. Commercial fishing engagement and reliance for top South Atlantic communities.

Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database 2022.

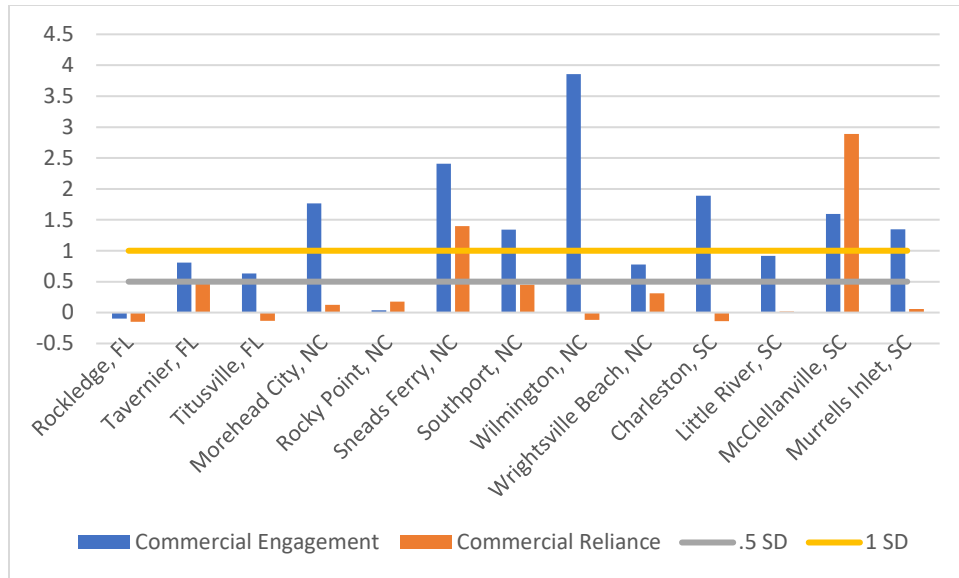


Figure 3.4.4.2. Commercial fishing engagement and reliance for top Gulf communities.
Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database 2022.

3.4.5. Social Vulnerability

NOAA NMFS created a suite of indices using census data to examine the social vulnerability of coastal communities. The three indices are poverty, population composition, and personal disruption. The variables included in each of these indices have been identified through the literature as being important components that contribute to a community's vulnerability. Poverty includes poverty rates for different groups; population composition includes more single female-headed households, households with children under the age of five, minority populations, and those that speak English less than well; and personal disruption includes disruptions such as higher separation rates, higher crime rates, and unemployment. Increased rates in the indicators are signs of populations experiencing vulnerabilities. As above, these scores are standardized. For those communities that exceed the thresholds of one-half or one SD, it would be expected that they would exhibit vulnerabilities to sudden changes or social disruption that might accrue from regulatory change.

Figures 3.4.5.1 and 3.4.5.2 provide social vulnerability rankings for place-based communities identified in Section 3.4 as important to commercial snapper grouper fishing or marine fishing in general. Several communities exceed the threshold of one standard deviation above the mean for at least one of the indices (Hialeah, FL; Hollywood, FL; Miami, FL; Rocky Point, NC). These communities may be the most likely to exhibit vulnerabilities to social or economic disruption resulting from regulatory changes. Negative scores, like the scores in several of the communities in North and South Carolina, suggest lower vulnerability index scores, relative to other communities in the region and relatively less vulnerability to economic or social disruptions.

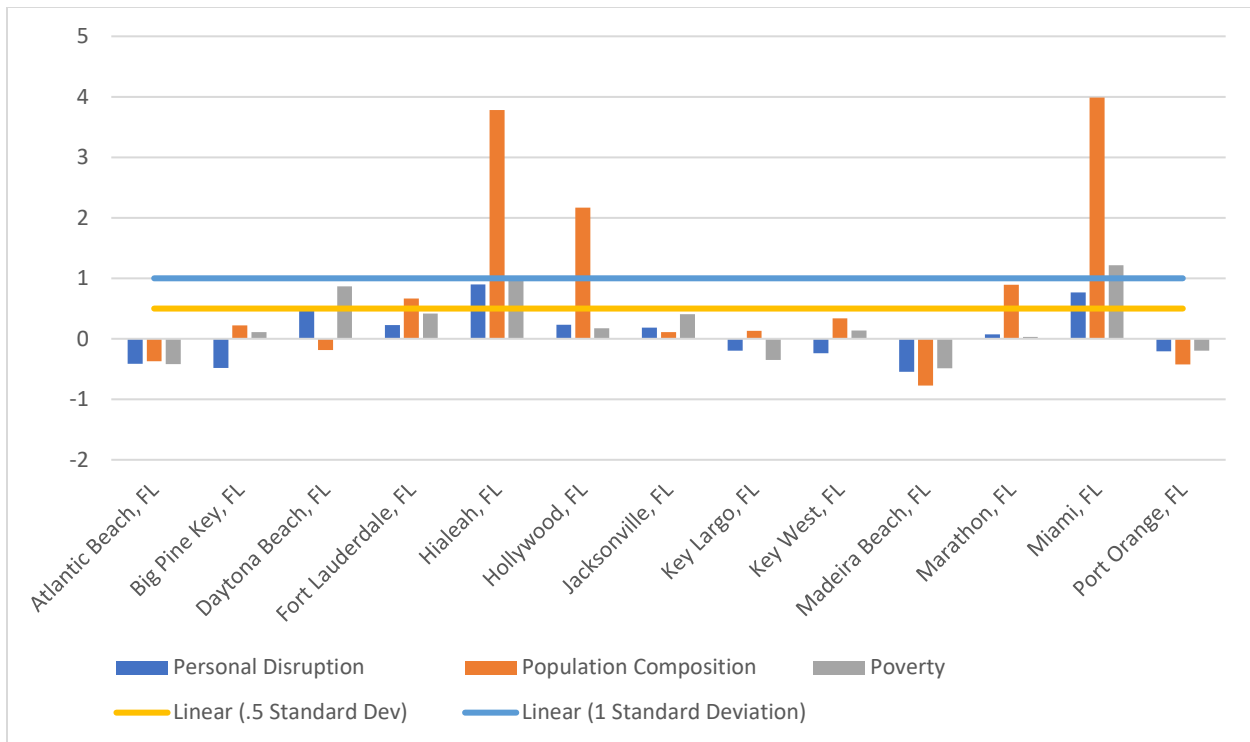


Figure 3.4.5.1. Social vulnerability indices for top commercial Snapper Grouper communities in the South Atlantic

Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database 2022.

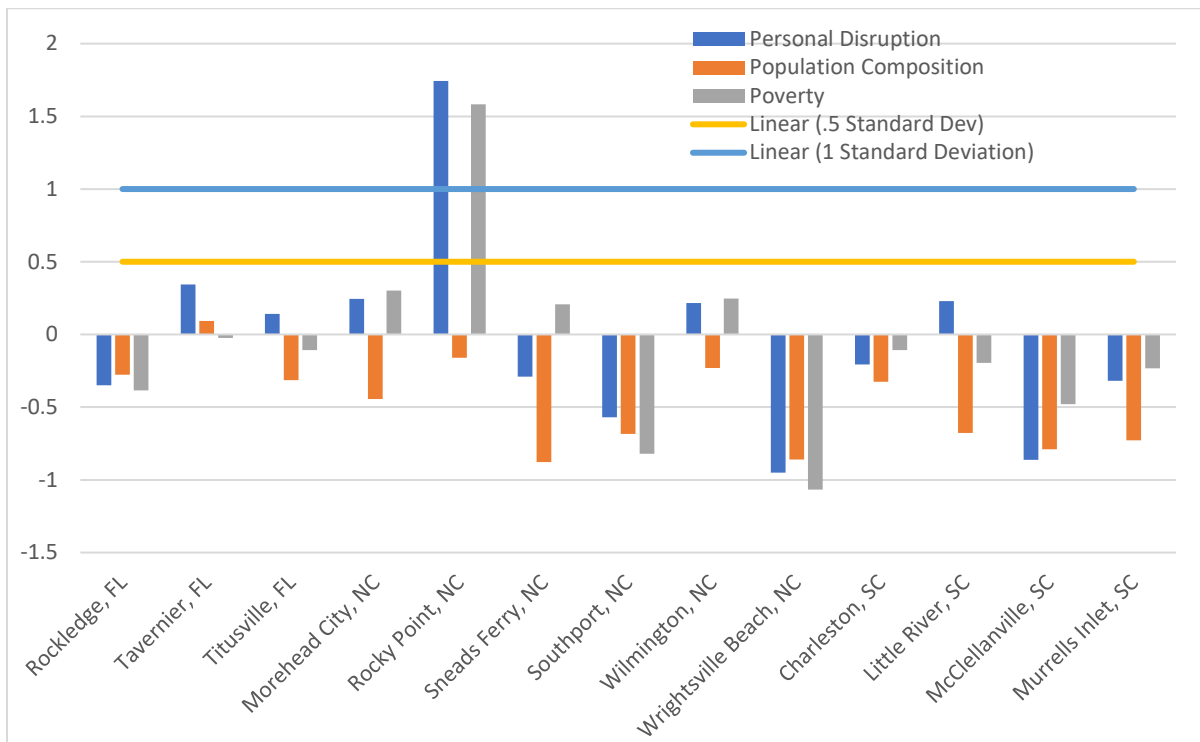


Figure 3.4.5.2. Social vulnerability indices for top commercial Snapper Grouper communities in the South Atlantic.

Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database 2022.

The description of fishing activities presented here highlights which communities may be most involved in commercial fishing in the snapper grouper fishery and the subset of species identified in these proposed actions. It is expected that the impacts from the regulatory actions in this amendment, whether positive or negative, will most likely affect those communities identified above.

3.5. Administrative Environment

3.5.1. Federal Fishery Management

Federal fishery management is conducted under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. §§ 1801 et seq.), originally enacted in 1976 as the Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Magnuson-Stevens Act claims sovereign rights and exclusive fishery management authority over most fishery resources within the EEZ, an area extending 200 nm from the seaward boundary of each of the coastal states, and authority over U.S. anadromous species and continental shelf resources that occur beyond the U.S. EEZ.

To assist the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) in fishery management, the Magnuson-Stevens Act established eight regional fishery management councils that represent the expertise and interests of constituent states. Each council has a scientific and statistical committee (SSC) that provides ongoing scientific advice to that council for fishery management decisions, as well as advisory panels (AP) to assist the council in carrying out its functions under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Councils, SSCs and APs conduct their business in public meetings, pursuant to procedures prescribed by the Magnuson-Stevens Act and written procedures established by each council. NMFS, with the advice of the regional councils, manages fisheries needing conservation and management within each council's jurisdiction. The Secretary is responsible for collecting and providing the data necessary for the councils to prepare fishery management plans, and the Secretary is responsible for promulgating regulations to implement approved fishery management plans and amendments after ensuring that management measures are consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and with other applicable laws (Appendix A). In most cases, the Secretary has delegated this authority to NMFS.

The Council is responsible for conservation and management of fishery resources in federal waters of the U.S. South Atlantic. These waters extend from 3 to 200 miles offshore from the seaward boundary of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida to Key West. The Council has thirteen voting members: one from NMFS; one each from the state fishery agencies of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida; and eight public members appointed by the Secretary. On the Council, there are two public members from each of the four South Atlantic States. Non-voting members include representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), State Department, and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. For the Council's Snapper-Grouper Committee, the Council has adopted procedures whereby the non-voting members serving on the Council Committees have full voting rights at the Committee level but not at the full Council level. Council members serve three-year terms and are recommended by state governors and appointed by the Secretary from lists of nominees submitted by state governors. Appointed members may serve a maximum of three consecutive terms.

Public interests also are involved in the fishery management process through participation on Advisory Panels and through council meetings, which, with few exceptions for discussing personnel and legal matters, are open to the public. The Council uses its SSC to review the data and science being used in assessments and fishery management plans/amendments. In addition, the regulatory process is in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, usually in the form of “notice and comment” rulemaking.

3.5.2. State Fishery Management

The state governments of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida have the authority to manage fisheries that occur in waters extending three nautical miles from their respective shorelines. North Carolina’s marine fisheries are managed by the Marine Fisheries Division of the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality. The Marine Resources Division of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources manages South Carolina’s marine fisheries. Georgia’s marine fisheries are managed by the Coastal Resources Division of the Department of Natural Resources. The Division of Marine Fisheries Management of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is responsible for managing Florida’s marine fisheries. Each state fishery management agency has a designated seat on the Council. The purpose of state representation at the Council level is to ensure state participation in federal fishery management decision-making and to promote the development of compatible regulations in state and federal waters.

The South Atlantic states are also involved through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) in management of marine fisheries. This commission was created to coordinate state regulations and develop management plans for interstate fisheries. It has significant authority, through the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act and the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act, to compel adoption of complementary state regulations to conserve coastal species. The ASMFC is also represented at the Council but does not have voting authority at the Council level.

NMFS’s State-Federal Fisheries Division is responsible for building cooperative partnerships to strengthen marine fisheries management and conservation at the state, inter-regional, and national levels. This division implements and oversees the distribution of grants for two national (Inter-jurisdictional Fisheries Act and Anadromous Fish Conservation Act) and two regional (Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act and Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act) programs. Additionally, it works with the ASMFC to develop and implement cooperative State-Federal fisheries regulations.

3.5.3. Enforcement

Both the NMFS Office for Law Enforcement (NOAA/OLE) and the USCG have the authority and the responsibility to enforce Council regulations. NOAA/OLE agents, who specialize in living marine resource violations, provide fisheries expertise and investigative support for the overall fisheries mission. The USCG is a multi-mission agency, which provides at sea patrol services for the fisheries mission.

Neither NOAA/OLE nor the USCG can provide a continuous law enforcement presence in all areas due to the limited resources of NOAA/OLE and the priority tasking of the USCG. To supplement at sea and dockside inspections of fishing vessels, NOAA entered into Cooperative Enforcement Agreements with all but one of the states in the Southeast Region (North Carolina), which granted authority to state officers to enforce the laws for which NOAA/OLE has jurisdiction. In recent years, the level of involvement by the states has increased through Joint Enforcement Agreements, whereby states conduct patrols that focus on federal priorities and, in some circumstances, prosecute resultant violators through the state when a state violation has occurred.

The NOAA Office of General Counsel Penalty Policy and Penalty Schedule is available online at <http://www.gc.noaa.gov/enforce-office3.html>.

Chapter 4. Environmental Effects and Comparison of Alternatives

4.1. Action 1. Remove the Two-for-One Requirement for the Snapper Grouper Commercial Unlimited Permit

4.1.1. Biological Effects

Retention (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**) or removal (**Preferred Alternative 2**) of the two-for-one requirement for transferring snapper grouper commercial unlimited (SG 1) permits would be expected to have neutral direct biological effects, as changes in permit accessibility do not directly result in changes to fishing-related mortality (harvest and dead discards).

Potential indirect biological effects are dependent on the resultant behavior of the fishery, in terms of number of participants, effort, and harvest. These metrics could also be impacted by other actions in this amendment, notably the increase of commercial trip limits for several species (Actions 3-9). Overall, if removal of the two-for-one requirement (**Preferred Alternative 2**) results in increased harvest, this could result in increased probability of negative effects on snapper grouper stocks, due to increased fishing-related mortality. However, potential negative effects are constrained by other regulations, such as annual catch limits (ACL) and accountability measures (AM), such that the increased mortality would not be expected to result in overfishing.

Under **Preferred Alternative 2**, the removal of the two-for-one requirement reduces the barrier to entry for those that do not currently hold an SG 1 permit, including those that currently hold 225-lb trip limited (SG 2) permits. This could lead to a slight increase in the number of active (those that produce landings) SG 1 permits if more active participants are able to acquire SG 1 permits. An increased number of active SG 1 permits would be expected to result in greater catches of snapper grouper species that have not recently been limited by their ACLs. Species that have recently been limited by their ACLs would be expected to continue to be limited by their ACLs, with potentially shorter seasons due to more active participants and greater amounts of commercial catch per day. However, the magnitude of potential change is limited due to the limited number of permits and the small number of transfers that have historically occurred (even factoring in some amount of increase in the number of transfers). High prices for permits are likely to continue and limit the number of new SG 1 permit holders per year.

4.1.2. Economic Effects

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, the two-for-one requirement for commercial SG 1 permits would remain in place indefinitely. There would continue to be a reduction in the number of

Alternatives

1. (No Action). Retain the two for one requirement for commercial SG 1 permits.
2. **Remove the two for one requirement for commercial SG 1 permits.**

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

available commercial SG 1 permits as new entrants come into the fishery and two individually owned permits are exchanged for a single new permit. Under this alternative, the acquisition cost of obtaining a SG 1 permit would likely remain elevated compared to **Preferred Alternative 2** and would create distributional economic effects amongst existing permit holders and new entrants, but the net economic effects to the fishery participants are likely similar between the two alternatives. The higher permit acquisition cost under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would represent a relative cost to new entrants but also a relative benefit for some permit holders.

Removing the “two for one” provision for commercial SG 1 permits under **Preferred Alternative 2** would help reduce the rate of attrition for permits by removing the mandated consolidation mechanism when new entrants come into the fishery. This alternative may also increase permit accessibility and lower the cost of SG 1 permits. Lowering the permit costs would create distributional economic effects amongst existing permit holders and new entrants. The lower permit acquisition cost under **Preferred Alternative 2** would represent a relative benefit to new entrants but also a relative cost for some permit holders.

The relative increase in permit availability under **Preferred Alternative 2** would likely also lead to increased effort in comparison to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. This increased effort could lead to potentially meeting annual catch limits (ACLs) faster for some species and a shortening of fishing seasons for those species. While there would be a benefit for new entrants in the fishery from a new revenue stream, this may come at a decrease in available catch per vessel and thus decreased available revenue for existing fishery participants. Conversely for species where the commercial ACL is under-utilized, the increase in effort and presumably the ensuing increase in landings would lead to an increase in net economic benefits for both fishery and seafood dealers. Since the sector ACL for several snapper grouper species is not fully harvested each year (Appendix F), it can be assumed that both commercial landings and associated revenue in the fishery would increase under **Preferred Alternative 2** compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Thus, the net economic benefits of **Preferred Alternative 2** are expected to be greater than those of **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

4.1.3. Social Effects

Fishing communities most likely experience effects from this action are those with a high number of SG1 permits that are highly engaged in commercial fishing. Of specific note are communities that are also highly reliant on commercial fishing, including Sneads Ferry, NC, and Key West, Marathon, and Tavernier, Florida (Section 3.4). When compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** the proposed alternative (**Preferred Alternative 2**) would be less restrictive for fishermen looking to enter the commercial snapper grouper fishery. Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** effort in the snapper grouper fishery will continue to be reduced over time as new entrants to the fishery must purchase two permits and exchange them for one. **Preferred Alternative 2** would allow easier access to the commercial snapper grouper fishery, only requiring purchase of one permit for access, but would not result in expansion of the fishery as the limited access program would remain in place.

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** new snapper grouper fishermen would require significant capital to acquire permits from other fishermen who must be willing to sell their permit(s), a

significant barrier to entry. This can limit opportunities for younger or less-established fishermen and concentrate access among those with greater financial resources, reducing the flexibility of fishing communities to adapt over time. In some cases, it may also contribute to the consolidation of permits into fewer hands, potentially weakening the economic diversity and resilience of the fishing communities. Additionally, if snapper grouper permit numbers decline too far, the fishery may struggle to achieve optimum yield, leaving available resources underutilized and diminishing the social benefits associated with harvest. Alternatively, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** provides meaningful social benefits *if* the snapper grouper fishery remains overcapitalized by actively reducing fishing capacity. Fewer permits can help ensure that total harvest levels remain within annual target limits, which is especially critical for snapper grouper species that are considered overfished or undergoing overfishing.

Preferred Alternative 2 would lower barriers to entry and make it more feasible for younger or new fishermen to participate in the snapper grouper fishery, addressing the concern of the “greying of the fleet”. Easier entry into the commercial snapper grouper fishery would likely improve generational turnover, support the continuity of fishing communities, and broaden access to opportunities tied to the fishery. It may also reduce the concentration of permits among a smaller group of operators, helping to maintain a more diverse and locally rooted fleet. Alternatively, this could place additional pressure on already constrained stocks and make it more challenging to maintain harvest levels within sustainable limits, especially if permits that were previously latent become active once access to the fishery is less restrictive.

The social effects between **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2** can vary greatly between individual communities and regions depending on the relative importance of improving access to the snapper grouper fishery versus ensuring that participation does not undermine the long-term stability of the resource.

4.1.4. Administrative Effects

The administrative effects of removing the 2-for-1 requirement are expected to be beneficial for both the managing agency and the participants. Under **Preferred Alternative 2**, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Permits Office would no longer be required to verify and “retire” two existing permits to issue a single new transferable permit. This could eventually simplify the tracking and processing of transfers within the permits database. While there may be a minor initial increase in transfer applications as 225-lb trip-limited permit holders seek to upgrade, the long-term administrative oversight of the snapper grouper fishery is not expected to change significantly.

4.2. Action 2. Revise bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species that may be harvested while gear is on board and stowed

4.2.1. Biological Effects

Revision of bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species possession regulations for vessels with longline gear on board is not expected to directly result in overall changes to catch or effort directed at snapper grouper species. Therefore, direct biological effects are expected to be neutral.

Potential indirect biological effects are dependent on the resultant behavior of the fishery, in terms of the number of fishermen that choose to change their behavior in response to additional flexibility afforded by this action, effective effort, and harvest. Overall, if fishermen being allowed to retain additional snapper grouper species while having bottom longline gear on board (**Alternatives 2-4**) results in additional fishing-related mortality, then there could be increased probability of negative effects to some snapper grouper stocks (notably, wreckfish or mid-depth and shallower water species that are not allowed to be possessed with bottom longline gear on board under the current species restriction). However, potential negative effects are constrained by other regulations, such as ACLs and AMs, such that the increased mortality would not be expected to result in overfishing.

Effects of this action are expected to be limited, as not all commercial vessels in the snapper grouper fishery use bottom longline gear. Fisheries that the Council and Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) have noted may take advantage of the potential added flexibility include the short bottom longline shark fishery (managed under NMFS Highly Migratory Species) and the golden tilefish longline component. The true number of potentially affected vessels is unclear. Therefore, specific impacts on discard mortality or localized depletion cannot be precisely determined. Forty vessels are permitted with both a directed shark (SKD) permit and either an SG 1 or SG 2 permit (NOAA Fisheries Permits Database, queried August 26, 2026). Twenty-two vessels have an SG 1 permit with a golden tilefish longline endorsement. These figures are maximum estimates and likely overestimates of the number of vessels impacted as not all

Alternatives

1 (No Action). A commercial vessel with bottom longline gear on board may possess only snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish.

2. Allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than those currently allowed may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed.

3. Allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than those currently allowed may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip must submit a notification at sea, prior to switching gears.

4. Allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than those currently allowed may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip must carry an active vessel monitoring system on board.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

permitted vessels are actively fished and holding either the SKD permit or a golden tilefish endorsement does not necessarily mean that bottom longline is a primary gear for that vessel. Regardless of the gear used or the combination of species harvested, total landings are restricted by ACLs and AMs to ensure the stock remains at sustainable levels.

4.2.2. Economic Effects

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, commercial vessels with bottom longline gear onboard would continue to be limited in the number of snapper grouper species that may be harvested. This constraint restricts potential harvest for these vessels, thereby leading to foregone economic benefits due to lower trip revenue.

Alternative 2 would allow the possession of additional snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline onboard, thereby allowing such vessels to increase landings and associated trip revenue. This would result in increased economic benefits for these vessels. There would be an opportunity cost stemming from the time and effort taken to satisfy the new stowage requirements, but presumably this cost would be outweighed by additional revenue received from increased landings of snapper grouper species on trips where bottom longline gear is onboard, thus leading to an overall increase in net economic benefits.

The economic effects of **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4** would be similar to **Alternative 2**. **Alternative 3** would allow for similar increased net economic benefits for vessels with bottom longline gear onboard but would have a higher opportunity cost due to requiring a notification prior to switching gear types. **Alternative 4** would allow for increased harvest of additional species when bottom longline gear is onboard, but would implement a direct cost by requiring vessels to carry an active vessel monitoring system. This cost would presumably be outweighed by the ability to harvest additional species, thereby increasing net economic benefits for applicable commercial vessels.

In terms of an increase in net economic benefits, **Alternative 2** would be the most beneficial for vessels with bottom longline gear onboard, followed by **Alternative 3**, **Alternative 4**, and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

4.2.3. Social Effects

In general, management measures that increase the number of fish a commercial vessel can land during a given trip are expected to be beneficial to fishermen and fishing communities by increasing access to the resource, so long as overharvest is not occurring to negatively affect the stock in the long term. Allowing possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board and harvest if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed is anticipated to result in direct positive social effects to fishermen and communities that operate in the fishery utilizing bottom longline gear (**Alternatives 2 through 4**).

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** fishermen with bottom longline gear on board their vessels may not possess or harvest snapper grouper species (other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish) despite encountering

these species during their trip. Allowing harvest when bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed would increase their access to the snapper grouper fishery (**Alternative 2**, **Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 4**) and is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to these commercial fishing business in the form of increased revenue and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased fish available to the market or for personal consumption. The social benefits are likely to be highest in communities with high participation in the snapper grouper fishery utilizing bottom longline gear.

Requiring vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip to submit notification at sea prior to shifting gears (**Alternative 3**) or to have an active VMS onboard (**Alternative 4**) may result in positive or negative social effects when compared to **Alternative 2** depending on how individual fishing business must change their practices to account for the additional requirement. Providing notice of switching gear to or from bottom longline would take additional time when on a fishing trip when the captain and/or crew may traditionally have been completing other tasks. VMS would result in one time and reoccurring costs associated with purchase and maintenance of the technology as well as a time burden to learn how to properly install and utilize the technology.

4.2.4. Administrative Effects

The administrative effects of revising bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species possession regulations vary depending on the chosen alternative, ranging from neutral to an increased operational burden for the managing agency. **Alternative 2** (which would require gear stowage) is expected to have a minor impact, as it relies on routine at-sea visual inspections by the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) to verify that longline hooks are unbaited and off the deck. However, **Alternative 3** would introduce a substantial recurring administrative burden, requiring the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to establish and maintain a 24/7 toll-free call service center script and web-based database to process mandatory at-sea gear-switching notifications and relay them to enforcement personnel. **Alternative 4** would represent the highest administrative burden of these three alternatives to the agency. This would involve developing a snapper grouper specific vessel monitoring system program, including the review and approval of vessel monitoring systems (VMS) Additionally, the OLE would need to monitor the additional streams of data.

4.3. Action 3. Increase commercial trip limits for greater amberjack

4.3.1. Biological Effects

Currently, greater amberjack has trip limits of 1,200 lbs gw or ww, for both Season 1 (March-August) and Season 2 (September-February) (**Alternative 1, No Action**). The most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic greater amberjack (SEDAR 59, 2020) indicated the stock is not overfished and is not undergoing overfishing.

The commercial greater amberjack fishery has been managed with a split season and two separate commercial quotas since the implementation of Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 27 in 2020. This management structure was designed to ensure harvest opportunities are available during both the spring/summer and fall/winter periods, as greater amberjack are seasonally available to harvest in different areas of the region throughout the year.

Commercial logbook data from 2020 to 2024 were used to conduct a commercial trip limit analysis (Appendix F and Figures 4.3.1.1 and 4.3.1.2). Overall landings for greater amberjack have remained relatively consistent and significantly below the current commercial ACL in both seasons, during this time period. Season 1 landings saw a notable drop in 2019 and have remained stagnant, rarely approaching the current ACL of 538,933 lb gw. Season 1 includes a month-long harvest closure in April to protect the stock during peak spawning. During Season 2, landings were consistent, oscillating between 100,000 and 200,000 lb gw for all but one of the last ten years. About 6% of trips in Season 1 and less than 2% in Season 2 reached the current 1,200 lb limit. This suggests that for the vast majority of the fleet, the trip limit is not the factor preventing the ACL from being met.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 1 and Season 2 is 1,200 lbs gw.
2. **Increase the greater amberjack Season 1 trip limit to:**
 - 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.
 - 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.**
 - 2c. 2,000 lbs gw.
3. **Increase the greater amberjack Season 2 trip limit to:**
 - 3a. 1,500 lbs gw.
 - 3b. 1,750 lbs gw.**
 - 3c. 2,000 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

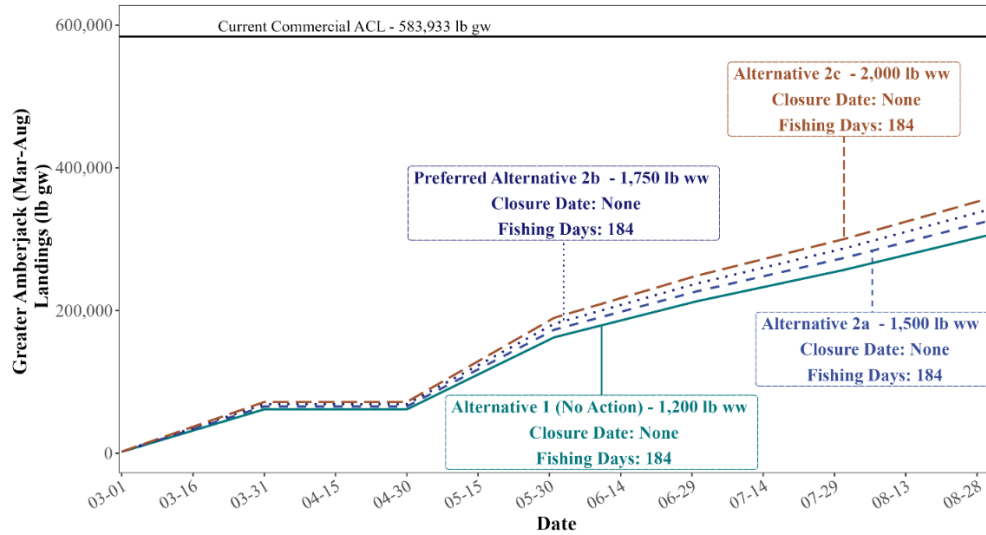


Figure 4.3.1.1. Estimated cumulative greater amberjack landings for each Action 3 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 1 (March to August), based on the average landings scenario.

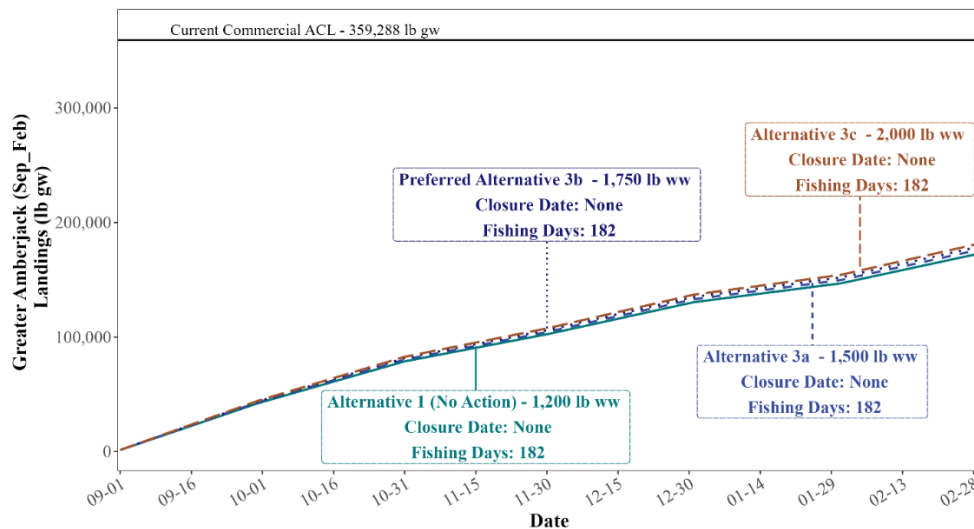


Figure 4.3.1.2. Estimated cumulative greater amberjack landings for each Action 3 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 2 (September to February), based on the average landings scenario.

Increasing the trip limit to 1,500 lbs, (**Sub-Alternatives 2a and 3a**) 1,750 lbs, (**Preferred Sub-Alternatives 2b and 3b**), or 2,000 lbs (**Sub-Alternatives 2c and 3c**), for either season are expected to potentially increase harvest but still not approach the ACL, resulting in no expected closures from reaching the ACL (Figures 4.3.1.1 and 4.3.1.2). Because the stock is not overfished and commercial harvest is constrained by the ACLs, which prevent unsustainable amounts of harvest being removed from the population, biological effects under any of the proposed trip limits in Action 3 are expected to be neutral. Any negative biological effects from increased harvest below or to the ACL are not likely to risk the stock becoming overfished on a region-wide scale.

4.3.2. Economic Effects

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset to some extent by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for greater amberjack that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining greater amberjack because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least direct negative economic effects.

Increasing trip limits in **Preferred Alternative 2** (Season 1) and **Preferred Alternative 3** (Season 2) would allow for increased revenue on trips that land greater amberjack, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue assuming there are not negative implications for ex-vessel price. Additionally, higher trip limits would lead to better utilization of the commercial sector ACL which could lead to increased total revenue and net economic benefits in the commercial fishery.

Lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial greater amberjack harvest over a longer period but contribute less to operating revenue on trips where greater amberjack are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL, resulting in comparatively lower economic benefits.

When compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Sub-alternative 2b** and **Preferred Sub-alternative 3b** would result in an estimated annual increase in PS of \$29,273 and \$4,955 respectively or a total of \$34,228 (2024 dollars) (Table 4.3.2.1). The estimated change in landings in Table 4.3.2.1 is based on 3-year average commercial landings (2022 to 2024) and the outcomes of the commercial analysis found in Appendix F which are used to show the expected increase in commercial landings under the various trip limit scenarios for the sub-alternatives of Action 3. The resulting estimated change in landings is paired with the appropriate ex-vessel price and PS estimate (\$2.35/lbs gw(Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) Social Science Research Group (SSRG) Socioeconomic Panel); PS estimate of 34.8% of gross revenue for the Jacks fishery (Liese 2023)) to estimate the change in economic benefits to the commercial sector. It is assumed that the ex-vessel price will not change due to the relatively small change in commercial landings from this action. Although there are no currently available estimates of the demand elasticity for greater amberjack, it is also assumed that there would be no expected change to CS from the commercial perspective since there is likely a high degree of substitutability of greater amberjack for other species.

Table 4.3.2.1. Estimated change in landings, gross revenue (ex-vessel value), and net economic benefits (PS) from the alternatives in Action 3 compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (2024 dollars).

Alternative	Landings (lbs gw)	Ex-vessel value	PS
Sub-alternative 2a	20,001	\$47,002	\$16,357
Pref. Sub-alternative 2b	35,795	\$84,119	\$29,273

Sub-alternative 2c	51,590	\$121,236	\$42,190
Sub-alternative 3a	3,383	\$7,951	\$2,767
Pref. Sub-alternative 3b	6,059	\$14,239	\$4,955
Sub-alternative 3c	8,735	\$20,528	\$7,144

In terms of potential net economic benefits **Sub-Alternative 2c** and **Sub-Alternative 3c** would be highest, followed by **Preferred Sub-Alternative 2b** and **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3b**, **Sub-Alternative 2a** and **Sub-Alternative 3a**, and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above and **Preferred Sub-Alternatives 2b** and **3b** are expected to increase net economic benefits for seafood dealers.

4.3.3. Social Effects

Preferred Alternative 2 and **Preferred Alternative 3** propose higher commercial trip limits during season one and season two, respectively, for greater amberjack and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the proposed increase in commercial trip limit are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of greater amberjack.

If the higher commercial trip limit for greater amberjack increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. However, landings for greater amberjack have been below the commercial ACL in recent years and none of the trip limits proposed in **Sub-Alternative 2a**, **Preferred Sub-Alternative 2b**, or **Sub-Alternative 2c**, are anticipated to result in a closure. Similarly, for season two, trip limits proposed under **Sub-Alternative 3a**, **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3b**, or **Sub-Alternative 3c**, are not anticipated to result in a closure.

4.3.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, none of the alternatives under consideration to modify commercial trip limits would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Greater amberjack is currently managed under a commercial trip limit of 1,200 pounds during

Season 1 and Season 2. Revising the commercial trip limits will require administrative effort with rulemaking. However, **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** and the associated sub-alternatives, are not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are effective under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

4.4. Action 4. Increase commercial trip limits for vermillion snapper

4.4.1. Biological Effects

Currently, vermillion snapper has trip limits of 1,000 lbs gw or ww, for both Season 1 (January-June) and Season 2 (July-December) (**Alternative 1, No Action**). The most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic vermillion snapper (SEDAR 55, 2018) indicated the stock is not overfished and is not undergoing overfishing.

Commercial logbook data from 2020 to 2024 were used to conduct a commercial trip limit analysis (Appendix F and Figures 4.4.1.1 and 4.4.1.2). Current landings in Season 1 range between 40,000–60,000 lb ww monthly, while Season 2 typically sees higher harvest rates of 50,000–75,000 lb ww. Approximately 11% of trips in Season 1 approached the trip limit of 1,000 lbs gw and 14% of trips in Season 2. This suggests that for the vast majority of the fleet, the trip limit is not the factor preventing the ACL from being met in recent years.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for vermillion snapper during Season 1 and Season 2 is 1,000 lbs gw. No process for temporarily adjusting the commercial trip limit is in place.
2. **Increase the Season 1 trip limit to:**
 - 2a. **1,500 lbs gw.**
 - 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.
 - 2c. 2,000 lbs gw
3. **Increase the Season 2 trip limit to:**
 - 3a. **1,500 lbs gw.**
 - 3b. 1,750 lbs gw.
 - 3c. 2,000 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

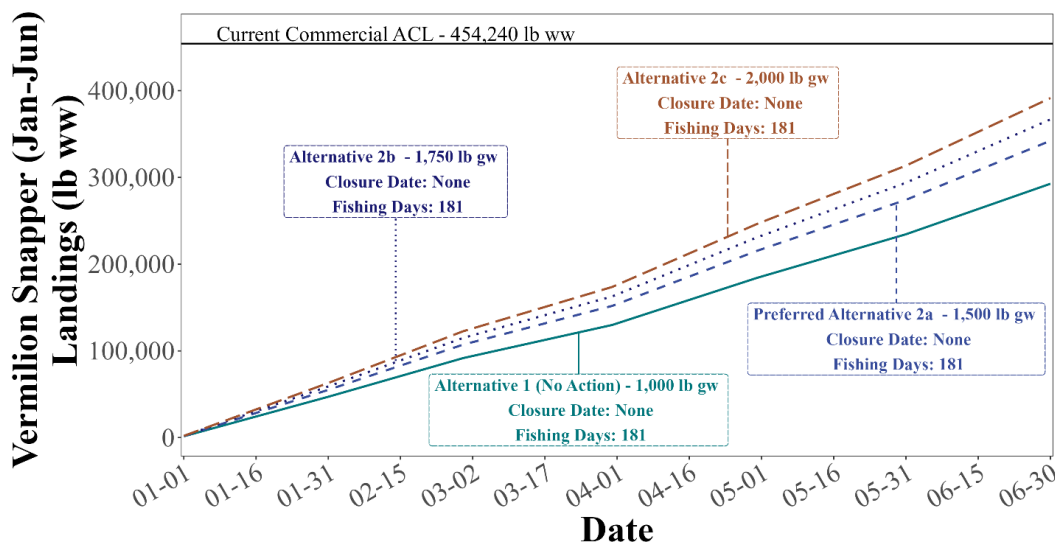


Figure 4.4.1.1. Estimated cumulative vermillion snapper landings for each Action 4 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 1 (January to June), based on the average landings scenario.

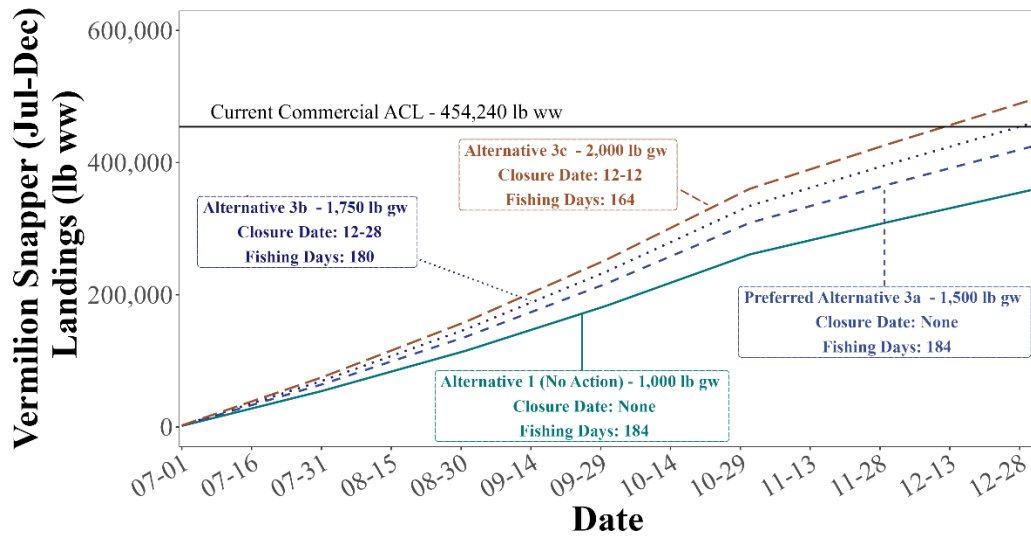


Figure 4.4.1.2. Estimated cumulative vermilion snapper landings for each Action 4 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 2 (July to December), based on the average landings scenario.

Increasing the trip limit to 1,500 lbs gw, (**Preferred Sub-Alternatives 2a and 3a**) 1,750 lbs gw, (**Sub-Alternatives 2b and 3b**), or 2,000 lbs gw (**Sub-Alternatives 2c and 3c**), for either season are expected to increase harvest, but with differing effects, due to the seasonality of harvest and the split-season management structure. For all the Season 1 (**Preferred Alternative 2**) sub-alternatives, the seasonal ACL is not expected to be met, and no closures are expected, though an above-average harvest under a 2,000 lbs gw limit (**Sub-Alternative 2c**) could result in a late-season closure.

For Season 2 (**Preferred Alternative 3**), closures are predicted by the analyses late in the season for trip limits of 1,750 lbs gw (**Sub-Alternative 3b**; closure date: December 28) and 2,000 lbs gw (**Sub-Alternative 3c**; closure date: December 12). However, Season 2 analyses were developed specifically to evaluate predicted harvest against the Season 2 ACL, not including unused ACL that is carried over from Season 1. Carry-over of unused ACL from Season 1 to Season 2 is part of the split-season management structure for vermilion snapper. Due to the predicted harvests for all Season 1 (**Preferred Alternative 2**) sub-alternatives not being expected to meet the seasonal ACL, it is likely that there will be unused ACL available to be carried over from Season 1 to Season 2. Also noting the late date of predicted closures for **Sub-Alternatives 3b** and **3c**, with this carry-over, the annual ACL is unlikely to be met and closures are unlikely to be realized under all Season 2 (**Preferred Alternative 3**) trip limit sub-alternatives.

Because the stock is not overfished and commercial harvest is constrained by the ACLs, which prevent unsustainable amounts of harvest being removed from the population, biological effects from commercial harvest under any of the proposed trip limits in Action 4 are expected to be neutral. Any negative biological effects from increased harvest below or to the ACL are not likely to risk the stock becoming overfished on a region-wide scale.

4.4.2. Economic Effects

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset to some extent by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for vermilion snapper that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining vermilion snapper because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least amount of direct negative economic effects.

Increasing trip limits in **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** would allow for increased revenue on trips that land vermilion snapper, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue. Additionally, higher trip limits would lead to better utilization of the commercial sector ACL which would lead to increased total revenue and net economic benefits in the commercial fishery.

Higher trip limits, such as those considered in **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3**, could also likely result in the commercial AMs being triggered sooner, thus creating an earlier commercial harvest closure for the species. Conversely, lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial vermilion snapper harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where vermilion snapper are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL.

When compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Sub-alternative 2a** and **Preferred Sub-alternative 3a** would result in an estimated annual increase in PS of \$71,505 and \$94,860 respectively or a total of \$166,365 (2024 dollars) (Table 4.4.2.1). The estimated change in landings in Table 4.4.2.1 is based on 3-year average commercial landings (2022 to 2024) and the outcomes of the commercial analysis found in Appendix F which are used to show the expected increase in commercial landings under the various trip limit scenarios for the sub-alternatives of Action 4. The analysis in Appendix F provided an estimated change in landings by pounds whole weight (lbs ww), so a conversion factor of 1.11 is applied to obtain estimated landings in pounds gutted weight (lbs gw). The resulting estimated change in landings is paired with the appropriate ex-vessel price and PS estimate (\$5.01/lbs gw (SEFSC SSRG Socioeconomic Panel); PS estimate of 31.9% of gross revenue for the vermilion snapper fishery (Liese 2023)) to estimate the change in net economic benefits to the commercial sector. It is assumed that the ex-vessel price will not change due to the relatively small change in commercial landings from this action. Although there are no currently available estimates of the demand elasticity for vermilion snapper, it is also assumed that there would be no expected change to CS from the commercial perspective since there is likely a high degree of substitutability of vermilion snapper for other species.

Table 4.4.2.1. Estimated change in landings, gross revenue (ex-vessel value), and net economic benefits (PS) from the alternatives in Action 4 compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (2024 dollars).

Alternative	Landings (lbs gw)	Ex-vessel value	PS
Pref. Sub-alternative 2a	44,652	\$224,153	\$71,505
Sub-alternative 2b	66,827	\$335,473	\$107,016
Sub-alternative 2c	89,014	\$446,849	\$142,545
Pref. Sub-alternative 3a	59,236	\$297,365	\$94,860
Sub-alternative 3b*	85,503	\$429,224	\$136,922
Sub-alternative 3c*	85,503	\$429,224	\$136,922

*Potential increase in landings is capped at the seasonal sector ACL of 454,240 lbs ww. This ACL was not projected to be met under the other sub-alternatives.

In terms of potential net economic benefits **Sub-Alternative 2c** and **Sub-Alternative 3c** would be highest, followed by **Sub-Alternative 2b** and **Sub-Alternative 3b**, **Preferred Sub-Alternative 2a** and **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a**, and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above and **Preferred Sub-Alternatives 2a** and **3a** are expected to increase net economic benefits for seafood dealers.

4.4.3. Social Effects

Preferred Alternative 2 and **Preferred Alternative 3** propose higher commercial trip limits during season one and season two, respectively, for vermilion snapper and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the proposed increase in commercial trip limit are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of vermilion snapper.

If the higher commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. Landings for vermilion snapper have been below the commercial ACL in recent years and none of the trip limits proposed in **Preferred Sub-Alternative 2a** or **Sub-Alternative 2b** are anticipated to result in a closure. Similarly, for season two, trip limits proposed under **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a** or **Sub-Alternative 3b** are not anticipated to result in a closure. **Sub-Alternative 2c** and **Sub-Alternative 3c** may result in slightly early closures (June 26 and December 12,

respectively) but only under a high-landings scenario. Social effects from the potential closures are expected to be minimal.

4.4.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, none of the actions alternatives under consideration to modify commercial trip limits would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Vermilion snapper is currently managed under a commercial trip limit of 1,000 pounds during season 1 and season 2. Revising the commercial trip limits will require administrative effort with rulemaking. However, **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** and the associated sub-alternatives, are not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are effective under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

4.5. Action 5. Increase commercial trip limits for red porgy

4.5.1. Biological Effects

The South Atlantic red porgy stock is currently overfished and undergoing overfishing (SEDAR 60, 2020), and is under a rebuilding plan that is expected to be completed by 2047. In 2020, a split season was implemented for commercial red porgy with Season 1 in January through April and Season 2 in May through December.

Commercial landings of red porgy have been well below the commercial ACLs (noting that the ACL was significantly lowered in 2023) for over ten years. Prior to the current rebuilding plan (implemented in 2023), red porgy were in a previous rebuilding plan that began in 2008 (via Snapper Grouper Amendment 15A) but did not rebuild the stock. Comments by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) following the SEDAR 60 stock assessment (April 2021) indicated that the stock's overfished status is more attributable to strong declines in recruitment since the 1990s rather than fishing-related mortality. Therefore, while catch restrictions provide the best possible scenario for rebuilding to occur, rebuilding will depend more heavily on improved recruitment.

Commercial logbook data from 2020 to 2024 were used to conduct a commercial trip limit analysis (Appendix F and Figures 4.5.1.1 and 4.5.1.2). Recent landings have been exceptionally low, consistently failing to meet the small rebuilding ACLs (12,907 lb gw for Season 1 in 2024; 32,886 lb gw for Season 2 in 2024). Approximately 45% of trips in Season 1 and 38% in Season 2 landed more than 10 fish. This suggests that for most of the fleet, the trip limit is not the factor preventing the ACL from being met.

Alternatives

1. **(No Action). The current trip limit for red porgy during Season 1 and Season 2 is 15 fish.**
2. Increase the Season 1 trip limit to:
Sub-Alt 2a. 30 fish.
Sub-Alt 2b. 45 fish.
3. Increase the Season 2 trip limit to:
Sub-Alt 3a. 30 fish.
Sub-Alt 3b. 45 fish.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

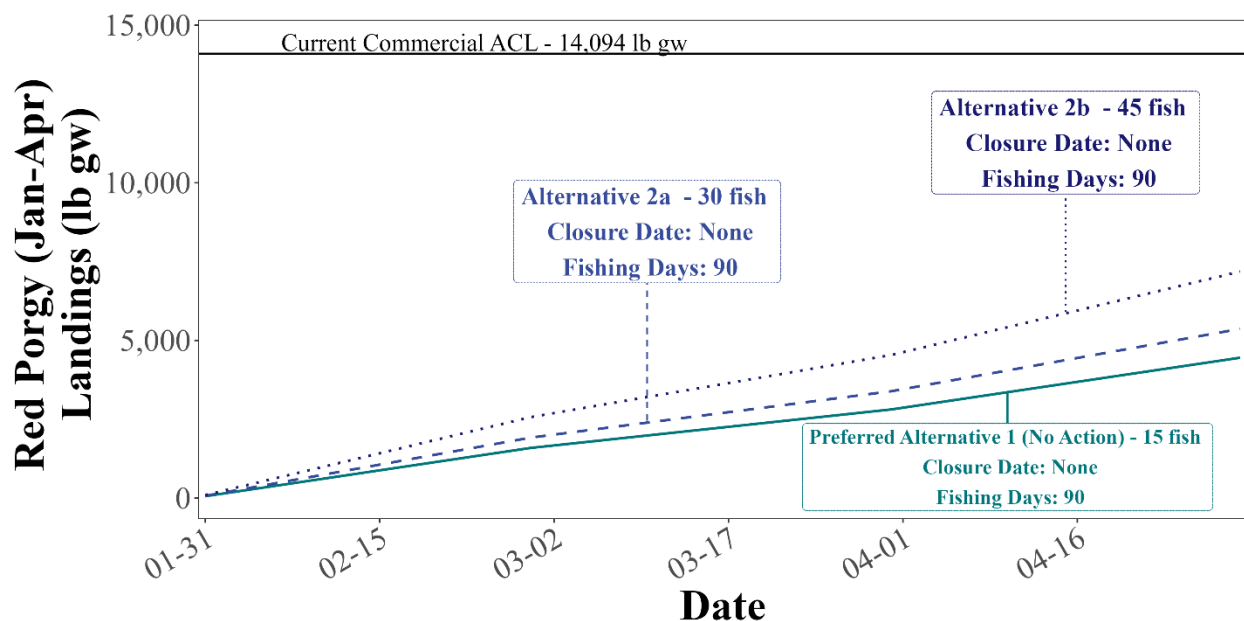


Figure 4.5.1.1. Estimated cumulative red porgy landings for each Action 5 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 1 (January to April), based on the average landings scenario.

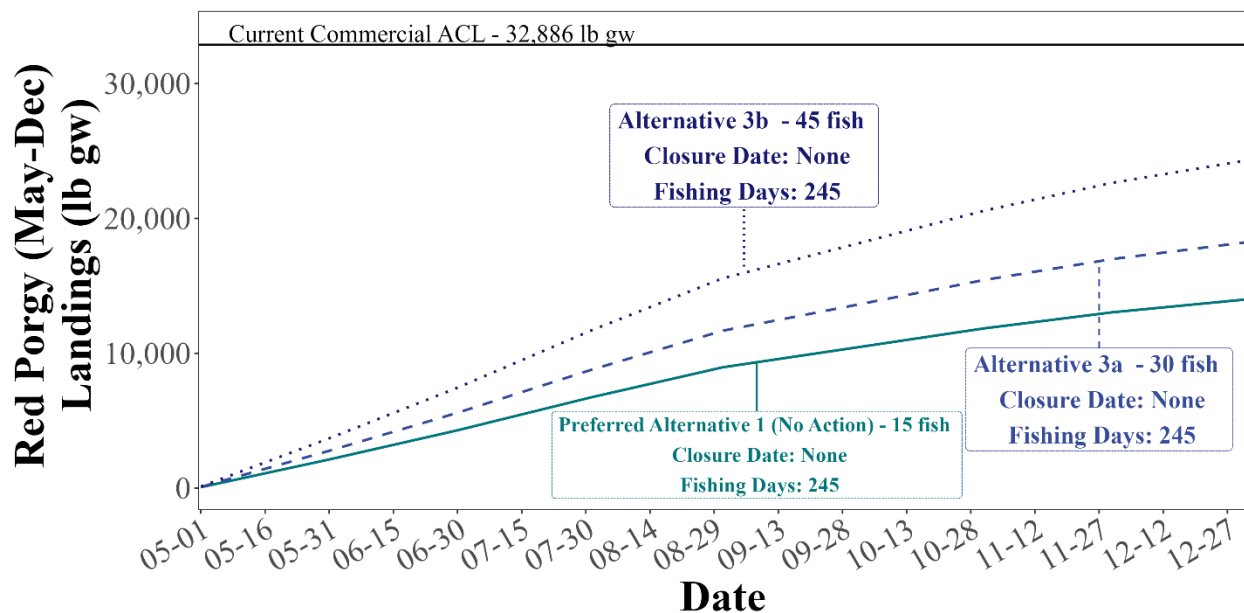


Figure 4.5.1.2. Estimated cumulative red porgy landings for each Action 5 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 2 (May to December), based on the average landings scenario.

Increasing the trip limit to 30 fish (**Sub-Alternatives 2a and 3a**) or 45 fish (**Sub-Alternatives 2b and 3b**) for either season are expected to potentially increase harvest but still not approach the ACL, resulting in no expected closures from reaching the ACL. However, consistent with the SSC's statements on rebuilding, lower fishing-related removals (landings plus dead discards) from the population provide the best possible scenario for red porgy to recover, should any conditions that impact recruitment improve. Therefore, the greatest potential biological benefits would be expected under the current trip limit (**Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)**), followed

by the 30-fish (**Sub-Alternatives 2a and 3a**) and 45-fish (**Sub-Alternatives 2b and 3b**) trip limits.

The proposed increases were originally considered to reduce discard mortality for trips that reach the trip limit. Commercial discard information is uncertain and has not been recommended for analytical use. Therefore, while it is possible that some trips may have a similar number of removals under a higher trip limit (noting, also, that red porgy have a commercial minimum size limit of 14 inches), analyses to estimate how discards could be affected by the different trip limits are unavailable.

4.5.2. Economic Effects

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset to some extent by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for red porgy that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining red porgy because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least direct negative economic effects.

Increasing trip limits in **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would allow for increased revenue on trips that land red porgy, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue. Additionally, higher trip limits would lead to better utilization of the commercial sector ACL which would lead to increased total revenue and net economic benefits in the commercial fishery.

Lower trip limits, such as **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial red porgy harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where red porgy are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL.

When compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, the sub-alternatives would result in an estimated annual increase in PS between \$1,062 and \$11,959 (2024 dollars) (Table 4.5.2.1). The estimated change in landings in Table 4.5.2.1 is based on 3-year average commercial landings (2022 to 2024) and the outcomes of the commercial analysis found in Appendix F which are used to show the expected increase in commercial landings under the various trip limit scenarios for the sub-alternatives of Action 5. The resulting estimated change in landings is paired with the appropriate ex-vessel price and PS estimate (\$3.08/lbs gw (SEFSC SSRG Socioeconomic Panel); PS estimate of 37.7% of gross revenue for the general snapper fishery (Liese 2023)) to estimate the change in net economic benefits to the commercial sector. It is assumed that the ex-vessel price will not change due to the relatively small change in commercial landings from this action. Although there are no currently available estimates of the demand elasticity for red porgy, it is also assumed that there would be no expected change to CS from the commercial perspective since there is likely a high degree of substitutability of red porgy for other species.

Table 4.5.2.1. Estimated change in landings, gross revenue (ex-vessel value), and net economic benefits (PS) from the alternatives in Action 5 compared to **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)** (2024 dollars).

Alternative	Landings (lbs gw)	Ex-vessel value	PS
Sub-alternative 2a	914	\$2,816	\$1,062
Sub-alternative 2b	2,733	\$8,417	\$3,173
Sub-alternative 3a	4,235	\$13,042	\$4,917
Sub-alternative 3b	10,299	\$31,722	\$11,959

In terms of potential net economic benefits **Sub-Alternative 2b** and **Sub-Alternative 3b** would be highest, followed by **Sub-Alternative 2a** and **Sub-Alternative 3a**, and **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above and **Alternatives 2** and **3** are expected to increase net economic benefits for seafood dealers.

4.5.3. Social Effects

Alternative 2 and **Alternative 3** propose higher commercial trip limits during season one and season two, respectively, for red porgy and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the proposed increase in commercial trip limit are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of red porgy.

If the higher commercial trip limit for red porgy increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. However, landings for red porgy have been well below the commercial ACL in recent years and none of the trip limits proposed in **Sub-Alternative 2a** or **Sub-Alternative 2b**. Similarly, for season two, trip limits proposed under **Sub-Alternative 3a** or **Sub-Alternative 3b** are not anticipated to result in a closure.

4.5.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)**, none of the actions alternatives under consideration to modify commercial trip limits would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Red porgy is currently managed under a commercial trip limit of 15 fish during season 1 and season 2. Revising the commercial trip limits will require administrative effort with rulemaking. However, **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** and the associated sub-alternatives, are not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are effective under **Preferred Alternative 1**. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Alternatives 2** and **Alternative 3** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

4.6. Action 6. Increase commercial trip limit for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina)

4.6.1. Biological Effects

The status of the hogfish stock off North Carolina through Georgia is officially unknown, per the most recent assessment (SEDAR 37, 2014). However, the fishery is managed under a commercial ACL of 23,456 lb ww.

Commercial logbook data from 2020 to 2024 were used to conduct a commercial trip limit analysis (Appendix F and Figure 4.6.1.1). While open year-round, commercial effort is highly seasonal. Landings are near zero during the first quarter of the calendar year, peak during the summer months from May through August (averaging ~3,000 to 3,500 lb ww per month), and steadily decline through the fall and winter. Only 2% of trips currently harvest within 10% of the existing 500 lb ww trip limit, indicating that the limit is not a major constraint for most of the fleet. Assuming fishermen who hit current limits expand their harvest to the proposed higher limits, overall landings are projected to increase by 11% to 22%.

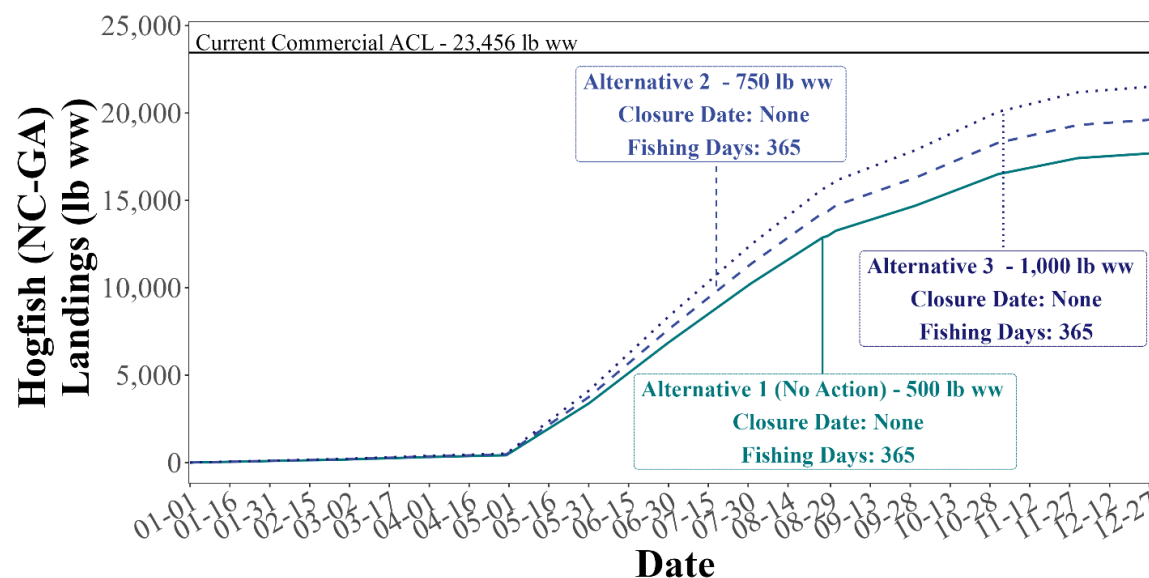


Figure 4.6.1.1. Estimated cumulative hogfish (Georgia to North Carolina) landings for each Action 6 commercial trip limit alternative, based on the average landings scenario.

Under average landings, neither alternative triggers an in-season closure, allowing the fishery to remain open for the full 365 days. Under a high landings) scenario, in-season closures are projected for later in the year November 24 (Alternative 2) and October 18 (Alternative 3).

Increasing the trip limit to 750 lbs ww (**Alternative 2**) or 1,000 lbs ww (**Alternative 3**) is expected to increase harvest efficiency. Biological impacts are expected to be neutral because harvest is constrained by the ACL and accountability measures prevent unsustainable harvest levels.

4.6.2. Economic Effects

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset to some extent by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for hogfish that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining hogfish because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least amount of direct negative economic effects.

Increasing trip limits via **Alternative 2** or **Alternative 3** would allow for increased revenue on trips that land hogfish, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue. Additionally, higher trip limits would lead to better utilization of the commercial sector ACL which would lead to increased total revenue and net economic benefits in the commercial fishery.

Lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial hogfish harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where hogfish are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL.

When compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would result in an estimated annual increase in PS of \$3,787 and \$7,522 respectively (2024 dollars) (Table 4.6.2.1). The estimated change in landings in Table 4.6.2.1 is based on 3-year average commercial landings (2022 to 2024) and the outcomes of the commercial analysis found in Appendix F which are used to show the expected increase in commercial landings under the various trip limit scenarios for the alternatives of Action 6. The analysis in Appendix F provided an estimated change in landings by lbs ww, so a conversion factor of 1.18 is applied to obtain estimated landings in lbs gw. The resulting estimated change in landings is paired with the appropriate ex-vessel price and PS estimate (\$6.15/lbs gw (SEFSC SSRG Socioeconomic Panel); PS estimate of 37.7% of gross revenue for the general snapper fishery (Liese 2023)) to estimate the change in net economic benefits to the commercial sector. It is assumed that the ex-vessel price will not change due to the relatively small change in commercial landings from this action. Although there are no currently available estimates of the demand elasticity for hogfish, it is also assumed that there would be no expected change to CS from the commercial perspective since there is likely a high degree of substitutability of hogfish for other species.

Table 4.6.2.1. Estimated change in landings, gross revenue (ex-vessel value), and net economic benefits (PS) from the alternatives in Action 6 compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (2024 dollars).

Alternative	Landings (lbs gw)	Ex-vessel value	PS
Alternative 2	1,633	\$10,044	\$3,787
Alternative 3	3,244	\$19,951	\$7,522

In terms of potential net economic benefits **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 2** would result in higher economic benefits compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above and **Alternatives 2** and **3** are expected to increase net economic benefits for seafood dealers.

4.6.3. Social Effects

Alternative 2 and **Alternative 3** propose higher commercial trip for hogfish off North Carolina through Georgia and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the proposed increase in commercial trip limit are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of hogfish.

If the higher commercial trip limit for hogfish increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. However, landings for hogfish have been well below the commercial ACL in recent years and the trip limits proposed in **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** are not anticipated to result in a closure except under an extremely high landing scenario (**Alternative 3**, October 20).

4.6.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, none of the actions alternatives under consideration to modify commercial trip limits would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Hogfish is currently managed under a commercial trip limit of 500 pounds. Revising the commercial trip limits will require administrative effort with rulemaking. However, **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** are not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are effective under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Alternatives 2**

and **Alternative 3** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

4.7. Action 7. Increase commercial trip limit for red grouper

4.7.1. Biological Effects

South Atlantic Red Grouper is currently overfished and undergoing overfishing (SEDAR 53, 2017) and is in the final years of a rebuilding plan (ending in 2028). The fishery is closed from January through April in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off Florida and Georgia and from January through May in the EEZ off South Carolina and North Carolina each year to protect shallow-water groupers during their spawning season.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for red grouper is 200 lbs gw.
2. Increase the red grouper trip limit to 300 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

Commercial logbook data from 2020 to 2024 were used to conduct a commercial trip limit analysis (Appendix F and Figure 4.7.1.1). Since 2016, landings have remained well below the ACL of 71,280 lb ww, oscillating between 25,000 and 50,000 lbs. The highest landings occur in May, immediately after the 4-month closure. After May, the landings decline throughout the year with a spike in landings in December. Based on recent landings, only 2% of trips have approached the current 200 lb gw limit.

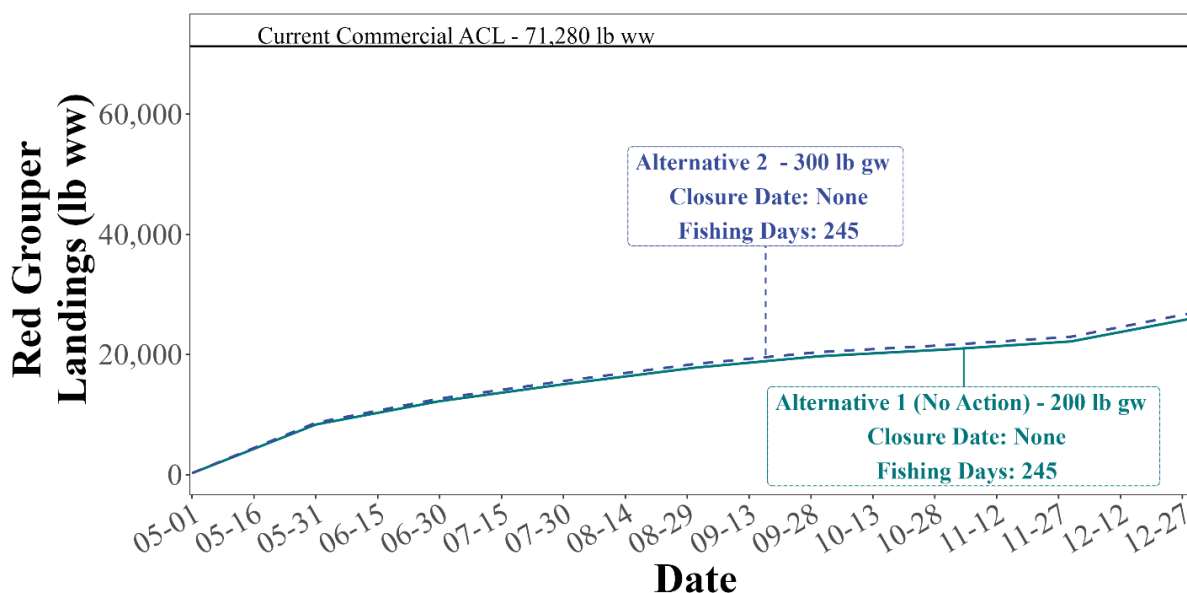


Figure 4.7.1.1. Estimated cumulative red grouper landings for each Action 7 commercial trip limit alternative, based on the average landings scenario.

Similar to red porgy and several other South Atlantic reef-associated species, red grouper showed declines in recruitment during their last stock assessment (SEDAR 53, 2017). However, unlike red porgy, fishery-independent indices (CITE SERFS Report: https://safmc.net/documents/a3a_sgap_marmap-serfs-trends-report-1990-2025_202604-pdf/)

indicate that red grouper may no longer be declining, with a stable trend (albeit below the long-term average) in relative abundance since approximately 2015.

With red grouper being in overfished status but showing some signs of stabilization in population trends, there could be some biological benefit to maintaining the current 200 lbs gw trip limit (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**) relative to increasing the trip limit to 300 lbs gw (**Alternative 2**). The difference between these alternatives may be small, as red grouper recruitment is more likely to be the primary factor for rebuilding rather than fishing-related mortality. However, lower annual harvest, as projected under the current trip limit would give the stock its greatest chance at rebuilding under its current plan and timeframe. That said, the ACL would prevent harvest from exceeding sustainable levels under either alternative, and the spawning closure would continue to protect spawning fish. These factors combined with the small difference in annual harvest between the 200 lbs gw and 300 lbs gw limits indicate that **Alternative 2** would not be expected to jeopardize rebuilding.

4.7.2. Economic Effects

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset to some extent by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for red grouper that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining red grouper because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least amount of direct negative economic effects.

Increasing trip limits in **Alternative 2** would allow for increased revenue on trips that land red grouper, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue. Additionally, higher trip limits would lead to better utilization of the commercial sector ACL which would lead to increased total revenue and net economic benefits in the commercial fishery.

Lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial red grouper harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where red grouper are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL.

When compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternative 2** would result in an estimated annual increase in PS of \$1,992 (2024 dollars) (Table 4.7.2.1). The estimated change in landings in Table 4.7.2.1 is based on 3-year average commercial landings (2022 to 2024) and the outcomes of the commercial analysis found in Appendix F which are used to show the expected increase in commercial landings under the various trip limit scenarios for the alternatives of Action 7. The analysis in Appendix F provided an estimated change in landings by lbs ww, so a conversion factor of 1.18 is applied to obtain estimated landings in lbs gw. The resulting estimated change in landings is paired with the appropriate ex-vessel price and PS estimate (\$6.76/lbs gw (SEFSC SSRG Socioeconomic Panel); PS estimate of 37.7% of gross revenue for

the general snapper fishery (Liese 2023)) to estimate the change in net economic benefits to the commercial sector. It is assumed that the ex-vessel price will not change due to the relatively small change in commercial landings from this action. Although there are no currently available estimates of the demand elasticity for red grouper, it is also assumed that there would be no expected change to CS from the commercial perspective since there is likely a high degree of substitutability of red grouper for other species.

Table 4.7.2.1. Estimated change in landings, gross revenue (ex-vessel value), and net economic benefits (PS) from the alternative in Action 7 compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (2024 dollars).

Alternative	Landings (lbs gw)	Ex-vessel value	PS
Alternative 2	782	\$5,283	\$1,992

In terms of potential net economic benefits **Alternative 2** would provide higher economic benefits than **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above and **Alternative 2** is expected to increase net economic benefits for seafood dealers.

4.7.3. Social Effects

Alternative 2 proposes a higher commercial trip for red grouper and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the proposed increase in commercial trip limit are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of red grouper.

If the higher commercial trip limit for red grouper increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. However, landings for red grouper have been well below the commercial ACL in recent years and the trip limit proposed in **Alternative 2** is not anticipated to result in a closure.

4.7.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, none of the actions alternatives under consideration to modify commercial trip limits would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Red grouper is currently managed under a commercial trip limit of 200 pounds. Revising the commercial trip limits will require administrative effort with rulemaking. However, **Alternative 2** is not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are effective under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Alternative 2** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

4.8. Action 8. Increase commercial trip limits for gray triggerfish

4.8.1. Biological Effects

The stock status of South Atlantic gray triggerfish is currently unknown. The fishery is managed under a commercial ACL of 156,162 lb ww per split season: Season 1 (January–June) and Season 2 (July–December). Landings have declined over the last decade, with neither season exceeding 100,000 lb ww in the most recent year of the time series—well below the seasonal ACL.

Commercial logbook data from 2020 to 2024 were used to conduct a commercial trip limit analysis (Appendix F and Figures 4.8.1.1 and 4.8.1.2). Monthly landings in Season 1 peak in May and June at approximately 15,000 lb ww. In Season 2, landings increase to a peak of nearly 30,000 lb ww in October before declining through December. Less than 1% of trips in either split season currently harvest within 10% of the existing 1,000 lb gw trip limit, with the vast majority of trips landing under 100 lb gw.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for gray triggerfish is 1,000 lbs ww.
2. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,200 lbs ww.
3. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,400 lbs ww.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

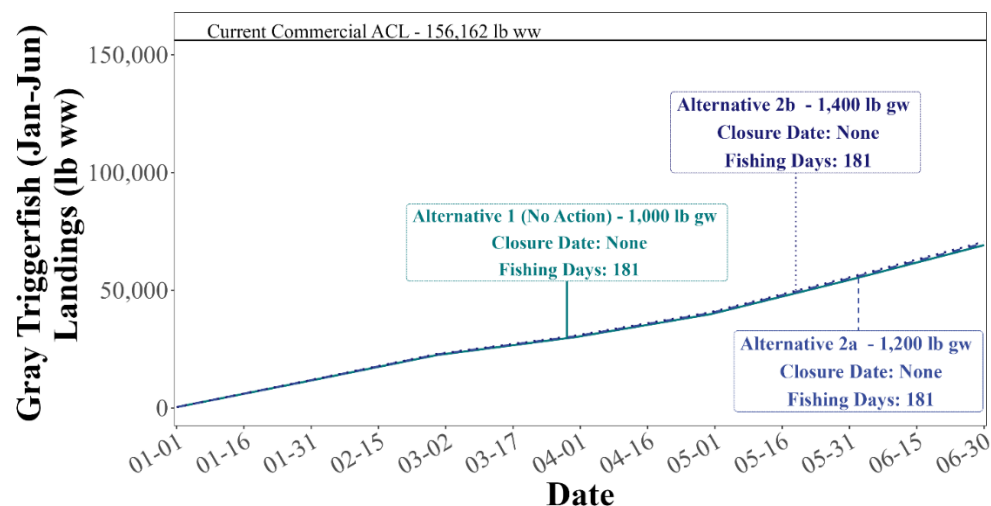


Figure 4.8.1.1. Estimated cumulative gray triggerfish landings for each Action 8 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 1 (January to June), based on the average landings scenario.

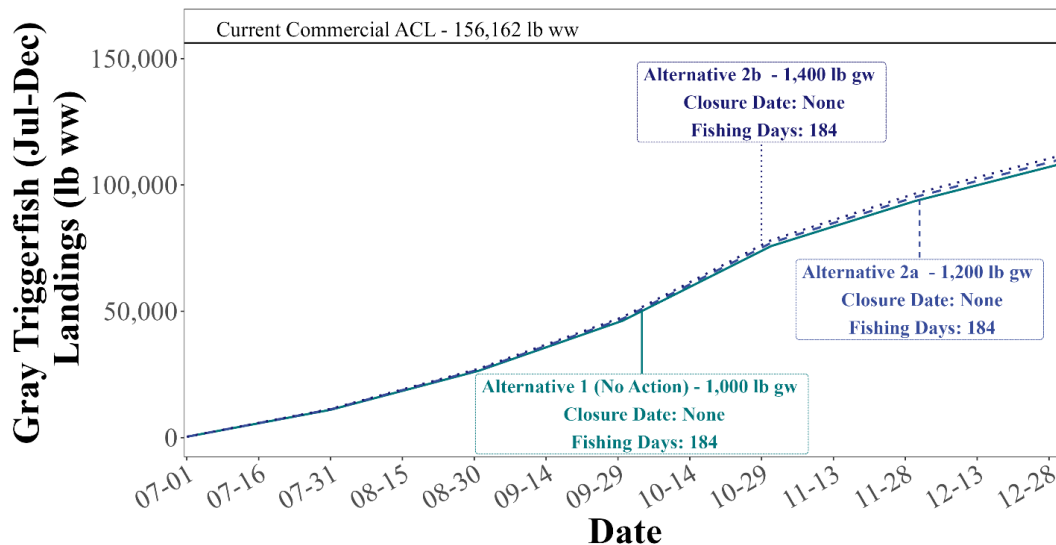


Figure 4.8.1.2. Estimated cumulative gray triggerfish landings for each Action 8 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 2 (July to December), based on the average landings scenario.

No seasonal closures are projected for any alternative in either split season, allowing the fishery to remain open for the full duration of both periods (181 days in Season 1; 184 days in Season 2).

Consequently, shifting the daily trip limit from 1,000 lbs gw (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**) to either 1,200 lbs gw (**Alternative 2**) or 1,400 lbs gw (**Alternative 3**) is projected to result in a minimal change in total landings across the South Atlantic states. The biological impacts to the stock would be expected to remain neutral as the catch is constrained by the overarching ACL and accountability measures.

4.8.2. Economic Effects

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset to some extent by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for gray triggerfish that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining gray triggerfish because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least amount of direct negative economic effects.

Potentially increasing trip limits in **Alternative 2** or **Alternative 3** would allow for increased revenue on trips that land gray triggerfish, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue. Additionally, higher trip limits would lead to better utilization of the commercial sector ACL which would lead to increased total revenue and net economic benefits in the commercial fishery.

Lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial gray triggerfish harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where gray triggerfish are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL.

When compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would result in an estimated annual increase in PS between \$2,961 and \$5,420 (2024 dollars) (Table 4.8.2.1). The estimated change in landings in Table 4.8.2.1 is based on 3-year average commercial landings (2022 to 2024) and the outcomes of the commercial analysis found in Appendix F which are used to show the expected increase in commercial landings under the various trip limit scenarios for the alternatives of Action 8. The analysis in Appendix F provided an estimated change in landings by lbs ww, so a conversion factor of 1.04 is applied to obtain estimated landings in lbs gw. The resulting estimated change in landings is paired with the appropriate ex-vessel price and PS estimate (\$3.53/lbs gw (SEFSC SSRG Socioeconomic Panel); PS estimate of 33.3% of gross revenue for the triggerfish fishery (Liese 2023)) to estimate the change in net economic benefits to the commercial sector. It is assumed that the ex-vessel price will not change due to the relatively small change in commercial landings from this action. Although there are no currently available estimates of the demand elasticity for gray triggerfish, it is also assumed that there would be no expected change to CS from the commercial perspective since there is likely a high degree of substitutability of gray triggerfish for other species.

Table 4.8.2.1. Estimated change in landings, gross revenue (ex-vessel value), and net economic benefits (PS) from the alternatives in Action 8 compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (2024 dollars).

Alternative	Landings (lbs gw)	Ex-vessel value	PS
Alternative 2	2,519	\$8,892	\$2,961
Alternative 3	4,611	\$16,278	\$5,420

In terms of potential net economic benefits, **Alternative 3**, followed by **Alternative 2** would provide higher economic benefits than **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above and **Alternatives 2** and **3** are expected to increase net economic benefits for seafood dealers.

4.8.3. Social Effects

Alternative 2 and **Alternative 3** propose higher commercial trip for gray triggerfish and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons,

which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the proposed increase in commercial trip limit are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of gray triggerfish. If the higher commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities.

4.8.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, none of the actions alternatives under consideration to modify commercial trip limits would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Gray triggerfish is currently managed under a commercial trip limit of 1,000 pounds. Revising the commercial trip limits will require administrative effort with rulemaking. However, **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** are not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are effective under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Alternatives 2** and **Alternative 3** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

4.9. Action 9. Increase commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line only)

4.9.1. Biological Effects

Golden tilefish are managed under two separate fleet components based on gear type, with the hook-and-line sector allocated a commercial ACL of 112,656 lb ww. While in-season closures have occurred frequently in recent years, the ACL has only been exceeded once in the last 5 years.

Commercial logbook data were analyzed in to evaluate proposed trip limit increases (Appendix F and Figure 4.9.1.1). Monthly landings are variable throughout the calendar year, reaching a clear peak in June at nearly 20,000 lb gw on average. Approximately 15% of historical hook-and-line trips from 2020 to 2024 caught more than 450 lbs gw, indicating the existing 500 lbs gw limit (**Alternative 1, No Action**) actively restricts a notable portion of the fleet. Assuming those capping trips expand their harvest to the higher proposed limits, total landings are projected to scalar up by 8% to 20%.

Increasing the commercial trip limit to 600 lb gw (Preferred Alternative 2) or 750 lb gw (Alternative 3) is expected to afford greater trip efficiency, but higher trip limits will likely accelerate harvest rates and trigger earlier in-season closures. Despite shortened open seasons, the biological impacts on the stock are expected to remain neutral because overall catch remains strictly constrained by the ACL and accountability measures.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line only) is 500 lbs gw.
2. **Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 600 lbs gw.**
3. Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 750 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

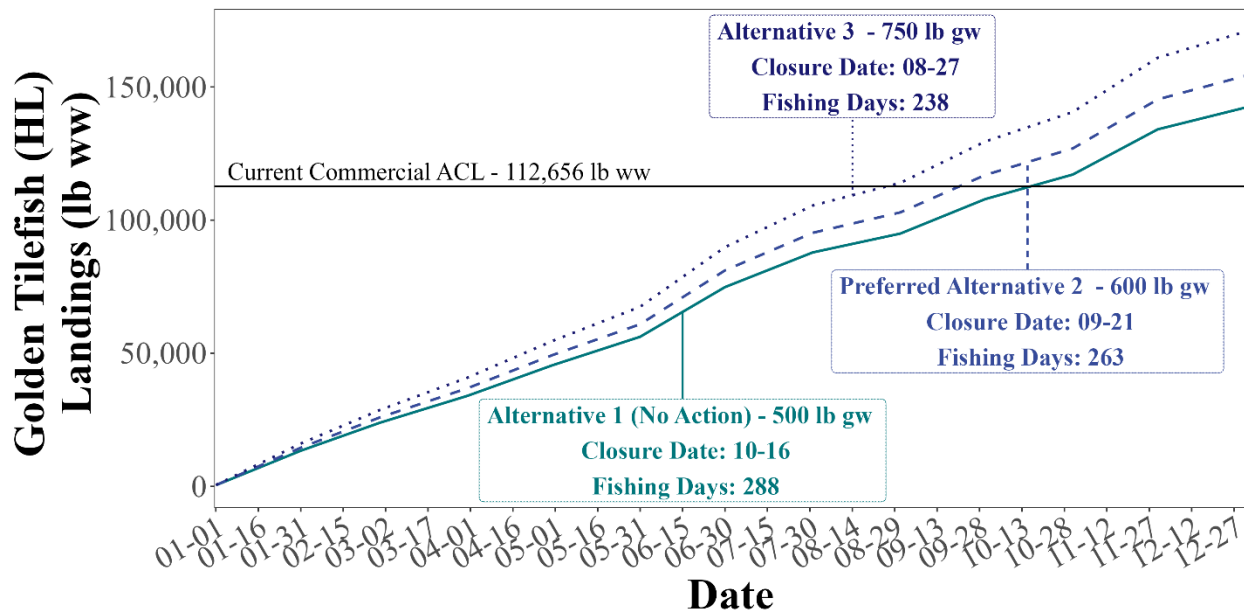


Figure 4.9.1.1. Estimated cumulative golden tilefish (hook and line) landings for each Action 9 commercial trip limit alternative, based on the average landings scenario.

Using average landing histories, closures are predicted on October 16 for **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, to September 21 under **Preferred Alternative 2**, and as early as August 27 under **Alternative 3**. When using high landings, these closure dates begin in late June.

4.9.2. Economic Effects

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset to some extent by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for golden tilefish that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining golden tilefish because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least amount of direct negative economic effects.

Potentially increasing trip limits in **Preferred Alternative 2** or **Alternative 3** would allow for increased revenue on trips that land golden tilefish, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue. Additionally, higher trip limits would lead to better utilization of the commercial sector ACL which would lead to increased total revenue and net economic benefits in the commercial fishery.

Higher trip limits could also likely result in the commercial AMs being triggered sooner, thus creating an earlier commercial harvest closure for the species. Conversely, lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial golden tilefish harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where golden tilefish

are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL.

Since the current section and gear ACL is projected to be met under all of the alternatives examined (Appendix F), total harvest would remain the same between the alternatives and there are no quantitative economic effects that can be estimated for this action. In terms of potential net economic benefits, **Alternative 3**, followed by **Preferred Alternative 2** would provide higher economic benefits than **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above and **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** are expected to increase net economic benefits for seafood dealers.

4.9.3. Social Effects

Preferred Alternative 2 and **Alternative 3** propose higher commercial trip for golden tilefish harvested using hook and line gear and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the proposed increase in commercial trip limit are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of golden tilefish. If the higher commercial trip limit for golden tilefish increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities.

4.9.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, none of the actions alternatives under consideration to modify commercial trip limits would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Golden tilefish (hook and line) is currently managed under a commercial trip limit of 500 pounds. Revising the commercial trip limits will require administrative effort with rulemaking. However, **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** are not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are effective under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

4.10. Action 10. Require sale of all snapper grouper caught on commercial trips

4.10.1. Biological Effects

Action 10 addresses the transaction of fish after they have already been harvested. A requirement to sell commercially harvested fish (**Alternative 2**) would not be expected to result in any change in harvest of snapper grouper species. Therefore, biological effects of **Alternative 2** would be neutral, relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). Commercial snapper grouper harvest is not required to be sold, but if sold, must be sold to a federally-permitted dealer.
2. All snapper grouper harvest on commercial trips is required to be sold to a permitted dealer.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

However, **Alternative 2** may result in effects on biological data from dealer reports. Under current management (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**), fish harvested on commercial trips that are kept for personal consumption are likely not reported by dealers. Dealer reports are typically the primary method for tracking in-season catch. Under **Alternative 2**, fish that are intended for personal consumption would need to be recorded as being sold to the dealer (and thus, included in the dealer's report), then purchased by the fisherman. Depending on how many snapper grouper are currently being harvested by commercial vessels and not being sold, **Alternative 2** may result in some increase to the number of fish reported by dealers, even though the actual number of fish being harvested from snapper grouper stocks is not expected to change. If **Alternative 2** is implemented, any resulting changes to reported commercial harvests should be noted, and effects of this action should be factored into analyses that use these numbers, such as stock assessments and season projections.

4.10.2. Economic Effects

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, snapper grouper harvested on commercial trips could be used for non-commerce purposes such as personal consumption if not sold. While most commercial harvest is sold to federally-permitted dealers, catch that is not sold does provide a benefit for those that consume it.

Requiring all snapper grouper harvested on commercial trips under **Alternative 2** may slightly increase trip revenue for commercial vessels and economic benefits for seafood dealers. The amount of snapper grouper harvested on commercial trips and not sold is likely minimal, thus the economic benefit from requiring sale of all such landings instead of allowing this harvest to be used for other purposes, such as personal consumption, is likely minimal.

In terms of net economic benefits to commercial vessels and dealers, **Alternative 2** would likely allow for higher economic benefits than **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

4.10.3. Social Effects

There has been some concern expressed by the commercial sector that snapper grouper species are being caught recreationally under commercial limits by vessels that hold commercial snapper grouper permits but operate as recreational vessels in that they do not sell their catches. While the extent of this practice is unknown, it has become a source of tension for some in the various sectors in the fishery. **Alternative 2** would require all snapper grouper harvested commercially (above the recreational bag limit) to be sold to a permitted dealer and would be expected to directly affect vessels with a commercial snapper grouper permit harvesting but not selling commercial quantities of snapper grouper species. In the short-term, this action will reduce benefits to individuals harvesting commercial amounts of snapper group species for personal consumption or other uses when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. There is currently limited information on the level of such harvest and thus it is not possible to determine the extent of possible negative social effects.

Alternative 2, while not expected to affect actual harvest of snapper grouper species, would potentially increase the number of fish being reported. Short term negative social effects may be seen if a species' commercial ACL is reached sooner and AMs are triggered. AMs can have significant direct and indirect social effects because, when triggered, they can restrict harvest. While the negative effects are usually short-term, they may at times induce other indirect effects through changes in fishing behavior or business operations that could have long-term social and biological effects, such as increased pressure on another species, or fishermen having to stop fishing due to regulatory closures. However, more accurate reporting of harvest is expected to contribute to sustainable management goals and be beneficial to fishermen and communities in the long term. Additionally, it is not anticipated that a substantial number of fish is being kept for personal consumption and not reported, making the exceeding of commercial ACLs due to **Alternative 2** unlikely.

4.10.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternative 2** would result in minor administrative impacts on the managing agency. The requirement that all snapper grouper harvest on commercial trips be sold to a federally-permitted dealer does not change the administrative framework or enforcement mechanisms currently in place for tracking commercial landings.

Requiring all commercial catches to be funneled through permitted dealers may slightly increase the volume of harvest data processed in dealer reporting databases. Additionally, minor administrative effort would be required for staff to develop and distribute educational and outreach materials to commercial permit holders and dealers regarding compliance.

Enforcement under **Alternative 2** would largely remain similar to status quo. Overall, **Alternative 2** is not expected to significantly increase staff time, require additional agency funding, or overburden current law enforcement operations.

Chapter 5. Council’s Choice for the Preferred Alternative

5.1. Action 1. Remove the 2-for-1 Requirement for the Snapper Grouper Commercial Unlimited Permit

5.1.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.1.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.1.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.1.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

The Council maintains an online form for stakeholders to submit comments throughout the Amendment 60 development process. All comments submitted through this form are available through the [Council’s website](#). Comments on Amendment 60 were also received during Council meetings and meetings of the Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee in [March 2025](#), [June 2025](#), [September 2025](#), [December 2025](#), [March 2026](#), [April 2026](#), and [June 2026](#). Online comments are provided through each meeting’s webpage, and transcripts of verbal public comments submitted during these meetings are available upon request to Council staff.

Online scoping for Amendment 60 was conducted from July 25, 2025, through August 8, 2025. Comments received during scoping are summarized in the [Discussion Document](#) for the Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee Meeting in September 2025.

Public hearings for Amendment 60 will be held on August 10 (Morehead City, NC), 11 (Bolivia, NC), 19 (Jacksonville, FL), and 31 (online), 2026. An additional public hearing will be held on September 16, 2026, during the September Council Meeting’s (Charleston, SC) public comment session. Online comments received by September 1, 2026, will be included in the comment summary provided to the Council during their September meeting.

See the September 2026 Discussion Document for a summary of public comment received through September 1, 2026.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). Retain the two for one requirement for commercial SG 1 permits.

2. Remove the two for one requirement for commercial SG 1 permits.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.1.5. Council Rationale

The Council has discussed benefits of selecting **Preferred Alternative 2** include:

- A simpler process for fishermen to transfer and acquire the SG 1 permit.
- More accessible opportunities for new or younger fishermen to enter the commercial snapper grouper fishery.
- Some potential reduction in the percentage of latent permits, as permit holders who no longer intend to actively participate in the fishery would have an easier process to sell to those who do.

5.2. Action 2. Revise bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species that may be harvested while gear is on board and stowed

5.2.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.2.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.2.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.2.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

See the September 2026 Discussion Document for a summary of public comment received through September 1, 2026.

5.2.5. Council Rationale

The Council has discussed benefits of selecting one of **Alternatives 2** through **4** would include:

- Increased flexibility for commercial fishermen that use bottom longline gear.
- More efficient use of fuel and work time, as harvests from multiple gears that currently require multiple trips could occur within a single trip.

Alternatives

1 (No Action). A commercial vessel with bottom longline gear on board may possess only snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish.

2. Allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than those currently allowed may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed.

3. Allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than those currently allowed may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip must submit a notification at sea, prior to switching to switching gears.

4. Allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than those currently allowed may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip must carry an active vessel monitoring system on board.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.3. Action 3. Increase commercial trip limits for greater amberjack

5.3.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.3.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.3.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.3.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

See the September 2026 Discussion Document for a summary of public comment received through September 1, 2026.

5.3.5. Council Rationale

The Council has discussed the following benefits from selection of a higher trip limit for greater amberjack:

- Enable fishermen to better take advantage of harvest opportunities on trips when greater amberjack are being caught efficiently.
- Provide social and economic benefits to the fishery while continuing to prevent overfishing.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 1 and Season 2 is 1,200 lbs gw.
2. **Increase the greater amberjack Season 1 trip limit to:**
 - 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.
 - 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.**
 - 2c. 2,000 lbs gw.
3. **Increase the greater amberjack Season 2 trip limit to:**
 - 3a. 1,500 lbs gw.
 - 3b. 1,750 lbs gw.**
 - 3c. 2,000 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.4. Action 4. Increase commercial trip limits for vermilion snapper

5.4.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.4.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.4.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.4.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

See the September 2026 Discussion Document for a summary of public comment received through September 1, 2026.

5.4.5. Council Rationale

The Council has discussed the following benefits from selection of a higher trip limit for greater vermilion snapper:

- Enable fishermen to better take advantage of harvest opportunities on trips when vermilion snapper are being caught efficiently.
- Provide social and economic benefits to the fishery while continuing to prevent overfishing.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 1 and Season 2 is 1,000 lbs gw. No process for temporarily adjusting the commercial trip limit is in place.
2. **Increase the Season 1 trip limit to:**
 - 2a. 1,500 lbs gw.**
 - 2b. 1,750 lbs gw.
 - 2c. 2,000 lbs gw
3. **Increase the Season 2 trip limit to:**
 - 3a. 1,500 lbs gw.**
 - 3b. 1,750 lbs gw.
 - 3c. 2,000 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.5. Action 5. Increase commercial trip limits for red porgy

5.5.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.5.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.5.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.5.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

See the September 2026 Discussion Document for a summary of public comment received through September 1, 2026.

5.5.5. Council Rationale

The Council has discussed the following benefits from not increasing the trip limit for red porgy:

- Allow the highest probability for the stock to rebuild when environmental conditions allow.

Alternatives

1. **(No Action).** The current trip limit for red porgy during Season 1 and Season 2 is **15 fish**.
2. Increase the Season 1 trip limit to:
Sub-Alt 2a. 30 fish.
Sub-Alt 2b. 45 fish.
3. Increase the Season 2 trip limit to:
Sub-Alt 3a. 30 fish.
Sub-Alt 3b. 45 fish.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.6. Action 6. Increase commercial trip limit for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina)

5.6.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.6.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.6.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.6.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

See the September 2026 Discussion Document for a summary of public comment received through September 1, 2026.

5.6.5. Council Rationale

The Council has discussed the following benefits from selection of a higher trip limit for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina)

- Enable fishermen to better take advantage of harvest opportunities on trips when hogfish are being caught efficiently.
- Provide social and economic benefits to the fishery while continuing to prevent overfishing.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for GA-NC hogfish is 500 lbs ww.
2. Increase the trip limit to 750 lbs ww.
3. Increase the trip limit to 1,000 lbs ww.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.7. Action 7. Increase commercial trip limit for red grouper

5.7.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.7.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for red grouper is 200 lbs gw.
2. Increase the red grouper trip limit to 300 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.7.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.7.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

See the September 2026 Discussion Document for a summary of public comment received through September 1, 2026.

5.7.5. Council Rationale

The Council has discussed the following benefits from selection of a higher trip limit for red grouper:

- Enable fishermen to better take advantage of harvest opportunities on trips when red grouper are being caught efficiently.
- Provide social and economic benefits to the fishery while continuing to prevent overfishing and rebuild the stock.

5.8. Action 8. Increase commercial trip limits for gray triggerfish

5.8.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.8.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for gray triggerfish is 1,000 lbs ww.
2. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,200 lbs ww.
3. Increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish to 1,400 lbs ww.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.8.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.8.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

See the September 2026 Discussion Document for a summary of public comment received through September 1, 2026.

5.8.5. Council Rationale

The Council has discussed the following benefits from selection of a higher trip limit for gray triggerfish:

- Enable fishermen to better take advantage of harvest opportunities on trips when gray triggerfish are being caught efficiently.
- Provide social and economic benefits to the fishery.

5.9. Action 9. Increase commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line only)

5.9.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.9.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.9.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.9.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

See the September 2026 Discussion Document for a summary of public comment received through September 1, 2026.

5.9.5. Council Rationale

The Council has discussed the following benefits from selection of a higher trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line only):

- Enable fishermen to better take advantage of harvest opportunities on trips when golden tilefish are being caught efficiently.
- Provide social and economic benefits to the fishery while continuing to prevent overfishing.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). The current trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line only) is 500 lbs gw.
2. **Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 600 lbs gw.**
3. Increase the commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line) to 750 lbs gw.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

5.10. Action 10. Require sale of all snapper grouper caught on commercial trips

5.10.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.10.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.10.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

Will be completed later in the development process.

5.10.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

See the September 2026 Discussion Document for a summary of public comment received through September 1, 2026.

5.10.5. Council Rationale

The Council has discussed the following benefits from requiring sale of snapper grouper harvested on commercial trips:

- Ensure that commercial snapper grouper permits are used to harvest snapper grouper that are intended for sale.
- Improve data used for in-season monitoring of commercial catches by accounting for fish that are caught but not currently included in dealer reports.

Alternatives

1. (No Action). Commercial snapper grouper harvest is not required to be sold, but if sold, must be sold to a federally-permitted dealer.
2. All snapper grouper harvest on commercial trips is required to be sold to a permitted dealer.

*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. **Preferred indicated in bold.**

Chapter 6. Cumulative Effects

6.1. Affected Area

The immediate impact area would be the federal 200-mile limit of the Atlantic off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida to Key West (South Atlantic exclusive economic zone [EEZ]), which is also the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) area of jurisdiction. In light of the available information, the extent of the boundaries would depend upon the degree of fish immigration/emigration and larval transport, whichever has the greatest geographical range. The ranges of affected species are described in Volume II of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan. For the proposed actions found in Amendment 60 the cumulative effects analysis includes an analysis of data from 2020 through 2024.

6.2. Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions Impacting the Affected Area

The complete history of management of the snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic region can be found on the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) website ([Rules and Regulations webpage](#)) and on the Council website ([Snapper Grouper FMP webpage](#)). Described below are the most relevant past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

Past Actions

- Regulatory Amendment 27 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2019): Established commercial split seasons and revised commercial trip limits for greater amberjack, red porgy, and vermilion snapper.
- Regulatory Amendment 30 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2019): Established a commercial trip limit for red grouper, revised the rebuilding timeframe, and modified seasonal spawning closures off the Carolinas.
- Amendment 49 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2023): Increased the Season 2 commercial trip limit for greater amberjack to 1,200 lbs ww or gw, revised sector allocations, and updated spawning closures.
- Amendment 50 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2023): Decreased the commercial trip limit for red porgy to 15 fish and established a rebuilding plan.
- Amendment 53 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2023): Addressed stock assessment results for South Atlantic gag grouper, establishing a rebuilding plan, adjusting catch levels, and setting recreational vessel limits.

Present Actions

- Amendment 54 to the Snapper Grouper FMP: Proposes to establish electronic logbook reporting requirements for commercial vessels participating in South Atlantic fisheries.
- Amendment 55 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (under development): Proposes to implement a rebuilding plan, catch level revisions, sector allocations, and accountability measures for the scamp and yellowmouth grouper complex.
- Amendment 56 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (under development): Responds to the SEDAR 76 stock assessment for South Atlantic black sea bass by evaluating revisions to catch levels, sector allocations, stock status determination criteria, and management measures.

Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

- Regulatory Amendment 39 to the Snapper Grouper FMP: Evaluates the sun-setting of Spawning Special Management Zones
- Amendment 40 to the Snapper Grouper FMP: Evaluates the re-opening of seasonal nearshore closed areas to on-demand black sea bass pots and modifies the commercial trip limit for pots.
- Amendment 61 to the Snapper Grouper FMP: Evaluates the revision of the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

6.3. Consideration of Climate Change and Other Non-Fishery Related Issues

Climate Change

Climate Change

Global climate changes could have significant effects on Atlantic fisheries, though the extent of these effects on the snapper grouper fishery is not known at this time. The Environmental Protection Agency's climate change webpage (<https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/marine-species-distribution>), and NOAA's Office of Science and Technology climate webpage (<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/climate>), provides background information on climate change, including indicators which measure or anticipate effects on oceans, weather and climate, ecosystems, health and society, and greenhouse gases. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report (February 28, 2022), U.S. Global Change Research Program (USGCRP)'s Fourth Climate Assessment (2018), and the Ecosystem Status Report for the U.S. South Atlantic Region (Craig et al. 2021) also provide a compilation of scientific information on climate change. Those findings are summarized below.

Ocean acidification, or a decrease in surface ocean pH due to absorption of anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions, affects the chemistry and temperature of the water. Increased thermal stratification alters ocean circulation patterns, and causes a loss of sea ice, sea level rise, increased wave height and frequency, reduced upwelling, and changes in precipitation and wind patterns. Changes in coastal and marine ecosystems can influence organism metabolism and

alter ecological processes such as productivity, species interactions, migration, range and distribution, larval and juvenile survival, prey availability, and susceptibility to predators. The “center of biomass,” a geographical representation of each species’ weight distribution, is being used to identify the shifting of fish populations. Warming sea temperature trends in the southeast have been documented, and animals must migrate to cooler waters, if possible, if water temperatures exceed survivable ranges (Needham et al. 2012). Rising water temperatures, ocean acidification, retreating arctic sea ice, sea level rise, high-tide flooding, coastal erosion, higher storm surge, and heavier precipitation events are projected to continue, putting ocean and marine species at risk, decreasing the productivity of certain fisheries, and threatening communities that rely on marine ecosystems for livelihoods and recreation (USGCRP 2018). Harvesting and habitat changes also cause geographic population shifts. Changes in water temperatures may also affect the distribution of native and exotic species, allowing invasive species to establish communities in areas they may not have been able to survive previously. The numerous changes to the marine ecosystem may cause an increased risk of disease in marine biota. An increase in the occurrence and intensity of toxic algae blooms will negatively influence the productivity of keystone animals, such as corals, and critical coastal ecosystems such as wetlands, estuaries, and coral reefs (Kennedy et al. 2002; IPCC 2022). Free et al. (2019) investigated the impacts of historical warming on marine fisheries production and found that climate change is altering habitats for marine fishes and invertebrates, but the net effect of these changes on potential food production is unknown.

Climate driven movement of fish stocks is causing commercial, small-scale, artisanal, and recreational fishing activities to shift poleward and diversify harvests (IPCC 2022). In the South Atlantic Region, species richness and abundance of offshore hard bottom reef fishes have generally declined over time while richness and abundance of demersal fishes in soft sediment habitats on the nearshore shelf have increased. Potential explanations for these patterns include changes in harvest (directed and bycatch), trophic interactions, and environmental effects on recruitment (Craig et al. 2021). Climate change may impact snapper grouper species in the future, but the level of impacts cannot be quantified at this time, nor is the time frame known in which these impacts will occur.

Patterns from stock assessments in the South Atlantic Region indicate biomass of most assessed species generally show declines from the 1970s through the 1990s with some species showing signs of recovery beginning in the early to mid-2000s. Recruitment of a number of snapper grouper species has declined since the early 2010s; whereas, recruitment of red snapper and some pelagic species has increased in recent years (Craig et al. 2021). In the near term, it is unlikely that the actions in Amendment 60 would compound or exacerbate the ongoing effects of climate change snapper grouper species.

Weather Variables

Hurricane season is from June 1 to November 30, and accounts for 97% of all tropical activity affecting the Atlantic basin. These storms, although unpredictable in their annual occurrence, can devastate areas when they occur. Although these effects may be temporary, those fishing related businesses whose profitability is marginal may go out of business if a hurricane strikes.

6.4. Overall Impacts Expected from Past, Present, and Future Actions

The proposed management actions are summarized in Chapter 2 of this document. Detailed discussions of the magnitude and significance of the impacts of the alternatives on the human environment appear in Chapter 4 of this document. None of the impacts of the actions in this amendment, in combination with past, present, and future actions have been determined to be significant. Although several other management actions, in addition to this amendment, are expected to affect snapper grouper species, any additive effects, beneficial and adverse, are not expected to result in a significant level of cumulative impacts.

The proposed actions would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as these are not in the South Atlantic EEZ. These actions are not likely to result in direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to unique areas, such as significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, park land, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas as the proposed action is not expected to substantially increase fishing effort or the spatial and/or temporal distribution of current fishing effort within the South Atlantic region. The U.S.S. Monitor, Gray's Reef, and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuaries are within the boundaries of the South Atlantic EEZ. The proposed actions are not likely to cause loss or destruction of these national marine sanctuaries because the actions are not expected to result in appreciable changes to current fishing practices. Additionally, the proposed actions are not likely to change the way in which the snapper grouper fishery is prosecuted; therefore, the actions are not expected to result in adverse impacts on health or human safety beyond the status quo.

6.5. Monitoring and Mitigation

Fishery-independent and fishery-dependent data comprise a significant portion of information used in stock assessments. Fishery-independent data are being collected through the Southeast Fishery Information Survey and the Marine Resources Monitoring Assessment and Prediction Program. The effects of the proposed actions are, and would continue to be, monitored through collection of recreational landings data by all the four states in the South Atlantic Region (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina). NMFS would continue to monitor and collect information on snapper grouper species for stock assessments and stock assessment updates, life history studies, economic and social analyses, and other scientific observations. The proposed actions relate to the harvest of indigenous species in the Atlantic, and the activities/regulations being altered do not introduce nonindigenous species and are not reasonably expected to facilitate the spread of such species through depressing the populations of native species. Additionally, these alternatives do not propose any activity, such as increased ballast water discharge from foreign vessels, which is associated with the introduction or spread on non-indigenous species.

Chapter 7. List of Preparers

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Brendan Mackesey	NOAA GC	NOAA General Counsel
Matt Walia	OLE	Compliance Liaison
Scott Crosson	SEFSC	Economist

IPT = Interdisciplinary Planning Team, SAFMC = South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, SERO = Southeast Regional Office, SF = Sustainable Fisheries Division, PR = Protected Resources Division, HC = Habitat Conservation Division, NOAA=National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, GC = General Counsel, OLE = Office of Law Enforcement, SEFSC = Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

Chapter 8. Agencies and Persons Consulted

Responsible Agencies

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4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
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843-571-4366/ 866-SAFMC-10 (TEL)
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NMFS, Southeast Region
263 13th Avenue South
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727- 824-5301 (TEL)
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List of Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Consulted

SAFMC Law Enforcement Advisory Panel
SAFMC Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel
SAFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee
North Carolina Coastal Zone Management Program
South Carolina Coastal Zone Management Program
Georgia Coastal Zone Management Program
Florida Coastal Zone Management Program
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Georgia Department of Natural Resources
South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries
North Carolina Sea Grant
South Carolina Sea Grant
Georgia Sea Grant
Florida Sea Grant
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
National Marine Fisheries Service
-Washington Office
-Office of Ecology and Conservation
-Southeast Regional Office
-Southeast Fisheries Science Center

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Appendix A. Other Applicable Law

A.1. Administrative Procedure Act (APA)

All federal rulemaking is governed under the provisions of the APA (5 U.S.C. Subchapter II), which establishes a “notice and comment” procedure to enable public participation in the rulemaking process. The APA also establishes a 30-day wait period from the time a final rule is published until it takes effect, with some exceptions. This amendment, issued under section 304(c)(1)(A) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), complies with the APA.

A.2. Information Quality Act (IQA)

The IQA (Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law 106-443)) which took effect October 1, 2002, directed the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to issue government-wide guidelines that “provide policy and procedural guidelines to federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information disseminated by federal agencies.” OMB directed each federal agency to issue its own guidelines, establish administrative mechanisms allowing affected persons to seek and obtain correction of information that does not comply with OMB guidelines, and report periodically to OMB on the number and nature of complaints. The NOAA Section 515 Information Quality Guidelines require a series of actions for each new information product subject to the IQA. This environmental assessment uses the best scientific information available and the document is in compliance with the IQA.

A.3. Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA)

Section 307(c)(1) of the federal CZMA of 1972 requires that all federal activities that directly affect the coastal zone be consistent with approved state coastal zone management programs to the maximum extent practicable. NMFS has determined that the actions in this amendment are consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the Coastal Zone Management Plans of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. Pursuant to Section 307 of the CZMA, this determination was been submitted to the responsible state agencies who administer the approved Coastal Zone Management Programs in the States of Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, and North Carolina. NMFS has responded to any state objections as required under the CZMA and its implementing regulations.

A.4. Executive Order 12612: Federalism

Executive Order (E.O.) 12612 requires agencies to be guided by the fundamental federalism principles when formulating and implementing policies that have federalism implications. The purpose of the Order is to guarantee the division of governmental responsibilities between the federal government and the states, as intended by the framers of the Constitution. No federalism issues have been identified relative to the proposed action and associated regulations. Therefore, preparation of a Federalism assessment under E.O. 12612 is not necessary.

A.5. Executive Order 12962: Recreational Fisheries

E.O. 12962 requires federal agencies, in cooperation with states and tribes, to improve the quantity, function, sustainable productivity, and distribution of U.S. aquatic resources for increased recreational fishing opportunities through a variety of methods. Additionally, the Order establishes a seven-member National Recreational Fisheries Coordination Council responsible for, among other things, ensuring that social and economic values of healthy aquatic systems that support recreational fisheries are considered by federal agencies in the course of their actions, sharing the latest resource information and management technologies, and reducing duplicative and cost-inefficient programs among federal agencies involved in conserving or managing recreational fisheries. The National Recreational Fisheries Coordination Council also is responsible for developing, in cooperation with federal agencies, states and tribes, a Recreational Fishery Resource Conservation Plan to include a five-year agenda. Finally, the Order requires NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a joint agency policy for administering the ESA.

The alternatives considered in this document are consistent with the directives of E.O. 12962.

A.6. Executive Order 13089: Coral Reef Protection

E.O. 13089, signed by President William Clinton on June 11, 1998, recognizes the ecological, social, and economic values provided by the Nation's coral reefs and ensures that federal agencies are protecting these ecosystems. More specifically, the Order requires federal agencies to identify actions that may harm U.S. coral reef ecosystems, to utilize their program and authorities to protect and enhance the conditions of such ecosystems, and to ensure that their actions do not degrade the condition of the coral reef ecosystem.

The alternatives considered in this document are consistent with the directives of E.O. 13089.

A.7. Executive Order 13158: Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

E.O. 13158 was signed on May 26, 2000, to strengthen the protection of U.S. ocean and coastal resources through the use of MPAs. The E.O. defined MPAs as "any area of the marine environment that has been reserved by federal, state, territorial, tribal, or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein." It directs federal agencies to work closely with state, local and non-governmental partners to create a comprehensive network of MPAs "representing diverse U.S. marine ecosystems, and the Nation's natural and cultural resources."

The alternatives considered in this document are consistent with the directives of E.O. 13158.

A.8. National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA)

Under the NMSA (also known as Title III of the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act of 1972), as amended, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce is authorized to designate National Marine Sanctuaries to protect distinctive natural and cultural resources whose protection and

beneficial use requires comprehensive planning and management. The National Marine Sanctuary Program is administered by the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries within NOAA. The NMSA provides authority for comprehensive and coordinated conservation and management of these marine areas. The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries serves as the trustee for a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 629,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington state to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. The network includes a system of 15 national marine sanctuaries and Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll marine national monuments. These sites include significant coral reef and kelp forest habitats, and breeding and feeding grounds of whales, sea lions, sharks, and sea turtles. The three sanctuaries in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone are the USS Monitor, Gray's Reef, and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuaries.

The alternatives considered in this document are not expected to have any adverse impacts on the resources managed by the National Marine Sanctuaries Program.

A.9. Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA)

The purpose of the PRA is to minimize the burden on the public. The PRA is intended to ensure that the information collected under the proposed action is needed and is collected in an efficient manner (44 U.S.C. 3501 (1)). The authority to manage information collection and record keeping requirements is vested with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). This authority encompasses establishment of guidelines and policies, approval of information collection requests, and reduction of paperwork burdens and duplications. The PRA requires NMFS to obtain approval from the OMB before requesting most types of fishery information from the public.

The actions in this document are not expected to affect PRA.

A.10.Small Business Act (SBA)

Enacted in 1953, the SBA requires that agencies assist and protect small-business interests to the extent possible to preserve free competitive enterprise. The objectives of the SBA are to foster business ownership by individuals who are both socially and economically disadvantaged; and to promote the competitive viability of such firms by providing business development assistance including, but not limited to, management and technical assistance, access to capital and other forms of financial assistance, business training, and counseling, and access to sole source and limited competition federal contract opportunities, to help firms achieve competitive viability. Because most businesses associated with fishing are considered small businesses, NMFS, in implementing regulations, must make an assessment of how those regulations will affect small businesses.

A.11.Public Law 99-659: Vessel Safety

Public Law 99-659 amended the Magnuson-Stevens Act to require that an FMP or FMP amendment must consider, and may provide for, temporary adjustments (after consultation with the U.S. Coast Guard and persons utilizing the fishery) regarding access to a fishery for vessels that would be otherwise prevented from participating in the fishery because of safety concerns

related to weather or to other ocean conditions. No vessel would be forced to participate in South Atlantic fisheries under adverse weather or ocean conditions as a result of the imposition of management regulations proposed in this amendment.

Appendix B. Regulatory Impact Review

B.1. Introduction

Text.

B.2. Problems and Objectives

Text.

B.3. Description of Fisheries

Text.

B.4. Effects of Management Measures

Action 1. Reduce the acceptable biological catch, total annual catch limit, and sector annual catch limits, and establish an annual optimum yield for South Atlantic red snapper

Text.

Action 2. Prohibit the use of more than one hook per line for the snapper grouper recreational sector

Text.

B.5. Public Costs of Regulations

Text.

B.6. Net Benefits of Regulatory Action

Text.

B.7. Determination of Significant Regulatory Action

Text.

Appendix C. Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis

C.1. Introduction

Text.

C.2. Statement of the Need for, Objective of, and Legal Basis for the Proposed Action

Text.

C.3. Description and Estimate of the Number of Small Entities to Which the Proposed Action Would Apply

Text.

C.4. Description of the Projected Reporting, Record-Keeping and Other Compliance Requirements of the Proposed Action, Including an Estimate of the Classes of Small Entities Which Will Be Subject to the Requirement and the Type of Professional Skills Necessary for the Preparation of the Report or Records

Text.

C.5. Identification of All Relevant Federal Rules, Which May Duplicate, Overlap, or Conflict with the Proposed Action

Text.

C.6. Significance of Economic Impacts on a Substantial Number of Small Entities

Substantial Number of Small Entities Criterion

Text.

Significant Economic Impact Criterion

The outcome of “significant economic impact” can be ascertained by examining two factors: disproportionality and profitability.

Disproportionality: Do the regulations place a substantial number of small entities at a significant competitive disadvantage to large entities?

No entities are expected to be directly affected by this regulatory action. Thus, the issue of disproportionality does not arise in the present case.

Profitability: Do the regulations significantly reduce profits for a substantial number of small entities?

No entities are expected to be directly affected by this regulatory action and therefore profits would also not be expected to be affected.

Based on the information above, a significant reduction in profits for a substantial number of small entities is not expected as a result of this proposed regulatory action.

C.7. Description of the Significant Alternatives to the Proposed Action and Discussion of How the Alternatives Attempt to Minimize Economic Impacts on Small Entities

Text.

Appendix D. Essential Fish Habitat and Move to Ecosystem Based Management

D.1. EFH and EFH-HAPC Designations and Cooperative Habitat Policy Development and Protection

D.1.1. Summary

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requires federal fishery management councils and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to designate essential fish habitat (EFH) for species managed under federal fishery management plans (FMP). Federal regulations that implement the EFH program encourage fishery management councils and NMFS to designate subsets of EFH to highlight priority areas for conservation and management. These subsets of EFH are called EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (EFH-HAPCs or HAPCs) and are designated based on ecological importance, susceptibility to human-induced environmental degradation, susceptibility to stress from development, or rarity of the habitat type.

Information supporting EFH and EFH-HAPC designations was updated (pursuant to the EFH Final Rule) in Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) II (SAFMC 2018). Additional detailed information supporting the EFH designations appears in FEP I (SAFMC 2009a), individual FMPs, general information on the EFH provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and its implementing regulations (50 CFR 900 Subparts J and K), and the [EFH User Guide \(SAFMC 2024\)](#).

In addition to implementing regulations to protect habitat from degradation due to fishing activities, the Council cooperates with NMFS to comment on non-fishing projects or policies that may impact EFH. The Council established a Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel (AP) and adopted a comment and policy development process that was recently revised in the Habitat Blueprint (SAFMC 2023). Members of the AP serve as the Council's habitat contacts and professionals in the field and have guided the Council's development of the policy statements. To access these policy statements, refer to the habitat website: <https://safmc.net/fishery-management-plans/habitat/>.

D.1.2. Habitat Conservation

The Council has been proactive in advancing habitat conservation through extensive fishing gear restrictions in all Council FMPs and by directly managing habitat and fisheries affecting those habitats through two FMPs: the FMP for Coral, Coral Reefs and Live/Hard Bottom Habitat of the South Atlantic Region (Coral FMP; SAFMC 1984) and the FMP for the Sargassum Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (SAFMC 2003).

D.1.3. Ecosystem Approach to Conservation and Management of Deep-water Ecosystems

Building on the long-term conservation approach, the Council facilitated the evolution of the Habitat Plan into FEP and FEP II to assemble information on the physical, biological, and human/institutional context of ecosystems within which fisheries are managed. These two documents were intended to initiate the transition from single species management to Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management (EBFM) in the region. To support this, the South Atlantic Council adopted broad goals: (1) maintaining or improving ecosystem structure and function; (2) maintaining or improving economic, social, and cultural benefits from resources; and (3) maintaining or improving biological and cultural diversity.

Through Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1 (CE-BA 1; SAFMC 2009b), Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 2 (SAFMC 2011), and Coral Amendment 8 (SAFMC 2013), the South Atlantic Council established and expanded deep-water coral HAPCs (CHAPCs) and co-designated them as EFH-HAPCs.

D.2. EFH for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP

EFH for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP includes coral reefs, live/hard bottom, submerged aquatic vegetation, artificial reefs and medium to high profile outcroppings on and around the shelf break zone from shore to at least 183 meters (m) (but to at least 610 m for wreckfish) where the annual water temperature range is sufficiently warm to maintain adult populations of members of this largely tropical complex. EFH includes the spawning area in the water column above the adult habitat and the additional pelagic environment, including *Sargassum*, required for larval survival and growth, up to and including settlement. In addition, the Gulf Stream is an EFH because it provides a mechanism to disperse snapper grouper species larvae.

For specific life stages of estuarine dependent and nearshore snapper grouper species, EFH includes areas inshore of the 31 m contour, such as attached macroalgae; submerged rooted vascular plants (seagrasses); estuarine emergent vegetated wetlands (saltmarshes, brackish marsh); tidal creeks; estuarine scrub/shrub (mangrove fringe); oyster reefs and shell banks; unconsolidated bottom (soft sediments); artificial reefs; and coral reefs and live/hard bottom.

D.3. HAPC for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP

EFH-HAPC for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP include medium to high profile offshore hard bottoms where spawning normally occurs; localities of known or likely periodic spawning aggregations; nearshore hard bottom areas; The Point, The Ten Fathom Ledge, and Big Rock (North Carolina); The Charleston Bump (South Carolina); mangrove habitat; seagrass habitat; oyster/shell habitat; all coastal inlets; all state-designated nursery habitats of particular importance to snapper grouper (e.g., Primary and Secondary Nursery Areas designated in North Carolina); pelagic and benthic *Sargassum*; Hoyt Hills for wreckfish; the Oculina Bank HAPC; all hermatypic coral habitats and reefs; manganese outcroppings on the Blake Plateau; and Council-designated Special Management Zones (SMZ). Areas that meet the

criteria for EFH-HAPCs include habitats required during each life stage (including egg, larval, post-larval, juvenile, and adult stages).

EFH-HAPCs for Golden Tilefish includes irregular bottom comprised of troughs and terraces intermingled with sand, mud, or shell hash bottom. Mud-clay bottoms in depths of 150-300 m are HAPC. Golden tilefish are generally found in 80-540 m, but most commonly found in 200 m depths. EFH-HAPC for Blueline Tilefish includes irregular bottom habitats along the shelf edge in 45-65 m depth; shelf break; or upper slope along the 100-fathom contour (150-225 m); hard bottom habitats characterized as rock overhangs, rock outcrops, manganese-phosphorite rock slab formations, or rocky reefs in the South Atlantic Bight; and the Georgetown Hole (Charleston Lumps) off Georgetown, South Carolina.

EFH-HAPCs for the Snapper Grouper complex include the following deep-water marine protected areas (MPA) as designated in Amendment 14 to the Snapper Grouper FMP: Snowy Grouper Wreck MPA, Northern South Carolina MPA, Edisto MPA, Charleston Deep Artificial Reef MPA, Georgia MPA, North Florida MPA, St. Lucie Hump MPA, and East Hump MPA.

The Council established the Special management Zone (SMZ) designation process in 1983 in the Snapper Grouper FMP, and SMZs have been designated in federal waters off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida since that time. The purpose of the original SMZ designation process, and the subsequent specification of SMZs, was to protect snapper grouper populations at the relatively small, permitted artificial reef sites and “create fishing opportunities that would not otherwise exist.” Thus, the SMZ designation process was centered on protecting the relatively small habitats, which are known to attract desirable snapper grouper species.

In CE-BA 1 (SAFMC 2009b), the Council determined that SMZs met the criteria to be EFH-HAPCs for species included in the Snapper Grouper FMP. Since CE-BA 1, the Council has designated additional SMZs in the Snapper Grouper FMP including Spawning SMZs. The SMZ and EFH-HAPC designations serve similar purposes in identifying and protecting valuable and unique habitat for the benefit of fish populations, which are important to both fish and fishers. Therefore, the Council determined that a designated SMZ meets the criteria for an EFH-HAPC designation, and the Council intends that all SMZs designated under the Snapper Grouper FMP also be designated as EFH-HAPCs under the Snapper Grouper FMP.

D.4. References

GMFMC (Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 1984. [FMP for Coral, Coral Reefs of the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic \(Coral FMP\)](#). Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council 4107 W Spruce St #200, Tampa, FL 33607 and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2003. [Fishery Management Plan for the Sargassum Fishery of the South Atlantic Region](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2009a. [Fishery Ecosystem Plan I of the South Atlantic Region](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2009b. [Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1 for the South Atlantic Region](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201; North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2011. [Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 2 for the South Atlantic Region](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201; North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2013. [Amendment 8 to the Fishery Management Plan for Coral, Coral Reefs, and Live/Hardbottom Habitats of the South Atlantic Region](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201; North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2018. [Fishery Ecosystem Plan II of the South Atlantic Region](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2023. [South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Habitat Program Evaluation and Blueprint](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2024. [Users Guide to Essential Fish Habitat Designations by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council](#). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

Appendix E. Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

Text.

Appendix F. Data Analyses

F.1. Analysis of Season Duration in Response to Proposed Measures to Increase Commercial Trip Limits in the South Atlantic

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council has discussed mechanisms to enable commercial fishermen to more efficiently harvest fish and reach the annual catch limits (ACL) set for their sector. Regulatory Amendment 60 includes actions aimed at increasing the commercial trip limit for several species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. The Council narrowed the focus of species to include: greater amberjack (Action 3), vermilion snapper (Action 4), red porgy (Action 5), Georgia to North Carolina hogfish (Action 6), red grouper (Action 7), gray triggerfish (Action 8), and the hook and line component of the golden tilefish fleet (Action 9). This analysis investigates current harvest trends for each species and provides season duration projections for each proposed commercial trip limit action alternative.

F.1.1. Data Sources

The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) compiles monitoring datasets that are used to track landings of all federally managed species in the commercial sector. Commercial landings come from dealer reports provided to the SEFSC (SEFSC Commercial ACL Monitoring Dataset – September 22, 2025) were used to provide summaries of harvest levels. Commercial logbook records were aggregated to describe the magnitude of harvest on individual commercial fishing trips (SEFSC Commercial Coastal Logbook Dataset – May 13, 2025). Lastly, biological data from the Trip Information Program (TIP) was used to calculate the average weight for fish species with trip limits monitored in number of fish instead of pounds. This report will use these data sources to describe the harvest conditions and project the season duration for each species.

F.1.2. Season Duration Analysis – Methodology

This analysis used the same approach to estimate the season duration for each of the proposed commercial trip limit increases of Snapper Grouper species in Actions 3-8. First, the landings history for each species was reviewed to understand how the harvest trajectory has changed over recent years, in relation to the ACL associated with each species. The landings were aggregated annually, by species and fishing season for the last ten years (2015-2024). These landings histories were reduced in some cases to exclude years with different management regimes (e.g. introduction of split seasons, geographic stratification, gear stratification, etc). Species with smaller differences between the current landing levels and the ACL were expected to have a higher likelihood of efficiency improvements for commercial fishermen.

Next, the last five years of commercial logbook records (2020-2024) were used to investigate the scale of harvest at the trip level, by species and fishing season. The total landings for each trip record were binned by total pounds or number of fish harvested, and proportion of trips within each bin was aggregated and averaged over the 5 year time period. This distribution identified the proportion of trips landing each species, over an increasing gradient of harvest. To evaluate each proposed trip limit alternative, it was assumed that fishermen who currently land the trip

limit would likely harvest the new higher proposed trip limit. A percent increase in harvest was then calculated for each proposed trip limit alternative, by determining the magnitude of additional harvest possible if all fishermen who land within 10% of the current trip limit instead landed the higher proposed trip limit values. After developing this scalar to represent the expected increase associated with each proposed alternative, the magnitude of daily harvest under the existing trip limit regime was calculated. The last 3 years of landings data were aggregated and averaged by month, the finest temporal scale available, for each species and fishing season. The average monthly landings were then divided by the number of days each month, to create a uniform daily harvest rate within each month. Three landings estimates were used to provide projections that incorporated uncertainty to capture the variability in harvest in recent years: average landings – 1 standard error, average landings, and average landings + 1 standard error. These harvest rates characterized the recent landing behavior for each species, highlighting how landings fluctuate over the course of the fishing season.

The evaluation of potential closure dates was accomplished by scaling the average daily landings rate by the percent increases associated with each trip limit alternative. The scaled daily landings estimates were then summed cumulatively and compared to the current ACL for each species and fishing season to determine if and when the fishery was projected to exceed the ACL and the total number of open fishing days for each scenario. The following sections of the analysis will summarize the analytical results for each species and fishing season.

F.1.3. Action 3 – Greater Amberjack

Greater amberjack are managed in two split seasons: Season 1 – March to August and Season 2 – September to February. For Season 1, the landings have showed a flat trend since 2019, with landings of approximately 300,000 lb gw per year, while landings in Season 2 have oscillated between 100,000 and 200,000 lb gw for the last 10 years (Figures F.1 and F.2). These annual landings levels are near or below 50% of the ACL for each season. The distribution of greater amberjack landings per trip shows only a small proportion of trips harvest within 10% of the current commercial trip limit, 6 % in Season 1 and 2% in Season 2 (Figures F.3 and F.4). The scalars generated by assuming those trips landing within 10% of the trip limit would land the new proposed commercial trip limits estimate the percent increase in landings to range from 18 to 30% for Season 1 and 2 to 6% in Season 2. The monthly landings of greater amberjack are highest in May for Season 1, while the rest of the open months of that season have landings around 50,000 lb gw (Figure F.5). In Season 2, landings for greater amberjack range between 10,000 to 40,000 lb gw (Figure F.6). The daily harvest rates calculated to represent low, average and high landings scenarios were upweighted by the scalars, summed cumulatively over the course of each fishing season, and compared to the current ACL to determine potential closure dates (Table F.1 and F.2). No seasonal closures were projected, for either commercial greater amberjack split season. The average landings scenario was plotted to show a visual representation of cumulative landings for each proposed commercial trip limit alternative in Action 3 (Figure F.7 and F.8), for each greater amberjack split season.

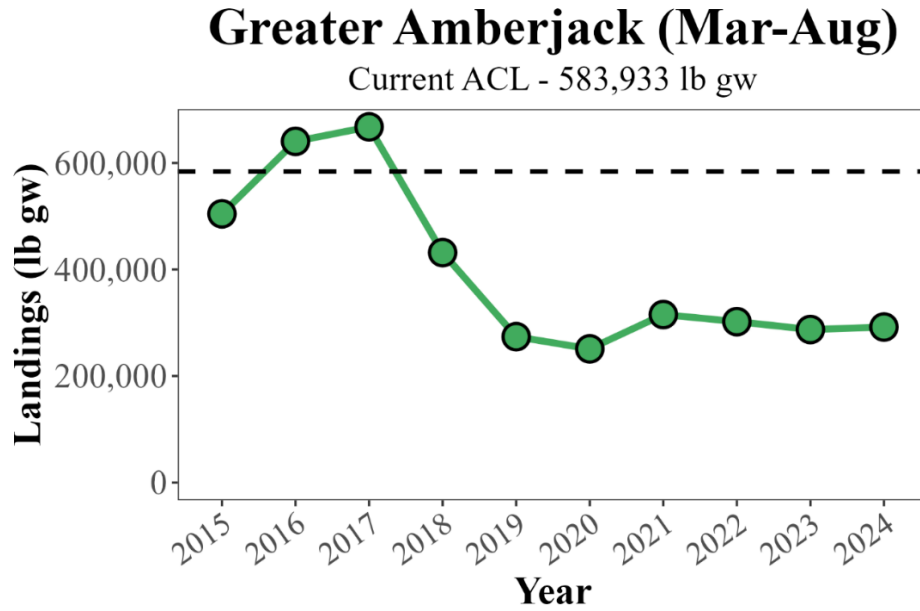


Figure F.1. Landings for South Atlantic greater amberjack during Season 1 (March to August) of the commercial fishing season, for the last 10 years (2015-2024).

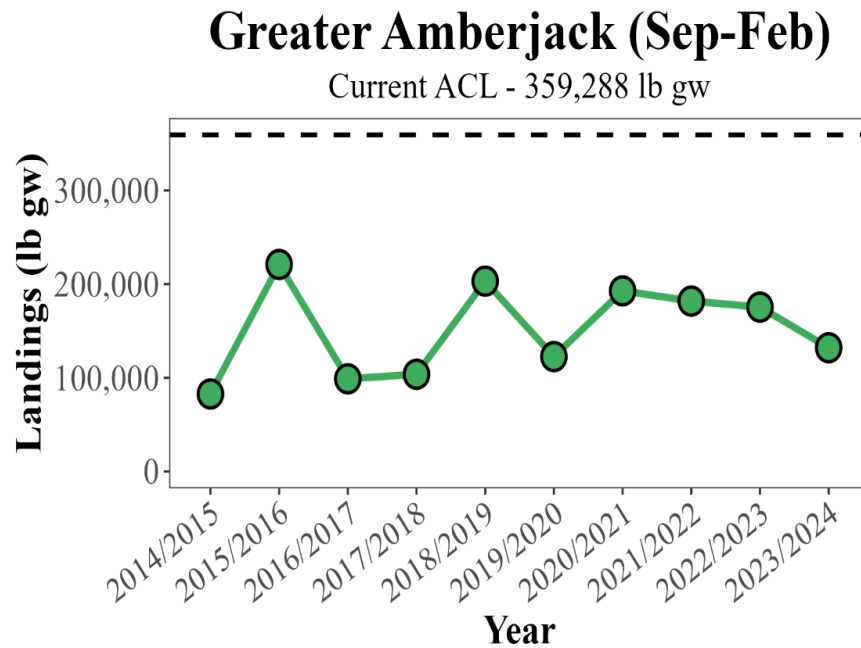


Figure F.2. Landings for South Atlantic greater amberjack during Season 2 (September to February) of the commercial fishing season, for the last 10 fishing seasons (2014/2015-2023/2024).

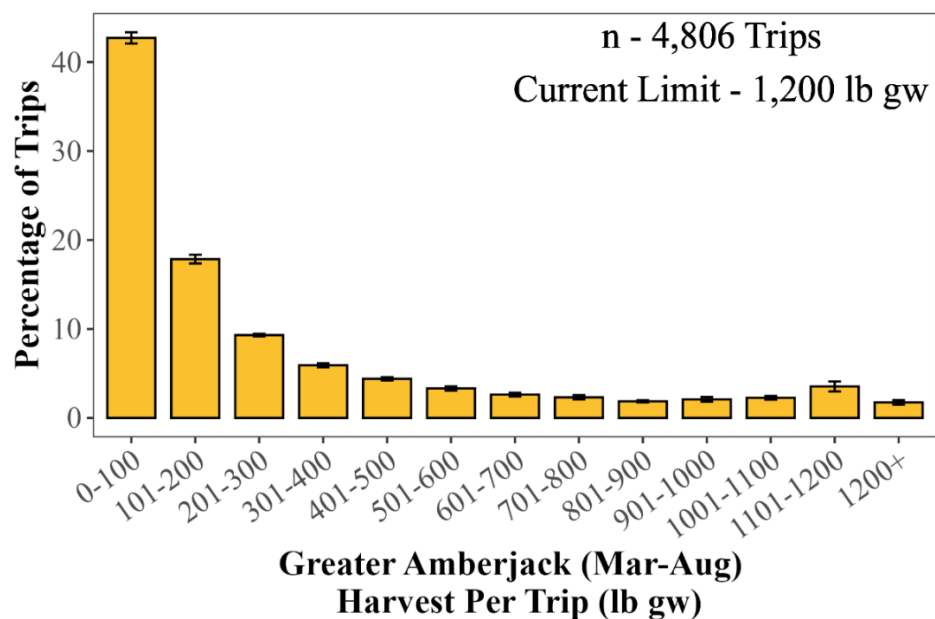


Figure F.3. Distribution of South Atlantic commercial trip harvest of greater amberjack during Season 1 (March to August) in 100 lb gw bins, data records aggregated between 2020 and 2024.

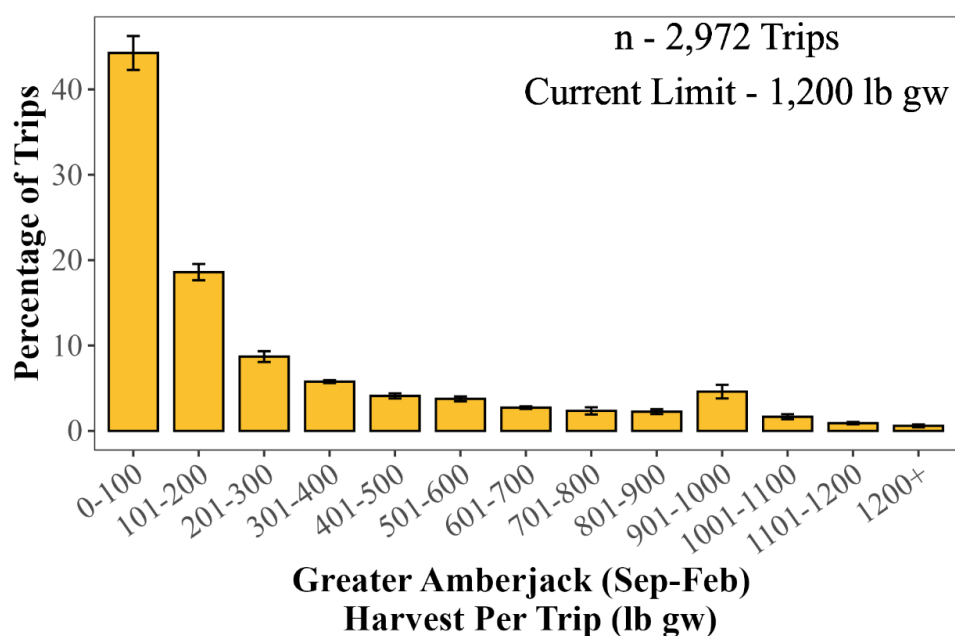


Figure F.4. Distribution of South Atlantic commercial trip harvest of greater amberjack during Season 2 (September to February) in 100 lb gw bins, data records aggregated between 2020 and 2024.

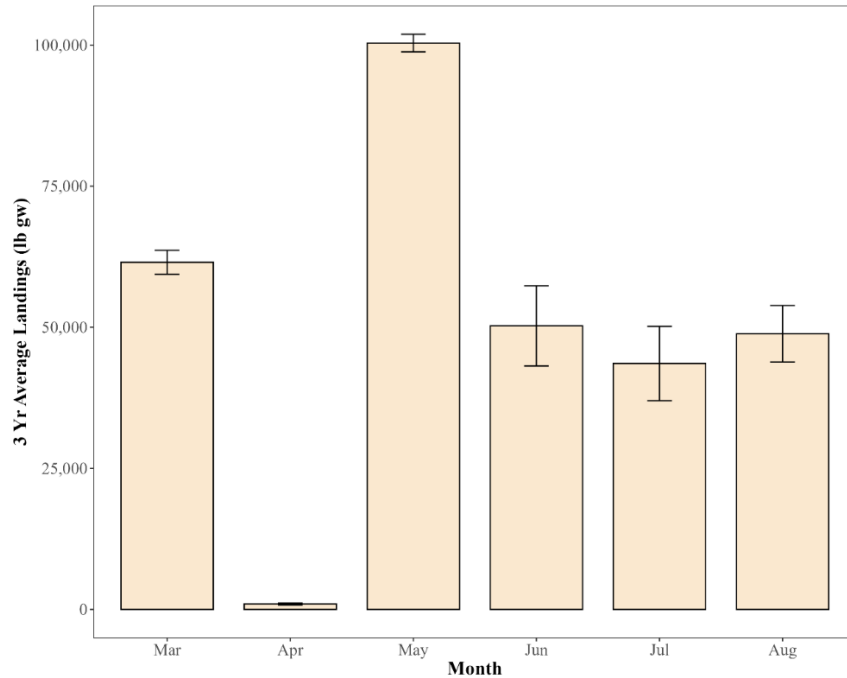


Figure F.5. Average commercial monthly landings, in lb gw, of South Atlantic greater amberjack in Season 1 (March to August), 2022 to 2024.

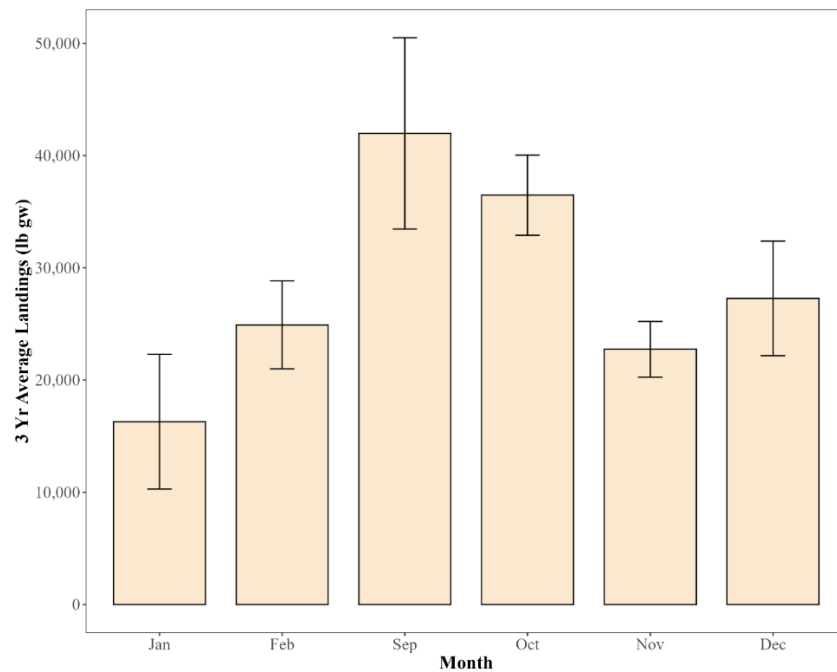


Figure F.6. Average commercial monthly landings, in lb gw, of South Atlantic greater amberjack in Season 2 (September to February), 2022 to 2024.

Table F.1. Predictions for when the greater amberjack annual catch limit (583,933 lb gw) would be met under the Action 3 commercial trip limit alternatives in Season 1 (March to August).

Action 3 Alternatives	Average Landings - 1 Standard Error		Average Landings		Average Landings + 1 Standard Error	
	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days
<i>Alternative 1 (No Action) - 1,200 lb ww</i>	-	184	-	184	-	184
<i>Alternative 2a - 1,500 lb ww</i>	-	184	-	184	-	184
<i>Preferred Alternative 2b - 1,750 lb ww</i>	-	184	-	184	-	184
<i>Alternative 2c - 2,000 lb ww</i>	-	184	-	184	-	184

Table F.2. Predictions for when the greater amberjack annual catch limit (359,288 lb gw) would be met under the Action 3 commercial trip limit alternatives in Season 2 (September to February).

Action 3 Alternatives	Average Landings - 1 Standard Error		Average Landings		Average Landings + 1 Standard Error	
	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days
<i>Alternative 1 (No Action) - 1,200 lb ww</i>	-	182	-	182	-	182
<i>Alternative 3a - 1,500 lb ww</i>	-	182	-	182	-	182
<i>Preferred Alternative 3b - 1,750 lb ww</i>	-	182	-	182	-	182
<i>Alternative 3c - 2,000 lb ww</i>	-	182	-	182	-	182

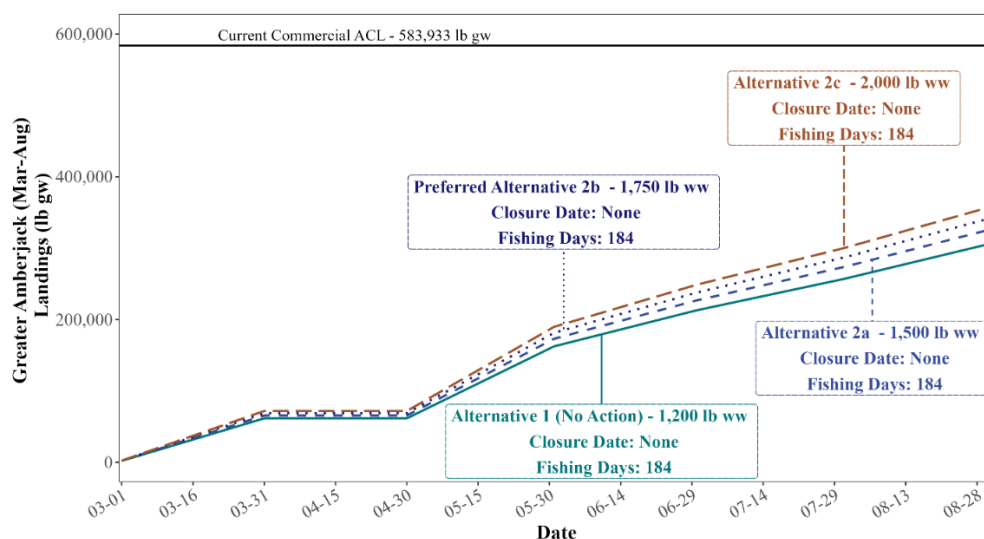


Figure F.7. Estimated cumulative greater amberjack landings for each Action 3 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 1 (March to August), based on the average landings scenario.

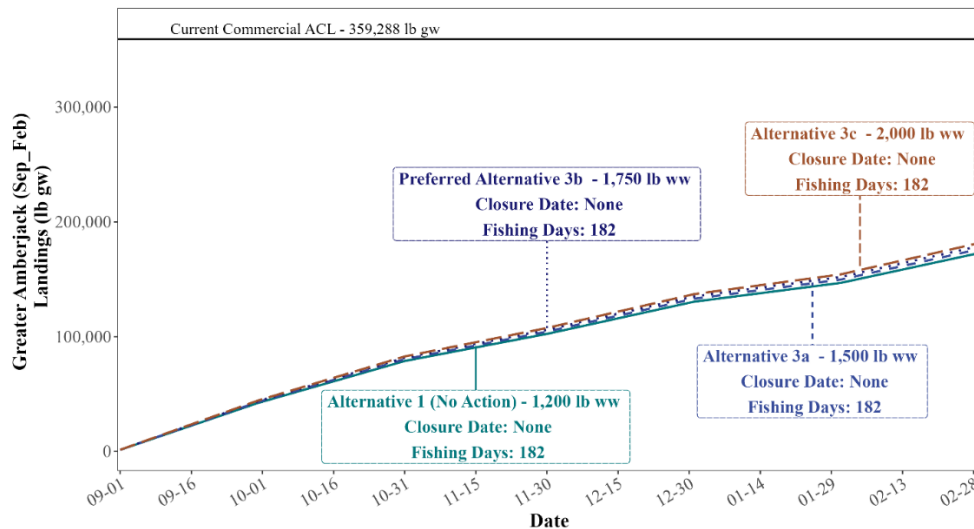


Figure F.8. Estimated cumulative greater amberjack landings for each Action 3 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 2 (September to February), based on the average landings scenario.

F.1.4. Action 4: Vermilion Snapper

Vermilion snapper are also managed in two split seasons: Season 1 – January to June and Season 2 – July to December. Over the last ten years, the commercial sector landed near or just above the current ACL until 2019, after which time landings have been relatively flat, ranging between 250,000 and 300,000 lb ww, in Season 1 (Figure 9). Vermilion snapper landings for Season 2, were higher in magnitude than in Season 1, with landings over 350,000 lb ww, with the exception of 2024 (Figure 10). The distribution of landings per trip shows between 11 and 14% of trips harvest within 10% of the current commercial trip limit in Season 1 and Season 2, respectively (Figures 11 and 12). The trip scalars generated by assuming those trips landing within 10% of the trip limit would land the new proposed commercial trip limits estimate a percent increase in landings from 17 to 34% for Season 1 and 9 to 38% in Season 2. Monthly landings of vermilion snapper range from 40,000-60,000 lb ww in Season 1 (Figure 13), and are even higher in Season 2, ranging from 50,000-75,000 lb ww (Figure 14). The daily harvest rates calculated to represent low, average and high landings scenarios were upweighted by the trip scalars, summed cumulatively over the course of each fishing season and compared to the current ACL for each season to determine potential closure dates (Table 3 and 4). A seasonal closure is only projected for Season 1 for the highest proposed trip limit alternative, under the high magnitude landings scenario. More closures are projected in Season 2, when the landings are higher on average, but the closures would be expected in the last month of fishing season for three of the four closures projected. The average landings scenario was plotted to show a visual representation of cumulative landings for each proposed commercial trip limit alternative in Action 4 (Figure 15 and 16), for each vermilion snapper split season.

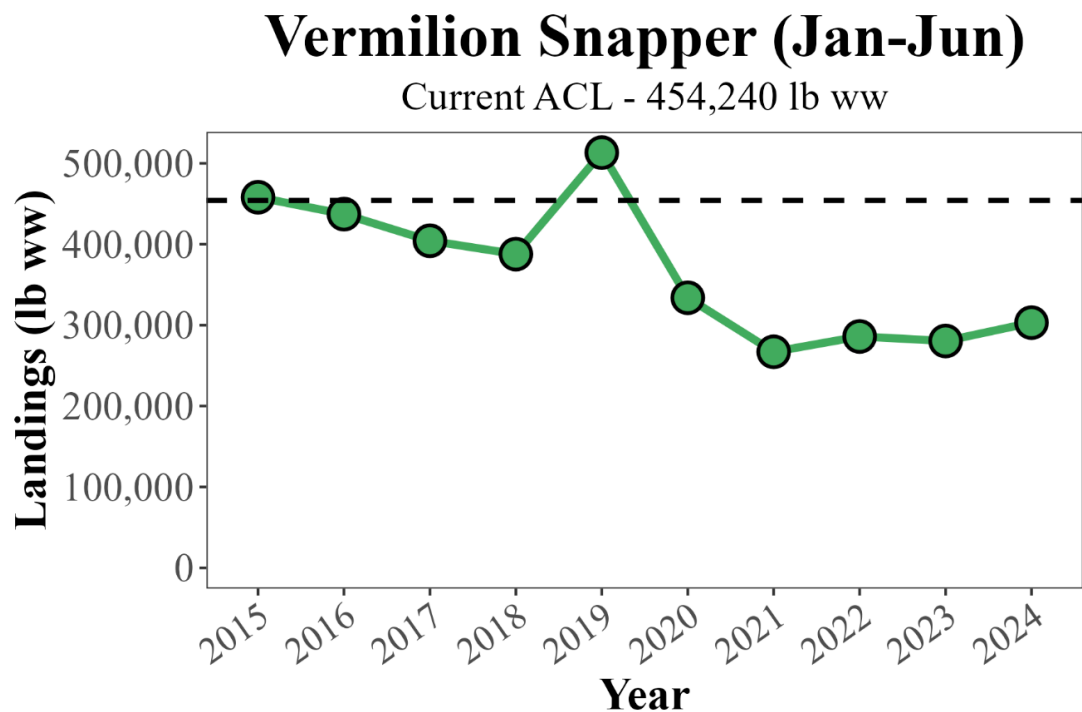


Figure F.9. Landings for South Atlantic vermilion snapper during Season 1 (January to June) of the commercial fishing season, for the last 10 years (2015-2024).

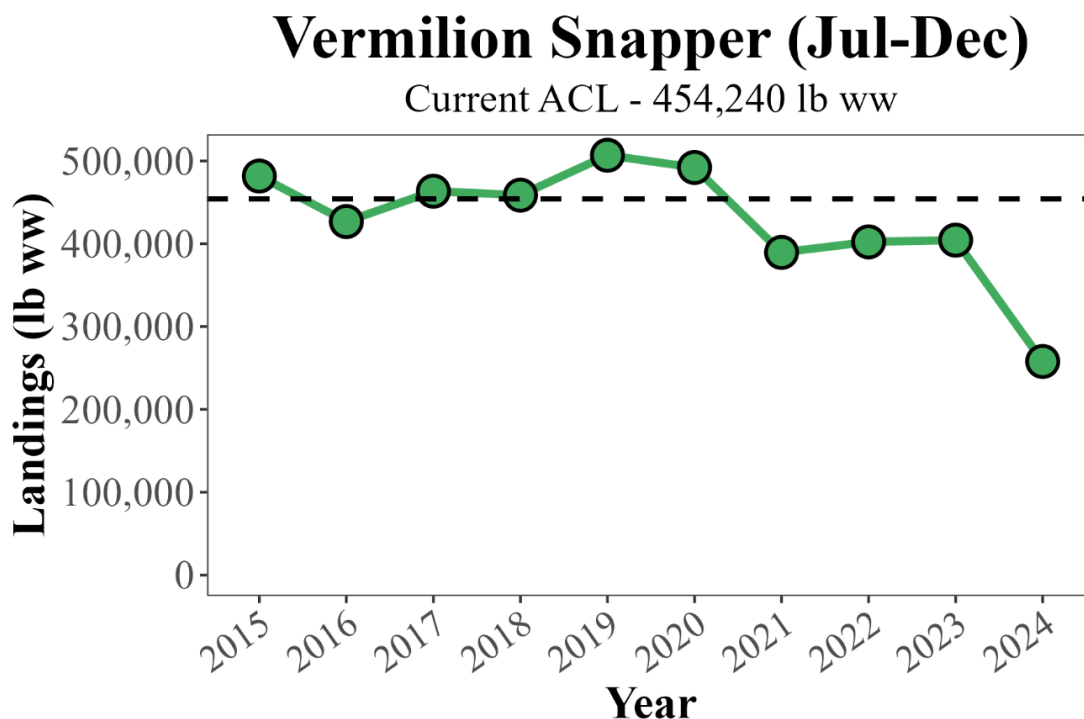


Figure F.10. Landings for South Atlantic vermilion snapper during Season 1 (July to December) of the commercial fishing season, for the last 10 years (2015-2024).

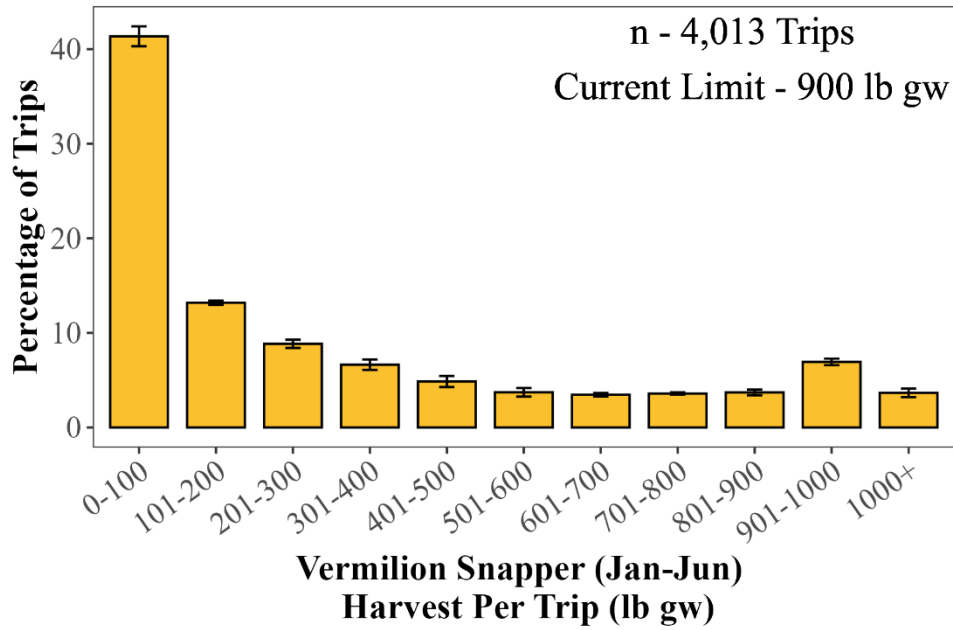


Figure F.11. Distribution of South Atlantic commercial trip harvest of vermilion snapper in 100 lb gw bins during Season 1 (January to June), data records aggregated between 2020 and 2024.

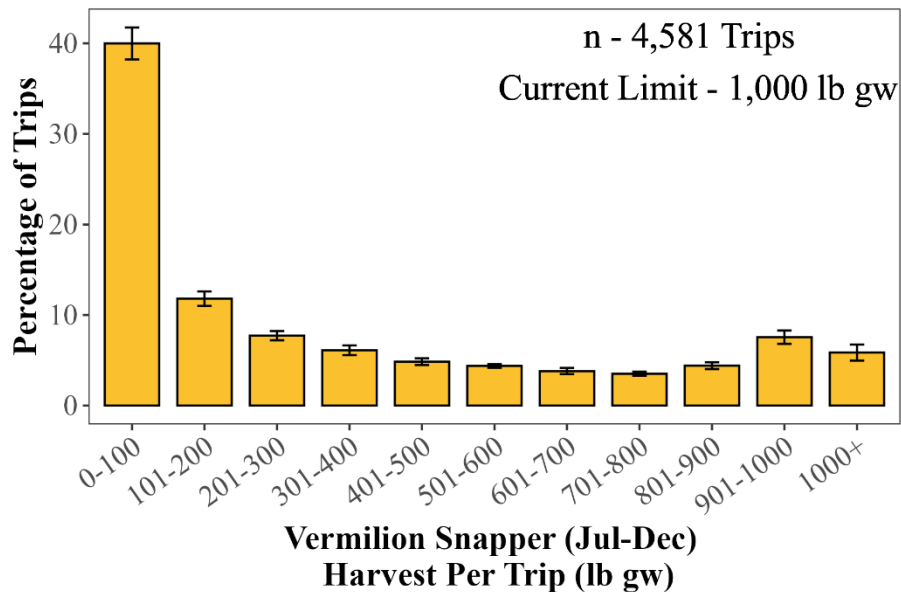


Figure F.12. Distribution of South Atlantic commercial trip harvest of vermilion snapper in 100 lb gw bins during Season 2 (July to December), data records aggregated between 2020 and 2024.

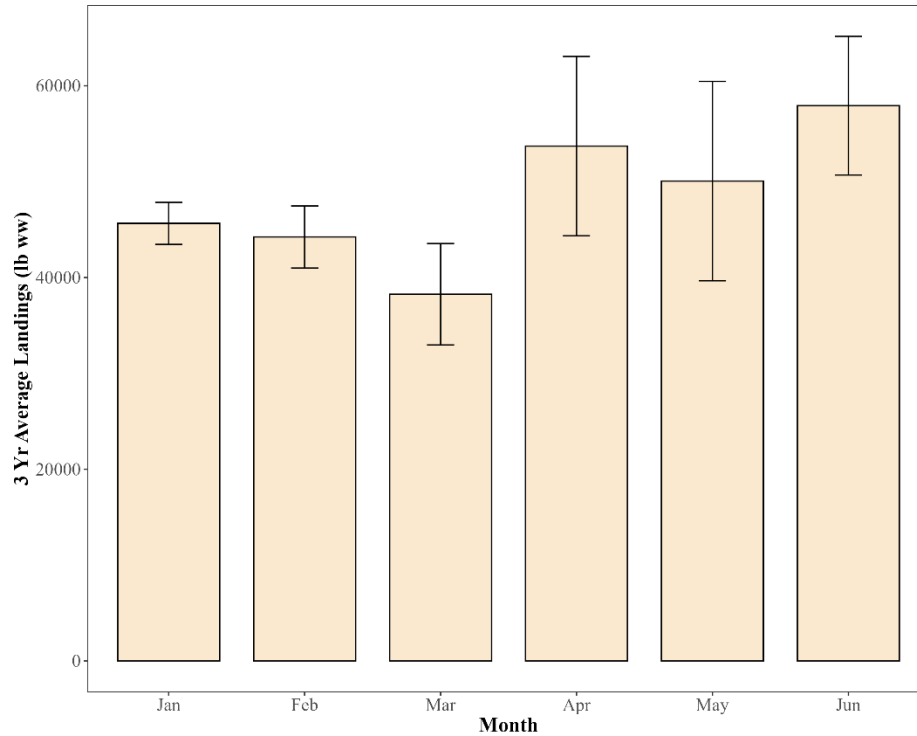


Figure F.13. Average commercial monthly landings, in lb ww, of South Atlantic vermilion snapper in Season 1 (January to June), 2022 to 2024.

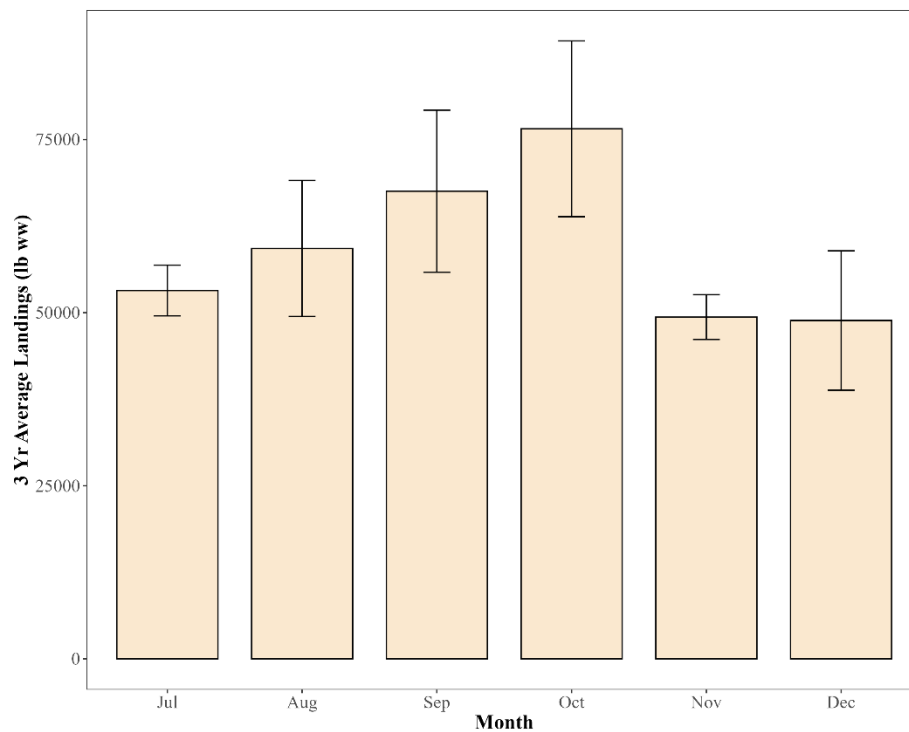


Figure F.14. Average commercial monthly landings, in lb ww, of South Atlantic vermilion snapper in Season 2 (July to December), 2022 to 2024.

Table F.3. Predictions for when the vermilion snapper annual catch limit (409,225 lb ww) would be met under the Action 4 commercial trip limit alternatives in Season 1 (January to June).

Action 4 Alternatives	Average Landings - 1 Standard Error		Average Landings		Average Landings + 1 Standard Error	
	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days
<i>Alternative 1 (No Action) - 1,000 lb gw</i>	-	181	-	181	-	181
<i>Preferred Alternative 2a - 1,500 lb gw</i>	-	181	-	181	-	181
<i>Alternative 2b - 1,750 lb gw</i>	-	181	-	181	-	181
<i>Alternative 2c - 2,000 lb gw</i>	-	181	-	181	26-Jun	176

Table F.4. Predictions for when the vermilion snapper annual catch limit (409,225 lb ww) would be met under the Action 4 commercial trip limit alternatives in Season 2 (July to December).

Action 4 Alternatives	Average Landings - 1 Standard Error		Average Landings		Average Landings + 1 Standard Error	
	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days
<i>Alternative 1 (No Action) - 1,000 lb gw</i>	-	184	-	184	-	184
<i>Preferred Alternative 3a - 1,500 lb gw</i>	-	184	-	184	7-Dec	159
<i>Alternative 3b - 1,750 lb gw</i>	-	184	28-Dec	180	21-Nov	143
<i>Alternative 3c - 2,000 lb gw</i>	-	184	12-Dec	164	8-Nov	130

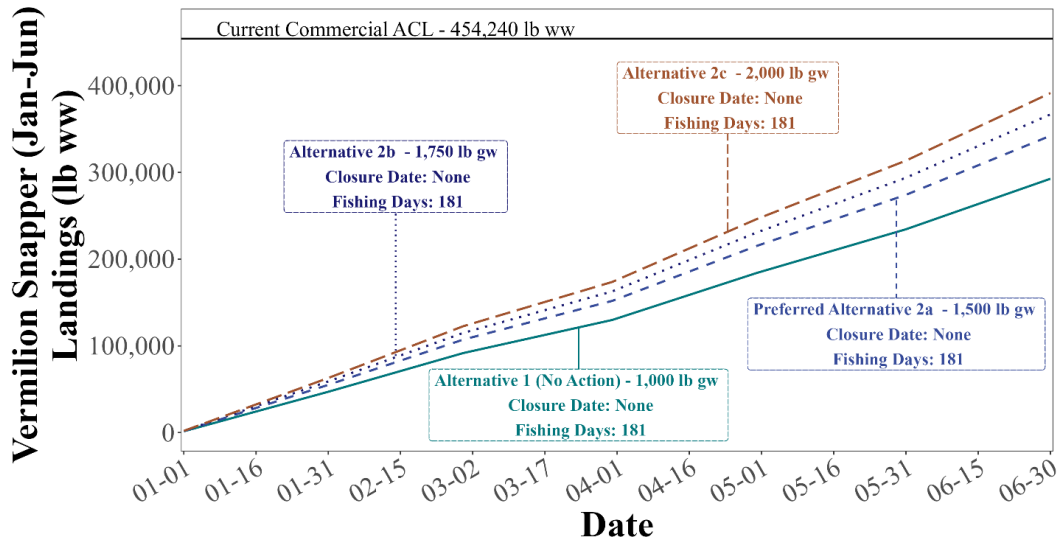


Figure F.15. Estimated cumulative vermilion snapper landings for each Action 4 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 1 (January to June), based on the average landings scenario.

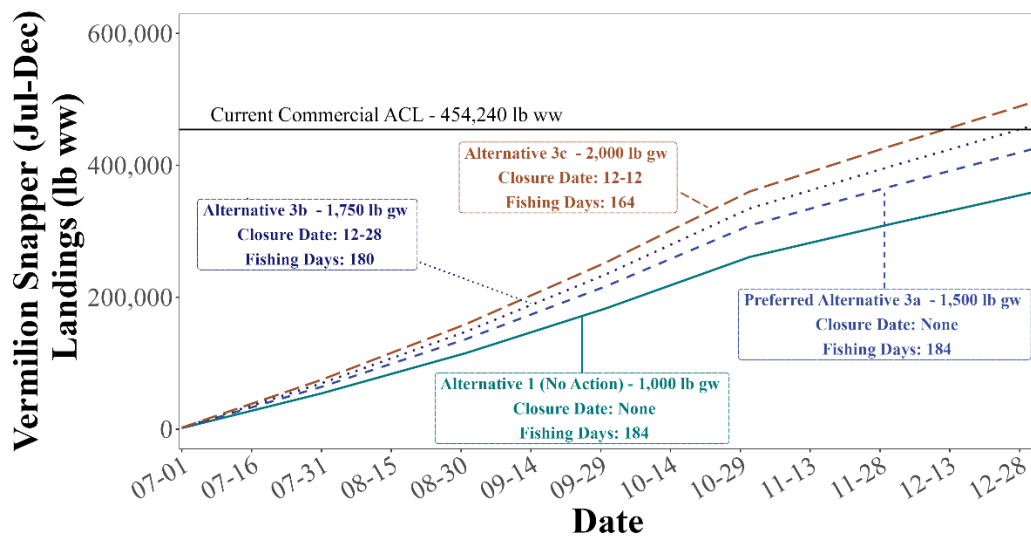


Figure F.16. Estimated cumulative vermilion snapper landings for each Action 4 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 2 (July to December), based on the average landings scenario.

F.1.5. Action 5: Red Porgy

Red porgy are managed in by a four month season: Season 1 – January to April and an eight month season: Season 2 – May to December. The landings history for this species was truncated to the last five years, to investigate fishery only after the split season was put implemented. The red porgy landings for both seasons were frequently above the current ACL until 2023, when a reduced commercial trip limit was put into place. Similar to other species investigated in this amendment, the Season 2 landings are higher than Season 1, approximately 3 times higher over the time series (Figure 17 and Figure 18). The commercial trip limit for red porgy is managed in

number of fish, so weight data from the Trip Information Program (TIP) was reviewed to determine an appropriate average weight for each red porgy season. The weight distribution was plotted by year and season, showing a similar spread of weight measurements in each year. Only 2023 and 2024 data were used to calculate the average weight for each season, to correspond with the trip limit reduction for the fishery (Figure 19 and Figure 20). The two year average weights for each fishing season were estimated to be 2.09 and 2.05 lb gw, respectively. These weights were used to estimate the number of fish harvested per trip, creating a harvest distribution for each season (Figure 21 and Figure 22). The trip scalars generated by assuming those trips landing within 10% of the trip limit would land the new proposed commercial trip limits estimate a percent increase in landings from 28 to 75% for Season 1 and 39 to 89% in Season 2. Monthly red porgy landings are low in magnitude, under 2,500 lb gw per month, with a declining trend from September to December (Figure 23 and Figure 24). The daily harvest rates calculated to represent low, average and high landings scenarios were upweighted by the scalars, summed cumulatively over the course of each fishing season and compared to the current ACL for each season to determine potential closure dates (Table 5 and 6). No seasonal closures are projected for either fishing season. The average landings scenario was plotted to show a visual representation of cumulative landings for each proposed commercial trip limit alternative in Action 5 (Figure 25 and 26), for each red porgy split season.

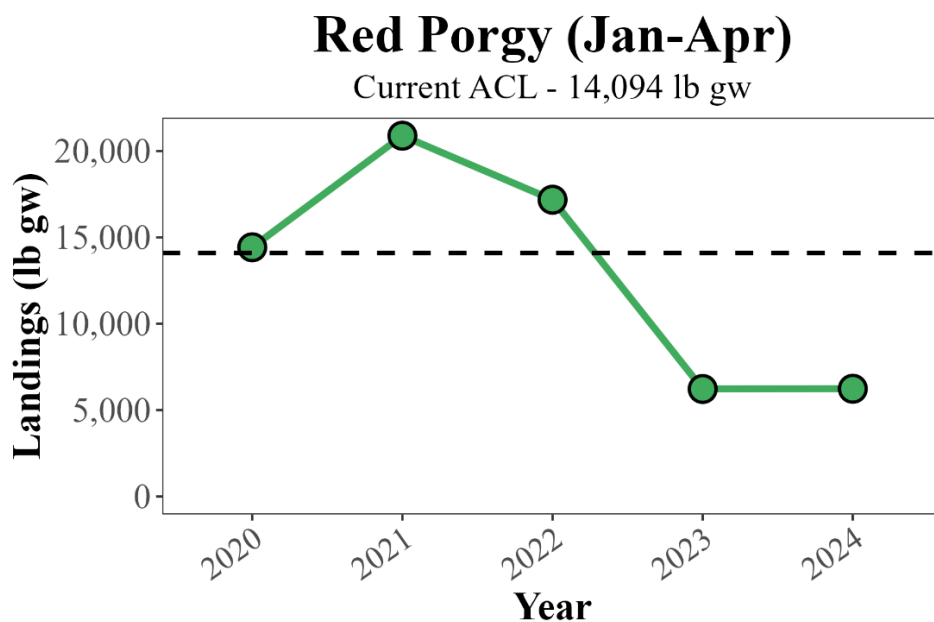


Figure F.17. Landings for South Atlantic red porgy during Season 1 (January to April) of the commercial fishing season, for the last 5 years (2020-2024).

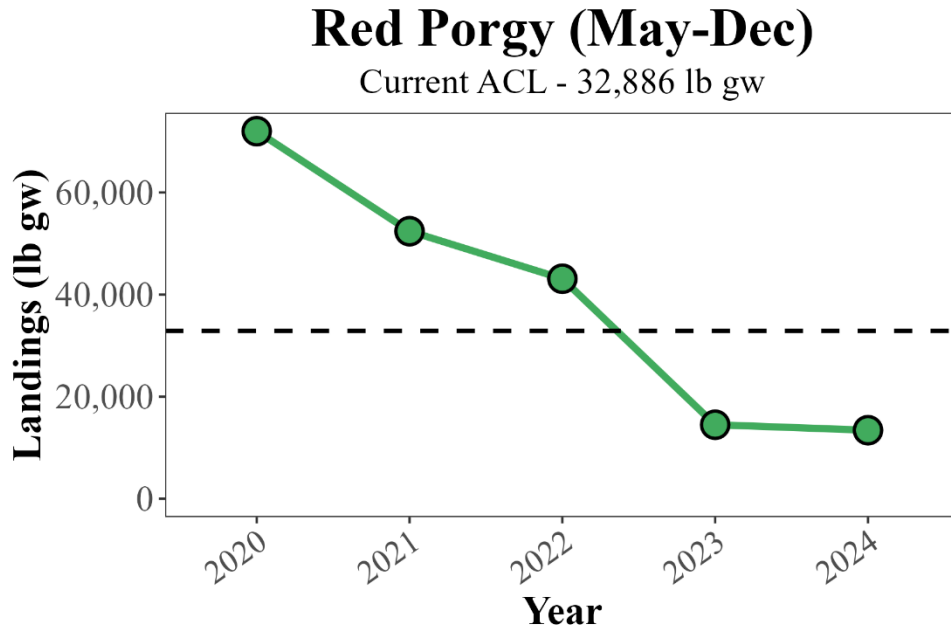


Figure F.18. Landings for South Atlantic red porgy during Season 2 (May to December) of the commercial fishing season, for the last 5 years (2020-2024).

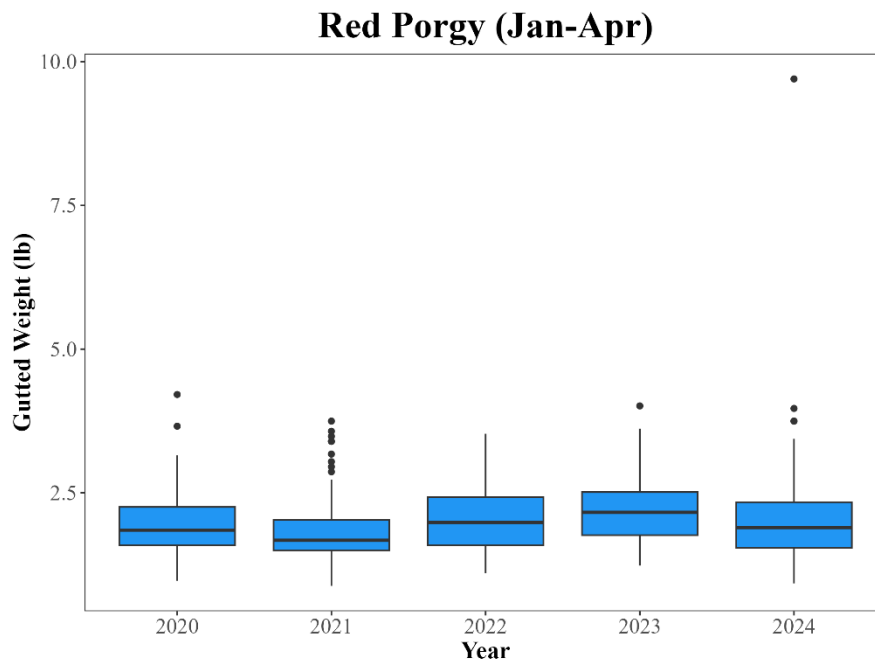


Figure F.19. Boxplot of red porgy weight, in lb gw, collected by Trip Information Program sampling in Season 2 (January to April) from 2020 to 2024.

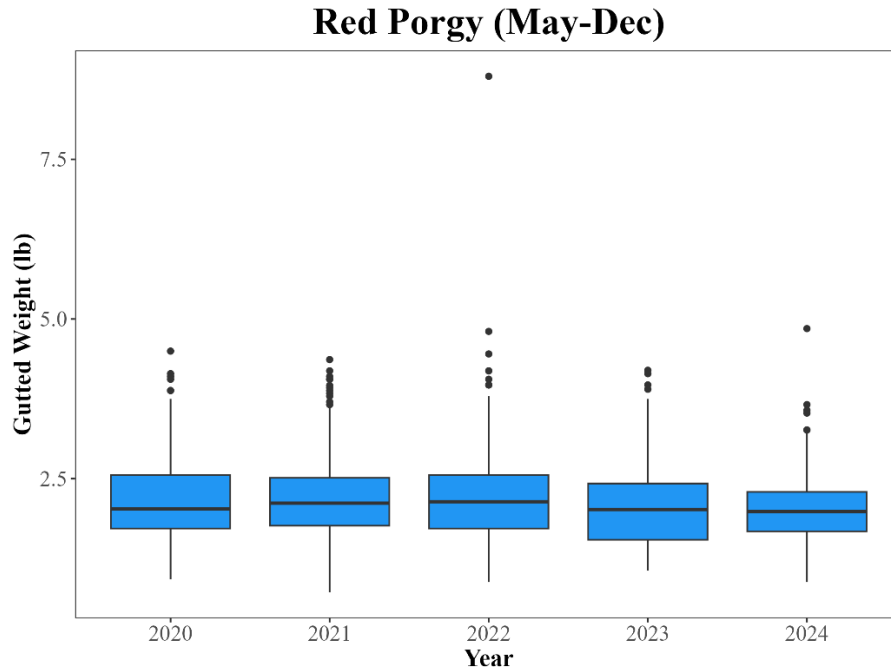


Figure F.20. Boxplot of red porgy weight, in lb gw, collected by Trip Information Program sampling in Season 2 (May to December) from 2020 to 2024.

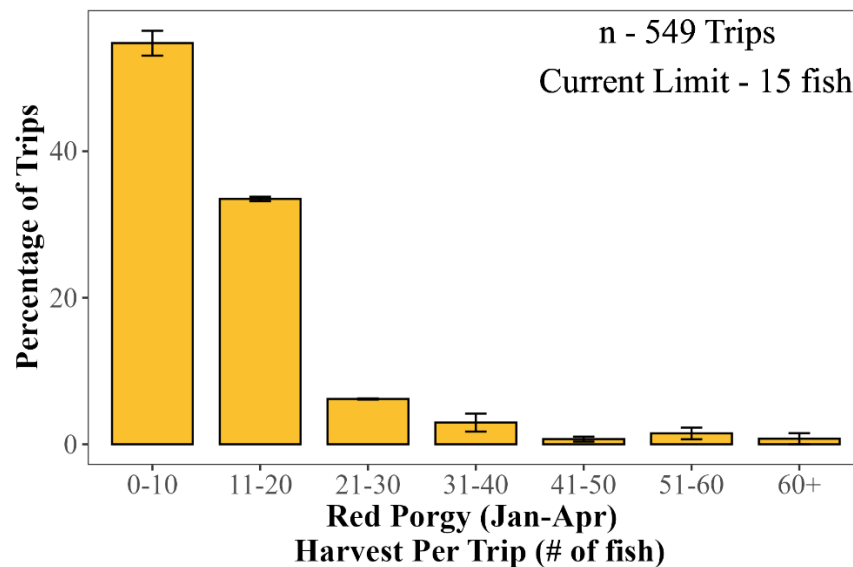


Figure F.21. Distribution of South Atlantic commercial trip harvest of red porgy in 10 fish bins during Season 1 (January to April), data records aggregated between 2020 and 2024.

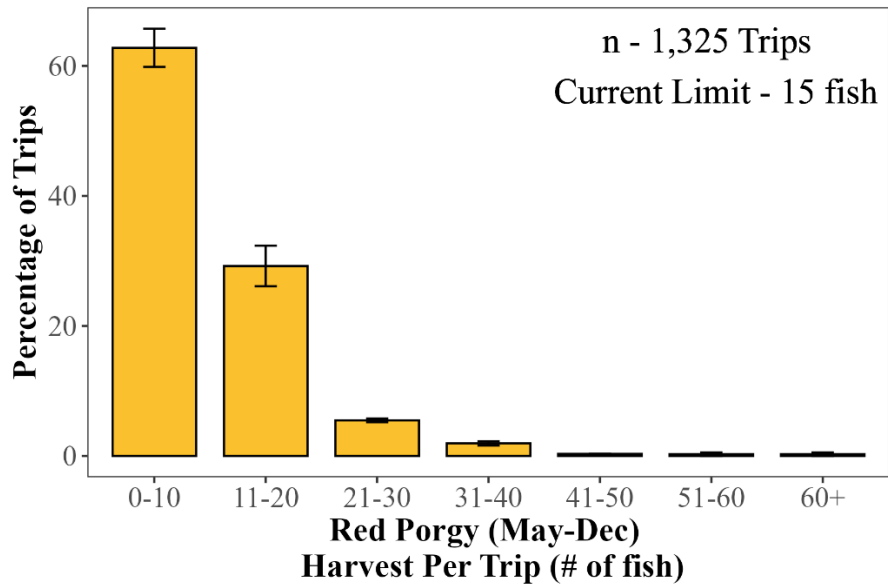


Figure F.22. Distribution of South Atlantic commercial trip harvest of red porgy in 10 fish bins during Season 2 (May to December), data records aggregated between 2020 and 2024.

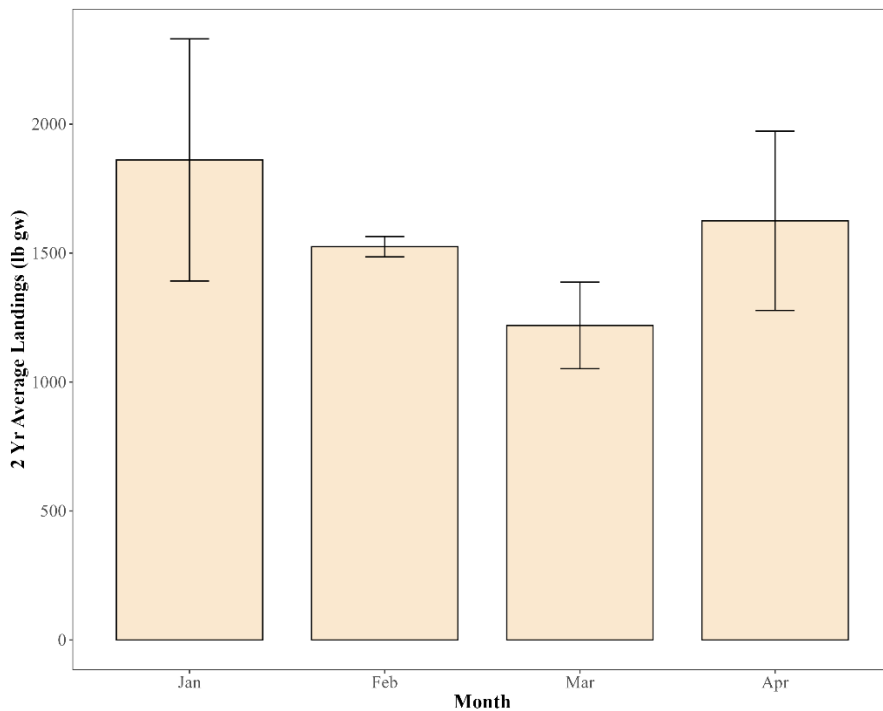


Figure F.23. Average commercial monthly landings, in lb gw, of South Atlantic red porgy in Season 1 (January to April), 2023 to 2024.

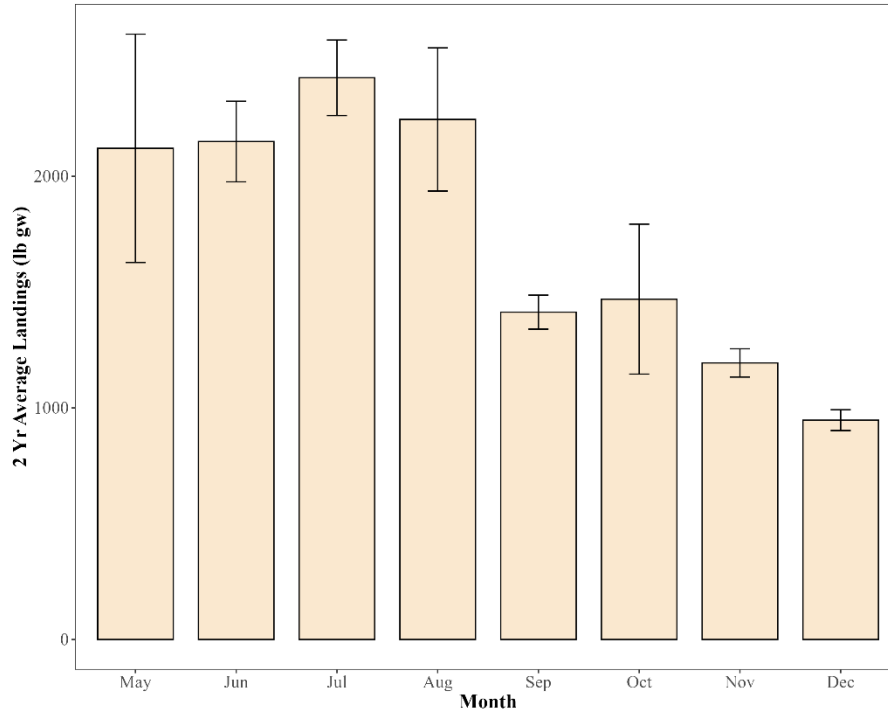


Figure F.24. Average commercial monthly landings, in lb gw, of South Atlantic red porgy in Season 2 (May to December), 2023 to 2024.

Table F.5. Predictions for when the red porgy annual catch limit (14,094 lb gw) would be met under the Action 5 commercial trip limit alternatives in Season 1 (January to April).

Action 5 Alternatives	Average Landings - 1 Standard Error		Average Landings		Average Landings + 1 Standard Error	
	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days
<i>Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action) - 15 fish</i>	-	90	-	90	-	90
<i>Alternative 2a - 30 fish</i>	-	90	-	90	-	90
<i>Alternative 2b - 45 fish</i>	-	90	-	90	-	90

Table F.6. Predictions for when the red porgy annual catch limit (32,886 lb gw) would be met under the Action 5 commercial trip limit alternatives in Season 2 (May to December).

Action 5 Alternatives	Average Landings - 1 Standard Error		Average Landings		Average Landings + 1 Standard Error	
	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days
<i>Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action) - 15 fish</i>	-	245	-	245	-	245
<i>Alternative 3a - 30 fish</i>	-	245	-	245	-	245
<i>Alternative 3b - 45 fish</i>	-	245	-	245	-	245

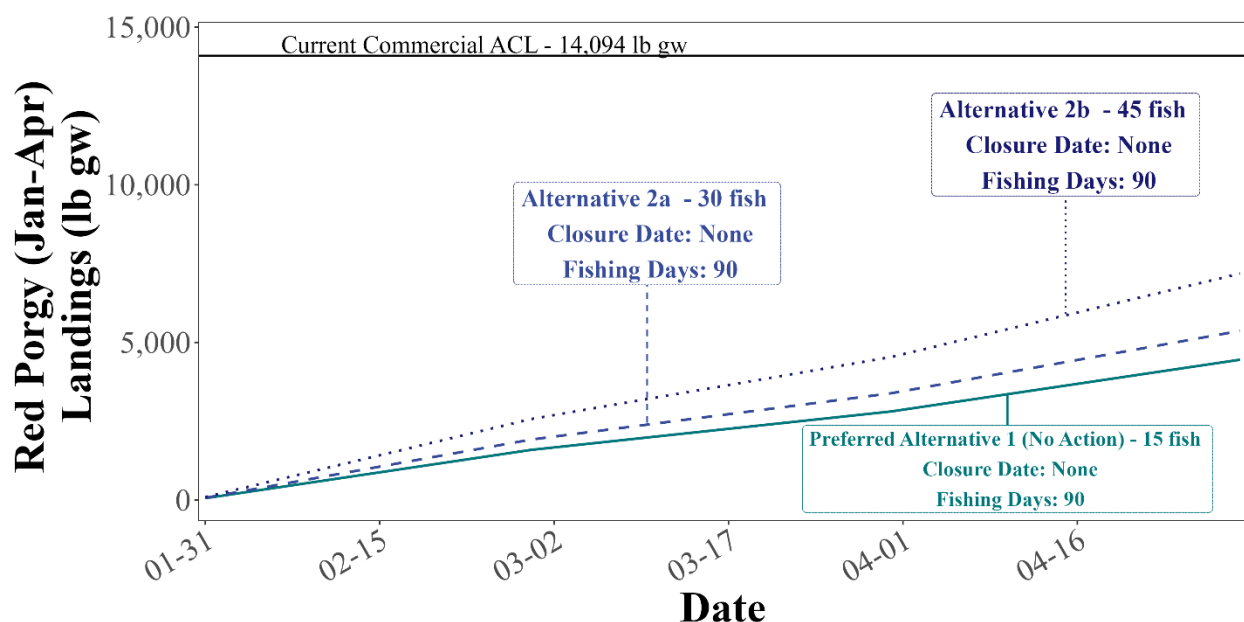


Figure F.25. Estimated cumulative red porgy landings for each Action 5 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 1 (January to April), based on the average landings scenario.

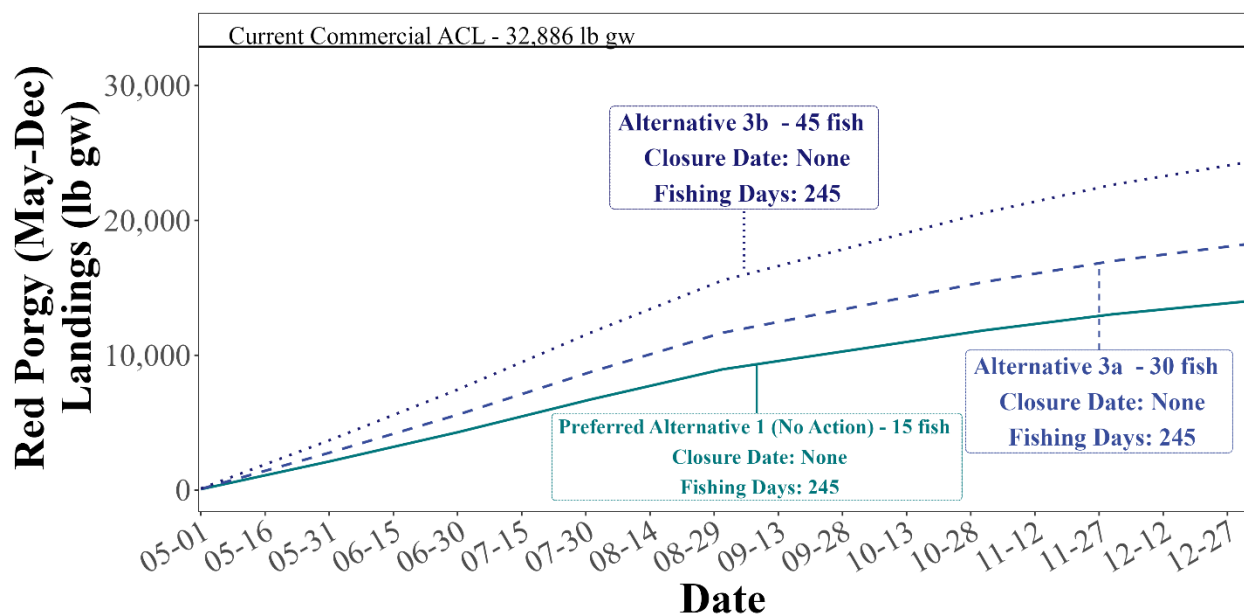


Figure F.26. Estimated cumulative red porgy landings for each Action 5 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 2 (May to December), based on the average landings scenario.

F.1.6. Action 6: Hogfish (Georgia to North Carolina)

Hogfish are managed with separate ACLs for the northern vs southern portion of the South Atlantic region. This action concerns the hogfish fishery from Georgia to North Carolina. The landings history was truncated to represent the time period after the ACL was divided into the

two geographic regions (Figure 27). Landings for the fishery generally remain within 5,000 lb ww of the current ACL. The distribution of hogfish landings per trip shows only 2% of trips harvest within 10% of the current commercial trip limit (Figure 28). The trip scalars generated by assuming those trips landing within 10% of the trip limit would land the new proposed commercial trip limits estimate the percent increase in landings to range from 11 to 22%. The monthly landings for hogfish (Georgia to North Carolina) are near zero for the first quarter of the calendar year, despite the fishery being open in those months. The bulk of hogfish harvest occurs in the summer months, decreasing through the fall to the end of the calendar year (Figure 29). The daily harvest rates calculated to represent low, average and high landings scenarios were upweighted by the scalars, summed cumulatively over the course of each fishing season and compared to the current ACL for each season to determine potential closure dates (Table 7). Seasonal closures are only projected to occur under the high landings scenario, but are still projected to keep the fishery open through November or October for the two proposed alternatives, respectively. The average landings scenario was plotted to show a visual representation of cumulative landings for each proposed commercial trip limit alternative in Action 6 (Figure 30), for hogfish (Georgia to North Carolina).

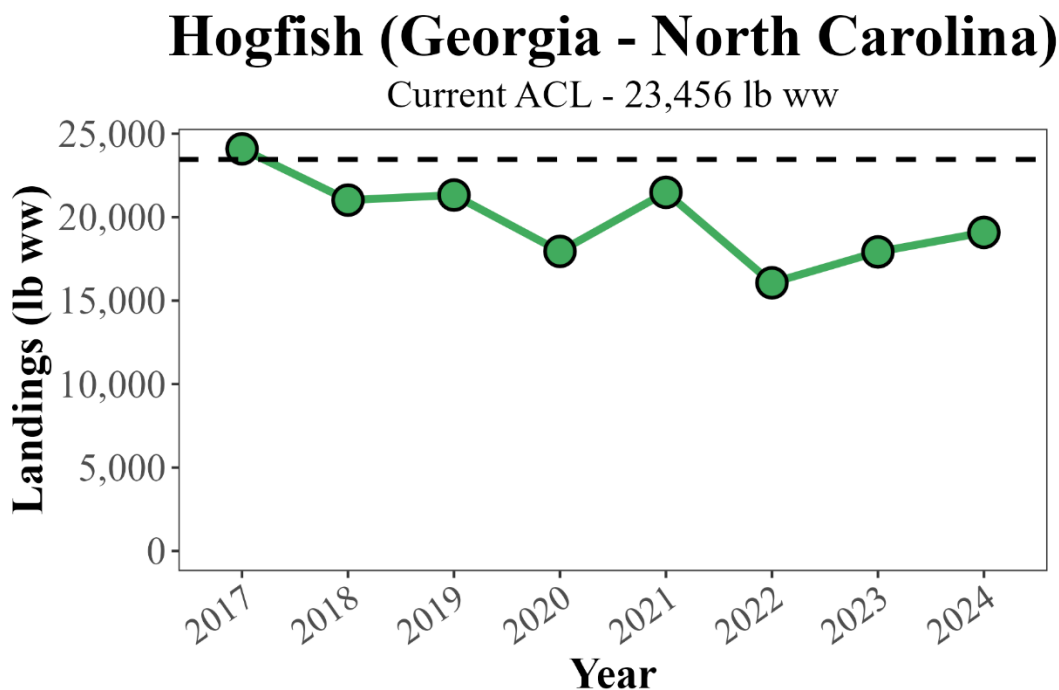


Figure F.27. Commercial landings for South Atlantic hogfish (Georgia to North Carolina) for the last 8 years (2017-2024).

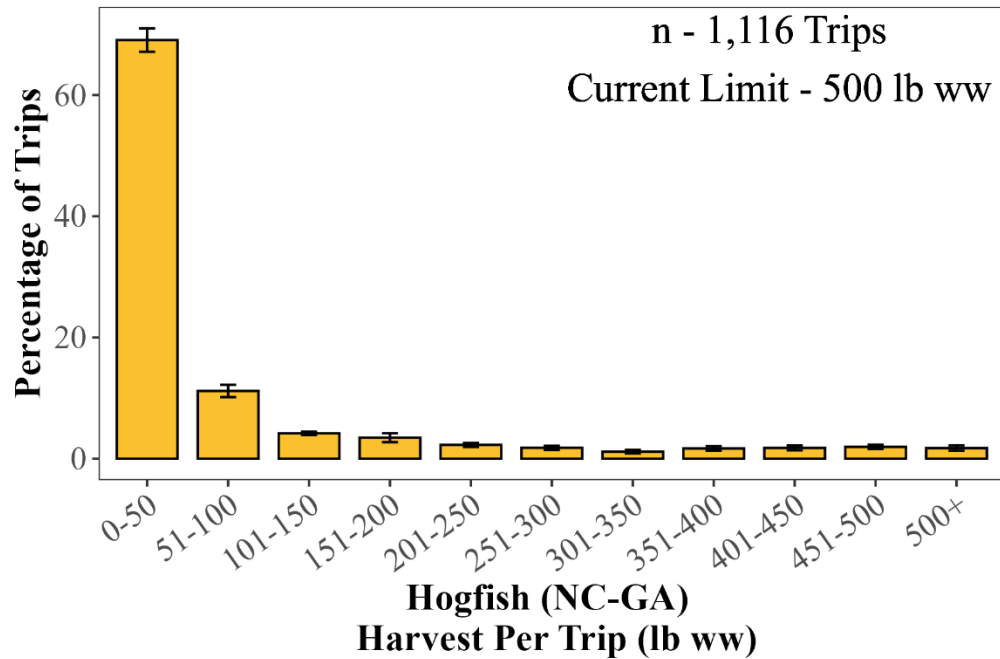


Figure F.28. Distribution of South Atlantic commercial trips harvest of hogfish (Georgia to North Carolina) in 50 lb ww bins, data records aggregated between 2020 and 2024.

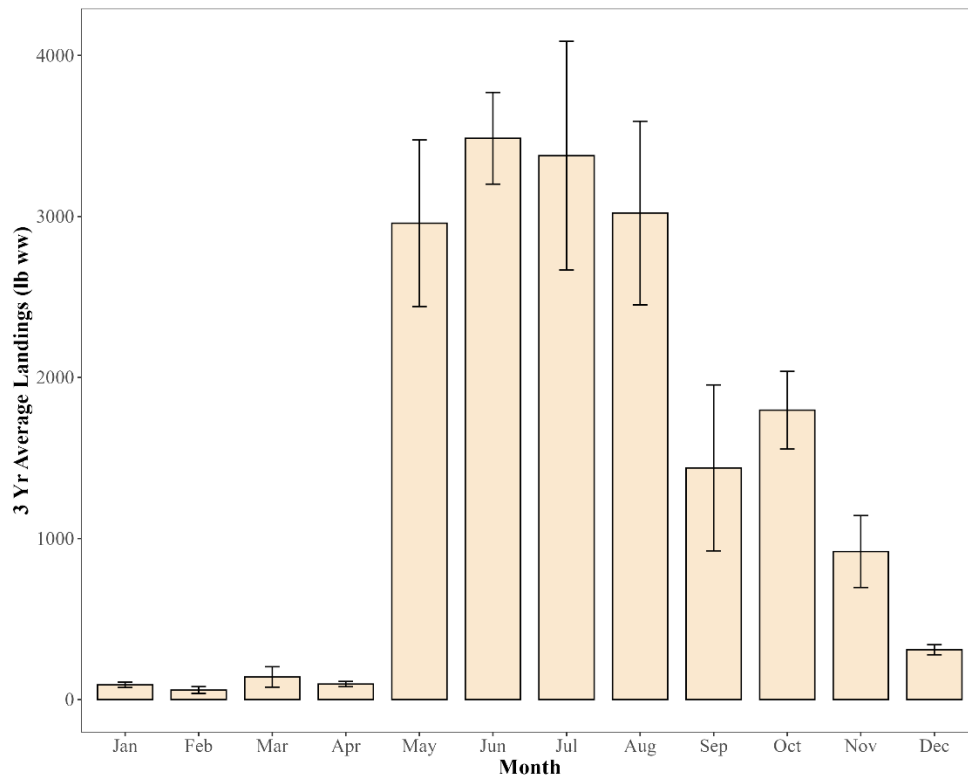


Figure F.29. Average commercial monthly landings, in lb ww, of South Atlantic hogfish (Georgia to North Carolina), 2022 to 2024.

Table F.7. Predictions for when the hogfish (North Carolina through Georgia) annual catch limit (23,456 lb ww) would be met under the Action 6 commercial trip limit alternatives.

Action 6 Alternatives	Average Landings - 1 Standard Error		Average Landings		Average Landings + 1 Standard Error	
	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days
<i>Alternative 1 (No Action) - 500 lb ww</i>	-	365	-	365	-	365
<i>Alternative 2 - 750 lb ww</i>	-	365	-	365	24-Nov	327
<i>Alternative 3 - 1,000 lb ww</i>	-	365	-	365	18-Oct	290

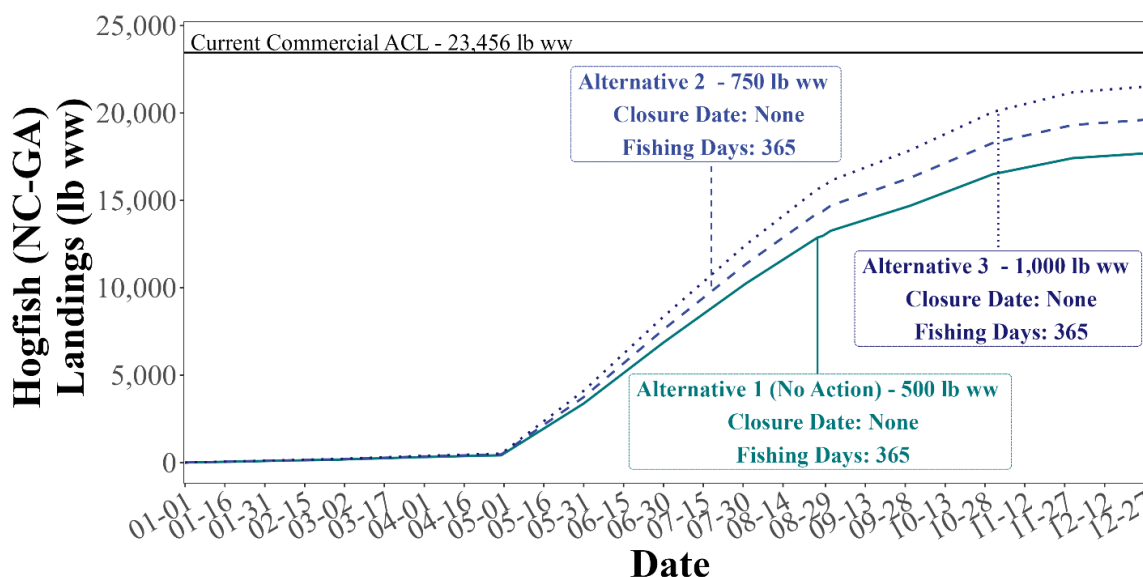


Figure F.30. Estimated cumulative hogfish (Georgia to North Carolina) landings for each Action 6 commercial trip limit alternative, based on the average landings scenario.

F.1.7. Action 7: Red Grouper

Red grouper landings in the South Atlantic have shown a declining trend since 2105, with landings less than half of the current ACL in many years of the time series (Figure 31). The distribution of landings per trip shows only 2% of trips harvest within 10% of the current commercial trip limit (Figures 32). The trip scalars generated by assuming those trips landing within 10% of the trip limit would land the new proposed commercial trip limits estimate the percent increase in landings of only 4%. Monthly landings of red grouper are highest in May, just under 9,000 lb ww on average, the first month of allowable harvest after the four month shallow-water grouper closure from January 1 to April 30 (Figure 33). The daily harvest rates calculated to represent low, average and high landings scenarios were upweighted by the scalars, summed cumulatively over the open fishing season and compared to the current ACL for each

season to determine potential closure dates (Table 8). No seasonal closures were projected, for the red grouper fishery, likely due to the low number of trips that currently harvest the commercial trip limit. The average landings scenario was plotted to show a visual representation of cumulative landings for the proposed commercial trip limit alternative in Action 7 (Figure 34).

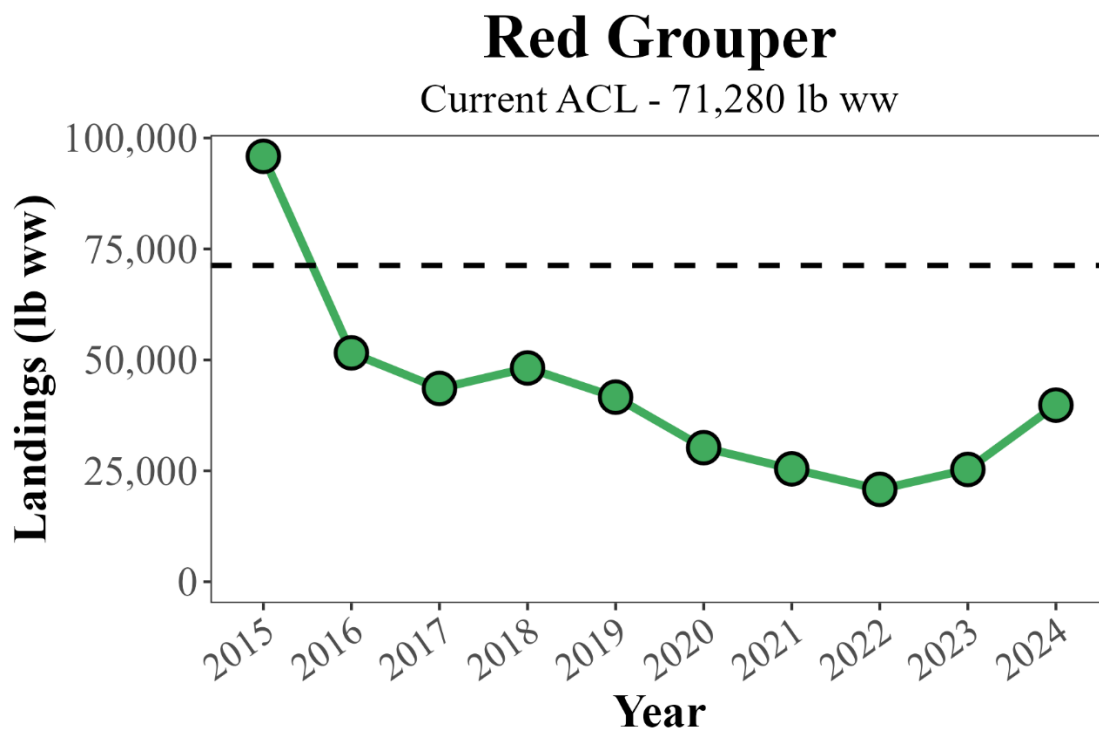


Figure F.31. Commercial South Atlantic red grouper landings for the last 10 years (2015-2024).

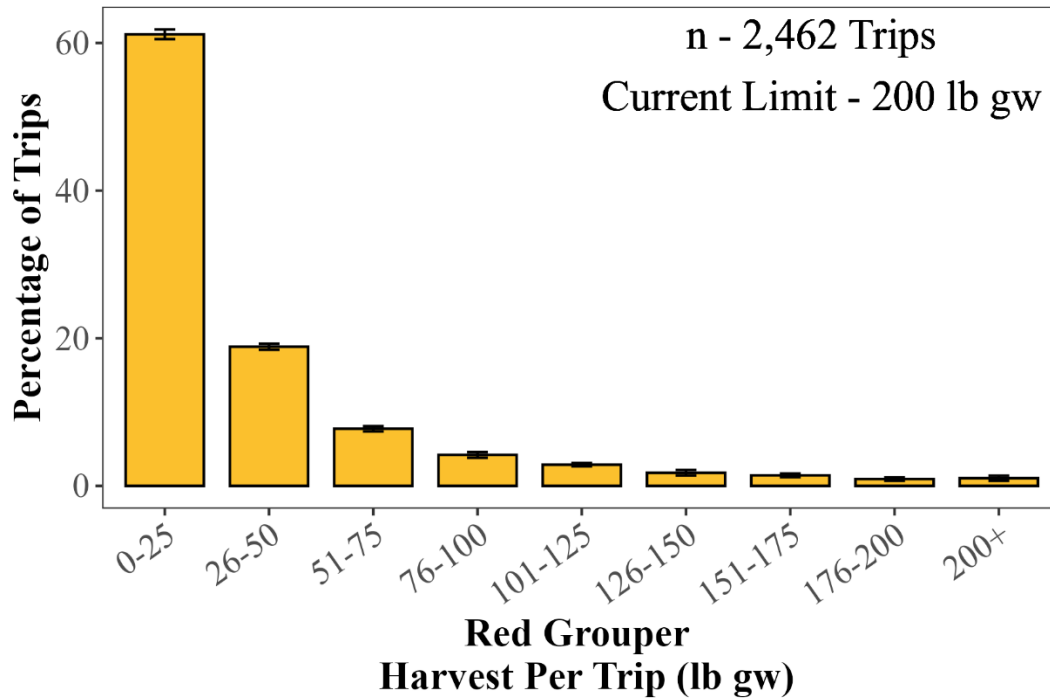


Figure F.32. Distribution of South Atlantic commercial trips harvest of red grouper in 25 lb gw bins, data records aggregated between 2020 and 2024.

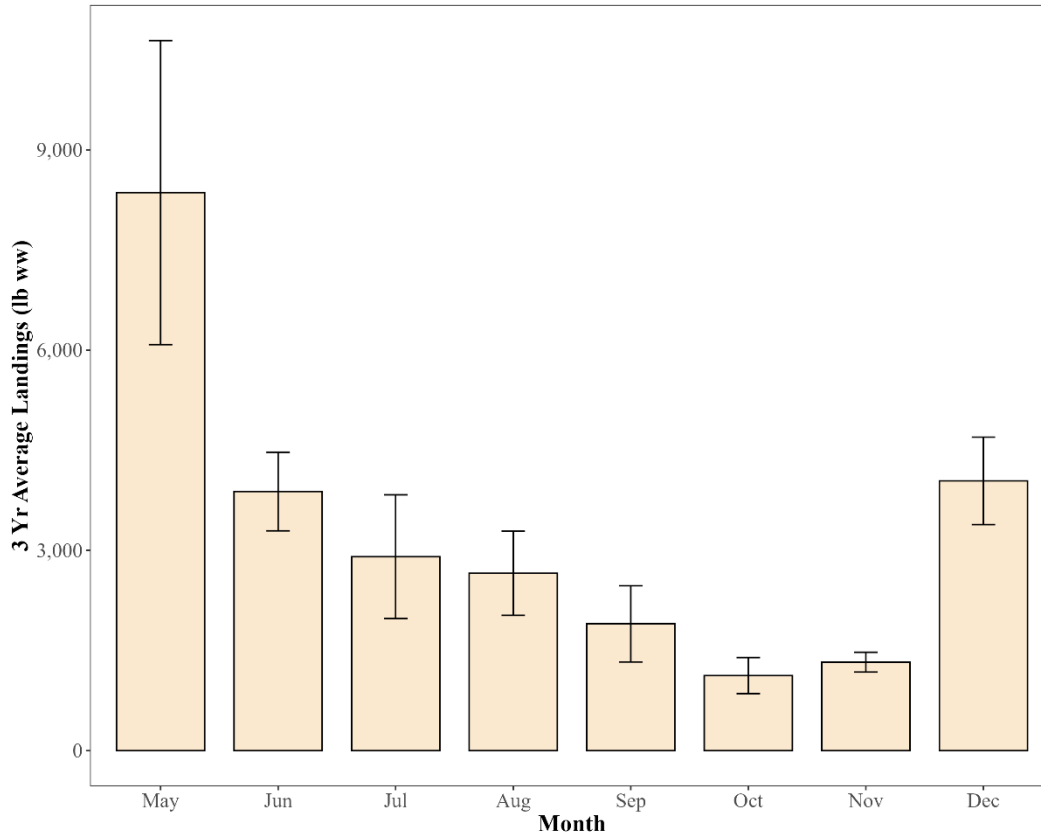


Figure F.33. Average commercial monthly landings, in lb ww, of South Atlantic red grouper, 2022 to 2024.

Table F.8. Predictions for when the red grouper annual catch limit (71,280 lb ww) would be met under the Action 7 commercial trip limit alternatives.

Action 7 Alternatives	Average Landings - 1 Standard Error		Average Landings		Average Landings + 1 Standard Error	
	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days
Alternative 1 (No Action) - 200 lb gw	-	245	-	245	-	245
Alternative 2 - 300 lb gw	-	245	-	245	-	245

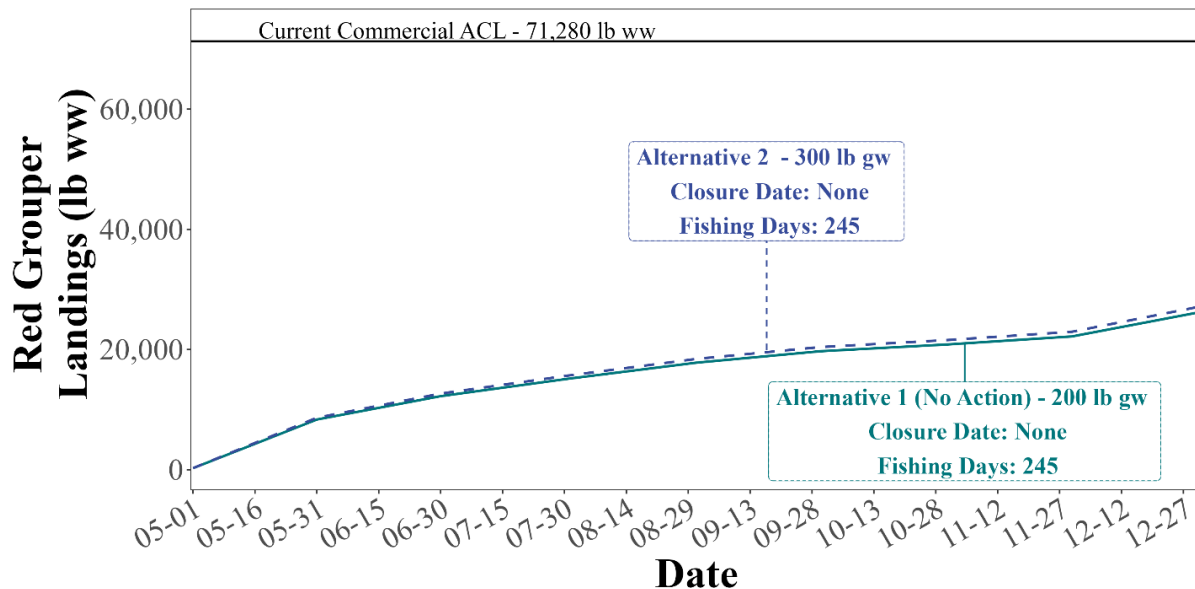


Figure F.34. Estimated cumulative red grouper landings for each Action 7 commercial trip limit alternative, based on the average landings scenario.

F.1.8. Action 8: Gray Triggerfish

Gray triggerfish are another species managed in two split seasons: Season 1 – January to June and Season 2 – July to December. Landings have shown a declining trend over the last ten years, for both split seasons, with the ACL not exceeded since 2020 (Figure 35 and Figure 36). Less than 100,000 lb ww were landed in the most recent year of the time series, for both split seasons. The distribution of landings per trip shows less than 1% of trips harvest within 10% of the current commercial trip limit, for either split season (Figure 37 and Figure 38). The trip scalars generated by assuming those trips landing within 10% of the trip limit would land the new proposed commercial trip limits estimate the percent increase in landings of 3% or less. In Season 1, average landings are variable, with highest landings in May and June at approximately 15,000 lb ww (Figure 39). In Season 2, monthly landing increase to a peak of almost 30,000 lb ww in October, before declining through the end of the calendar year (Figure 40). The daily harvest rates calculated to represent low, average and high landings scenarios were upweighted by the scalars, summed cumulatively over the course of each fishing season and compared to the current ACL for each season to determine potential closure dates (Table 9 and 10). No seasonal closures were projected, for either commercial gray triggerfish season, likely due to the majority of gray triggerfish trip landings less than 100 lb ww per trip. The average landings scenario was plotted to show a visual representation of cumulative landings for each proposed commercial trip limit alternative in Action 8 (Figure 41 and 42), for each gray triggerfish split season.

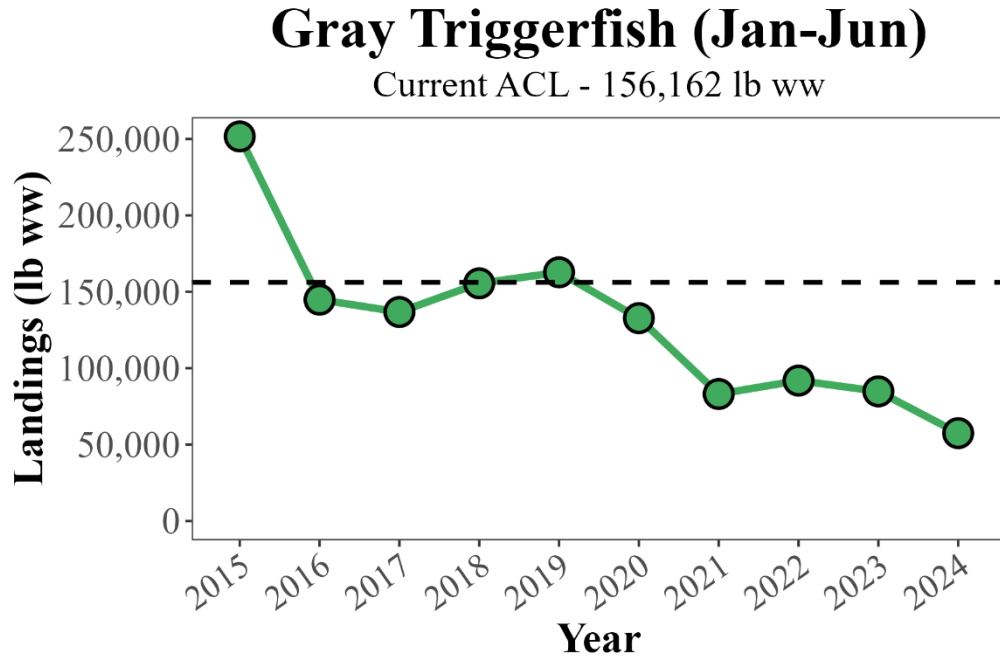


Figure F.35. Landings for South Atlantic gray triggerfish during Season 1 (January to June) of the commercial fishing season, for the last 10 years (2015-2024).

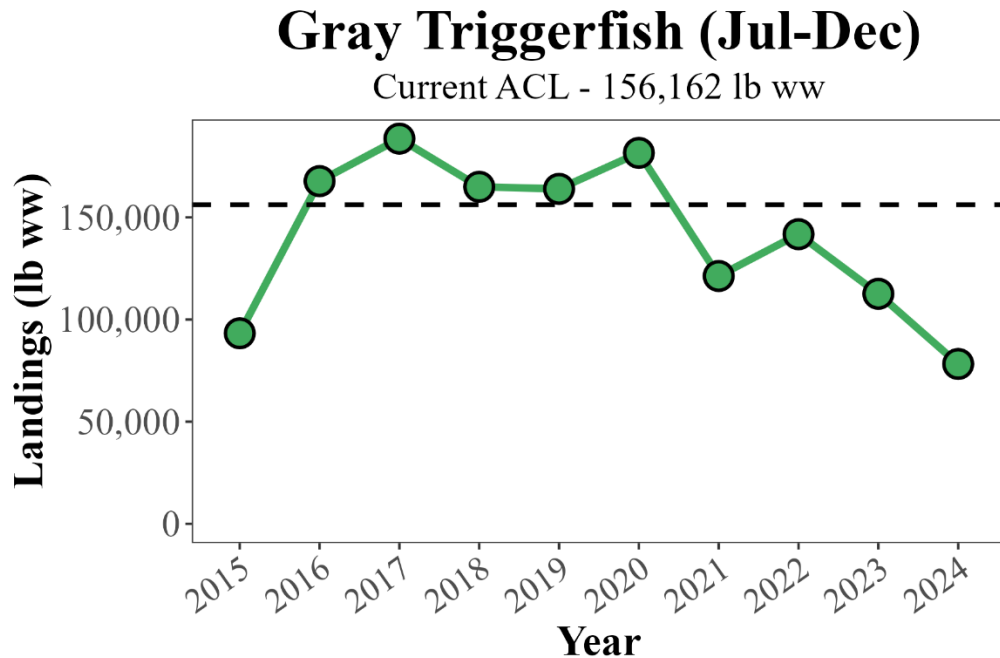


Figure F.36. Landings for South Atlantic gray triggerfish during Season 2 (July to December) of the commercial fishing season, for the last 10 years (2015-2024).

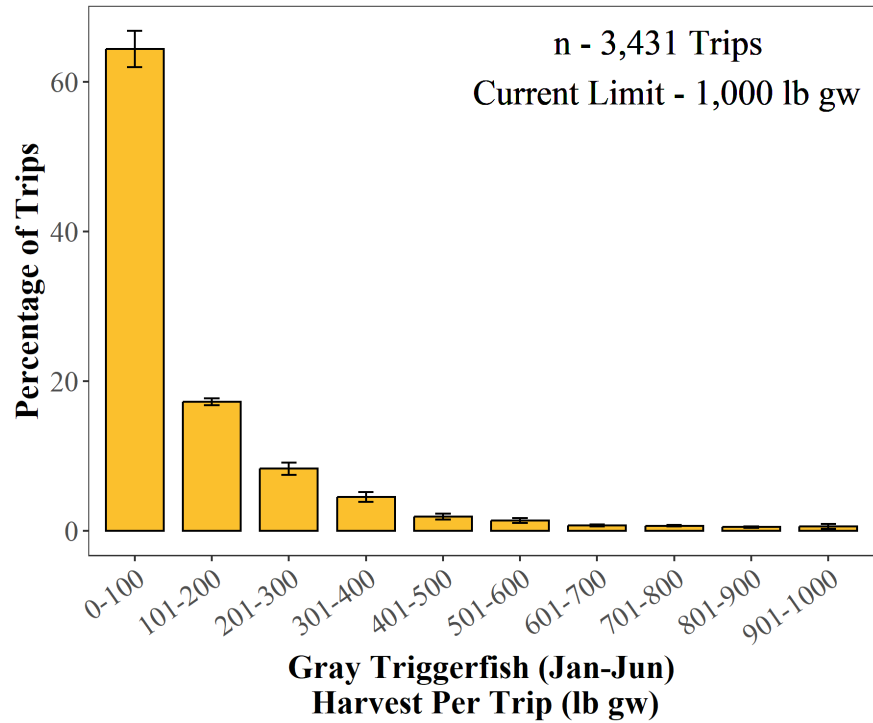


Figure F.37. Distribution of South Atlantic commercial trip harvest of gray triggerfish in 100 lb gw bins during Season 1 (January to April), data records aggregated between 2020 and 2024.

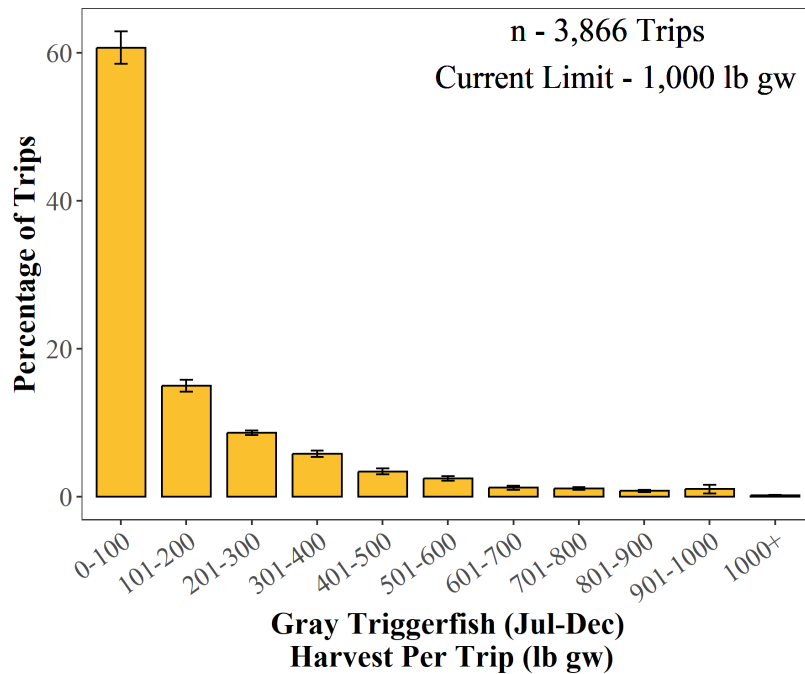


Figure F.38. Distribution of South Atlantic commercial trip harvest of gray triggerfish in 100 lb gw bins during Season 2 (May to December), data records aggregated between 2020 and 2024.

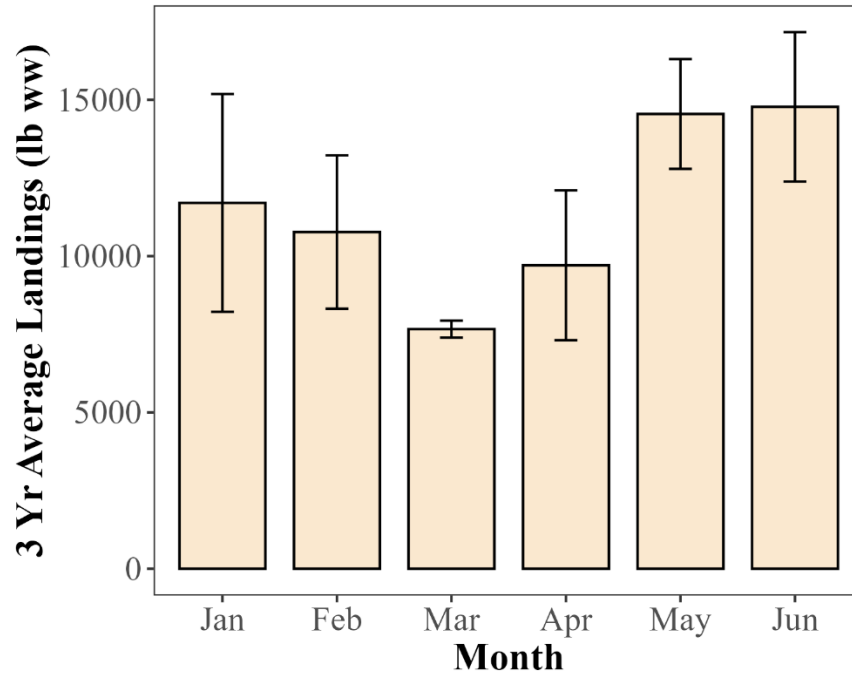


Figure F.39. Average commercial monthly landings, in lb gw, of South Atlantic gray triggerfish in Season 1 (January to June), 2022 to 2024.

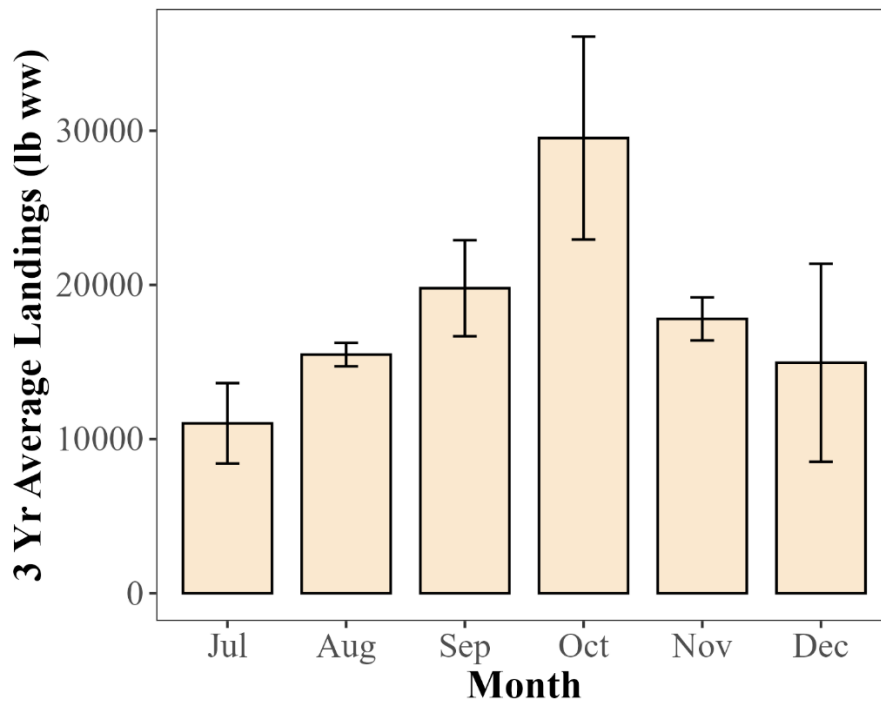


Figure F.40. Average commercial monthly landings, in lb gw, of South Atlantic gray triggerfish in Season 2 (July to December), 2022 to 2024.

Table F.9. Predictions for when the gray triggerfish annual catch limit (156,162 lb ww) would be met under the Action 8 commercial trip limit alternatives in Season 1 (January to June).

Action 8 Alternatives	Average Landings - 1 Standard Error		Average Landings		Average Landings + 1 Standard Error	
	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days
<i>Alternative 1 (No Action) - 1,000 lb gw</i>	-	181	-	181	-	181
<i>Alternative 2a - 1,200 lb gw</i>	-	181	-	181	-	181
<i>Alternative 2b - 1,400 lb gw</i>	-	181	-	181	-	181

Table F.10. Predictions for when the gray triggerfish annual catch limit (156,162 lb ww) would be met under the Action 8 commercial trip limit alternatives in Season 2 (July to December).

Action 8 Alternatives	Average Landings - 1 Standard Error		Average Landings		Average Landings + 1 Standard Error	
	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days
<i>Alternative 1 (No Action) - 1,000 lb gw</i>	-	184	-	184	-	184
<i>Alternative 2a - 1,200 lb gw</i>	-	184	-	184	-	184
<i>Alternative 2b - 1,400 lb gw</i>	-	184	-	184	-	184

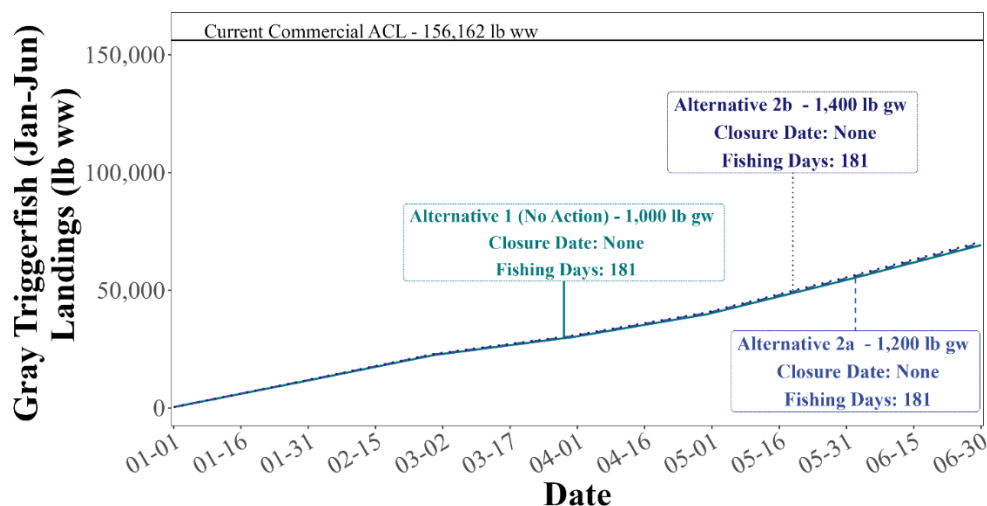


Figure F.41. Estimated cumulative gray triggerfish landings for each Action 8 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 1 (January to June), based on the average landings scenario.

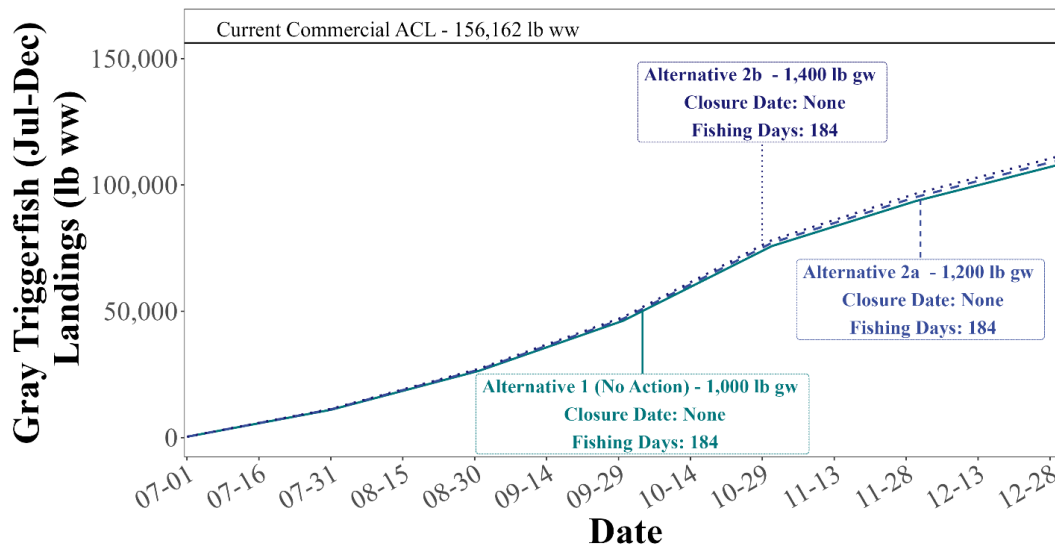


Figure F.42. Estimated cumulative gray triggerfish landings for each Action 8 commercial trip limit alternative in Season 2 (July to December), based on the average landings scenario.

F.1.9. Action 9: Golden Tilefish (Hook and Line)

Golden tilefish are managed in two separate fleets, based on the gear type used for harvest. Action 9 proposes changes to the harvest of golden tilefish by hook and line fishermen. Several closures have been projected in recent years, but the ACL has not been exceeded more than once in the last 5 years (Figure 43). The distribution of landings per trip show at least 15% of trips harvest within 10% of the current commercial trip limit (Figure 44). The trip scalars generated by assuming those trips landing within 10% of the trip limit would land the new proposed commercial trip limits estimate the percent increase in landings to range from 8 to 20%. Monthly landings of golden tilefish (hook and line) are variable throughout the calendar year, with the highest landings in June approaching 20,000 lb gw on average (Figure 45). The daily harvest rates calculated to represent low, average and high landings scenarios were upweighted by the scalars, summed cumulatively over the course of each fishing season and compared to the current ACL for each season to determine potential closure dates (Table 11). Seasonal closures were projected for all proposed alternatives, under the average and high landings scenarios. The higher commercial trip limits proposed will likely continue to initiate in-season closures for the fishery. The average landings scenario was plotted to show a visual representation of cumulative landings for each proposed commercial trip limit alternative in Action 9 (Figure 46).

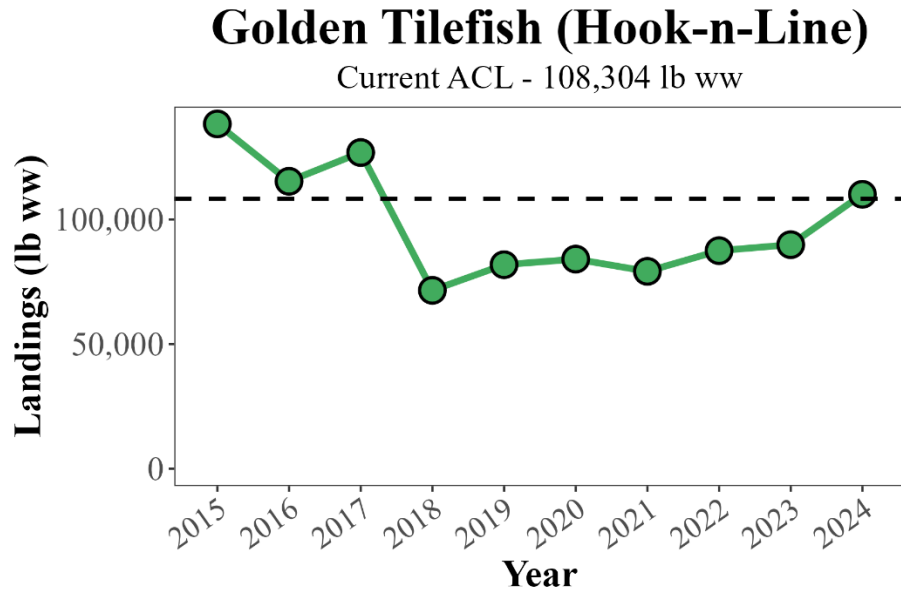


Figure F.43. Commercial landings for South Atlantic golden tilefish (hook and line) for the last 10 years (2015-2024).

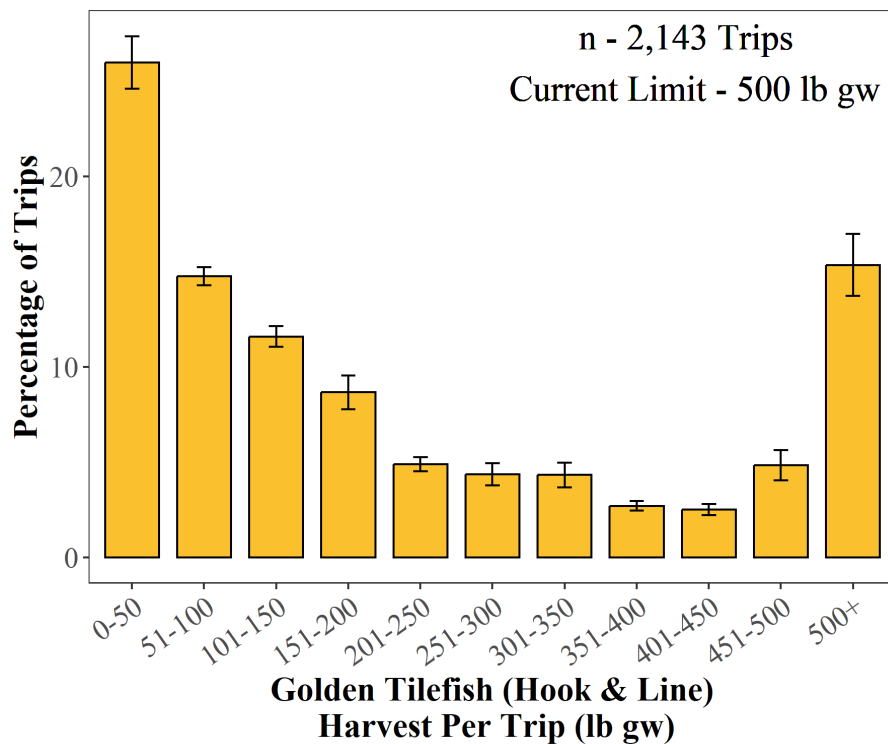


Figure F.44. Distribution of South Atlantic commercial trip harvest of golden tilefish (hook and line) in 50 lb gw, data records aggregated between 2020 and 2024.

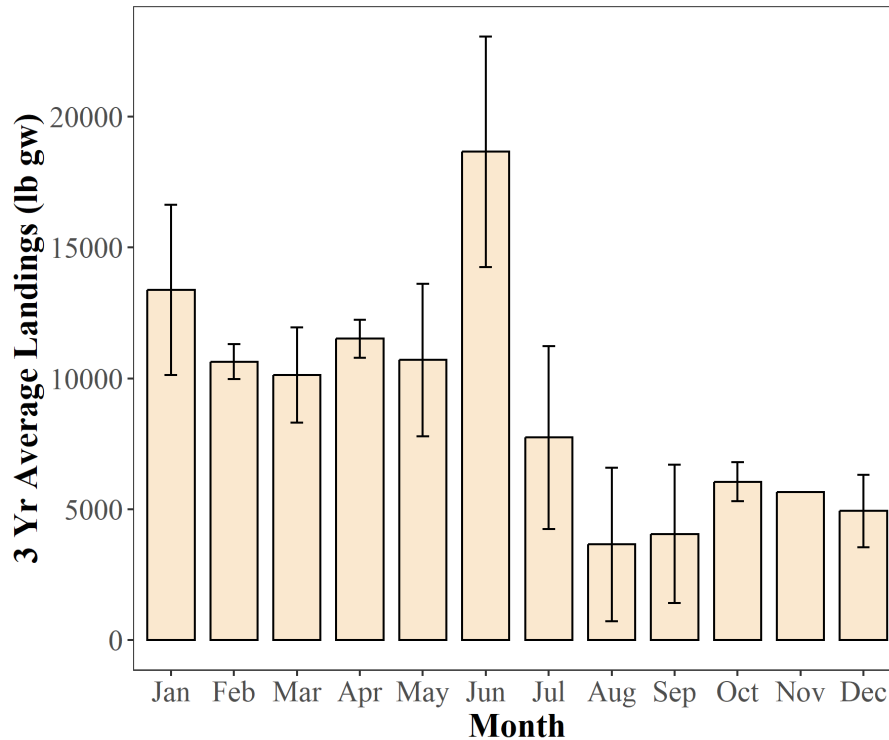


Figure F.45. Average commercial monthly landings, in lb gw, of South Atlantic golden tilefish (hook and line), 2022 to 2024.

Table F.11. Predictions for when the golden tilefish (hook and line) annual catch limit (112,656 lb ww) would be met under the Action 9 commercial trip limit alternatives.

Action 9 Alternatives	Average Landings - 1 Standard Error		Average Landings		Average Landings + 1 Standard Error	
	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days	Closure Date	Fishing Days
<i>Alternative 1 (No Action) - 500 lb gw</i>	-	365	16-Oct	288	22-Jul	202
<i>Preferred Alternative 2 - 600 lb gw</i>	-	365	21-Sep	263	8-Jul	188
<i>Alternative 3 - 750 lb gw</i>	-	365	27-Aug	238	24-Jun	174

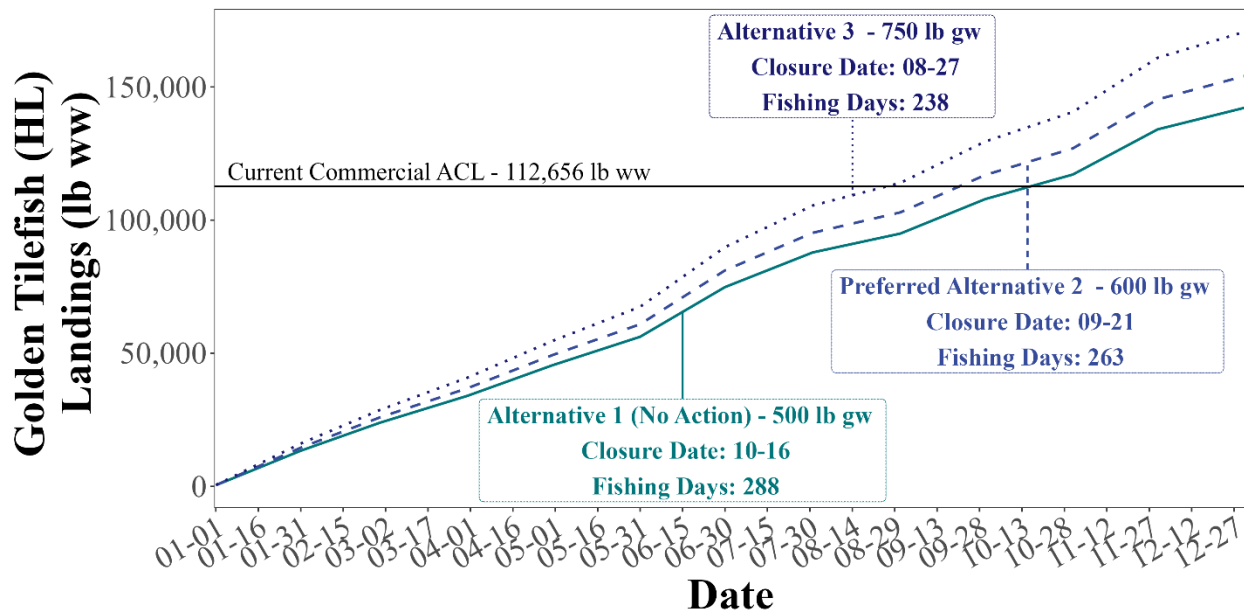


Figure F.46. Estimated cumulative golden tilefish (hook and line) landings for each Action 9 commercial trip limit alternative, based on the average landings scenario.

Appendix G. Bycatch Practicability Analysis

G.1. Background

Text.

G.2. Population Effects for the Bycatch Species

Text.

Commercial Sector

Text.

Recreational Sector

Text.

Current Discards

Text.

G.3. Practicability of Management Measures in Directed Fisheries Relative to their Impact on Bycatch and Bycatch Mortality

Expected Impacts on Bycatch for the Subject Amendment Actions

Text.

Past, Current, and Future Actions to Prevent Bycatch and Improve Monitoring of Harvest, Discards, and Discard Mortality

Text.

G.4. Ecological Effects Due to Changes in Bycatch

Text.

G.5. Changes in the Bycatch of Other Fish Species and Resulting Population and Ecosystem Effects

Text.

G.6. Effects on Marine Mammals and Birds

Marine Mammals

Text.

Sea Birds

Text.

G.7. Changes in Fishing, Processing, Disposal, and Marketing Costs

Text.

G.8. Changes in Fishing Practices and Behavior of Fishermen

Text.

G.9. Changes in Research, Administration, and Enforcement Costs and Management Effectiveness

Research

Text.

Administration

The proposed actions are not expected to significantly impact administrative costs.

Enforcement

The proposed actions are not expected to significantly impact enforcement costs.

G.10. Changes in the Economic, Social, or Cultural Value of Fishing Activities and Non-Consumptive Uses of Fishery Resources

Text.

G.11. Changes in the Distribution of Benefits and Costs

Text.

G.12. Social Effects

Text.

G.13. Conclusion

Text.

Appendix H. Fishery Impact Statement

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requires a Fishery Impact Statement (FIS) be prepared for all amendments to Fishery Management Plans (FMPs). The FIS contains an assessment of the likely biological, social, and economic effects of the conservation and management measures on: 1) fishery participants and their communities; 2) participants in the fisheries conducted in adjacent areas under the authority of another Council; and 3) the safety of human life at sea.

H.1. Actions Contained in Snapper Grouper Amendment __

Text.

H.2. Assessment of Biological Effects

Text.

H.3. Assessment of Economic Effects

Text.

H.4. Assessment of the Social Effects

Removing the two for one requirement for commercial SG 1 permits (Action 1) allow easier access to the commercial snapper grouper fishery for fishermen looking to enter the fishery. This lower barrier to entry would make it more feasible for younger or new fishermen to participate in the snapper grouper fishery, addressing the concern of the “greying of the fleet”. This would likely improve generational turnover, support the continuity of fishing communities, and broaden access to opportunities tied to the fishery. It may also reduce the concentration of permits among a smaller group of operators, helping to maintain a more diverse and locally rooted fleet. Alternatively, this could place additional pressure on already constrained stocks and make it more challenging to maintain harvest levels within sustainable limits, especially if permits that were previously latent become active once access to the fishery is less restrictive.

In general, management measures that increase the number of fish a commercial vessel can land during a given trip are expected to be beneficial to fishermen and fishing communities by increasing access to the resource, so long as overharvest is not occurring to negatively affect the stock in the long term. Allowing possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board and harvest if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed (Action 2) is anticipated to result in direct positive social effects to fishermen and communities that operate in the fishery utilizing bottom longline gear.

Action 3 proposes higher commercial trip limits during season one and season two, respectively, for greater amberjack and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency. In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how

fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. If increased landings cause the commercial ACL to be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure, negative social effects could be experienced resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. However, landings for greater amberjack have been below the commercial ACL in recent years and the changes proposed in this action are not anticipated to result in early closures.

Action 4 proposes higher commercial trip limits during season one and season two, respectively, for vermillion snapper and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency. In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. If increased landings cause the commercial ACL to be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure, negative social effects could be experienced resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. However, landings for vermillion snapper have been below the commercial ACL in recent years and the changes proposed in this action are not anticipated to result in early closures.

Action 5 proposes higher commercial trip limits during season one and season two, respectively, for red porgy and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency. In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. If increased landings cause the commercial ACL to be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure, negative social effects could be experienced resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. However, landings for red porgy have been below the commercial ACL in recent years and the changes proposed in this action are not anticipated to result in early closures.[CC1.1]

Action 6 proposes a higher commercial trip limit for hogfish and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency. In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. If increased landings cause the commercial ACL to be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure, negative social effects could be experienced resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. However, landings for hogfish have been below the commercial ACL in recent years and the changes proposed in this action are not anticipated to result in early closures.

Action 7 proposes a higher commercial trip limit for red grouper and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency. In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. If increased landings cause the commercial ACL to be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure, negative social effects could be experienced resulting from

decreased fishing opportunities. However, landings for red grouper have been below the commercial ACL in recent years and the changes proposed in this action are not anticipated to result in early closures.

Action 8 proposes a higher commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency. In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. If increased landings cause the commercial ACL to be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure, negative social effects could be experienced resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. However, landings for gray triggerfish have been below the commercial ACL in recent years and the changes proposed in this action are not anticipated to result in early closures.

Action 9 proposes a higher commercial trip limit for golden tilefish and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) utilizing hook and line gear by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency. In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. However, increased landings may cause the commercial hook and line ACL to be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure, negative social effects could be experienced resulting from decreased fishing opportunities.

Requiring all snapper grouper harvested commercially (above the recreational bag limit) to be sold to a permitted dealer (Action 10) would be expected to directly affect vessels with a commercial snapper grouper permit harvesting but not selling commercial quantities of snapper grouper species. In the short-term, this action will reduce benefits to individuals harvesting commercial amounts of snapper group species for personal consumption. However, more accurate reporting of harvest is expected to contribute to sustainable management goals and be beneficial to fishermen and communities in the long term.

H.5. Assessment of Effects on Safety at Sea

Text