

Summary Report

Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee

April 20-21, 2026

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee) met on April 20-21, 2026 to further develop Amendment 60 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

The Sub-Committee approved the agenda for the April 2026 meeting and minutes for the March 2026 meeting.

1. Amendment 60 (Commercial Permits and Trip Efficiency)

Council staff updated the Sub-Committee on progress made since the March meeting, including draft actions and alternatives. NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff presented information on commercial snapper grouper permits, information on potential notification systems to verify at-sea gear changes to or from bottom longline gear, and preliminary trip limit analyses for requested snapper grouper species. The Sub-Committee reviewed actions and alternatives and provided the following guidance for further amendment development:

Purpose and Need

- **Clarify that 'stability' refers to maintaining the current number of commercial participants (Note in Action 1 discussion that removal of the 2-for-1 policy contributes to this, as it reduces the number of permits that would be retired by the 2-for-1 policy)**
- **Remove portions of the purpose and need statements pertaining to temporarily adjustable trip limits and revision of possession requirements (previously, Action 11) as these actions and alternatives are being removed from further consideration.**
- The Sub-Committee also discussed the potential need to control permit ownership and how to encourage permits to be held by fishermen that will actively participate in the fishery.
 - The Sub-Committee discussed that this could potentially include minimum catch or sale requirements or additional outreach to permit holders with current reporting requirements for permit maintenance.
 - The Sub-Committee discussed that a 'use or lose' provision may be useful if a permit pool is also established. This could promote permit usage, while also not decreasing the number of permits over time.
 - The Sub-Committee decided that actions to establish usage requirements or a permit pool would not be included in Amendment 60, but may be considered through a future amendment, if necessary.
 - The Sub-Committee directed staff to include language in the introductory sections of Amendment 60 to indicate the Council's intent for the snapper grouper commercial fishery to be comprised of permit holders that are active participants in a professional commercial fleet that harvests with intent to sell their catch.

- The Sub-Committee discussed that a potential action aligned with this intent could be a requirement that all commercial harvest is sold. Such a provision is in place in the Gulf.

Action 1. Remove the 2-for-1 policy for the snapper grouper commercial unlimited permit

- The Sub-Committee reviewed permit-related information, including breakdowns of vessel leasing, co-occurring permits, and latent permits.
- The Sub-Committee noted the current high number of latent permits, which may be inhibiting the fishery from reaching its annual catch limits (ACL).
- The Sub-Committee decided that actions to directly address permit latency should not be taken in Amendment 60, because this may be positively impacted by removing the 2-for-1 policy and increasing commercial trip limits. Instead, the Council should continue to monitor permit activity versus latency in the years following implementation of Amendment 60. If latency does not begin to decrease, then the Council can consider action through a future amendment.
- The Sub-Committee noted that the 225-pound (SG 2) permit is not being addressed in this amendment. Further discussions about the long-term role of the SG 2 permit in the fishery will be revisited following the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel's April 2026 meeting.

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

- The Sub-Committee directed staff to **revise Alternative 3 to require an at-sea notification prior to switching to or from bottom longline gear, rather than a notification prior to departure.** This provides more accurate information for data collection and law enforcement.
- The Sub-Committee also directed staff to **include an additional alternative that considers requiring a vessel monitoring system (VMS)** to be able to switch to or from bottom longline gear within a trip.
 - The Sub-Committee directed staff to compile information on different types of VMS, associated costs, and information on potential financial assistance for acquiring these systems.
 - The Sub-Committee noted that the requirement for VMS (or notification) would ONLY apply for commercial fishermen intending to switch to or from bottom longline gear within a trip.
 - The Sub-Committee noted that further discussion is necessary about whether the VMS needs to be turned on only for trips that switch to or from bottom longline gear or for all of that vessel's trips.
 - A benefit of VMS over at-sea notification is more reliable communication. Connection strength can be an issue for satellite phones.
- The Sub-Committee requested guidance from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on whether consideration of alternatives under this action could speed or slow implementation of Amendment 60, considering established federal VMS and at-sea notification structures and whether this action would be perceived as regulatory or de-regulatory.

- The Sub-Committee directed staff to **incorporate wreckfish into the considered alternatives**, to allow wreckfish fishermen to carry bottom longline gear on board and possess other snapper grouper species (while not changing the gear restrictions for harvest of each species).

Adjustable Trip Limits for Select Snapper Grouper Species (Alternatives under Actions 3-10)

- The Sub-Committee discussed a potential process for temporarily adjusting trip limits for snapper grouper species, based on harvest relative to ACLs in the previous year.
- The Sub-Committee reviewed the timing and components of this process. The Sub-Committee decided that the **alternatives considering adjustable trip limits should be removed from Actions 3-10**, and only ‘static’ trip limit changes should be considered in Amendment 60.
 - The Sub-Committee noted that the steps of this process were too complicated and too reliant on catch projections that would need to be estimated relatively early in the fishing year (~6 months) for all steps of evaluation, review, and implementation to be completed before the beginning of the next fishing year.
- The Sub-Committee is interested in further exploration of methods to quicken the process of changing trip limits, outside of Amendment 60.
 - The Sub-Committee directed staff to **explore other avenues** to accomplish this, such as revising abbreviated framework procedures, or clarifying ways to use current framework procedures to quickly implement these changes.
 - Include National Environmental Policy Act implications
 - Explore how other Councils have established processes for more expedited actions
 - Include consideration of faster changes for similar recreational management measures (e.g. bag or vessel limits), as well
 - The Sub-Committee also directed staff to **provide information on commercial landings and performance of trip limits every 2-years through the Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Reports** during the same meeting as the annual report on the Southeast Reef Fish Survey (SERFS) is presented.

Actions 3-10. Revise Commercial Trip Limits

The Sub-Committee directed the following changes to trip limit actions (Actions 3-10) and made the following recommendations for preferred alternatives to the Snapper Grouper Committee’s review in the June 2026 Council meeting. In addition to the following species-specific changes, the Sub-Committee requested a discussion in June about whether an emergency action could be considered to speed the implementation of trip limit increases.

Action 3. Revise commercial trip limits for greater amberjack

- Add sub-alternatives that consider a 1,750 lbs gw trip limit for each season.
- Revise all considered trip limits to be in gutted weight, rather than whole or gutted weight.
- **Sub-Committee Recommendation:** Select 2,000 lbs as the preferred sub-alternatives for both seasons.

Action 4. Revise commercial trip limits for vermilion snapper

- Add sub-alternatives that consider a 1,750 lbs gw trip limit for each season.
- Remove the sub-alternative considering a 1,250 lbs gw trip limit for Season 1.
- **Sub-Committee Recommendation:** Select 1,500 lbs as the preferred sub-alternative for both seasons.

Action 5. Revise commercial trip limits for red porgy

- **Sub-Committee Recommendation:** Select 45 fish as the preferred sub-alternative for both seasons.

Action 6. Revise commercial trip limits for hogfish (GA-NC)

- Add an alternative that consider a 750 lbs ww trip limit.

Action 7. Revise commercial trip limits for hogfish (GA-NC)

- **Sub-Committee Recommendation:** Select 300 lbs gw as the preferred alternative.

Action 8. Revise commercial trip limits for gray triggerfish

- This action previously only included an alternative to establish adjustable trip limits (which will be removed).
- Add alternatives to consider trip limit changes to 1,200 lbs ww and 1,400 lbs ww for both seasons.

Action 9. Revise commercial trip limits for golden tilefish (hook and line only)

- This action previously only included an alternative to establish adjustable trip limits (which will be removed).
- Add alternatives to consider trip limit changes to 600 lbs ww and 750 lbs ww.

Action 10. Revise commercial trip limits for gag

- Remove this action from further consideration in Amendment 60.

Action 11. Modify Commercial Trip Limit and Possession Requirements

- The Sub-Committee noted several issues that require further discussion to address this action, including:
 - o A plan for the impending change to electronic reporting
 - o Examples of actions that could convey accountability to law enforcement
 - o Necessary information that needs to remain with the fish
 - o Necessary timing for communications between the fishermen and dealer
- Beyond these issues, the Sub-Committee determined that addressing the issue of allowing fishermen to complete a trip and begin a new trip during times when a dealer is not open to receive the harvested fish extends beyond the Snapper Grouper FMP. That is, similar changes may need to be made to other FMPs (e.g. Coastal Migratory Pelagics and Dolphin Wahoo).
- Therefore, the Sub-Committee directed staff to remove this action from further consideration in Amendment 60.
- The Sub-Committee directed staff to explore options to address this issue through another, more comprehensive amendment.