



**NOAA
FISHERIES**

**Southeast
Region**

Amendment 59 to the Snapper-Grouper FMP



SAFMC Meeting
March 5, 2025
Jekyll Island, GA

Why is NMFS taking Action?

July 2021
Council informed overfishing is occurring; Federal law requires overfishing be ended

Between June 2023 and June 2024, NMFS sued 3 times for failure to end overfishing

Aug 2024 - Jan 2025
NMFS updates stock assessment, publishes Secretarial Amendment and proposed rule

Mar 2023
Council approves action to address overfishing; later rescinds action in Dec 2023

Aug 2024 NMFS agrees to settle one lawsuit; must develop a Secretarial Amendment and submit a final rule to Federal Register by June 2025

Purpose and Need

- End and prevent overfishing of the South Atlantic red snapper stock and maintain adequate rebuilding progress.
- Reduce dead discards of red snapper to provide additional opportunities for retaining red snapper and further minimize bycatch consistent with bycatch mandates.

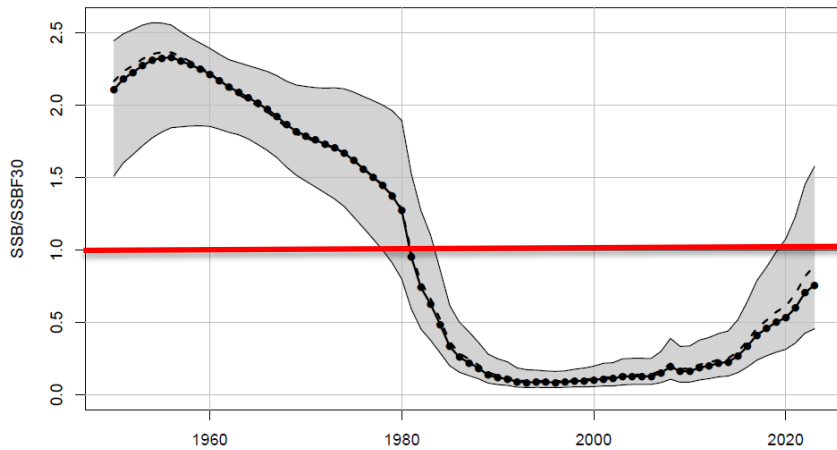


Stock Status

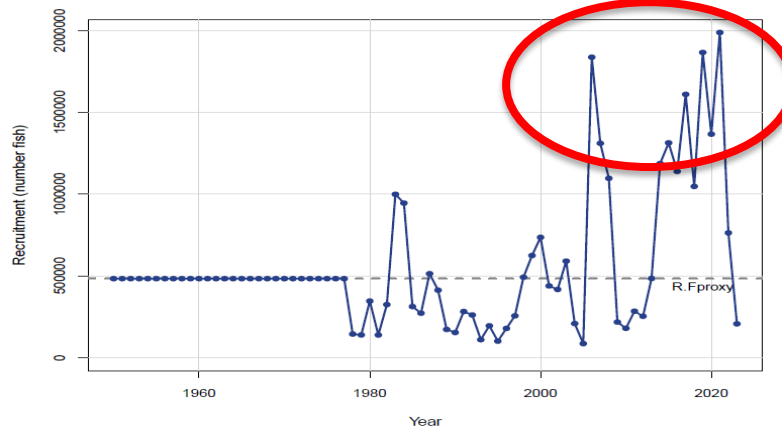
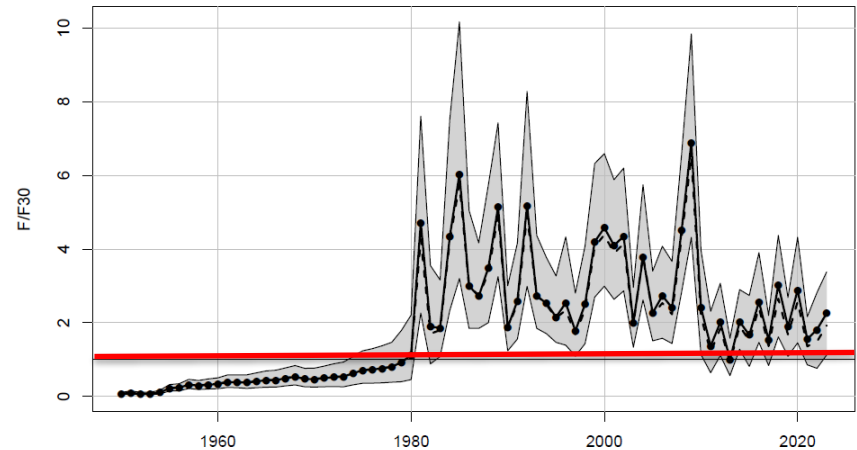
- SEDAR 73 red snapper assessment was completed in March 2021
 - Included data through 2019
 - Overfished, but making rebuilding progress
 - Undergoing overfishing
- NMFS updated the red snapper assessment in December 2024
 - Now includes data through 2023
 - No longer overfished, but still rebuilding
 - Undergoing overfishing based on Council's overfishing threshold

Red Snapper Assessment Results

Stock is rebuilding
At 76% of target biomass



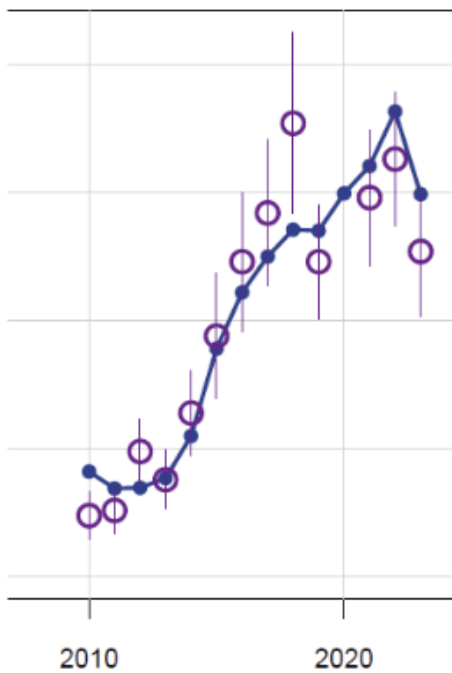
Fishing mortality exceeds
overfishing threshold



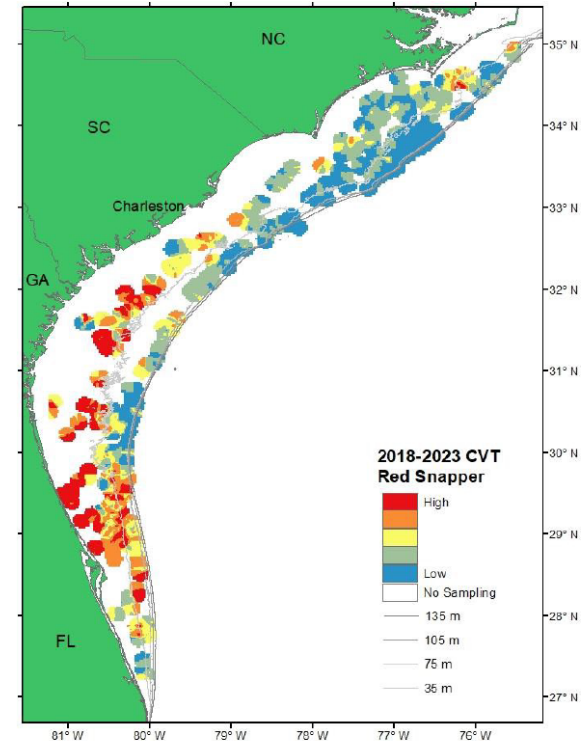
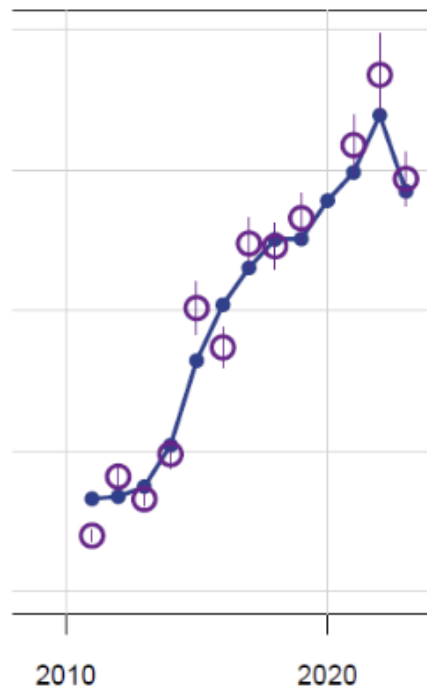
Large numbers of
young fish entering
the fishery

Abundance Indices

Chevron Trap Index

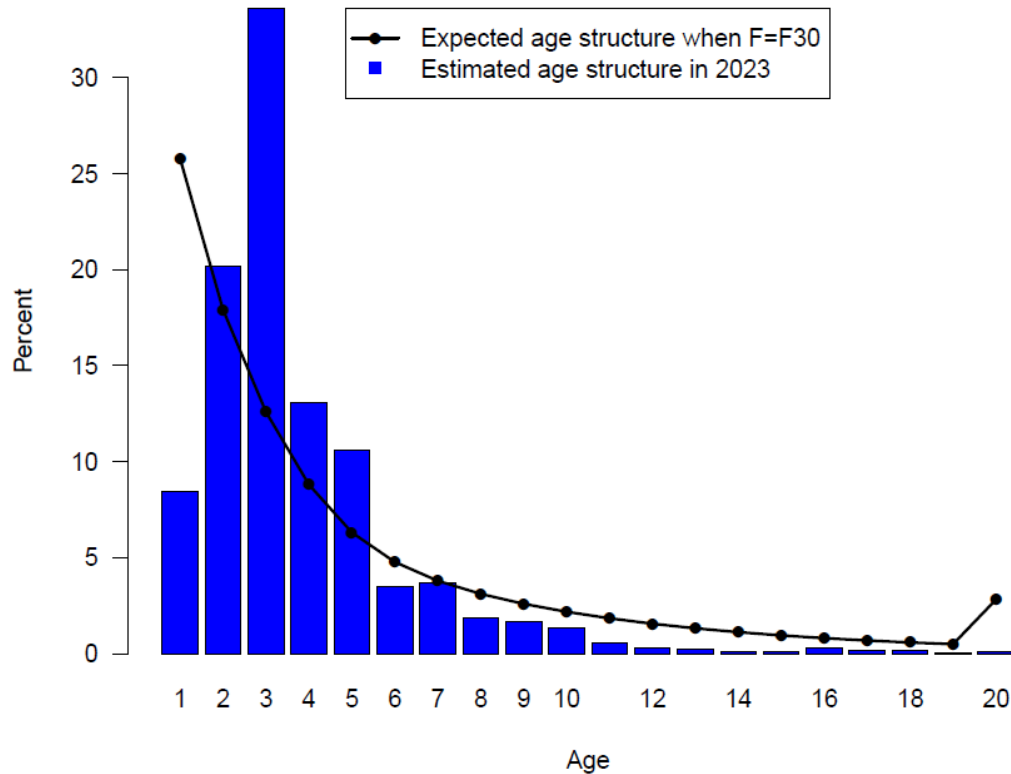


SERFS video index



Vecchio et al. 2024

Age Structure



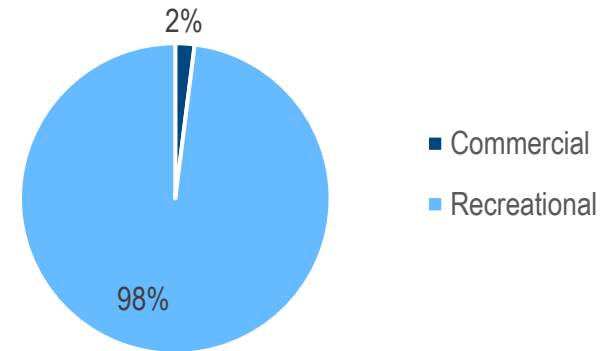
Ages 2-5 indicate an abundance of fish resulting from high numbers of young fish entering fishery in recent years

The number of age 6+ fish is below the expected age structure needed to maximize yield over long term

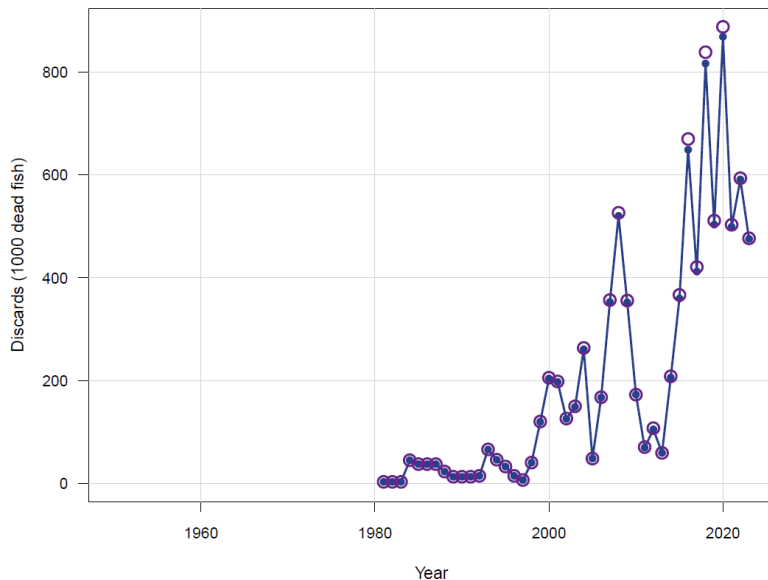
The Challenge

The number of dead discards is limiting increases in catch limits, resulting in forgone yield

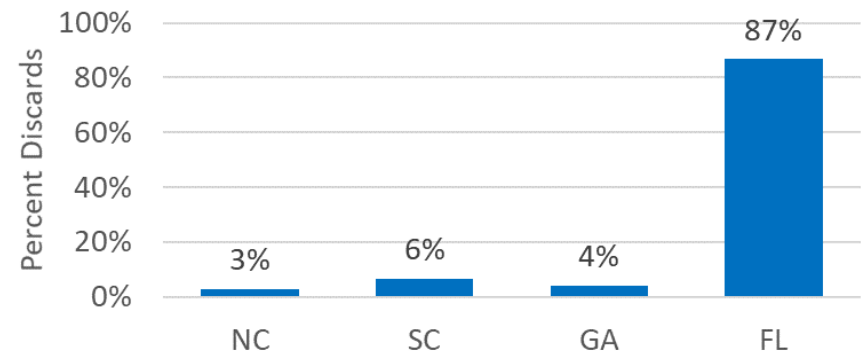
Dead Discards



Recreational Discards (1980-2023)

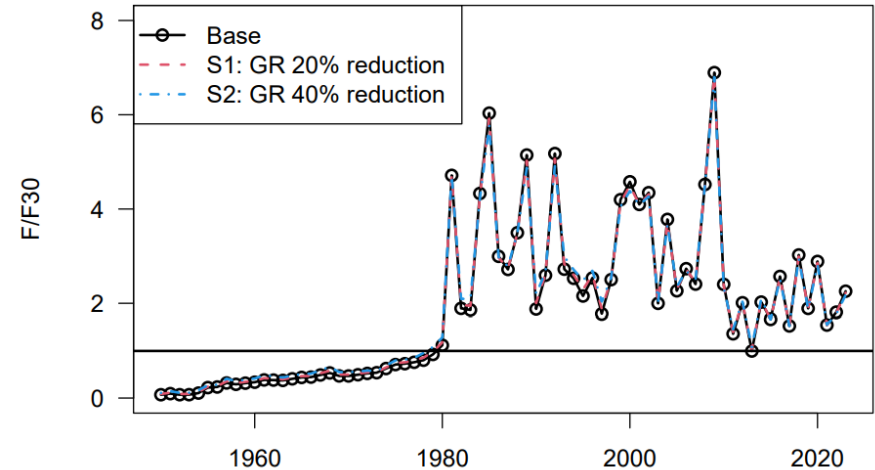
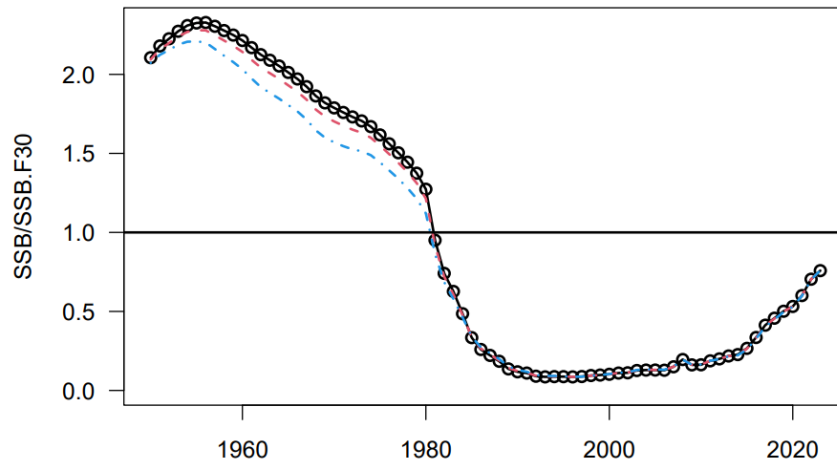


Proportion of Recreational Discards by State (2021-2023)



Release mortality:
32% comm, 22% headboat, 23% private/charter

Assessment Sensitivity Runs – Recreational Catch Estimates



- Stock status does not change if recreational catch estimates are 20% or 40% lower.
- Lower catches result in a smaller population size and lower estimates of young fish entering the population.

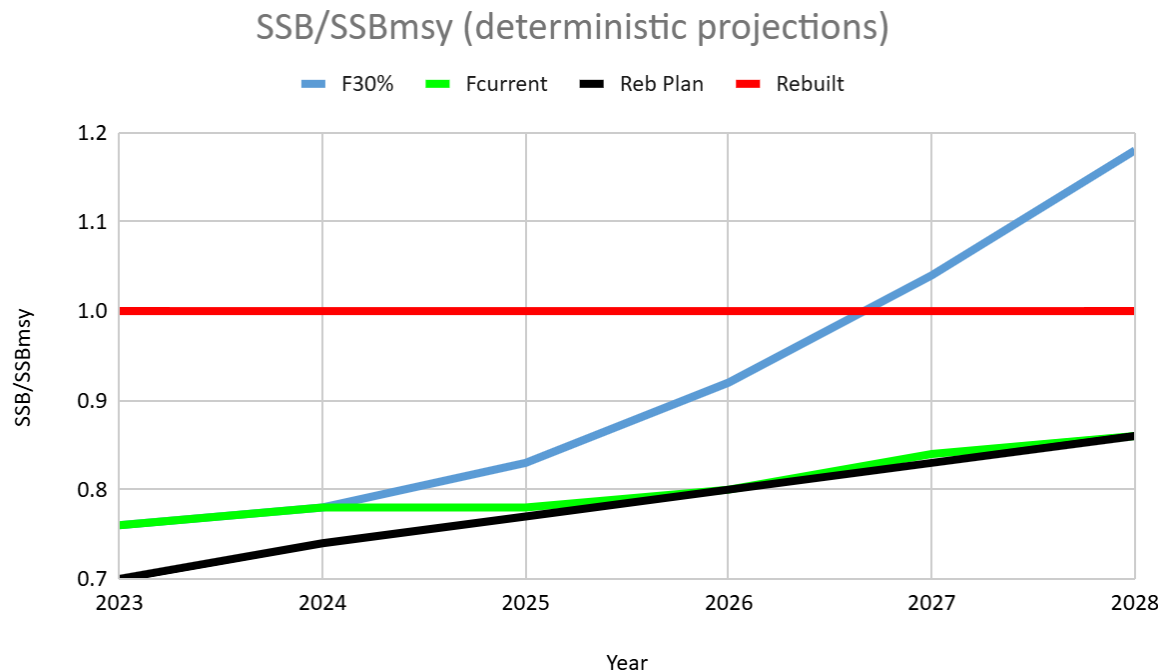
Action 1: Proxy for Red Snapper Overfishing

Alternative 1: (No Action). Overfishing occurs when current $F > F_{MSY}$ or $F_{30\%SPR}$.

Preferred Alternative 2. Overfishing occurs when current $F > F_{MSY}$ or a reasonable proxy, based on the best scientific information available consistent with National Standard 2.

- This proxy allows the population to remain on track with rebuilding plan through 2028 based on recent average recruitment (fish entering fishery) until a new stock assessment is completed and used for management.
- Stock would no longer be undergoing overfishing, but would still require reductions in discards to increase fishing opportunities.

Action 1: Proxy for Red Snapper Overfishing



Alternative 1: (No Action) (blue line) Stock rebuilt (red line) by 2027, but requires much steeper reductions in fishing mortality

Preferred Alternative 2 (green line): Allows for continued rebuilding consistent with the rebuilding plan (black line)

Action 2: Acceptable Biological Catch

Alternative	ABC in total removals (landed fish + dead discards)
Alternative 1 (No Action)	53,000 (18,000 + 35,000)
Preferred Alternative 2	509,000 (71,000 + 438,000)
Alternative 3	464,000 (65,000 + 399,000)

The ABC must be set at or below the Overfishing Limit = 553,000 fish

Action 3: Annual Catch Limits based on Action 2 preferred Acceptable Biological Catch

ACL Alternative	Required Dead Discard Reduction	Total ACL (landings + dead discards (n))	Commercial ACL (lbs ww)	Recreational ACL (n)
Alt 1	--	42,510 (landings only)	124,815 lbs ww	29,656 (n)
Alt 2	16%	505,000 (105,000 landings + 400,000 dead discards)	300,000 lbs ww	64,000 (n)
Preferred Alt 3	24%	500,000 (139,000 landings + 361,000 dead discards)	346,000 lbs ww	85,000 (n) *equivalent to 887,000 lbs ww
Alt 4	32%	496,000 (172,000 landings + 323,000 dead discards)	390,000 lbs ww	105,000 (n)

Allocation: 28.07% commercial, 71.93% recreational

Action 3: Additional Annual Catch Limits Considered

ACL Alternative	Required Dead Discard Reduction	Total ACL (landings + dead discards (n))	Commercial ACL (lbs ww)	Recreational ACL (n)
Alt 1	--	42,510 (landings only)	124,815 lbs ww	29,656 (n)
Alt 2	16%	464,000 (65,000 landings + 399,000 dead discards)	233,000 lbs ww	40,000 (n)
Alt 3	24%	459,000 (96,000 landings + 363,000 dead discards)	284,000 lbs ww	59,000 (n)
Alt 4	32%	454,000 (131,000 landings + 323,000 dead discards)	330,000 lbs ww	80,000 (n)

Allocation: 28.07% commercial, 71.93% recreational

Recreational Season Length

Annual Catch Limits	Estimated Season Length
29,656 fish	2-3 days
64,000 fish	3-7 days
85,000 fish	5-9 days
105,000 fish	6-11 days
40,000 fish	2-4 days
59,000 fish	3-6 days
80,000 fish	4-8 days

- Despite a 3-fold increase in the recreational catch limit, the season is estimated to be 5-9 days, spread across 3-5 weekends (Sat/Sun)
- Why is the season so short?
 - Recreational catch rates are high and range from 9,526 - 19,072 fish/day based on 2018-2023 seasons

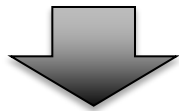
Safety at Sea – Recreational Sector

- If the NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator (RA) determines that weather conditions classified by the National Weather Service at least as severe as a Small Craft Advisory exist, or are projected to exist, in the South Atlantic EEZ, the RA may modify the opening and closing dates of the recreational fishing season, **including off a specific South Atlantic state.**
- NOAA Fisheries would file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register and announce via NOAA Weather Radio and a Fishery Bulletin any change in the dates of the red snapper recreational fishing season.

Overfishing Limit
553,000 fish



Acceptable Biological Catch
509,000 fish

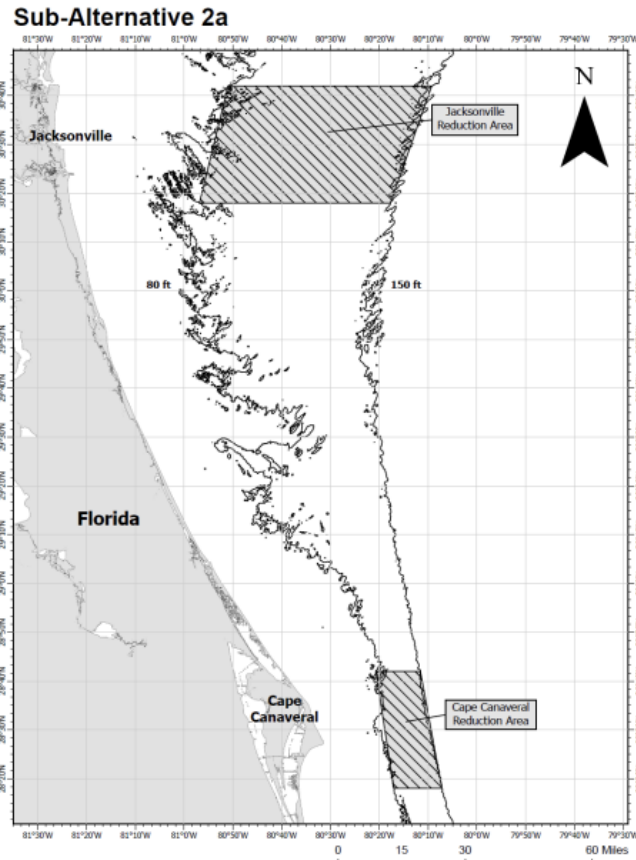


Annual Catch Limit
500,000 fish

Scientific Uncertainty

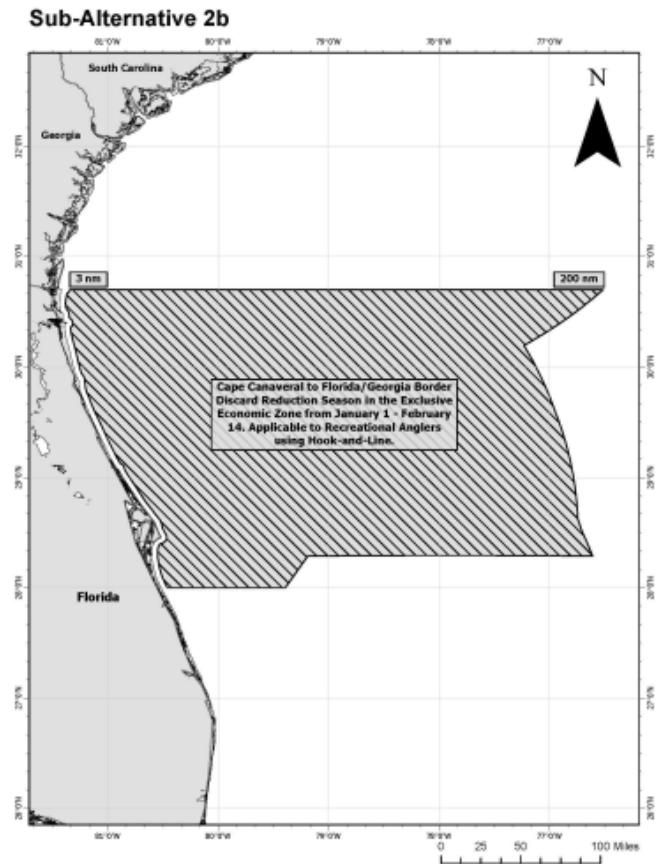
Must set ACL equal to or less than ABC

Action 4: Measures to Reduce Recreational Sector Red Snapper Dead Discards (Sub-Alternative 2A)



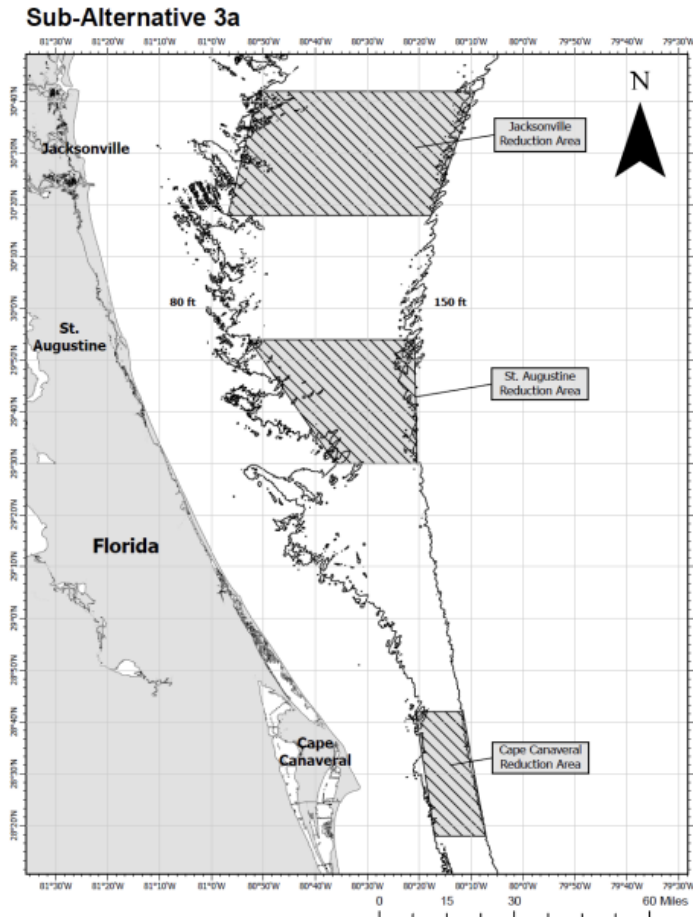
- Two year-round discard reduction areas between 80-150 depth
 - Jacksonville
 - Cape Canaveral
- 16% reduction in dead discards
- Prohibits recreational and for-hire fishers from fishing for, harvesting, or possessing Snapper-Grouper with hook-and-line fishing gear (including trolling gear)
- Spearfishing for snapper-grouper and trolling for pelagics is allowed.

Action 4: Measures to Reduce Recreational Sector Red Snapper Dead Discards (Sub-Alternative 2B)



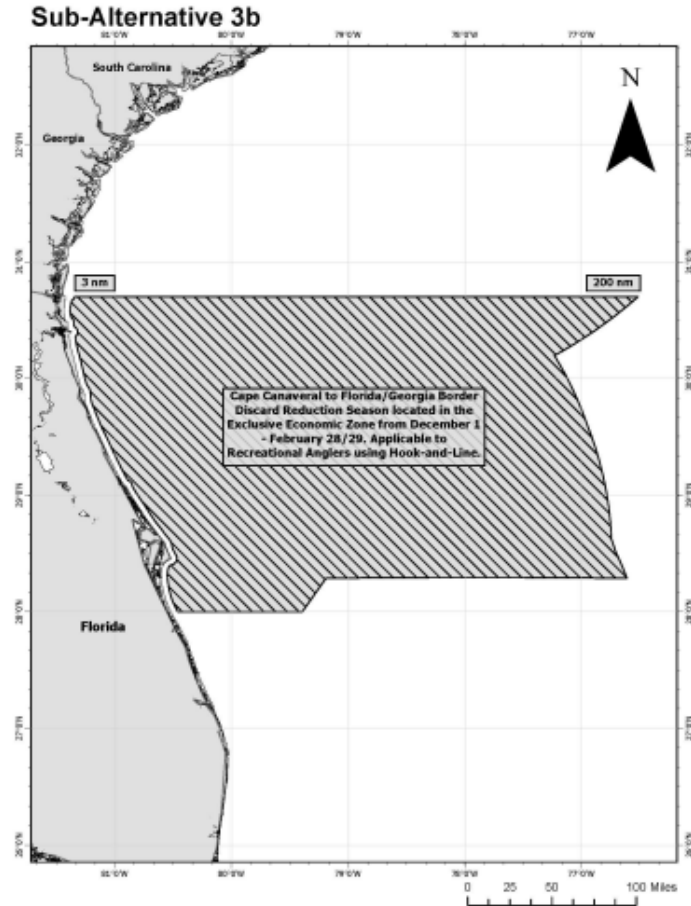
- Jan 1 – Feb 14 discard reduction season between Cape Canaveral (28° north) and the FL/GA border
- 16% reduction in dead discards
- During the closure, recreational and for-hire fishers are prohibited from fishing for, harvesting, or possessing Snapper-Grouper with hook-and-line fishing gear (including trolling gear)
- Spearfishing for snapper-grouper and trolling for pelagics is allowed.

Action 4: Measures to Reduce Recreational Sector Red Snapper Dead Discards (Sub-Alternative 3A)



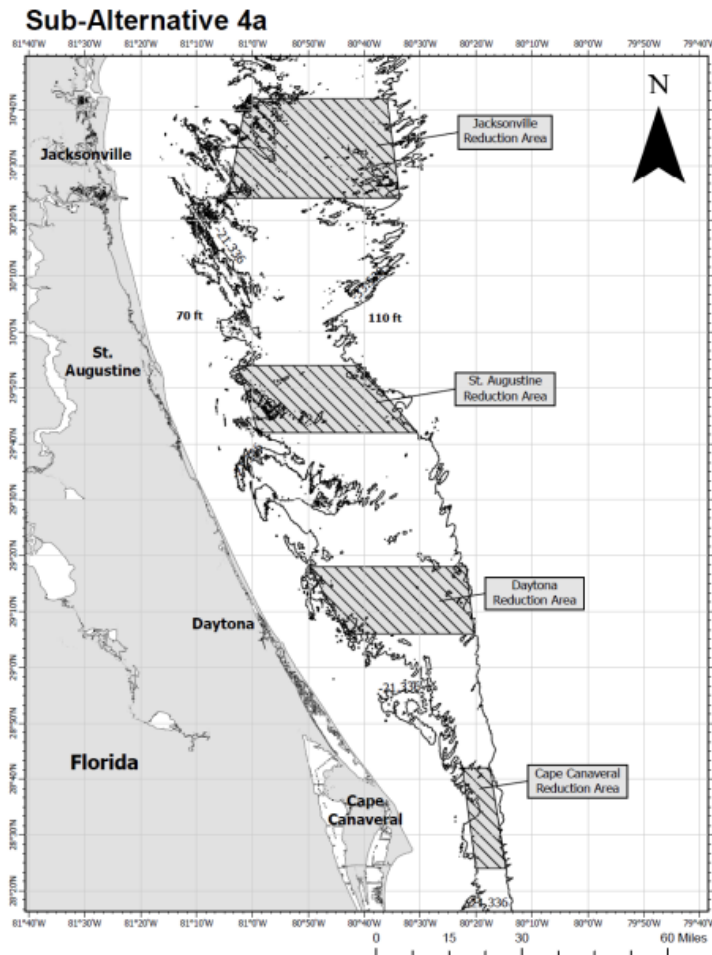
- Three year-round discard reduction areas between 80-150 feet:
 - Jacksonville
 - St. Augustine
 - Cape Canaveral
- 24% reduction in dead discards
- Prohibits recreational and for-hire fishers from fishing for, harvesting, or possessing Snapper-Grouper with hook-and-line fishing gear (including trolling gear)
- Spearfishing for snapper-grouper and trolling for pelagics is allowed.

Action 4: Measures to Reduce Recreational Sector Red Snapper Dead Discards (**Preferred Sub-Alternative 3B**)



- Dec 1 – Feb 28/29 discard reduction season between Cape Canaveral (28° north) and the FL/GA border
- 24% reduction in dead discards
- During the closure, recreational and for-hire fishers are prohibited from fishing for, harvesting, or possessing Snapper-Grouper with hook-and-line fishing gear (including trolling gear)
- Spearfishing for snapper-grouper and trolling for pelagics is allowed.

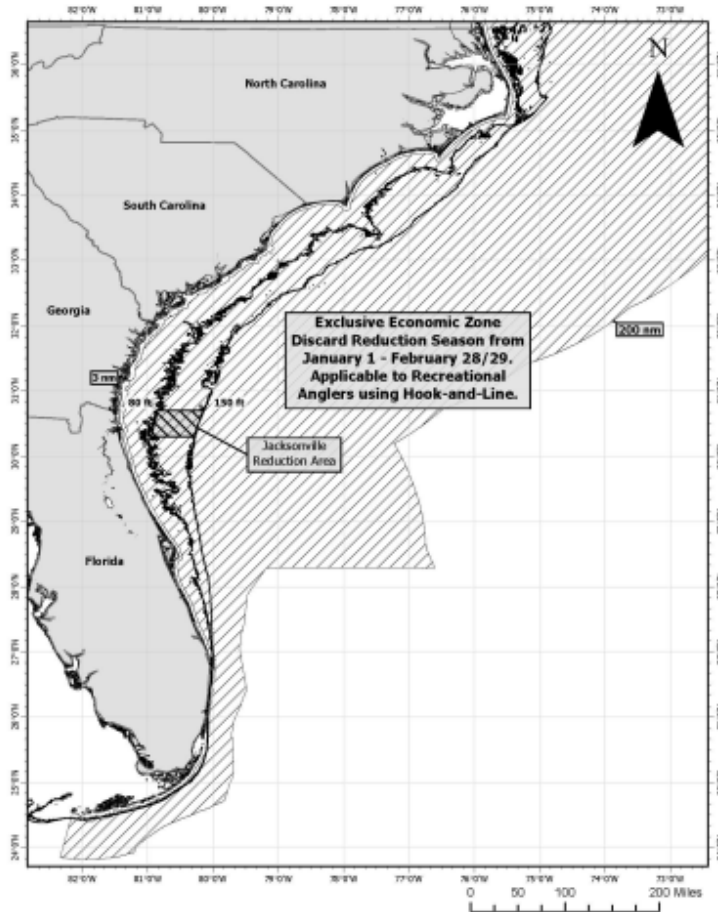
Action 4: Measures to Reduce Recreational Sector Red Snapper Dead Discards (Sub-Alternative 4A)



- Four year-round discard reduction areas between 70-110 feet:
 - Jacksonville
 - St. Augustine
 - Daytona Beach
 - Cape Canaveral
- 32% reduction in dead discards
- Prohibits recreational and for-hire fishers from fishing for, harvesting, or possessing Snapper-Grouper with hook-and-line fishing gear (including trolling gear)
- Spearfishing for snapper-grouper and trolling for pelagics is allowed.

Action 4: Measures to Reduce Recreational Sector Red Snapper Dead Discards (Sub-Alternative 4B)

Sub-Alternative 4b



- Jan 1– Feb 28/29 discard reduction season in South Atlantic EEZ + a year round discard reduction area of Jacksonville
- 32% reduction in dead discards
- During the closure and within the discard reduction area, recreational and for-hire fishers are prohibited from fishing for, harvesting, or possessing Snapper-Grouper with hook-and-line fishing gear (including trolling gear)
- Spearfishing for snapper-grouper and trolling for pelagics is allowed.

Action 5A: Commercial Trip Limit

Alternative	Trip Limit	Estimated Season Length based on 346,000 lb commercial ACL
Alternative 1 (No Action)	75 lbs gw	146 days
Alternative 2	100 lbs gw	124 days
Preferred Alternative 3	150 lbs gw	95 days
Alternative 4	200 lbs gw	76 days

Action 5B: Commercial Fishing Season

Alternative	Season Start Date
Alternative 1 (No Action)	2 nd Monday in July
Preferred Alternative 2	May 1 (beginning in 2026)
Alternative 3	June 1 (beginning in 2026)



Action 6: Recreational Fishing Season

Alternative	Season Start Date
Alternative 1 (No Action)	2 nd Friday in July, 3-day weekends (Fri-Sun)
Alternative 2	2 nd Friday in June, 3-day weekends (Fri-Sun; beginning in 2026)
Preferred Alternative 3	2 nd Saturday in July, 2-day weekends (Sat-Sun, beginning in 2025)
Preferred Alternative 4	2 nd Saturday in June, 2-day weekends (Sat-Sun; beginning in 2026)

Red Snapper Experimental Studies



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NEWS

NOAA Fisheries Recommends Funding Projects that Explore Innovative Strategies to Reduce Red Snapper Discards and Increase Fishing Opportunities in the South Atlantic

February 12, 2024

- 5 projects awarded funding in 2024
- 3 projects received experiment fishing permits
 - Testing aggregate bag limits and full retention



Action 7: Experimental Studies Program

Alternative 1: (No Action). Do not establish an experimental studies program

Alternative 2 and Preferred Alternative 3:

- Both establish an annual process for requesting, evaluating, and approving proposals for projects intended to reduce red snapper discards and increase fishing opportunities.
- NMFS would evaluate proposals based on a fixed schedule each year
- Both alternatives would set the authorized amount of red snapper for projects as the difference between the ABC and total ACL selected in Actions 2 and 3.

For Example: $ABC - ACL = \text{authorized fish}$
 $509,000 - 500,000 = 9,000 \text{ fish}$

- Alternative 2 does not place a cap on the authorized amount of red snapper, while Preferred Alternative 3 establishes a maximum amount of 10,000 red snapper, or the difference between the ABC and total ACL, whichever is less

Action 8: Modify the Fishing Year

Alternative	Fishing Year
Alternative 1 (No Action)	January 1-December 31
Preferred Alternative 2	May 1-April 30
Alternative 3	June 1-May 31

Public Comments as of 3/5/2025

Public Hearing	Date	Registered Attendees	Public Comments
Charleston, SC	2/5	19	7
Morehead City, NC	2/6	25	2
Jacksonville, FL	2/24	55	16
Cocoa Beach, FL	2/25	76	16

379 public comments on the Notice of Availability/Proposed Rule and 11 on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Public Comment Summary

- Opposition to 3-month closure - there will be adverse impacts on businesses and closure will cause effort shift to shallower waters
- Some support for 3-month closure; bottom fish populations need help
- Do not take action until more information is obtained
- Headboats should be exempted from closures
- Science is flawed; discards are overestimated
- Regulations unfairly target recreational sector – should also target commercial sector
- Implement minimum size limits or a slot limit
- Choose alternatives with smaller closed areas
- Some comments on start dates/structure of fishing seasons and changes to commercial trip limit

Summary

- Amendment 59 ends and prevents overfishing
- Stock is no longer overfished, but is still rebuilding
- Rule proposes highest catch levels since rebuilding plan began (~3 fold increase)
- Catch levels are contingent on achieving a 24% reduction in dead discards through implementation of a recreational discard reduction area off NE Florida
- Modifications to the commercial trip limit and season start date are also intended to reduce discards
- An experimental studies program would provide a defined process for additional projects to test management strategies for reducing dead discards and increasing fishing opportunities.

Ways to Provide Public Input

Provide public comment during tonight's meeting

Submit comments electronically via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal:

1. Go to: <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NMFS-2024-0142>
2. Click the "Open for Comments" icon, then the "Comment" icon, and then complete the required fields.
3. Enter or attach your comments.

Send written via mail to:

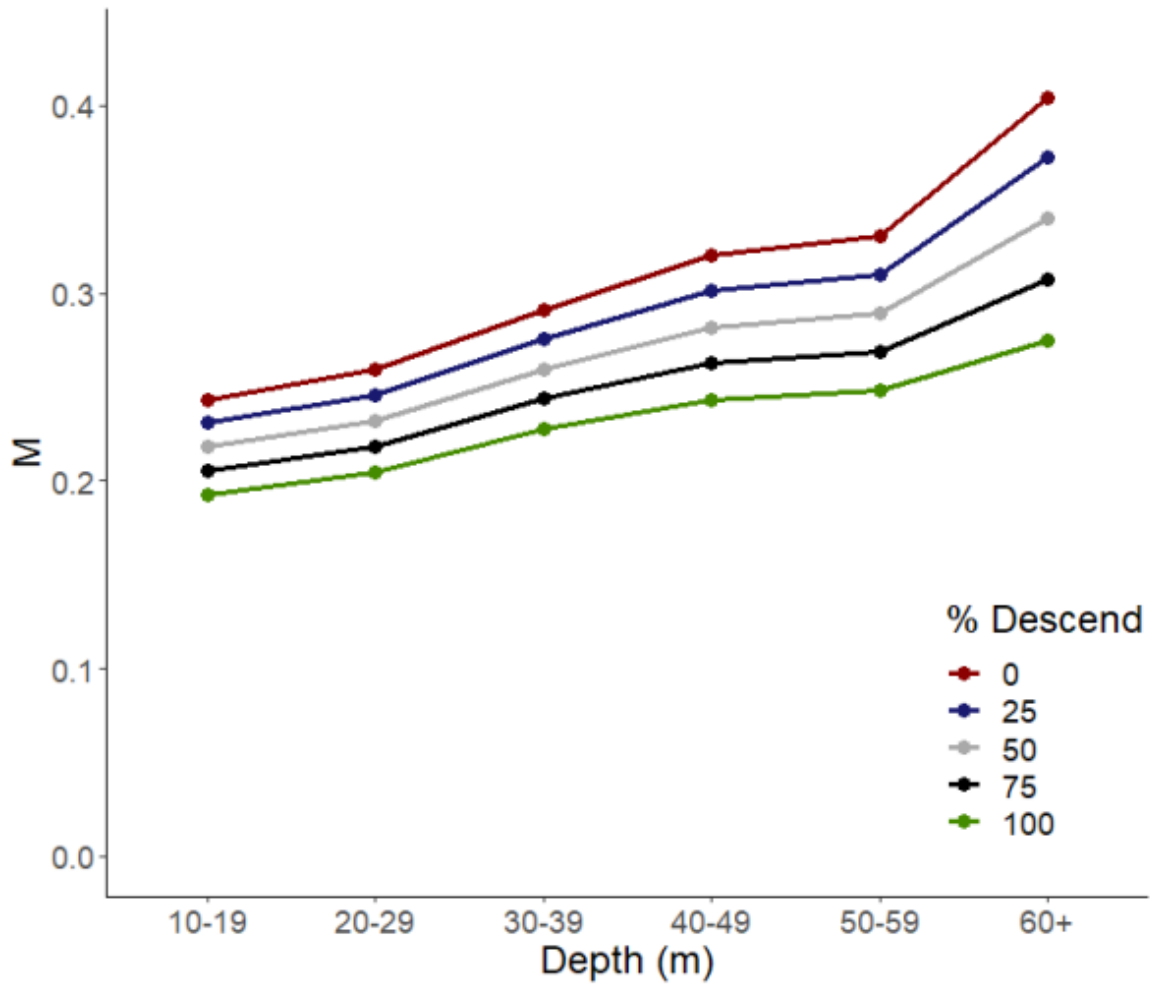
NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office,
Sustainable Fisheries Division
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505



Questions?

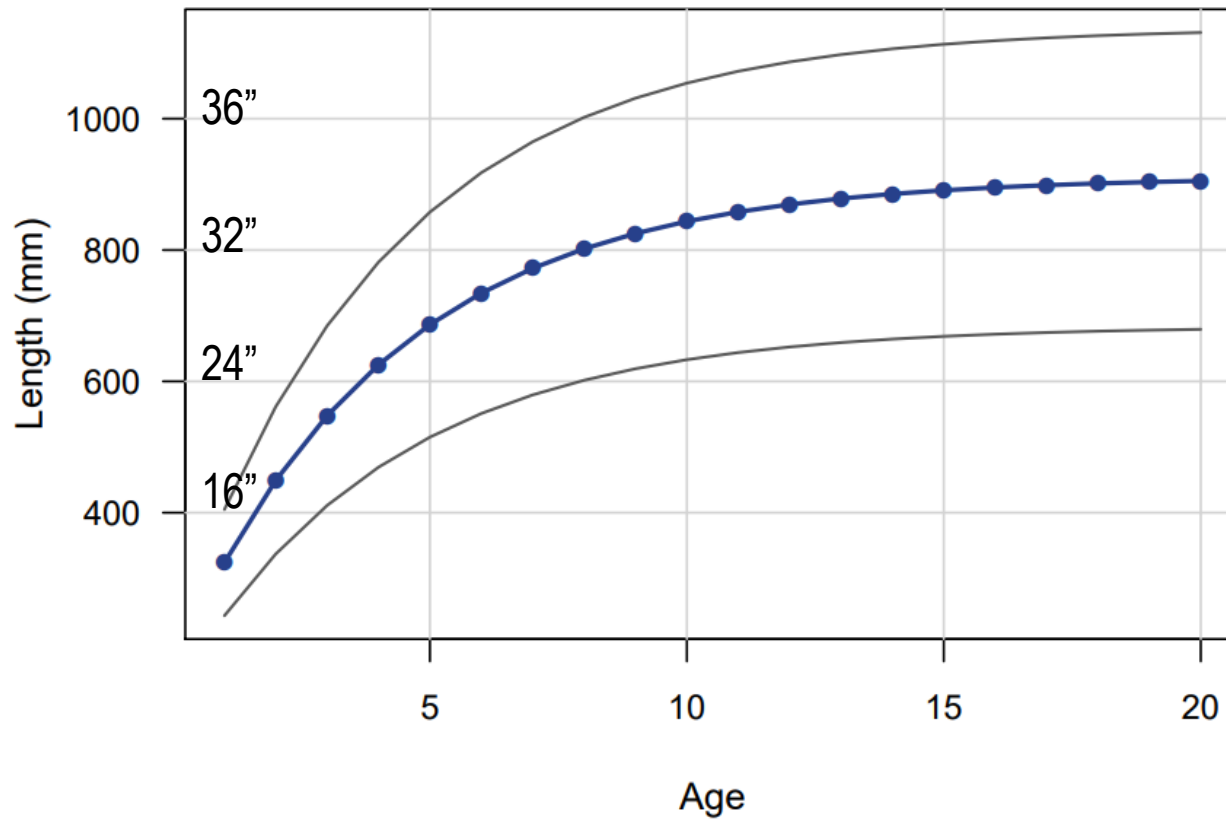
Additional Slides

Release Mortality



SEDAR 73-WP15

Mean Length at Age



SEDAR 73-WP15

Secretarial Amendment Authority

MSA 304(c) PREPARATION AND REVIEW OF SECRETARIAL PLANS.—

- (1) The Secretary may prepare a fishery management plan, with respect to any fishery, or any amendment to any such plan, in accordance with the national standards, the other provisions of this Act, and any other applicable law, if—
 - (A) the appropriate Council fails to develop and submit to the Secretary, after a reasonable period of time, a fishery management plan for such fishery, or any necessary amendment to such a plan, if such fishery requires conservation and management;
 - (B) the Secretary disapproves or partially disapproves any such plan or amendment, or disapproves a revised plan or amendment, and the Council involved fails to submit a revised or further revised plan or amendment; or
 - (C) the Secretary is given authority to prepare such plan or amendment under this section.