



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Snapper Grouper

Evaluation of the Fishery Management Unit (Revised)

June 2025

Background

In December 2024, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) requested information to begin evaluating the need for conservation and management of species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU). The FMU composition is relevant to other ongoing Council considerations, and any changes to the FMU need to be identified to advance other Council projects.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 46 (Recreational Permitting and Education Requirement)

Amendment 46 considers which snapper grouper species should require a federal (or designated equivalent) permit for recreational harvest and possession. The Council is also considering whether and how state licenses or endorsements could be deemed equivalent alternatives to a federal permit, and how species designated for the state licenses or endorsements should align with those requiring a federal permit.

For-Hire Reporting

The Council is developing an amendment to improve reporting for the charter/headboat component of the recreational fishery. If the Council considers changes to the Snapper Grouper FMU, this could affect the number of species that would need to be reported.

Evaluation Criteria

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) section 302(h)(1) requires that a council prepare a fishery management plan (FMP) for each fishery under its authority that requires conservation and management. Not every fishery requires federal management. Any stocks that are predominately caught in federal waters and are overfished or

subject to overfishing, or likely to become overfished or subject to overfishing, are considered to require conservation and management (50 CFR § 600.305(c)(1)). Beyond such stocks, councils may determine that additional stocks require “conservation and management.” (see Magnuson-Stevens Act definition at 16 U.S.C. 1802(5)). Based on this definition, and other relevant provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, a council should consider the following non-exhaustive list of factors when deciding whether additional stocks require conservation and management:

- i. The stock is an important component of the marine environment.
- ii. The stock is caught by the fishery.
- iii. Whether an FMP can improve or maintain the condition of the stock.
- iv. The stock is a target of a fishery.
- v. The stock is important to commercial, recreational, or subsistence users.
- vi. The fishery is important to the Nation or to the regional economy.
- vii. The need to resolve competing interests and conflicts among user groups and whether an FMP can further that resolution.
- viii. The economic condition of a fishery and whether an FMP can produce more efficient utilization.
- ix. The needs of a developing fishery, and whether an FMP can foster orderly growth.
- x. The extent to which the fishery is already adequately managed by states, by state/federal programs, or by federal regulations pursuant to other FMPs or international commissions, or by industry self-regulation, consistent with the requirements of the MSA and other applicable law.

[50 CFR § 600.305\(c\)\(4\)](#): When considering removing a stock from, or continuing to include a stock in, an FMP, Councils should prepare a thorough analysis of factors in [paragraphs \(c\)\(1\)\(i\) through \(x\)](#) of this section, and any additional considerations that may be relevant to the particular stock. As mentioned in [paragraph \(c\)\(3\)](#) of this section, if the amount and/or type of catch that occurs in Federal waters is a significant contributing factor to the stock's status, such information would weigh heavily in favor of continuing to include a stock in an FMP. Councils should consider weighting the factors as follows. Factors in [paragraphs \(c\)\(1\)\(i\) through \(iii\)](#) of this section should be considered first, as they address maintaining a fishery resource and the marine environment. See [16 U.S.C. 1802\(5\)\(A\)](#). These factors weigh in favor of continuing to include a stock in an FMP. Councils should next consider factors in [paragraphs \(c\)\(1\)\(iv\) through \(ix\)](#) of this section, which set forth key economic, social, and other reasons contained within the MSA for an FMP action. See [16 U.S.C. 1802\(5\)\(B\)](#). Finally, a Council should consider the factor in [paragraph \(c\)\(1\)\(x\)](#) of this section before deciding to remove a stock from, or continue to include a stock in, an FMP. In many circumstances, adequate management of a fishery by states, state/Federal programs, or another Federal FMP would weigh in favor of removing a stock from an FMP. See e.g., [16 U.S.C. 1851\(a\)\(7\)](#) and [1856\(a\)\(3\)](#).

Ecosystem Component Species

Ecosystem Component Species (see §§ 600.305(c)(5) and 600.310(d)(1)) are stocks that a Council or the Secretary has determined do not require conservation and management, but desire to list in an FMP in order to achieve ecosystem management objectives.

Stocks that are identified in an FMP but not in need of conservation and management (*i.e.*, EC species or stocks that the fishery interacts with but are managed primarily under another FMP, *see* § 600.305(c)(5) through (6)) do not require ACLs, other reference points, or accountability measures.

Last Meeting (March 2025)

In March 2025, the Council identified seventeen species to evaluate more in-depth to determine whether they are still in need of conservation and management. These species are: misty grouper, margate, sailor's choice, tomtate, white grunt, bar jack, jolthead porgy, knobbed porgy, saucereye porgy, scup, whitebone porgy, banded rudderfish, blackfin snapper, cubera snapper, queen snapper, Atlantic spadefish, and sand tilefish.

The Council directed staff to update the Shiny application that was previously used to evaluate the need for conservation and management for several species in December 2020.

Objective for this Meeting (June 2025)

Review information on the requested species and decide whether changes to the FMU should be further considered through an amendment.

List of Requested Snapper Grouper Species

All species requested for further evaluation are listed with their sector annual catch limits (ACL) in Table 1. None of these species have been assessed. The Council will develop initial rationale for maintaining species in the FMP or considering changes to their need for conservation and management using a survey via Google Forms that considers information to address each of the 10 criteria listed above. **Staff will email the Council ahead of the meeting with instructions on how to respond to the survey to prepare for the scheduled discussion.**

Table 1. Sector annual catch limits (ACL) during 2024 for snapper grouper species requested by the Council for further evaluation of the need for conservation and management. Species that are part of a complex are listed with their complex sector ACLs. Species complexes are managed under a single, collective ACL for all species in the complex. Commercial and recreational ACLs for individual species within complexes are shown in italics to indicate expected distributions of catch within complexes at the time that the ACLs were set.

Complex/Species	Comm ACL (lbs ww)	Rec ACL (CHTS lbs ww)
Atlantic Spadefish	150,552	661,926
Bar Jack	13,228	49,021
Deep-water Complex¹	131,268	38,628
Misty Grouper	2,388	475
Sand Tilefish	1,770	6,213
Queen Snapper	8,756	710
Blackfin Snapper	1,096	2,569
Other Jacks Complex²	189,422	267,799
Banded Rudderfish	4,270	5,000
Other Snappers Complex³	344,575	1,169,308
Cubera Snapper	12,381	50,884
Other Porgies Complex	36,348	106,914
Jolthead Porgy	1,571	36,315
Knobbed Porgy	34,515	32,926
Saucereye Porgy	0	3,606
Scup	0	9,306
Whitebone Porgy	262	24,762
Grunts Complex	217,903	618,122
White Grunt	203,405	440,484
Sailor's Choice	0	22,674
Tomtate	0	92,670
Margate	14,498	62,294

Committee Action

Further develop rationale on whether this subset of species should be maintained under conservation and management in the Snapper Grouper FMP. If species need to be considered for removal from the FMU or designation as ecosystem component species, consider initiating an amendment to modify the Snapper Grouper FMP accordingly.

¹ Also includes Silk Snapper and Yellowedge Grouper

² Also includes Almaco Jack and Lesser Amberjack

³ Also includes Gray Snapper and Lane Snapper