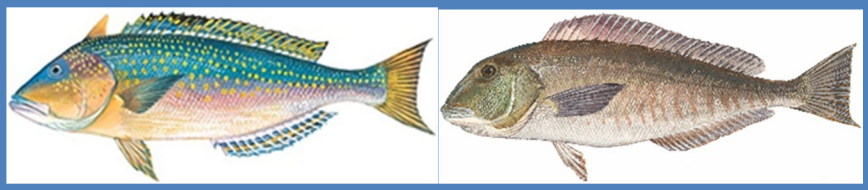
Amendment 52



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

Catch Level Adjustments and Allocations for Golden Tilefish; Management and Accountability Measures for Golden Tilefish and Blueline Tilefish

Decision Document
December 2022

Background

Golden Tilefish

Current management of South Atlantic golden tilefish is based on an update of SEDAR 25 completed in 2016 with an assessment period of 1962-2014 (SEDAR 2016). This amendment addresses the SEDAR 66 standard assessment for golden tilefish, which was completed in 2021, and includes recreational landings estimates using the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES). Revised catch levels would be specified based on the Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) recommended acceptable biological catch (ABC) and this most recent assessment.

The Council received the results of the assessment and the SSC's recommendations for the overfishing limit (OFL) and ABC at their June 2021 meeting. The SSC determined the stock is no longer experiencing overfishing, but there is a high degree of uncertainty in the stock status determination since the stock is being fished at or close to maximum sustainable yield (MSY). The Council directed staff to begin work on a plan amendment to adjust catch levels based on the SSC recommendations and SEDAR 66 (2021).

The Council is also responding to an industry request to vary when the fishing season begins for the longline component of the commercial golden tilefish sector which would avoid oversupplying the market in the first part of January and allow commercial longline vessels to remain fishing for golden tilefish during the Lenten season when prices tend to be relatively high.

An application providing an overview of the golden tilefish fishery, including management history, landings, and assessment information, can be found here: https://safmc-shinyapps.shinyapps.io/SA_FisheryDataTilefish/.

Blueline Tilefish

During the time-period 2017-2021, landings of blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic region have often exceeded the recreational sector annual catch limit (ACL) and total ACL. To address such situations, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act National Standard 1 Guidelines contain the following language: *If the catch exceeds the ACL for a given stock, or stock complex, more than once in the last four years, the system of ACLs and AMs should be reevaluated and modified if necessary to improve its performance and effectiveness.*

Currently, the recreational sector has a four-month season, May 1 through August 31, that was established in 2015 through Amendment 32. That amendment also established a 1 fish per vessel limit during the open season. The bag limit was increased to the current 3 fish per person per day through implementation of Regulatory Amendment 25 in 2016.

The in-season recreational accountability measure (AM) currently in place is triggered when recreational landings meet, or are projected to meet, the recreational ACL. Despite overages of the recreational ACL, this AM has not been triggered and implemented except for 2022, because of the difficulty in the availability of in-season landings estimates. The post-season AM is triggered by an overage of the recreational ACL, an overage of the total (commercial and recreational) ACL, and an overfished determination for the stock. If those criteria are met, a payback of the overage and a reduction in next year's fishing season are implemented. Payback of overages of the recreational ACL have not been implemented because blueline tilefish are currently not overfished. Hence, the Council is re-evaluating the system of AMs for the recreational sector and considering modification to recreational management measures.

An application providing an overview of the blueline tilefish fishery, including management history, landings, and assessment information, can be found here: https://safmc-shinyapps.shinyapps.io/SA_FisheryDataBluelineTilefish/

Management actions in this amendment

Action 1: Revise the golden tilefish acceptable biological catch, total annual catch limit, and annual optimum yield.
Action 2: Revise sector allocations and sector annual catch limits for golden tilefish.
Action 3. Modify the fishing season for the commercial golden tilefish hook and line and longline components.
Action 4. Modify recreational accountability measures for golden tilefish.
Action 5. Modify blueline tilefish recreational bag limit.
Action 6. Modify blueline tilefish recreational season.
Action 7. Modify recreational accountability measures for blueline tilefish.

Amendment timing

June 2021	Receive SSC comments and recommendations on SEDAR 66
December 2021	Review AP comments and options paper, and approve for scoping
February 2022	Conduct scoping hearings
March 2022	Review scoping comments and provide guidance to staff
April 2022	AP comments on actions and alternatives
June 2022	Reviewed modifications to the amendment, reviewed AP input, select preferred alternatives, and approved for public hearings
Oct 2022	AP provided opportunity for comments on actions and alternatives
September 2022	Review public hearing comments and approve all actions
December 2022	**Review final draft amendment and consider approval for formal review**
2023	Regulations effective

Objectives for this meeting

- Review actions and alternatives
- Review selected preferred alternatives
- Consider approval for formal review

Council action at previous meeting

- Approved removing the OFL from Purpose and Need and Action 1
- Changed to **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)** for **Action 6**
- Approved all actions

Purpose and Need Statements

The *purpose* is to revise the acceptable biological catch, annual optimum yield, total annual catch limit and sector allocations for golden tilefish based on the most recent stock assessment. Additionally, the purpose is to consider modifications to management measures and accountability measures for golden tilefish and blueline tilefish.

The *need* is to base conservation and management measures on the best scientific information available and achieve optimum yield, consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and its National Standards.

Actions

Action 1. Revise the acceptable biological catch, total annual catch limit, and annual optimum yield for golden tilefish

Purpose of Action

The golden tilefish total annual catch limit (ACL) is being revised to incorporate the new acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations of the SSC, based on the SEDAR 66 (2021) stock assessment, as well as the updated recreational landings from the Marine Recreational Information Program's (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES).

Alternative 1 (No Action). The total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for golden tilefish are equal to the **current** acceptable biological catch (342,000 lbs gutted weight). The current acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program's Coastal Household Telephone Survey.

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

Year	ABC (lbs gw)	Annual OY (lbs gw)	Total ACL (lbs gw)
2023	435,000	435,000	435,000
2024	448,000	448,000	448,000
2025	458,000	458,000	458,000
2026+	466,000	466,000	466,000

Alternative 3. The total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for golden tilefish are equal to 95% of the updated acceptable biological catch level. The updated acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey.

Year	ABC (lbs gw)	Annual OY (lbs gw)	Total ACL (lbs gw)
2023	435,000	413,250	413,250
2024	448,000	425,600	425,600
2025	458,000	435,100	435,100
*2026+	466,000	442,700	442,700

*2026 values will remain in place until modified.

Alternative 4. The total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for golden tilefish are equal to 90% of the updated acceptable biological catch level. The updated acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey.

Year	ABC (lbs gw)	Annual OY (lbs gw)	Total ACL (lbs gw)
2023	435,000	391,500	391,500
2024	448,000	403,200	403,200
2025	458,000	412,200	412,200
*2026+	466,000	419,400	419,400

*2026 values will remain in place until modified.

Discussion:

- All of the action alternatives would result in higher ACLs than the status quo.
- The acceptable biological catch, total annual catch limit, and annual optimum yield would increase annually until 2026 and remain in place after 2026 until modified.

Summary of Biological Effects:

- **Alternative 1 (No Action)** is not a viable alternative.
- Increasing golden tilefish catch levels as proposed in this amendment would not be expected to result in negative biological impacts.
- **Preferred Alternative 2** would result in the least biological benefit to golden tilefish as there would be no buffer between the ABCs and the total ACLs. Biological benefits resulting from **Alternatives 3** and **4** would increase as the buffer increases.
- Although **Preferred Alternative 2** would allow the greatest amount of harvest of the action alternatives considered, it is based on the SSC's ABC recommendation and BSIA and represents a catch level that does not result in overfishing.

Summary of Economic Effects:

- From a net economic benefits perspective, **Preferred Alternative 2** would provide the highest potential net economic benefits of the viable alternatives being considered followed by **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4.**

Table 1. Estimated change in potential net economic benefits to the recreational and commercial sectors from **Action 1** for **Preferred Alternative 2 (**2020 $)**.**

Year	Commercial	Recreational	Total
2023	$138,185	-$788,341	-$650,156
2024	$157,724	-$784,077	-$626,353
2025	$172,754	-$780,848	-$608,094
2026+	$184,778	-$778,229	-$593,450

Summary of Social Effects:

- The ACL does not directly affect resource users unless the ACL is met or exceeded.
- The higher the ACL, the greater the short-term social benefits that would be expected to accrue if harvest is sustainable.
- Communities that would be most affected are in the state of Florida, specifically Port Orange, Titusville, Cocoa, and Fort Pierce, Florida.
- **Preferred Alternative 2** would be the most beneficial for fishermen, followed by **Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 4**.

Draft Rationale:

- Magnuson-Stevens Act does not preclude the OY or ACL from being set equal to the ABC, but neither can exceed the OFL.
- The Council has been frequently setting the ACL and OY equal to the ABC and below the OFL.
- A revised ACL would be specified based on the most recent assessment and the SSC's recommended ABCs that are adopted by the Council. SEDAR 66 included landings data using MRIP FES rather than the previously used CHTS data. Per the guidance provided at 50 CFR §600.310(f)(4)(iv), the Council has chosen to specify OY for golden tilefish on an annual basis. The Council has also chosen to set OY equal to the total ACL.
- Because golden tilefish is neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing, the Council determined a precautionary additional buffer between the ACL (and OY) and the ABC was not needed.
- In general, an ACL cannot exceed the ABC and may be set annually or on a multiyear plan basis. Annual catch limits in coordination with AMs must prevent overfishing. The Magnuson-Stevens Act National Standard 1 guidelines specify that Councils can choose to account for management uncertainty by setting the ACL below the ABC, but states that an ACL may typically be set very close to the ABC.

Committee Action:

- REVIEW ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE AND SELECTED PREFERRED
- REVIEW UPDATED EFFECTS SUMMARY

- REVIEW/MODIFY DRAFT RATIONALE

Action 2. Revise sector allocations and sector annual catch limits for golden tilefish

Purpose of Action

Allocations need to be reviewed since the recreational landings stream changed in the new assessment. Recreational landings are now estimated using data from the FES rather than the CHTS.

Note: The revised sector ACLs in Alternatives 1 (No Action) through 2 reflect the revised total ACL in Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 1, which uses recreational landings from the MRIP using the FES method, as well as updates to commercial and headboat landings used in the latest assessment (SEDAR 66). The commercial ACL is allocated between two gear sectors: 25% is allocated to the hook and line sector and 75% to the longline sector based on Amendment 18B (2012).

Alternative 1 (No Action). Retain the current commercial allocation of 97% of the total annual catch limit for golden tilefish and the current recreational allocation of 3% of the total annual catch limit for golden tilefish. Within the commercial sector, 25% of the total ACL is allocated to the hook and line (HL) component and 75% to the longline (LL) component.

Year	Total ACL= ABC	Commercial ACL (lbs gw) (97% of Total ACL)			Recreational ACL (numbers of fish) (3% of Total ACL)
		Total	HL (25%)	LL (75%)	
2023	435,000	421,950	105,488	316,462	2,326
2024	448,000	434,560	108,640	325,920	2,396
2025	458,000	444,260	111,065	333,195	2,449
2026+	466,000	452,020	113,005	339,015	2,492

Note: Recreational ACL in numbers of fish was calculated using the average weight (5.61 lbs) from recreational samples in SEDAR 66 data from 2016 through 2018.

Preferred Alternative 2. Allocate 96.70% of the revised total annual catch limit for golden tilefish to the commercial sector and 3.30% of the revised total annual catch limit for golden tilefish to the recreational sector. Within the commercial sector 25% is allocated to the hook and line (HL) component and 75% to the longline (LL) component.

Year	Total ACL= ABC	Commercial ACL (lbs gw) (96.7% of Total ACL)			Recreational ACL (numbers of fish) (3.3% of Total ACL)
		Total	HL (25%)	LL (75%)	

2023	435,000	420,645	105,161	315,484	2,559
2024	448,000	433,216	108,304	324,912	2,635
2025	458,000	442,886	110,722	332,165	2,694
2026+	466,000	450,622	112,656	337,967	2,741

Note: Recreational ACL in numbers of fish was calculated using the average weight (5.61lbs) from recreational samples in SEDAR 66 data from 2016 through 2018.

Discussion:

- In Amendment 18B (2012), the Council chose to divide the commercial annual catch limit between two gear sectors: 25% is allocated to the hook and line sector and 75% to the longline sector. Such an allocation restored access to the resource for hook-and-line fishermen to proportions observed prior to 2006, and during periods when they have historically harvested golden tilefish (late summer to early fall).
- It was noted that, if the hook-and-line component regularly reached its ACL in the future, the Council would consider increasing the allocation. The Council reviewed the recent catch history for the hook and line component which showed catch below the allocation in 2016-2018 and slightly over the allocation in 2019-2021 (Appendix A). In addition, Council advisors did not recommend changing allocation between components of the commercial sector at this time. The Council subsequently chose not to consider changes to the current allocation between these two commercial components.
- The Council is only considering two allocation scenarios for the recreational and commercial sectors golden tilefish. The update to the recreational landings stream did not substantially change the historical landings ratio between sectors.
- The current allocations for the recreational and commercial sectors are 3% and 97%, respectively. These allocation percentages were based on applying the formula of sector annual catch limit = ((mean landings 2006-2008)*0.5)) + ((mean landings 1986-2008)*0.5) to the landings dataset used in Snapper Grouper Amendment 17B that included recreational estimates from the MRIP CHTS.
- Applying the same allocation method to data used in SEDAR 66, including recreational FES data where applicable, would result in allocations of 96.70% and 3.30% for the commercial and recreational sectors, respectively.
- The incorporation of the new MRIP-FES data for golden tilefish did not result in a large change in estimated landings from the recreational sector with the resulting annual catch limit allocation percentages shifting up from 3% to 3.3% with the commercial sector shifting from 97% to 96.7%.
- While the commercial sector allocation shifts from 97% to 96.7%, the commercial ACL in 2023 will increase over 80,000 pounds.

Summary of Biological Effects:

- Biological effects are not expected to be substantially different between **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2**.
- Golden tilefish are most likely to be captured with species such as yellowedge grouper, warsaw grouper, snowy grouper, silk snapper, and wreckfish. However, many of the

overlapping occurrences for these species with golden tilefish were minimal except for yellowedge grouper.
- This action would not be expected to result in any biological effects, positive or negative, on co-occurring species and there are no expected impacts to EFH from this action.

Summary of Economic Effects:

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

Table 2. Estimated change in net economic benefits from **Action 2**, **Preferred Alternative 2** compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (2020 $).

Fishing Year	Commercial	Recreational	Total
2023	-$2,028	$14,194	$12,166
2024	-$2,089	$14,560	$12,471
2025	-$2,136	$14,925	$12,790
2026+	-$2,173	$15,169	$12,996

Summary of Social Effects:

- **Alternative 1 (No Action)** may have few social effects and with **Preferred Alternative 2,** there would be a less than 1% decrease in the commercial percentage compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.
- The choice of an allocation would need to be assessed with other actions within this amendment to determine the overall social effects and whether short-term losses are offset by any long-term biological gains.

Draft Rationale:

- Amendment 18B allocated the commercial annual catch limit between two gear sectors: 25% to the hook and line sector and 75% to the longline sector. Such an allocation restored access to the resource for hook-and-line fishermen to proportions observed prior to 2006, and during periods when they had historically harvested golden tilefish (late summer to early fall). The Council reviewed the recent catch history for the hook and line component which showed catch below the allocation in 2016-2018 and slightly over the allocation in 2019-2021 (Appendix A). In addition, Council advisors did not recommend changing allocation between components of the commercial sector at this time. The Council subsequently chose not to consider changes to the current allocation between these two commercial components.
- The recreational sector accounts for a fairly constant but small portion of the harvest, given that golden tilefish is a deep-water species that is caught further from shore and in greater depths than most of the other species in the snapper grouper complex.
- Considering the limited recreational effort for, and harvest of, golden tilefish, the Council views this revised allocation as a fair and equitable allocation between sectors that is

reasonably calculated to promote conservation and that does not give any entity an excessive share of harvest privileges.
- The Council determined that this allocation division encourages a rational and well-managed use of the golden tilefish resource that also optimizes the social and economic benefits.

Committee Action:

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

Action 3. Modify the fishing season for the commercial golden tilefish hook and line and longline components

Purpose of Action

The Council is responding to an industry request to vary when the fishing season begins for the longline component of the commercial golden tilefish sector which would avoid oversupplying the market in the first part of January and allow commercial longline vessels to remain fishing for golden tilefish during the Lenten period when prices tend to be relatively high.

Note: Council may choose more than one alternative. The commercial fishing year for golden tilefish is January 1 to December 31.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not modify the commercial fishing season for golden tilefish (January 1- December 31).

Alternative 2. Modify the fishing season for the commercial **hook and line component**.
Sub-Alternative 2a. Modify the fishing season to start January 15.
Sub-Alternative 2b. Modify the fishing season to start January 22.
Sub-Alternative 2c. Modify the fishing season to start February 1.

Preferred Alternative 3. Modify the fishing season for the commercial **longline component**.
Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a. Modify the fishing season to start January 15.
Sub-Alternative 3b. Modify the fishing season to start January 22.
Sub-Alternative 3c. Modify the fishing season to start February 1.

Discussion:

- Golden tilefish are important for the market when the shallow water grouper fishery is closed (January 1 through April 30). Under **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a** the fishing year would remain the calendar year but use of longline would be delayed until January 15.
- Not modifying the fishing season for the hook and line component, would allow them a "head start" for the year before the longline sector begins fishing.

Hook and Line Component

- There is no projected closure date before August 1st from either **Alternative 1 (No Action)** or **Alternative 2**.

Longline Component

- Projected closure dates based on the ACL in **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a** (Table 3).

Table 3. The projected closure dates for the golden tilefish commercial longline component based on the ACL in **Preferred Alternative 3**.

		Start Date
Year	**ACL**	**January 15**
2021	248,805	**19-Mar**
2022	303,155	**2-Apr**
2023	315,484	**5-Apr**
2024	324,912	**8-Apr**
2025	332,165	**9-Apr**
2026	337,967	**11-Apr**

Summary of Biological Effects:

- The action proposed would have a minimal biological effect to the golden tilefish stock.
- None of the alternatives would change the impacts on spawning as the majority of the effort will still be concentrated in the winter months. Golden tilefish spawn off the southeast coast of the United States from March through late July, with a peak in April. Peak spawning occurs from May through September in waters north of Cape Canaveral.
- Regardless of the alternative selected, this action is not anticipated to have negative biological impacts on golden tilefish since the commercial sector is constrained by the ACL (as determined in Action 1 and Action 2) and AMs.

Summary of Economic Effects:

- From a total harvest perspective, all of the alternatives in **Action 3** would likely result in all of the commercial sector ACL being landed.
- If the seasonality of golden tilefish landings shifts due to modifying the start date of the longline component under **Preferred Alternative 3**, net economic benefits would be expected to comparatively increase (Table 4).

Table 4. Estimated change in net economic benefits for the commercial longline component from **Preferred Alternative 3** compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (2020 $).

Fishing Year	Preferred Sub-alternative 3a	Sub-alternative 3b	Sub-alternative 3c
2023	**$8,105**	$13,834	$22,015
2024	**$8,851**	$14,580	$22,762
2025	**$9,426**	$15,155	$23,336
2026+	**$9,885**	$15,614	$23,796

Summary of Social Effects:

- Golden tilefish is an important commercial species in Florida, particularly in central Florida (Port Orange, Titusville, Cocoa, and Fort Pierce).
- Changes to the start of the fishing season for the commercial hook-and-line or the commercial longline components could change the level of access to the golden tilefish stock during periods when golden tilefish are available.
- The effects on commercial fishermen and related businesses would be associated with access to golden tilefish stock during periods when the dockside price is highest, and if the commercial ACL is met and an early closure occurs.
- Staggering the commercial hook and line (**Alternative 2**) and commercial longline (**Preferred Alternative 3**) seasons may reduce the number of fish on the market at a given time and increase the profitability of commercial longline businesses. It would also allow the longline fishery to remain open closer to the Lenten season when prices for fish increase.
- The farther apart the two seasons the higher likelihood of avoiding low prices due to a flooded market, assuming golden tilefish are available in highly reliant communities at the time. **Sub-alternative 3c** would offset the hook and line and longline seasons the furthest followed by **Sub-alternative 3b**, **Preferred Sub-alternative 3a,** and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Draft Rationale:

- The Council responded to an industry request to consider modifying the start of the fishing season for commercial golden tilefish sectors, to try to avoid oversupplying the market in the first part of the year and allow commercial longline vessels to remain fishing for golden tilefish during the Lenten season, when prices tend to be relatively high.
- Golden tilefish are important for the market when the shallow water grouper fishery is closed. In addition, the longline endorsement holders stated they would prefer a January 15 opening to improve social benefits to families at the start of the year (e.g., have some time after the holidays to prepare to begin fishing and not have to rush to be ready by January 1).
- The Council decided not to modify the fishing season for the hook and line component of the recreational sector. The hook and line component of the commercial sector is limited to 500 lbs gw per trip, whereas vessels with longline gear and a golden tilefish endorsement can land 4,000 lbs gw of golden tilefish per trip. Hence, the Council reasoned that the hook and line component would benefit from getting a "head start" for the year before the longline sector begins fishing.

Committee Action:

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

Action 4. Modify recreational accountability measures for golden tilefish.

Purpose of Action:

Modifications to recreational accountability measures for golden tilefish are being considered to prevent recreational landings from exceeding the sector ACL and correcting for overages if they occur.

Alternative 1 (No Action).
If recreational landings of golden tilefish reach, or are projected to reach, the recreational annual catch limit, the recreational sector will close for the remainder of the fishing year unless the National Marine Fisheries Service determines that no closure is necessary based on the best scientific information available.
If the recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, then during the following fishing year, recreational landings will be monitored for a persistence in increased landings. If necessary, the National Marine Fisheries Service will reduce the length of the recreational fishing season and the recreational annual catch limit by the amount of the recreational overage, if the species is overfished and the total annual catch limit is exceeded.

Alternative 2. Retain the current recreational in-season closure accountability measure. If the recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, then during the following fishing year, recreational landings will be monitored for a persistence in increased landings. If necessary, the National Marine Fisheries Service will reduce the length of the recreational fishing season and the recreational annual catch limit by the amount of the recreational overage.

Preferred Alternative 3. Remove the current recreational accountability measure that closes the recreational sector in-season. The National Marine Fisheries Service will annually announce the length of the recreational fishing season based on catch rates from the previous season. The fishing season will start on January 1 and end on the date National Marine Fisheries Service projects the recreational annual catch limit will be met.

Discussion:

- Preferred Alternative 3 would remove in-season AMs and modify postseason AMs for the recreational golden tilefish fishery where Alternative 1 and Alternative 2 would retain in-season AMs.

Summary of Biological Effects:

- Biological benefits would be expected to be greater for the alternative that provides the most timely and realistic option chosen to trigger and implement an AM.
- **Preferred Alternative 3** would result in biological benefit to the stock in that it is likely to prevent in-season overages of the recreational ACL. However, this alternative would not correct for an overage if it were to occur due to an unforeseen increase in recreational effort.

Biological benefits to the golden tilefish stock would be greatest under **Preferred Alternative 3**, followed by **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Summary of Economic Effects:

- **Preferred Alternative 3** would limit overall long-term harvest of golden tilefish but could result in economic benefits that mitigate the short-term cost of the AM itself by allowing more time to adjust to the changing harvest regulations through a consistent announcement of the season length.
- In terms of potential short-term negative economic effects to the recreational sector, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would have the highest potential negative economic effects since there is a payback provision, followed by **Alternative 2**, and **Preferred Alternative 3**.

Summary of Social Effects:

- AMs can have direct and indirect social effects because, when triggered, can restrict harvest in the current season or subsequent seasons.
- Under **Preferred Alternative 3**, the end date for golden tilefish recreational harvest may shift each year; however, announcing the length of the season at the beginning of the year would allow private anglers and for-hire businesses to plan their activities around the closure in advance.

Draft Rationale:

- The Council is proposing modifying the recreational accountability measures to prevent ACL overages and render the measures more efficient.
- **Preferred Alternative 3** is the most suitable among the alternatives considered to prevent persistent overages of the recreational ACL in that NMFS will would account for any overages by annually announcing the length of the recreational fishing season based on projections of when the recreational ACL would be met.
- Recreational harvest of golden tilefish would continue to open on January 1 each year. The Council is also proposing the elimination of the in-season accountability measures for golden tilefish and modifying the AM to establish a closure date for the following fishing year based on previous years landings. Currently, the time lag when data is available makes in-season management inefficient.

Committee Action:

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

Action 5. Modify blueline tilefish recreational bag limit.

Purpose of Action

The Council is considering lowering the recreational bag limit to lower the chance of the sector exceeding the ACL. From 2017 through 2021, landings of blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic region often exceeded the sector and total ACL.

Note: The Council can select more than one alternative to address bag limit modification as well as retention of blueline tilefish by captain and crew.

Alternative 1 (No Action). The current recreational blueline tilefish bag limit is 3 per person per day. Captain and crew of for-hire vessels with valid Federal South Atlantic Charter/Headboat Snapper Grouper Permit are allowed to retain bag limit quantities of all snapper grouper species during the open recreational season.

Preferred Alternative 2. Reduce recreational blueline tilefish bag limit to 2 fish per person per day.

Alternative 3. Reduce recreational blueline tilefish bag limit to 1 fish per person per day.

Preferred Alternative 4. Do not allow retention of blueline tilefish by captain and crew.

Discussion:

- The Council is considering reducing the recreational bag limit to decrease the chance of the sector exceeding the ACL and having overages. During the time-period 2017-2021, landings of blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic region, have often exceeded the sector and total ACL.
- The largest percentage of the landings was during the open recreational seasons from 2017 through 2021 was attributed to the charter component of the recreational sector, followed by the headboat component and the private recreational component (**Table 5**).
- The percentage of trips harvesting a range of blueline tilefish per person per day and by mode (Headboat, charter, and private) are shown in **Figure 1** (including captain and crew), and **Figure 2** (excluding captain and crew).
    - If the captain and crew are excluded from the bag limit, there will be a slight increase in the percentage of charter trips that can retain two blueline tilefish.

Table 5. Percent of South Atlantic blueline tilefish recreational landings by mode during the open season from 2017 to 2021.

Mode	Percentage of Landings
MRIP Charter	71.6%
MRIP Private	1.9%
Headboat	26.6%

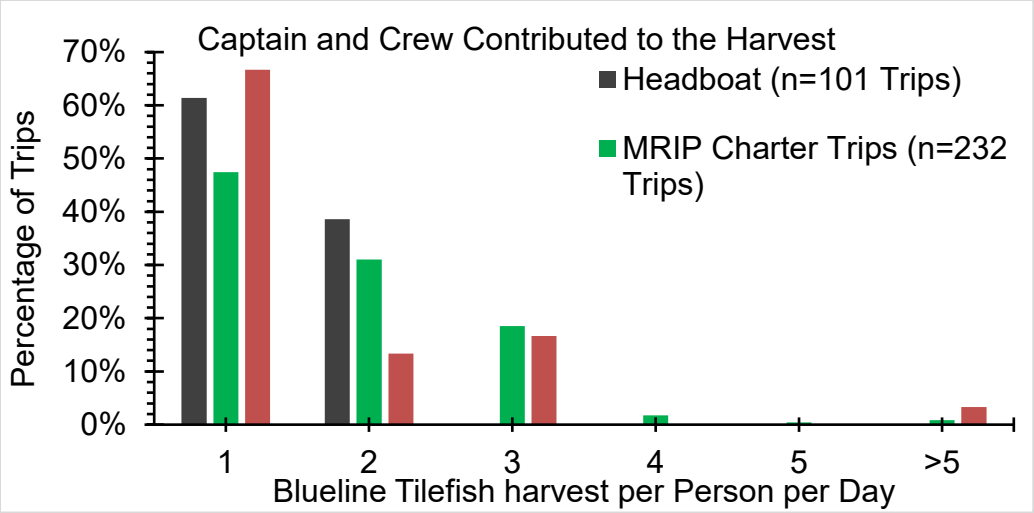


Figure 1. Percentage of trips for a range of South Atlantic blueline tilefish harvested per person for the three components of the recreational sector during the open seasons in 2017-2021 and *including retention by captain and crew*.

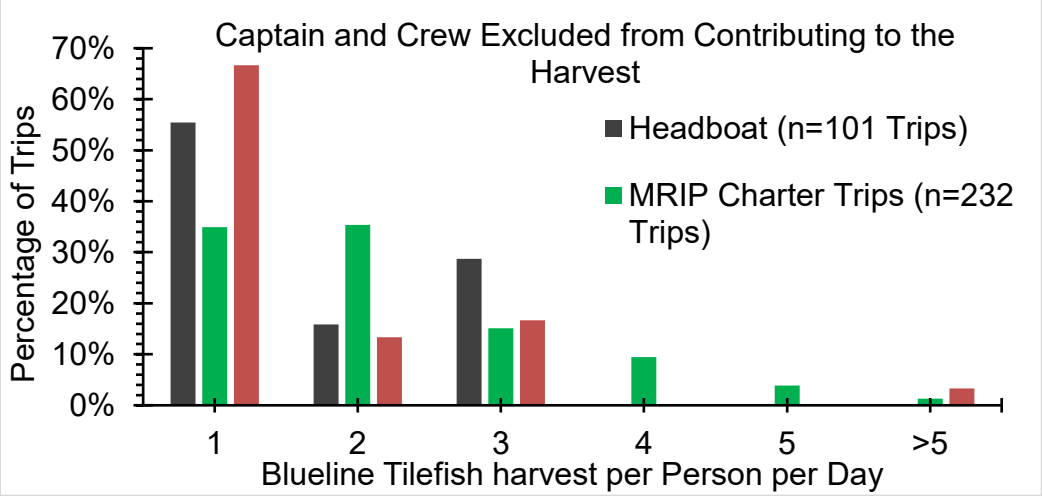


Figure 2. Percentage of trips for a range of South Atlantic blueline tilefish harvested per person for the three components of the recreational sector during the open seasons in 2017-2021 and *excluding retention by captain and crew*.

Summary of Biological Effects:

- This action is expected to result in positive biological impacts to the blueline tilefish stock the alternatives would reduce recreational harvest by up to 38.8% under a reduction in the bag limit to one fish per person per day with no retention by captain and crew.
- The combination of **Alternative 3** and **Preferred Alternative 4**, would result in the greatest benefit to the stock, followed by the combination of **Preferred Alternatives 2** and **4**, **Preferred Alternative 4**, and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Summary of Economic Effects:

- Setting the bag limit at 2 fish **(Preferred Alternative 2)** or 1 fish per person (**Alternative 3)** would have greater negative economic effects on a trip-level due to constraining harvest and related economic benefits.
- Removing a captain and crew bag limit (**Preferred Alternative 4**) may also constrain harvest leading to similar economic effects in comparison to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.
- **Preferred Alternative 2** is estimated to result in an estimated decrease in CS of $273,922 and **Preferred Alternative 4** is estimated to result in an estimated decrease in CS of $119,268 (**Table 6**).
- While there may be some benefit from implementing a reduced bag limit (**Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3**) or eliminating captain and crew bag limits (**Preferred Alternative 4**) stemming from a prolonged season, such a limitation may affect the marketability of for-hire trips if limits are set too low. Thus, a lower bag limit may lead to a decrease in economic benefits for for-hire vessels due to decreased for-hire trips being booked by customers in comparison to the current limits in **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Table 6. Estimated change in recreational harvest of blueline tilefish and associated change in net economic benefits Consumer Surplus (CS) from **Action 5**.

Alternative	Estimated change in harvest (%)	Estimated change (#s of fish)	Estimated change in CS (2020 $)
Alternative 1 (No Action)	0.0%	-	-
Preferred Alternative 2	**-8.5%**	**-4,498**	**-$273,993**
Alternative 3	-35.1%	-18,572	-$1,131,430
Preferred Alternative 4	**-3.7%**	**-1,958**	**-$119,268**

Summary of Social Effects:

- In general, a reduction in the recreational bag limit (**Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3**) or prohibiting retention of fish by captain and crew (**Preferred Alternative 4**) may help slow the rate of harvest, lengthen a season, and prevent the ACL from being exceeded.
- Bag and vessel limits that are too low may make fishing trips inefficient and lower angler satisfaction.
- Slowing the rate of harvest and ensuring sustainable of harvest of the blueline tilefish stock would provide for long-term social benefits.
- If slowing the rate of harvest and lengthening the season provides additional fishing opportunities to the recreational fishing communities, **Alternative 3** (35% reduction in landings) would be the most beneficial, followed by **Preferred Alternative 2** (8.5%), Preferred **Alternative 4** (3.7%), and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Draft Rationale:

- Reducing the blueline tilefish bag limit from three to two fish per person per day (**Preferred Alternative 2**) and prohibiting retention of the bag limit by captain and crew

(**Preferred Alternative 4**) are expected to keep the recreational landings of blueline tilefish from consistently exceeding the recreational ACL.

Committee Action:

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

Action 6. Modify blueline tilefish recreational season.

Purpose of Action

The Council considering modifications to the recreational season to reduce recreational harvest and reduce the chance of the sector exceeding the ACL. From 2017 through 2021, landings of blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic region often exceeded the sector and total ACL.

Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not modify the blueline tilefish recreational season. The current recreational season is May 1-August 31.

Alternative 2. Modify blueline tilefish recreational season to May 1 through July 30.

Alternative 3. Modify blueline tilefish recreational season to June 1 through August 31.

Alternative 4. Modify blueline tilefish recreational season to May 1 through June 30.

Alternative 5. Modify blueline tilefish recreational season to July 1 through August 31.

Discussion:

- The Council also discussed aligning the season with snowy grouper to reduce discards.

Draft Rationale:

- The current four-month recreational season (May 1 through August 31) is a compromise to address the needs of recreational fishermen targeting blueline tilefish in Florida and North Carolina.
- The Council views the length of the existing recreational season as necessary, considering that charter vessels account for 77% of the catch of blueline tilefish and they generally shift to bottom fishing and target blueline tilefish during the doldrums of summer in July and August when catch of both dolphin and tuna fishing drops off.
- Florida representatives noted this season would also take into consideration the co-occurrence of snowy grouper and blueline tilefish off Florida.

Committee Action:

- REVIEW ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE AND SELECTED PREFERRED
- REVIEW UPDATED EFFECTS SUMMARY

- REVIEW/MODIFY DRAFT RATIONALE

Action 7. Modify recreational accountability measures for blueline tilefish.

Purpose of Action:

The Council is considering modifying the post-season recreational accountability measure to ensure recreational landings remain at or below the recreational ACL and to address overages regardless of whether the stock is overfished or whether the total ACL was exceeded. During the time-period 2017-2021, landings of blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic region have often exceeded the sector and total ACL.

Alternative 1 (No Action). If recreational landings of golden tilefish reach, or are projected to reach, the recreational annual catch limit, the recreational sector will close for the remainder of the fishing year unless the National Marine Fisheries Service determines that no closure is necessary based on the best scientific information available.
If the recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, then during the following fishing year, recreational landings will be monitored for a persistence in increased landings. If necessary, the National Marine Fisheries Service will reduce the length of the recreational fishing season and the recreational annual catch limit by the amount of the recreational overage, if the species is overfished and the total annual catch limit is exceeded.

Alternative 2. Retain the recreational in-season closure. If the recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, then during the following fishing year, recreational landings will be monitored for a persistence in increased landings. If necessary, the National Marine Fisheries Service will reduce the length of the recreational fishing season and the recreational annual catch limit by the amount of the recreational overage.

Preferred Alternative 3. Remove the current recreational in-season accountability measure. NMFS will annually announce the length of the recreational fishing season based on catch rates from the previous season. The fishing season will start on May 1 and end on the date National Marine Fisheries Service projects the recreational annual catch limit will be met.

Discussion:

- In-season accountability measures for blueline tilefish would stay in place under all alternatives being considered. However, the Council intends to remove these measures for snowy and they removed them for red porgy, both of which have shortened recreational seasons.
- Also, if the preferred is retained, the AM will be different than what is now being considered for snowy grouper. Amendment 51 for snowy grouper is proposing to remove the current recreational in-season accountability measures. If recreational snowy grouper landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, the Regional Administrator will reduce the length of the following year's recreational fishing season by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational annual catch limit from being exceeded in the

following year. However, the length of the recreational season will not be reduced if the Regional Administrator determines, using the best scientific information available, that it is not necessary.

Summary of Biological Effects:

- Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, the recreational ACL and the total ACL would need to be exceeded and the stock would need to be overfished for the AM to be triggered.
- **Alternative 2** provides a mechanism to prevent the recreational ACL from being exceeded in-season and a mechanism to reduce the length of the following year's fishing season if the ACL is exceeded. As such, **Alternative 2** could have positive biological effects to the blueline tilefish stock.
- **Preferred Alternative 3** would result in biological benefit to the stock in that it is likely to correct overages of the recreational ACL if they occur. However, this alternative would not correct for an overage in-season if it were to occur due to an unforeseen increase in recreational effort.
- Biological benefits to the blueline tilefish stock would be greatest under **Alternative 2** followed by **Preferred Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Summary of Economic Effects:

- Recreational AMs typically consist of corrective measures that create short-term indirect negative economic effects by curtailing harvest and fishing activity when harvest has exceeded the sector ACL, thus potentially affecting net revenues of for-hire operations and CS on recreational fishing trips.
- **Preferred Alternative 3** could result in economic benefits that mitigate the short-term cost of the AM itself by allowing more time to adjust to the changing harvest regulations through a consistent announcement of the season length.

Summary of Social Effects:

- AMs can have direct and indirect social effects because, when triggered, can restrict harvest in the current season or subsequent seasons.
- 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 effects. Some of those effects are similar to other thresholds being met and may involve switching to other species or discontinuing fishing altogether. Those restrictions usually translate into reduced opportunity for harvest, which in turn can change fishing behaviors. Those behaviors can increase pressure on other stocks or amplify conflict. While these negative effects are usually short term, they may at times induce other indirect effects that can have a lasting effect on a community.
- With **Preferred Alternative 3** the end date for blueline tilefish may shift each year, announcing at the beginning of the season would allow private anglers and for-hire businesses to plan their activities around the closure in advance.

Draft Rationale:

- The Council is proposing modifying the recreational accountability measures for blueline tilefish to prevent overages of the recreational ACL and render the AM more effective.
- **Preferred Alternative 3** is the most suitable among the alternatives considered for a relatively short recreational season (May 1- August 31).

Committee Action:

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

DRAFT MOTION: APPROVE AMENDMENT 52 TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE SNAPPER GROUPER FISHERY OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION FOR FORMAL SECRETARIAL REVIEW AND DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT AS NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE. GIVE STAFF EDITORIAL LICENSE TO MAKE ANY NECESSARY EDITORIAL CHANGES TO THE DOCUMENT/CODIFIED TEXT AND GIVE THE COUNCIL CHAIR AUTHORITY TO APPROVE THE REVISIONS AND RE-DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT.

Appendix A. Past and present ABC, ACLs, landings, and closures for golden tilefish.

Table A1. Table of past and present ABC, ACLs, landings, and closures for golden tilefish.

Management Measures	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
ABC (gw)	**668,000**	**668,000**	**668,000**	**655,000**	**558,000**	**558,000**	**323,000**	**342,000**	**342,000**	**342,000**
Total ACL (gw)	**625,000**	**625,000**	**625,000**	**625,000**	**558,000**	**558,000**	**323,000**	**342,000**	**342,000**	**342,000**
Com. ACL H&L(gw)	541,295	541,295	135,324	135,324	135,324	135,324	79,328	82,935	82,935	82,935
Com. ACL LL (gw)	Combined	Combined	405,971	405,971	405,971	405,971	234,982	248,805	248,805	248,805
Com. Landings H&L (gw)	517,188	537,946	144,678	143,872	121,962	131,941	74,445	85,141	87,616	82,279
Com. Landings LL (gw)			564,421	389,244	411,367	405,691	227,554	282,676	256,676	242,051
Com. Overage/ Underage H&L(%) Closure Date	95.5 2/17/12	99.4 5/5/13	106.9 8/29/14	106.3 12/8/15	90.1	97.5 11/29/17	93.8 8/14/18	102.7 7/23/19	105.6 7/23/20	100.8 6/1/21
Com. Overage/ Underage LL (%) Closure Date			139 3/5/14	95.9 2/19/15	101.3 3/15/16	99.9 5/19/17	96.8 3/25/18	113.6 3/14/19	103.1 2/18/20; 3/14-23/20	94.3 2/10/21: 3/20-30/21
Rec. ACL (# of fish)	3,019	3,019	3,019	3,019	3,019	3,019	2,187	2,316	2,316	2,316
Rec. Landings, "Old" MRIP (# of fish)	3,627	4,143	1,357	3,595	13,010	1,746	3,112	15,638	2,894	2,539
Rec. Overage/ Underage (%) Closure Date	120.1	137.2 6/3/13	44.9 6/7/14	119.1 8/11/15	430.9 8/27/16	57.8	142	675	125	110

Appendix B. Past and present ABC, ACLs, landings, and closures for Blueline Tilefish.

Table B1. Table of past and present ABC, ACLs, landings, and closures for Blueline Tilefish.

Management Measures	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
ABC (ww)			**224,100**	**224,100**	**224,100**	**224,100**	**233,968**	**233,968**
Total ACL (ww)			**174,798**	**174,798**	**174,798**	**174,798**	**233,968**	**233,968**
Com. ACL (ww)	112,207	17,841	87,521	87,521	87,521	87,521	117,148	117,148
Com. Landings (ww)	159,300	80,337	100,392	87,558	93,051	95,904	116,563	119,781
Com. Overage/ Underage (%)	142.0	450.3	114.71	100.04	106.32	109.58	99.50	102.20
Comm. closure date		4/7/15	6/1/16 Reopened 7/13/16; 8/30/16	7/18/17 Reopened 10/24/17-11/1/17	8/22/18	7/30/19	8/11/20	8/1/21
Rec. ACL (ww)	111,893	17,791	87,277	87,277	87,277	87,277	116,820	116,820
Rec. Landings, MRIP-CHTS (ww)	95,712	45,323	172,286	153,959	116,597	110,113	392,253	189,224
Rec. Overage/Underage (%)	85.5	254.8	197.40	176.40	133.59	126.16	335.78	161.98
Rec. Closure date		6/10/15						

Note: Prior to 2014 Blueline Tilefish was part of the Deepwater Complex. 2021 Recreational landings are preliminary wave 1-4 MRIP landings. Recreational landings were provided from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center on October 25, 2021 and include both MRIP-CHTS and Southeast Region Headboat Survey landings.