

Amendment 46 to the Fishery  
Management Plan for the Snapper  
Grouper Fishery of the South  
Atlantic Region  
(Private Recreational Permitting and Education  
Requirement)  
Decision Document  
March 2025

**Note:** Words that are [underlined and in blue font](#) provide a link to other documents.

## Background

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) has been developing Amendment 46 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan (FMP), with the most recent review at the [December 2024 meeting](#). At that meeting, the Council also reviewed recommendations from the Snapper Grouper Private Angler Advisory Panel (AP). The Council directed staff to revise the Purpose and Need statements, prepared a discussion of “key stocks” in the fishery, and further revise the action that would allow an exemption from the federal permit and education requirement for states (Action 5).

Several of the Council’s AP’s have provided feedback on action in this amendment over multiple meetings. The full summary reports and recommendations that the Council has previously received on Amendment 46 can be found under the following links:

- Joint Council Workgroup on Section 102 of the Modern Fish Act (click [HERE](#))
- Private Recreational Reporting Working Group recommendations (click [HERE](#))
- Snapper Grouper Recreational Permitting and Reporting Advisory Panel ([Meeting 1](#), [Meeting 2](#), [Meeting 3](#), [Meeting 4](#), and [Meeting 5](#))
- Snapper Grouper Private Angler AP ([Meeting 1](#) and [Meeting 2](#))
- Snapper Grouper AP ([Meeting 1](#) and [Meeting 2](#))
- Outreach and Communications AP (click [Meeting 1](#) and [Meeting 2](#))
- Law Enforcement AP (click [HERE](#))

## Actions in this amendment

1. Establish a private recreational permit in the snapper grouper fishery
2. Specify the species that would be covered by the permit
3. Establish a required education component
4. Specify the timing of when the required education component needs to be completed
5. Establish an exemption to the federal permit and education requirement based on permitting by the states

## Objectives for this meeting

- Review December 2024 Council guidance and subsequent IPT feedback.
- Provide feedback on edits to the purpose and need statements.
- Provide feedback on edits to Actions 2 and 5.
- Provide guidance on approval for public hearings.
  - Consider delaying approval for public hearings until the June 2025 meeting, with hearings to take place in the summer months 2025?

## Tentative amendment timing

✓December 2022	Council reviewed options paper and approved amendment for scoping.
✓Winter 2023	Conducted scoping.
✓March 2023	Council reviewed scoping comments and provided guidance on the amendment.
✓June 2023	Council reviewed amendment and Technical AP and Snapper Grouper AP comments.
✓September 2023	Council reviewed amendment and Technical AP comments.
✓December 2023	Council reviewed Snapper Grouper and Outreach and Communications AP comments, draft effects, and made modifications to the amendment.
✓March 2024	Council reviewed of amendment and Law Enforcement AP comments.
✓Spring 2024	Review by Private Angler AP and Permitting and Reporting AP.
✓June 2024	Council reviewed AP comments.
✓December 2024	Council reviews amendment and AP comments.
<b>March 2025</b>	<b>Council reviews modifications to the amendment, selects preferred alternatives, and <i>potentially</i> approves for public hearings.</b>
Spring 2025	Conduct public hearings.
June 2025	Council reviews amendment and public hearing comments.
September 2025	Council reviews final draft of amendment and considers approval for formal review.
2026/2027 (TBD)	Regulation changes effective.

## Purpose and Need statements

The **purpose** of the amendment is to develop a federal recreational permitting system that will identify the universe of private anglers or vessels targeting South Atlantic snapper grouper species and will enhance the ability to collect recreational effort and catch data **through potential increases in survey frame and precision of effort estimation**. Also work to promote best recreational fishing practices through education.

The **need** for the amendment is to improve the quality of effort and catch data for the private component of the recreational sector that targets South Atlantic snapper grouper species, while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects. Also improve education on best fishing practices.

### Council Guidance from December 2024:

- Adapt the statements to include planning for potential reporting and expansion to other FMPs in the future.
- Further emphasize the intent to survey permit holders to enhance data collection.

### **IPT comments/recommendations:**

Regarding adapting the statements to include planning for potential reporting and expansion to other FMPs, the IPT suggested including this in the discussion. If it is included in the purpose statement, the Council would need to provide rationale for how the actions and alternatives analyzed in the amendment directly support this element.

### Committee Action:

- Provide feedback on proposed edits to the purpose and need statements.

## Actions in the Amendment

### **Action 1. Establish a federal private recreational permit requirement in the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region**

**Purpose of the Action:** *This action is necessary to establish a federal private recreational permit requirement in the snapper grouper fishery and determine whether the permit will be issued to a vessel or an angler.*

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Do not establish a federal private recreational permit requirement for vessels or anglers in the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

**Alternative 2.** Require a federal permit for all private vessels to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.

**Preferred Alternative 3.** Require a federal permit for all private anglers to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.

#### **Council guidance from December 2024:**

- Request that NMFS consult with OST to provide clarity on the survey methodology at a future meeting.
- This was requested and a presentation is being prepared for the June 2025 Council meeting.

#### **Committee Action:**

- No action needed.

**Action 2. Specify the species for which a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required**

***Purpose of the Action:** This action would specify the species that would be covered by a federal private recreational permit requirement in the snapper grouper fishery.*

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** A federal private recreational permit does not apply to any snapper grouper species.

**Preferred Alternative 2.** A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required when fishing for, harvesting, or possessing any species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

**Alternative 3.** A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required when fishing for, harvesting, or possessing any species covered by the Florida State Reef Fish Survey.

**Alternative 4.** A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required when fishing for, harvesting, or possessing any deepwater species.

**DRAFT Alternative 5.** A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required when fishing for, harvesting, or possessing key stocks.

**Discussion:**

- The Committee has the option to select multiple alternatives as preferred to capture different groups of species.
- **Alternatives 2 through 4** address the species would be covered by the permit (**Table 1**).
  - **Alternative 2** would cover 55 species.
  - **Alternative 3** would cover 13 species.
  - **Alternative 4** would cover 10 species.
- The species that would fall under “key stocks” in **DRAFT Alternative 5** need to be defined before further analysis of the alternative can occur.

**Table 1.** Species found within the snapper grouper fishery management unit.

Species	FL SRFS	DW Species	Species	FL SRFS	DW Species
Black grouper	X		Cottonwick		
Gag	X		Cubera snapper		
Greater amberjack	X		Goliath grouper		
Hogfish	X		Gray snapper		
Mutton snapper	X		Graysby		
Red grouper	X		Jolthead porgy		
Red snapper	X		Knobbed porgy		
Vermilion snapper	X		Lane snapper		

Yellowtail snapper	X		Longspine porgy		
Banded rudderfish	X		Margate		
Lesser amberjack	X		Nassau grouper		
Gray triggerfish	X		Ocean triggerfish		
Almaco jack	X		Red hind		
Yellowedge grouper		X	Red porgy		
Silk snapper		X	Rock hind		
Misty grouper		X	Rock sea bass		
Sand tilefish		X	Sailor's choice		
Queen snapper		X	Saucereye porgy		
Blackfin snapper		X	Scamp		
Blueline tilefish		X	Scup		
Golden tilefish		X	Speckled hind		
Snowy grouper		X	Tomtate		
Wreckfish		X	Warsaw grouper		
Atlantic spadefish			White grunt		
Bank sea bass			Whitebone porgy		
Bar Jack			Yellowfin grouper		
Black sea bass			Yellowmouth grouper		
Coney					

\*FL SRFS = species is covered by the Florida State Reef Fish Survey.

\*DW Species = species is part of the deepwater complex or a species typically found in deepwater.

**Council guidance from December 2024:**

- Add an alternative that would cover “key stocks” (see SEDAR Committee Report December 2024). (Note that the number of species may be broader)
- “Key stocks” will be discussed and identified by the Council at a future date.
- During discussion of this action, the Committee provided direction to Council staff to review the Snapper Grouper complex to determine what species are in need of federal conservation and management and change the Fishery Management Unit.

**Committee Action:**

- Discuss **DRAFT Alternative 5** and whether to approve it for inclusion in **Action 2**.

### **Action 3. Establish an education component in conjunction with a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit**

***Purpose of the Action:** This action is necessary to establish a required education component for private recreational permit holders fishing for, harvesting, or possessing snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region. The action also clarifies whether the implementation of the required education component would be delayed from the implementation of the private recreational permit.*

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Do not require an education component for private recreational permit holders to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.

**Alternative 2.** Establish and require an education component in conjunction with a private recreational snapper grouper permit to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone. The education component would be **required for initial issuance** of a federal private recreational permit.

**Alternative 3.** Establish and require an education component in conjunction with a private recreational snapper grouper permit to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone. The education component would be **implemented after** the federal private recreational permit requirement has been established.

Completion of the education component would be required:

**Sub-alternative 3a.** Before initial reissuance of the permit.

**Sub-alternative 3b.** When permit holders are required to complete the education requirement by the issuing authority.

#### **Council guidance from December 2024:**

- Accept the IPT suggested edits to the alternatives (reflected in the alternatives above).

#### **Committee Action:**

- No action needed.

#### **Action 4. Specify the timing of the education component requirement for the private recreational snapper grouper permit**

**Purpose of the Action:** This action is necessary to establish how often an education component would need to be completed.

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** There is not a required education component for private recreational anglers or vessels to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.

**Alternative 2.** Completion of the education component would be required upon each issuance of a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit.

**Alternative 3.** Completion of the education component would be required every other year upon issuance of a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit.

**Alternative 4.** Completion of the education component would be required only upon initial issuance of a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit.

**Alternative 5.** Completion of the education component would be required upon initial issuance of a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and each time that the education component materials are updated.

#### **Council guidance from December 2024:**

- Accept the IPTs edits to the alternatives (reflected in the alternatives above).

#### **Committee Action:**

- No action needed.



## **Action 5. Establish an exemption to the federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and education requirements based on permitting and education by the states**

**Purpose of the Action:** This action would establish a mechanism that would exempt a state from the federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and education requirements provided that similar measures were enacted for state-based permit and education requirements.

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Do not establish an exemption to the federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and education requirements to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.

**Alternative 2.** Establish an exemption to the federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and education requirements. The National Marine Fisheries Service would certify a state permit and education component as equivalent to a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and education component provided the state implements equivalent measures that at a minimum include the following:

**Sub-alternative 2a.** The state permit is required for the preferred entity specified in Action 1.

**Sub-alternative 2b.** The state permit is required for the preferred species identified in Action 2.

**Sub-alternative 2c.** The state permit would have the preferred education requirements identified in Action 3 and Action 4.

**Sub-alternative 2d.** The state permit would remain valid for the same period of time as the federal permit.

### **Council guidance from December 2024:**

- Add an allowance that would accommodate the existing Florida state reef fish survey.
  - Either exempt Florida or “grandfather” the existing program in to allow an exemption from a federal permit and education requirement.
- Make sure that future state programs can be exempted from federal permit and education requirements.
- Carry through “equivalent” or “comparable” in the wording of sub-alternatives rather than “same.”
- Gather feedback on whether Florida, which has an angler-based permit, could be provided an exemption from the federal requirement if the federal permit is vessel-based.
- Accept the IPT suggested edits to the alternatives in Action 5.

### **IPT Comments/recommendations:**

- The identifier needs to be the same regarding the affected entity (vessel or individual). May need to have further discussion on how the state and federal systems would interact.
- Using “equivalent” or “comparable” in the language of alternatives would not make sense. Instead, the IPT recommends referring to a previous action/alternative in the alternative language. For discussion purposes, the preferred from a previous action can be re-stated to better establish the connection.

- Florida could legally be exempted from the federal requirements, but the rationale for doing so is important. However, it may not be the best route.
- Exempting Florida may get complicated. Licensing requirements are varied and what would it mean for lobster, snook, etc.
- Further discussions with Florida are needed to clarify how their program would align with federal requirements.
- It was noted that the intent of this action is to avoid a duplicative state and federal permitting situation. If a state in the future wants to go along the lines of Florida and develop its own program, it would be able to do so.
- The IPT continued to express concern that requirements under the Florida program are not the same as what the federal permit would put in place.
- It is not clear how the effort estimation process works for states that are exempt from the [National Saltwater Angler Registry](#). The amendment should include a description of how data are transferred to the Office of Science and Technology and how the process may be affected with implementation of the actions proposed in this amendment.
- There needs to be a closer look at how the saltwater registry has been working relative to states being exempt.
- May need another alternative that allows for data transfer of comparable information from a state to the federal agency to describe how the state and federal needs can be met without a true exemption.
- Administrative costs and the feasibility of integrating state and federal systems would be critical in moving forward.
- It is going to take a lot of effort and money for the federal government to develop a permit and education requirement. There is concern that if a permit and education program are developed and the states subsequently implement programs of their own, effort and money spent on a federal permit will be wasted.

**Committee Action:**

- Discuss IPT feedback and edits to **Action 5**.
  - Consider accepting edits to **Alternative 2**.

**Committee Action:**

- **DRAFT MOTION: APPROVE AMENDMENT 46 AND ALL ACTIONS, AS REVISED, FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT.**
  - DIRECT STAFF TO PREPARE AMENDMENT 46 FOR CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS AT THE JUNE 2025 COUNCIL MEETING.