

Meeting Summary Report

Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee

November 5, 2024

In June 2024, the South Atlantic Council (Council) formed the Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee) and tasked it with reviewing the Snapper Grouper Vision Blueprint and developing a list of commercial management topics that require further consideration. The Sub-Committee met via webinar on November 5, 2024.

The Sub-Committee approved the agenda for the November 2024 meeting.

1. Review of Commercial Issues in the 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint

Council staff presented a summary of management objectives relevant to the commercial sector from the 2015 Vision Blueprint, noting actions that the Council has taken since the Blueprint's publishing that are consistent with these objectives.

2. Discussion of Current Commercial Issues and Initial Prioritization

The Sub-Committee reviewed the initial list of potential topics that was provided by the Council in their initial tasking. The Sub-Committee maintained several of these topics for further discussion, providing some additional detail on necessary conversations within these broader topics. The updated list of topics is shown below:

- 2-for-1 commercial permit policy
 - Evaluate whether this policy is still necessary and whether the commercial sector is currently over-capitalized.
 - Consider the number of 2-for-1 exchanges that have occurred over time to get an idea whether this transaction is reasonable for new entrants.
 - If the 2-for-1 policy is recommended to continue, define evaluation criteria and a process by which it can be removed in the future, when it is no longer needed.
- The portfolio of permits and fishing activities necessary to sustain commercial fishing businesses
 - Consider how necessary permits may be changing as stocks shift and expand across Council jurisdictional boundaries.
- Improving biomass of commercially important stocks
 - The success of the commercial fishery is primarily dependent on sustainable biomass that allows access to harvest.
 - Commercial fishermen need year-round access to enough biomass (even if from different stocks at different times of year) to run their businesses.
 - The current portfolio fishing model is necessary because several stocks have declined, leading to stricter management and reduced access.
- Permit transfers
 - Examine relationships between individual and business permit holders.
 - Address potential loopholes that allow transfers in ways not originally intended.
 - Consider the number of transfers that have occurred over time to get an idea of the frequency as compared to the 2-for-1 exchanges.
- Permit leasing

- Commercial 225 lb permit policies
 - Evaluate the need for these permits in the current fishery
 - Consider repurposing the permit to be specifically for new entrants into the fishery
 - Consider a permit pool or bank to enable new entrance into the fishery
- Regional management
- Items from the Florida Commercial Fishing Summit
 - The primary issue relevant to federal snapper grouper management noted in the summit is identifying and addressing barriers to new entrants
- Competition with imports
 - Investigate the extent to which the commercial snapper grouper fishery competes with imported fish
 - If competition with imports is notable, explore methods within the Council’s purview that may aid in domestic sales.
 - The Council could consider import minimum size limits like Florida currently requires.
 - The Sub-Committee discussed sustainable seafood certifications and decided that these should not be considered by the Council for the snapper grouper fishery due to potential conflicts of interest from the Council being involved in business marketing. Several other organizations already have certification programs, and the Council is required by law to manage fisheries to be sustainable.
 - Addressing potential competition with imports may not be an actionable item for the Council. Instead, this may be a consideration when issues that could affect the commercial market occur.
- Different permit usage (e.g. “permit stacking”, others)
- Ways to increase trip efficiency
 - “Step-ups” as the converse of step-downs that would increase trip limits if a percentage of the optimum yield has not been landed by a specified time of the fishing year.
 - Multi-day or day-based trip limits.
- The Sub-Committee noted that while infrastructure and working waterfront issues greatly affect the commercial fishery, these issues are beyond the Council’s purview. Therefore, the Sub-Committee does not recommend continued discussions on these topics at this time.
- Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ) concerns.
 - Look at the [NOAA Fisheries EEJ Implementation Strategy](#) to determine applicable actions for the commercial sector and this Sub-Committee.
- Climate change and ecosystem concerns
 - One member commented that incorporation of ecosystem-based or multi-species models can help move away from management being so reactive to single-species stock assessments.

Sub-Committee members commented that the Sub-Committee’s effort should identify barriers to the success of the commercial fishery and develop an initial vision of what the commercial fishery should look like in the next several years.

The Sub-Committee decided that prioritization of the above-listed topics was premature for this meeting, and more background information is necessary to evaluate the most immediate actions. To facilitate discussion of these topics at a future meeting, the Sub-Committee tasked staff with compiling the following information:

- Number of 2-for-1 permit exchanges over time
- Previous staff reports on the 2-for-1 permit policy with updates through recent years, if possible
- A previous staff report on overcapitalization of the fishery.
- A summary of the frequency with which commercial trips meet their limit
 - Look initially at analyses completed for recent amendments
 - If possible, include the length of the trip (day versus multi-day trip)
- [NOAA Fisheries EEJ Implementation Strategy](#)
- Commercial landings by state for the top 5-10 commercial species in the last 5 years
- Information about permit ownership
 - Percentage of owner-operators and multi-permit owners
 - Evaluate data over time, if possible
 - Qualitative information can be useful, as well. The intent is to show whether and how permit ownership has changed over time; not necessarily through exact numbers.
 - Coordinate with state agencies and the Southeast Regional Office (SERO)
- Commercial landings relative to annual catch limits by stock for 2020-2024
- A previous SERO presentation by Kevin McIntosh that addressed several permit-related questions, including transfers, renewals, and processes for business and individual ownership

The Sub-Committee also noted that several parts of the requested information were developed years ago and may be outdated with respect to current issues in the fishery. Changes to the fishery from the time that information was analyzed or developed should be considered when evaluating the information and making decisions for the current and future commercial fishery.

Next Steps

The Sub-Committee decided that their next meeting should be in-person and before the March 2025 Council meeting. The Sub-Committee noted that this could occur the day or morning before a scheduled Council meeting to avoid additional travel. Staff also noted that with the size of the Sub-Committee, the Council staff office may be a viable meeting location. Staff will follow up with Sub-Committee members to plan the time and location of the next meeting.

At the next meeting, staff will present the information requested (above), as available, and the Sub-Committee will determine next steps for prioritizing commercial topics.