10/24/2025

Modifications to Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper Management Measures

Draft Amendment 55
to the Fishery Management Plan for
Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf
and
Draft Amendment 44
to the Fishery Management Plan for the
Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

November 2025

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

ABC	acceptable biological catch
ACL	annual catch limit
ACT	annual catch target
AM	accountability measures
APAIS	Access Point Angler Intercept Survey
BMSY	stock biomass level capable of producing an equilibrium yield of MSY
CHTS	Coastal Household Telephone Survey
Council	Gulf Council
Councils	Gulf and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils
DWG	deep-water grouper
E.O.	Executive Order
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	economic impact statement
FES	Fishing Effort Survey
FMP	Fishery Management Plan
GMFMC	Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
GRFS	Gulf Reef Fish Survey
Gulf	Gulf of America (Formerly Gulf of Mexico)
IRFA	initial regulatory flexibility analysis
MFMT	maximum fishing mortality threshold
MRFSS	Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey
MRIP	Marine Recreational Information Program
MSST	minimum stock size threshold
MSY	maximum sustainable yield
Magnuson-Stevens Act	Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
OFL	overfishing limit
OST	Office of Science and Technology
OY	optimum yield
RFA	Regulatory Flexibility Analysis
RIR	Regulatory Impact Review
Reef Fish FMP	Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf
SDC	status determination criteria
SEDAR	Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review
SEFSC	Southeast Fisheries Science Center
SEIS	Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
SERO	Southeast Regional Office
SPR	spawning potential ratio
SRFS	State Reef Fish Survey

SRHS	Southeast Region Headboat Survey
SSB	spawning stock biomass
SSC	Scientific and Statistical Committee
Secretary	Secretary of Commerce
South Atlantic Council	South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
TL	total length
USCG	United States Coast Guard
mp	million pounds
ww	whole weight

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The southeastern U.S. stocks of mutton snapper (*Lutjanus analis*) and yellowtail snapper (*Ocyurus chrysurus*) are respectively considered to be single unit stocks in the Gulf of America (Gulf) and South Atlantic regions. While mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper are managed separately by the Gulf Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council; collectively, "the Councils"), determining the jurisdictional apportionment of the stock acceptable biological catch levels (ABCs) requires the Councils to work collectively. The actions in Amendment 55 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico (Reef Fish Amendment 55) and Amendment 44 to the FMP for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper Amendment 44) would update catch levels and modify management of mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper in the Gulf and South Atlantic regions. This is a joint FMP amendment for each Council's FMP and must be approved by both Councils. Once both Councils approve the amendment, it may then be submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for approval and implementation by the Secretary of Commerce. Actions include revising the stock overfishing limits (OFLs), stock ABCs, jurisdictional apportionment of the ABCs and annual catch limits (ACL) between the Gulf and South Atlantic, sector allocations, and sector ACLs. The stock OFLs and ABCs are based on the new Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) 79 (2024) and SEDAR 96 (2025) stock assessments for mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper, respectively. These stock assessments were deemed consistent with the best scientific information available by both Councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSCs). While the Councils must agree on the jurisdictional apportionment methods, beyond that, the Councils are at liberty to manage these two species within their respective jurisdictions in the manner which provides the greatest benefit to the Nation. Sector allocations are not used for either species in the Gulf Council's jurisdiction; thus, no further consideration for Gulf sector allocations for these species will be made in this document. The jurisdictions for each Council are shown in Figure 1.1.1 and 1.1.2.

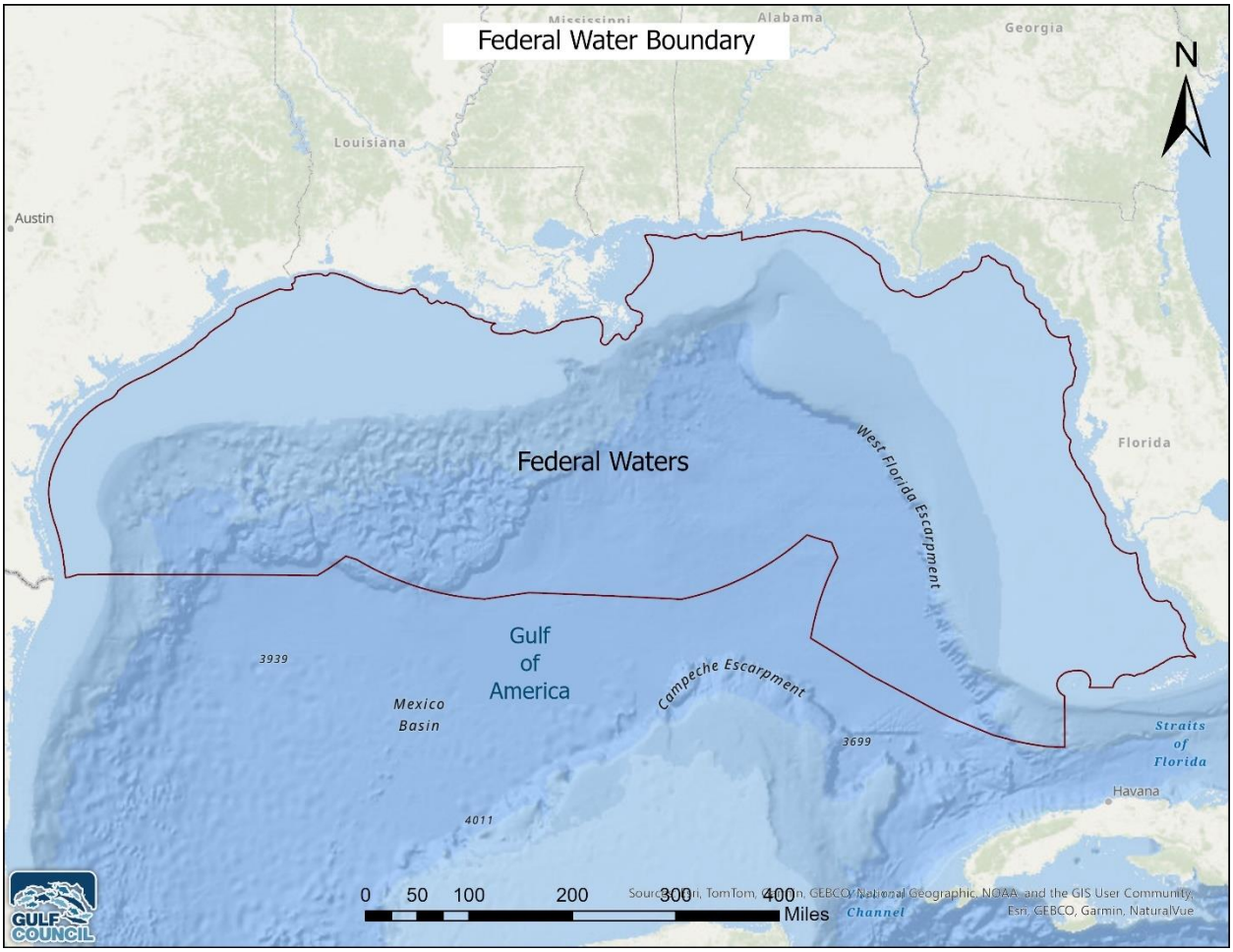

Figure 1.1.1. Jurisdictional boundaries of the Gulf Council.

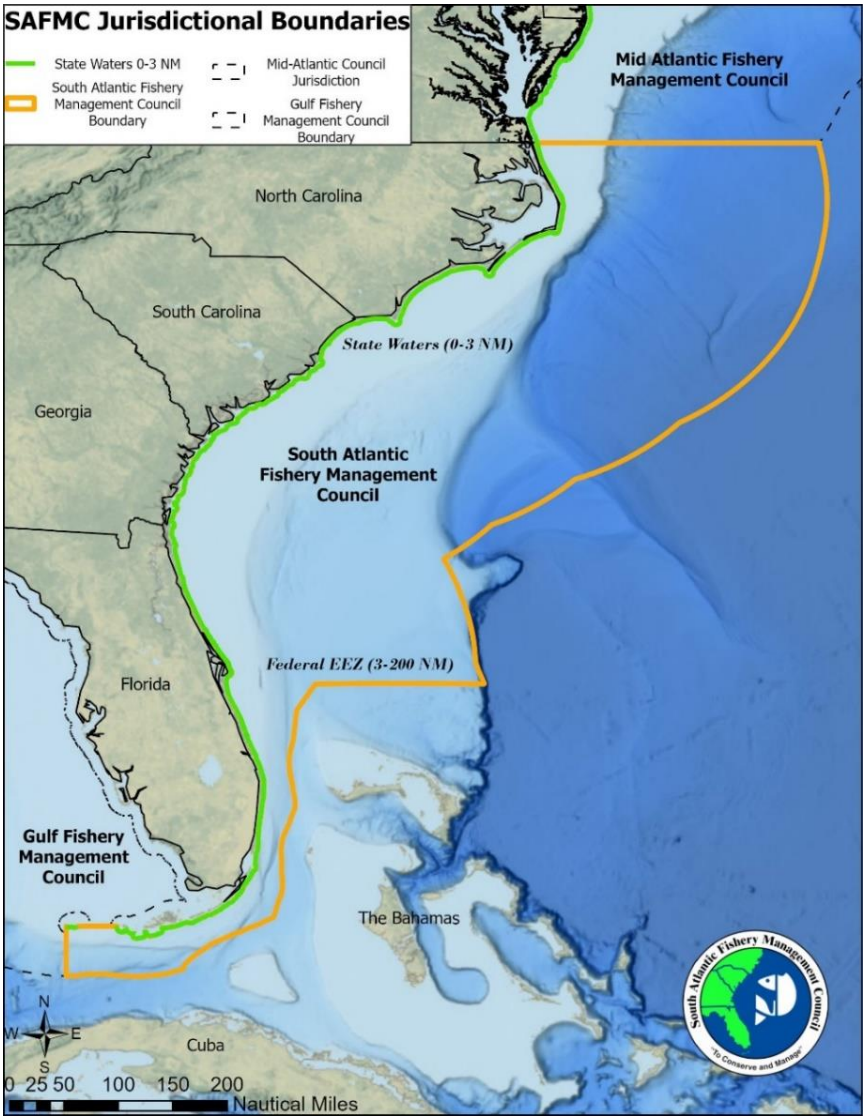

Figure 1.1.2. Jurisdictional boundaries of the South Atlantic Council.

In February 2025, the Councils' SSCs met to review new stock assessments for both mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper (see Sections 1.3 and 1.4 below). These stock assessments found the respective stocks to be healthy as of 2023 and used a new recreational private vessel landings survey from Florida (State Reef Fish Survey [SRFS]) for estimating recreational private vessel landings. After reviewing the stock assessments, the SSCs recommended updated catch advice for both species. In response, the Councils decided to update the management measures contained herein to reflect the health of the stocks, and the use of the new survey.

Current Management and Landings

Recreational landings for both mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper are now inclusive of SRFS, which produces more precise landings estimates than the previously used federal Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) for private recreational vessels. MRIP is still used to

inform recreational shore mode landings, and MRIP's For-Hire Telephone Survey informs charter for-hire landings. The SRFS- and MRIP-informed catch estimates differ in how landings data in southwest Florida (i.e., Area D in the Western Keys [Figure 1.1.3.]) are attributed. Under MRIP, this area is combined with Area E (Figure 1.1.3) and these landings have historically been attributed to the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction. Under the SRFS program, Areas D and E are split to provide additional geographic resolution and the landings in Area D are attributed to the Gulf. Headboat landings in Area D (estimated using the Southeast Region Headboat Survey [SRHS]) have historically been attributed to the Gulf, and this practice continues. Likewise, the federal charter for-hire landings in Area D are typically combined with Area E and attributed to the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction. MRIP shore mode landings in Areas D and E are also attributed to the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction. Table 1.1.1 describes which data will be attributed to which Council by survey for this amendment.

Reader Note, 10/24/2025: The landings data herein will be updated before the December 2025 South Atlantic Council meeting to reflect the appropriate fleet-specific recreational data stratification. This modification will have some effect on the values presented in Chapter 2.

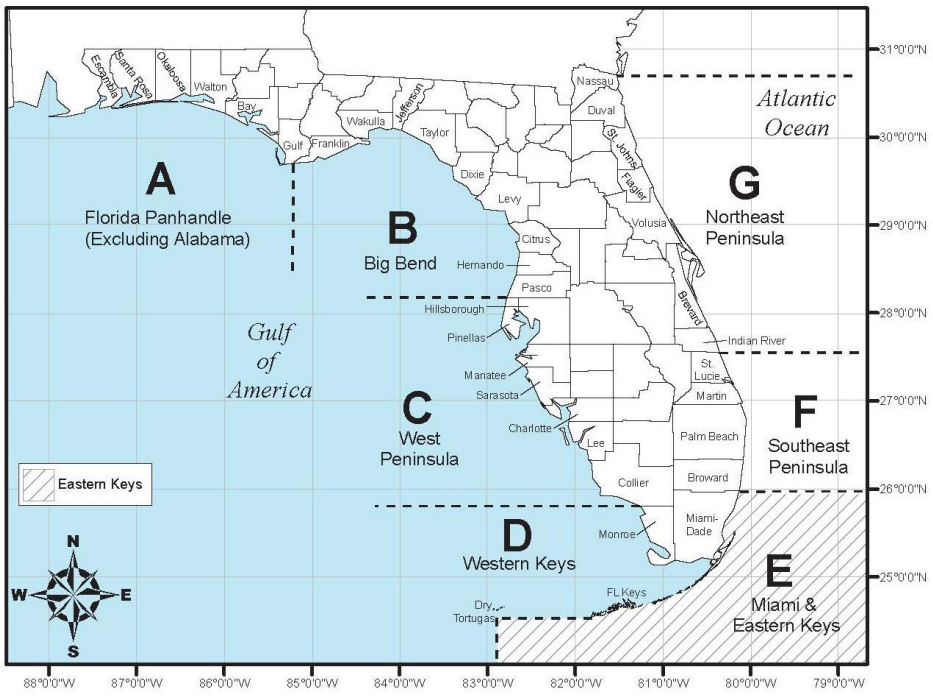

Figure 1.1.3. Map of survey areas used by Florida's SRFS program used to survey the offshore private recreational component of mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper catch and effort.

Table 1.1.1. A description of how the recreational landings from southwest Florida (i.e., Area D) are attributed to the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils.

Mode	Survey	Council
Offshore private vessel	SRFS	Gulf
Federal charter for-hire	MRIP	South Atlantic
Headboat	SRHS	Gulf
Shore	MRIP	South Atlantic

1.2 Purpose and Need

The purpose of these fishery management plan amendments is to revise the southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper stock overfishing limit, and stock acceptable biological catch, based on the results of the SEDAR 79 and SEDAR 96 stock assessments, respectively. The amendments would also revise the jurisdictional apportionment between the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils, the regional annual catch limits, and the South Atlantic sector allocations.

The need for these fishery management plan amendments is to update existing catch limits, jurisdictional apportionments of the ABCs, and South Atlantic sector allocations for southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper to be consistent with the best scientific information available, and achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

1.3 Mutton Snapper

Stock Assessment

SEDAR 79 (2024) was a stock assessment of southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and estimated the stock to be healthy using data through 2023. This mutton snapper stock assessment used SRFS in place of MRIP survey data for estimating mutton snapper catch and effort from private recreational fishing vessels. A table summarizing the results of the mutton snapper stock assessment, including current stock status determination criteria, is shown in Table 1.3.1.

Table 1.3.1. Summary of benchmarks and reference points used in the SEDAR 79 assessment for mutton snapper. Spawning stock biomass (SSB) is in metric tons (male and female combined SSB), whereas F is a harvest rate (total biomass killed all ages / total biomass age 1+). An SPR proxy of 30% is presented. Values highlighted in **green** indicate the stock is neither overfished, nor undergoing overfishing. F=fishing mortality; MSY=maximum sustainable yield); MFMT=maximum fishing mortality threshold; MSST=minimum stock size threshold.

Criteria	Definition	Value
$F_{MSYProxy}$	Equilibrium F to achieve 30% SPR	0.149
MFMT	$F_{MSYProxy}$	0.149
$F_{Current}$	Geometric mean of $F_{2021\text{-}2023}$	0.08
$F_{Current}$/MFMT	Current overfishing status	**0.537**
$SSB_{MSYProxy}$	Equilibrium SSB at $F_{30\%SPR,}$ in metric tons	3,352
MSST	0.75 * $SSB_{30\%SPR,}$ in metric tons	2,514
$SSB_{Current}$	SSB in 2023, in metric tons	5,403
$SSB_{Current}/SSB_{MSYProxy}$	Stock status based on $SSB_{30\%SPR}$	1.62
$SSB_{Current}$/MSST	Stock status based on MSST	**2.15**

The Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs met in February 2025 to review the SEDAR 79 stock assessment and yield projections. Traditionally, when reviewing a single stock which occurs

across Council jurisdictional boundaries, the Councils' SSCs will use the status determination criteria (SDC) for the Council in whose jurisdiction the majority of the biomass of the assessed species occurs. For mutton snapper, this would be the South Atlantic Council. Thus, the South Atlantic Council's SDC for mutton snapper was used, as is reflected in the "Definitions" column of Table 1.3.1. In addition, the South Atlantic Council defines optimum yield (OY) for mutton snapper as the yield corresponding to the stock ACL, which for mutton snapper, would also be equal to the ABC. The SSCs issued two joint consensus statements at the conclusion of their review of SEDAR 79. First, the SSCs agreed to use an alternative approach from the previous stock assessment, because of differences in how the uncertainty in the OFL was characterized. Second, the SSCs used the geometric mean of the most recent five years of recruitment (2019 – 2023) for informing OFL and ABC projections. Using the geometric mean for recruitment can be interpreted to indicate a regime shift; however, in this situation for mutton snapper, the SSCs do not think a regime shift has occurred. The OFL is set at $F_{30\%SPR}$, and the ABC is set at 75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$, for the years 2026 – 2028, as derived from the provided projections for 2024 – 2028. The resulting mutton snapper stock OFLs and ABCs for 2026 – 2028 are shown in Table 1.3.2, with the years 2024 – 2025 of the projections grayed out to show that those years will have passed before management changes can be implemented. For reference, the current OFL and ABC are shown in the legacy federal Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) units in Table 1.3.3.

Table 1.3.2. SSCs recommended OFL and ABC values for mutton snapper, based on the results of SEDAR 79 (2024) and using an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at $F_{30\%SPR}$. Catch limits are in pounds (lb) whole weight (ww).

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	**ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)**
2024	*3,280,143*	*2,498,073*
2025	*3,384,760*	*2,662,320*
2026	3,363,706	2,725,359
2027	3,313,030	2,752,377
2028	3,270,355	2,772,615

Table 1.3.3. Current OFL and ABC values for mutton snapper, inclusive of MRFSS and using an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at $F_{30\%SPR}$. Catch limits are in lb ww.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	**ABC (P* = 0.375)**
2025+	850,077	798,300

Current Regulations

As mentioned, mutton snapper is managed separately by the Councils. For example, while the South Atlantic Council uses sector allocations and commercial trip limits for mutton snapper, the Gulf Council does not. A summary of mutton snapper management measures, less catch limits, is shown in Table 1.3.4.

Table 1.3.4. Current management measures for mutton snapper by Council jurisdiction.

Species	Region	Jurisdictional Apportionment of ABC	Fishing Year	Daily Bag Limit	Trip Limit (lb ww)	Min Size Limit	Sector Allocations
Mutton Snapper	**Gulf**	**18%**	Jan 1 - Dec 31	5 per person within 10-snapper aggregate	None	18" TL both sectors	None
	South Atlantic	**82%**	Jan 1 - Dec 31	5 per person within 10-snapper aggregate	Jan 1 - Mar 31: 500 lb Apr 1 - Jun 30: 5 per person per day Jul1 - Dec 31: 500 lb	18" TL both sectors	17.02% Com 82.98% Rec

Recent Landings

Table 1.3.5. Southeastern U.S. mutton snapper landings from 1986 – 2024. Gulf = Gulf of America less Monroe County, Florida. SA = South Atlantic, including Monroe County, Florida. Comm = commercial. Rec = recreational. Data are in lb ww.

Year	Gulf Comm	SA Comm	Gulf Rec	SA Rec	Gulf Total	SA Total	Stock Total
1986	124,041	286,791	18,846	1,006,690	142,887	1,293,481	1,436,367
1987	179,608	374,843	3,300	1,258,344	182,908	1,633,187	1,816,095
1988	138,373	311,531	11,177	1,101,054	149,550	1,412,585	1,562,135
1989	242,861	274,405	1,264	780,797	244,125	1,055,202	1,299,327
1990	304,168	149,921	187,263	457,475	491,431	607,396	1,098,827
1991	283,324	200,706	1,960	1,322,470	285,284	1,523,176	1,808,460
1992	244,106	156,231	22,110	1,043,319	266,216	1,199,550	1,465,765
1993	276,066	169,112	4,664	1,318,522	280,730	1,487,634	1,768,364
1994	181,610	176,022	4,946	670,486	186,556	846,508	1,033,064
1995	88,866	196,265	2,767	762,831	91,633	959,096	1,050,728
1996	84,246	207,243	31,395	466,119	115,641	673,362	789,004
1997	69,841	221,674	30,586	587,019	100,427	808,693	909,121
1998	73,343	282,490	30,112	763,415	103,455	1,045,905	1,149,359
1999	84,854	168,141	3,358	831,108	88,212	999,249	1,087,461

2000	80,146	124,475	1,717	570,688	81,863	695,163	777,027
2001	99,960	133,047	3,436	460,859	103,396	593,906	697,301
2002	101,446	132,219	1,697	727,369	103,143	859,588	962,731
2003	124,508	144,109	9,315	791,205	133,823	935,314	1,069,138
2004	201,938	145,860	12,788	572,197	214,726	718,057	932,784
2005	140,947	96,298	3,650	789,284	144,597	885,582	1,030,179
2006	214,115	74,901	1,857	1,180,729	215,972	1,255,630	1,471,602
2007	133,086	88,895	19,994	1,349,973	153,080	1,438,868	1,591,948
2008	81,391	76,706	47,872	2,223,830	129,263	2,300,536	2,429,798
2009	43,689	78,131	12,164	759,057	55,853	837,188	893,041
2010	54,242	74,737	1,541	673,383	55,783	748,120	803,902
2011	94,238	66,164	1,391	310,411	95,629	376,575	472,205
2012	88,695	77,224	7,156	788,251	95,851	865,475	961,326
2013	107,814	75,392	6,741	1,108,590	114,555	1,183,982	1,298,537
2014	129,383	98,584	8,843	1,309,800	138,226	1,408,384	1,546,610
2015	123,255	101,668	3,267	1,360,135	126,522	1,461,804	1,588,326
2016	78,146	72,172	5,702	1,634,173	83,847	1,706,345	1,790,192
2017	125,738	66,064	3,040	988,579	128,777	1,054,643	1,183,421
2018	138,752	84,307	28,875	953,265	167,627	1,037,572	1,205,199
2019	59,200	77,763	4,293	1,107,753	63,493	1,185,516	1,249,009
2020	62,474	79,820	2,615	1,330,190	65,088	1,410,010	1,475,098
2021	59,191	65,660	3,691	921,187	62,882	986,846	1,049,729
2022	66,544	64,111	16,524	777,806	83,068	841,917	924,984
2023	98,225	71,709	28,306	1,028,773	126,530	1,100,482	1,227,012
2024	86,538	52,298	31,210	1,137,899	117,748	1,190,197	1,307,945

Source: Commercial and recreational landings data are from SRFS, SEFSC and SERO ACL Monitoring Datasets and are current as of June 2025.

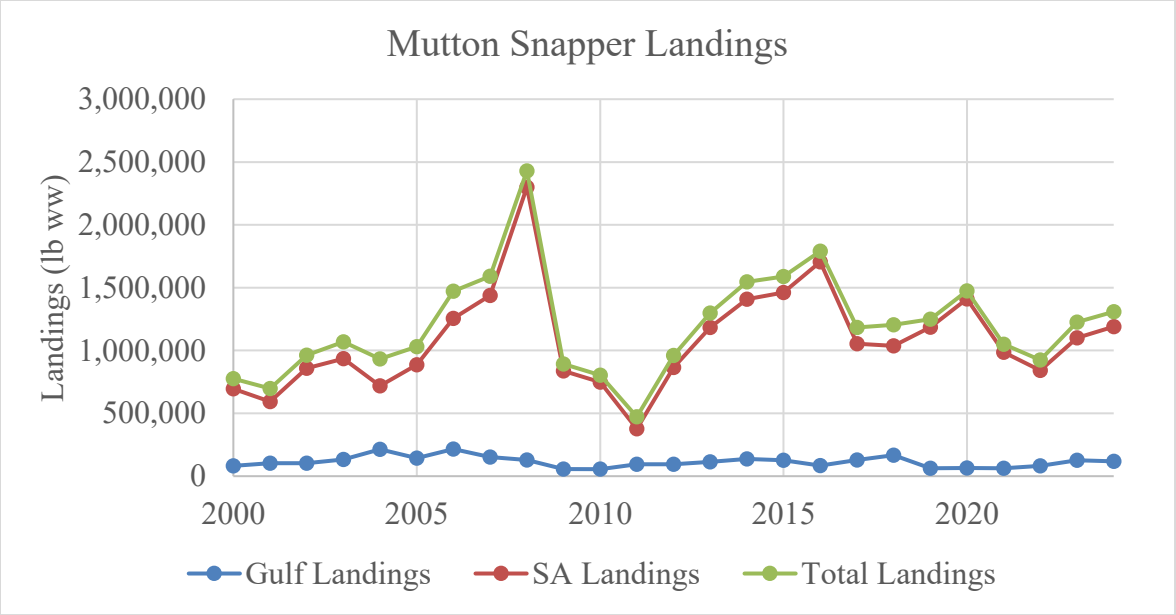

Figure 1.3.1. Southeastern U.S. mutton snapper landings from 1986 – 2024. Gulf = Gulf of America less Monroe County, Florida. SA = South Atlantic, including Monroe County, Florida. Data are in lb ww.
Source: Commercial and recreational landings data are from SRFS, SEFSC and SERO ACL Monitoring Datasets and are current as of June 2025.

1.4 Yellowtail Snapper

Stock Assessment

SEDAR 96 (2025) was the stock assessment of southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper and estimated the stock to be healthy using data through 2023. This assessment is inclusive of private recreational vessel landings estimates from SRFS (as also used in SEDAR 79 [2024]). A table summarizing the results of the yellowtail snapper stock assessment, including current stock status determination criteria, is shown in Table 1.4.1.

Table 1.4.1. Summary of benchmarks and reference points used in the SEDAR 96 assessment for yellowtail snapper. SSB is in metric tons (male and female combined SSB), whereas F is a harvest rate (total biomass killed all ages / total biomass age 1+). An SPR proxy of 30% is presented. Values highlighted in **green** indicate the stock is neither overfished, nor undergoing overfishing.

Criteria	Definition	Value
$F_{MSYProxy}$	Equilibrium F to achieve 30% SPR	0.398
MFMT	$F_{MSYProxy}$	0.398
$F_{Current}$	Geometric mean of $F_{2021-2023}$	0.263
$F_{Current}$/MFMT	Current overfishing status	**0.661**
$SSB_{MSYProxy}$	Equilibrium SSB at $F_{30\%SPR}$, in metric tons	1,817
MSST	0.75 * $SSB_{30\%SPR}$, in metric tons	1,362
$SSB_{Current}$	SSB in 2023, in metric tons	2,518
$SSB_{Current}/SSB_{MSYProxy}$	Stock status based on $SSB_{30\%SPR}$	1.386
$SSB_{Current}$/MSST	Stock status based on MSST	**1.845**

The Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs met in February 2025 to review the SEDAR 96 stock assessment and yield projections. Using the same justification as detailed for mutton snapper in Section 1.3, the South Atlantic Council's SDC for yellowtail snapper was used, as is reflected in the "Definitions" column of Table 1.4.1. In addition, the South Atlantic Council defines OY for yellowtail snapper as the yield corresponding to the stock ACL, which for yellowtail snapper, would also be equal to the ABC. The SSCs issued two joint consensus statements at the conclusion of their review of SEDAR 96. First, the SSCs agreed to use an alternative approach from the South Atlantic Council's P* approach in its ABC Control Rule for yellowtail snapper, because of differences in how the uncertainty in the OFL was characterized. Second, the SSCs used the arithmetic mean of the most recent five years of recruitment (2019-2023) for informing OFL and ABC projections. Using the arithmetic mean for recruitment can be interpreted to indicate a regime shift; however, for yellowtail snapper, the SSCs do not think a regime shift has occurred. The OFL is set at $F_{30\%SPR}$, and the ABC is set at 75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$, for the years 2026 – 2028, as derived from the provided projections for 2024 – 2028. The resulting yellowtail snapper stock OFLs and ABCs for 2026 – 2028 are shown in Table 1.4.2, with the years 2024 – 2025 of the projections grayed out to show that those years will have passed before management changes can be implemented. For reference, the current OFL and ABC are shown in the legacy federal MRFSS units in Table 1.4.3.

Table 1.4.2. SSCs recommended OFL and ABC values for yellowtail snapper, based on the results of SEDAR 96 (2025) and using an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at $F_{30\%SPR}$. Catch limits are in lb ww.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)
2024	*5,076,490*	*3,955,300*
2025	*4,767,230*	*3,973,088*
2026	4,495,187	3,925,031
2027	4,364,600	3,913,426
2028	4,307,856	3,918,634

Table 1.4.3. Current OFL and ABC values for yellowtail snapper, in MRFSS units and using an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at $F_{30\%SPR}$. Catch limits are in lb ww.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (P* = 0.375)
2025+	4,510,000	4,050,000

Current Regulations

As mentioned, yellowtail snapper is managed separately by the Councils. For example, while the South Atlantic Council uses sector allocations for yellowtail snapper, the Gulf Council does not. A summary of yellowtail snapper management measures, less catch limits, is shown in Table 1.4.4.

Table 1.4.4. Current management measures for yellowtail snapper by Council jurisdiction.

Species	Region	Jurisdictional Apportionment of ABC	Fishing Year	Daily Bag Limit	Trip Limit (lb ww)	Min Size Limit	Sector Allocations
Yellowtail Snapper	**Gulf**	**25%**	Aug 1 - Jul 31	10 fish per person within 10-snapper aggregate	none	12" TL both sectors	None
	South Atlantic	**75%**	Aug 1 - Jul 31	10 fish per person within 10-snapper aggregate	none	12" TL both sectors	52.56% Com 47.44% Rec

Recent Landings

Table 1.4.5. Southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper landings from 1986 – 2024. Gulf = Gulf of America less Monroe County, Florida. SA = South Atlantic, including Monroe County, Florida. Comm = commercial. Rec = recreational. Data are in lb ww.

Year	Gulf Comm	SA Comm	Gulf Rec	SA Rec	Gulf Total	SA Total	Stock Total
1986	233,591	885,229	8,694	2,637,021	242,285	3,522,250	3,764,535
1987	1,275,194	88,876	56,566	1,909,304	1,331,760	1,998,180	3,329,940
1988	310,897	1,101,679	9,852	2,302,022	320,749	3,403,701	3,724,450
1989	998,063	853,473	16,750	10,023,402	1,014,813	10,876,875	11,891,689
1990	878,858	876,755	11,545	5,503,634	890,403	6,380,389	7,270,791
1991	787,663	1,073,979	66,773	9,627,074	854,436	10,701,053	11,555,490
1992	831,013	1,024,653	141,442	1,482,455	972,455	2,507,108	3,479,563

1993	1,067,452	1,311,367	60,543	2,636,625	1,127,995	3,947,992	5,075,987
1994	1,344,942	860,543	22,474	1,924,999	1,367,416	2,785,542	4,152,958
1995	591,074	1,265,856	3,434	2,162,212	594,508	3,428,068	4,022,576
1996	485,120	973,815	2,854	1,352,483	487,974	2,326,298	2,814,272
1997	218,384	1,455,496	2,880	1,249,396	221,264	2,704,892	2,926,156
1998	341,473	1,183,074	5,433	1,196,439	346,906	2,379,513	2,726,419
1999	601,027	1,245,345	63,611	845,570	664,638	2,090,915	2,755,553
2000	388,984	1,203,154	6,610	785,451	395,594	1,988,605	2,384,199
2001	246,849	1,174,008	16,177	670,210	263,026	1,844,218	2,107,243
2002	341,823	1,069,057	10,959	979,500	352,782	2,048,557	2,401,339
2003	463,743	948,886	10,618	1,692,961	474,361	2,641,847	3,116,208
2004	478,221	1,002,309	43,308	1,659,431	521,529	2,661,740	3,183,268
2005	510,437	814,899	37,790	730,422	548,227	1,545,321	2,093,547
2006	542,237	695,010	96,955	1,689,726	639,192	2,384,736	3,023,928
2007	350,079	628,612	26,835	1,902,444	376,914	2,531,056	2,907,970
2008	460,569	910,319	8,893	2,787,404	469,462	3,697,723	4,167,185
2009	891,925	1,085,281	31,367	953,845	923,292	2,039,126	2,962,417
2010	569,275	1,126,231	16,934	1,052,276	586,209	2,178,507	2,764,716
2011	769,729	1,125,227	59,711	973,589	829,440	2,098,816	2,928,256
2012	630,984	1,439,586	5,163	1,129,915	636,147	2,569,501	3,205,648
2013	734,112	1,328,974	3,375	1,695,044	737,487	3,024,018	3,761,505
2014	466,969	1,544,093	9,634	2,122,485	476,603	3,666,578	4,143,182
2015	504,193	1,652,524	50,170	1,495,205	554,363	3,147,729	3,702,091
2016	426,298	2,579,968	16,078	1,666,268	442,376	4,246,235	4,688,611
2017	687,627	2,093,931	372,949	1,607,451	1,060,576	3,701,382	4,761,958
2018	532,942	1,421,476	70,279	1,584,773	603,221	3,006,249	3,609,470
2019	490,868	1,679,344	71,076	869,782	561,943	2,549,126	3,111,069
2020	218,733	1,177,277	52,348	1,522,174	271,081	2,699,451	2,970,532
2021	248,446	1,387,338	127,097	1,290,745	375,543	2,678,083	3,053,626
2022	304,302	1,474,795	254,099	1,335,177	558,401	2,809,972	3,368,373
2023	224,792	1,230,663	136,774	878,299	361,566	2,108,962	2,470,528
2024	137,179	822,895	146,777	805,494	283,956	1,628,390	1,912,346

Source: Commercial and recreational landings data are from SRFS, SEFSC and SERO ACL Monitoring Datasets and are current as of June 2025.

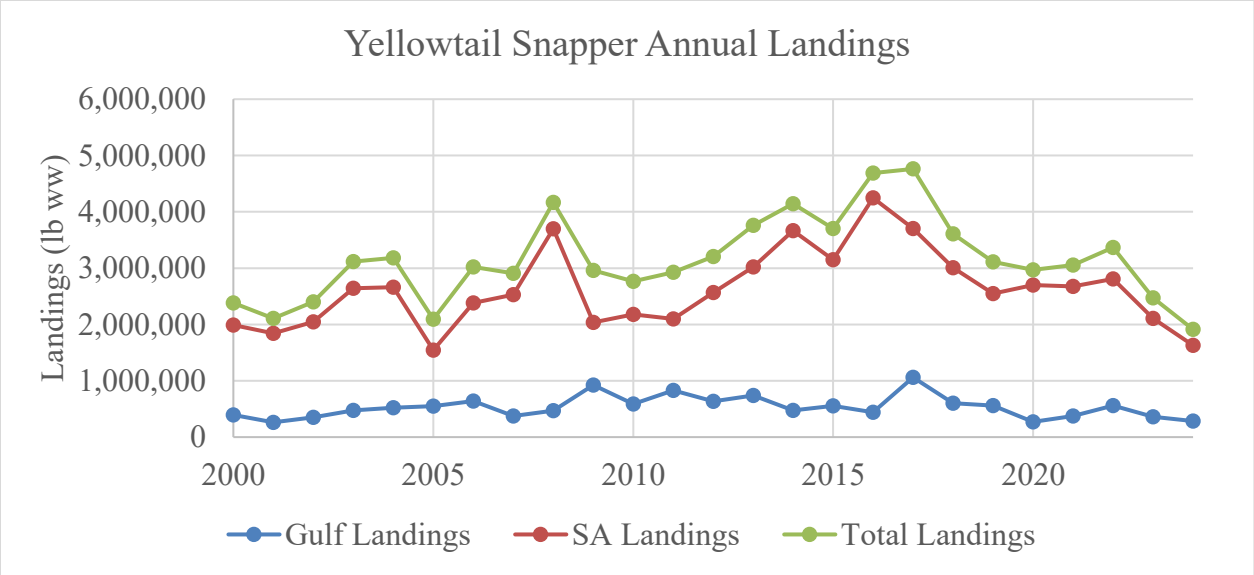

Figure 1.4.1. Southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper landings from 1986 – 2024. Gulf = Gulf of America less Monroe County, Florida. SA = South Atlantic, including Monroe County, Florida. Data are in lb ww.

Source: Commercial and recreational landings data are from SRFS, SEFSC and SERO ACL Monitoring Datasets and are current as of June 2025.

1.5 History of Management

This section focuses specifically on management modifications affecting southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper catch limits, sector allocations, and retention limits. A complete history of management for the Reef Fish FMP is available on the Gulf Council's website.[1] A complete history of management for the Snapper Grouper FMP is available on the South Atlantic Council's website.[2]

1.5.1 Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper – Gulf

Original Reef Fish FMP, including EIS, RIR, and RFA and implemented in November 1984, implemented regulations designed to rebuild declining reef fish stocks, included: (1) prohibitions on the use of fish traps, roller trawls, and powerhead-equipped spear guns within an inshore stressed area; (2) a minimum size limit of 13 inches total length (TL) for red snapper with the exceptions that for-hire boats were exempted until 1987 and each angler could keep 5 undersized fish; and, (3) data reporting requirements. It also established a calendar fishing year for managed reef fish species.

Amendment 1 to the Reef Fish FMP, including an EA, RIR, and IRFA, and implemented in May 1990, set objectives to stabilize long-term population levels of all reef fish species by establishing a survival rate of biomass into the stock of spawning age fish to achieve at least 20% spawning stock biomass per recruit by January 1, 2000. It allowed a 2-day possession limit for charter vessels and head boats on trips that extend beyond 24 hours, provided the vessel has two licensed operators aboard as required by the U.S. Coast Guard, and each passenger can provide a receipt to verify the length of the trip; established a longline and buoy gear boundary at the 50-fathom depth contour west of Cape San Blas, Florida, and the 20-fathom depth contour east of Cape San Blas, inshore of which the directed harvest of reef fish with longline gear and buoy gear was prohibited, and the retention of reef fish captured incidentally in other longline operations (e.g., sharks) was limited to the recreational daily bag limit; limited trawl vessels to the recreational size and daily bag limits of reef fish; established fish trap permits (up to 100 fish traps per permit holder); and established a commercial reef fish vessel permit. It also established a 12-inch total length (TL) minimum size limit on mutton and yellowtail snapper.

Amendment 31 to the Reef Fish FMP, including a final SEIS, RIR and IRFA, implemented May 2010, prohibited the use of bottom longline gear shoreward of a line approximating the 35-fathom contour from June through August; established a longline endorsement; and restricted the total number of hooks onboard each reef fish bottom longline vessel to 1,000, of which only 750 may be rigged for fishing.

Generic ACL/AM Amendment, including a final SEIS, RIR and IRFA, implemented January 2012, addressed a requirement in the Reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act of 2006 to establish

[1] https://gulfcouncil.org/fishery-management/implemented-amendments/reef-fish/
[2] https://safmc.net/fishery-management-plans/snapper-grouper/

ACLs and AMs for federally managed species. This amendment also established a stock ACL of 725,000 lb gutted weight and ACT of 645,000 lb gutted weight for yellowtail snapper for the Gulf. However, the ACT was never used for management purposes. This amendment also established jurisdictional allocation between the South Atlantic and Gulf.

A **Framework Action to the Reef Fish FMP**, including EA, RIR and IRFA, implemented September 2013, increases the Gulf of Mexico yellowtail snapper annual catch limit from 725,000 lb round weight to 901,125 lb round weight, and removes the requirement to have onboard and use venting tools when releasing reef fish.

A **Framework Action to the Reef Fish FMP**, including EA, RIR and IRFA, implemented March 2017, changes the commercial and recreational yellowtail snapper fishing year so that it opens on August 1 and runs through July 31, each year. The framework action also modifies the circle hook requirement so that the use of circle hooks is not required while commercial fishing with natural bait for yellowtail snapper south of Cape Sable (the line extending due west from 25°09' N. latitude off the west coast of Monroe County, Florida, to the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils' shared boundary).

Amendment 44 to the Reef Fish FMP including EA, RIR and IRFA, implemented December 2017, standardized the MSST for certain reef fish species. The MSST is used to determine whether a stock is overfished; if the biomass of the stock falls below the threshold, then the stock is overfished. The MSST for several reef fish species was set equal to 50% of the biomass at MSY. This amendment was approved on December 21, 2017.

A **Framework Action to the Reef Fish FMP**, including EA, RIR and IRFA, implemented July 2018, removes the annual catch target (ACT) for mutton snapper and decreases the annual catch limit (ACL) to 134,424 pounds for 2018 and 139,392 pounds for 2019. The amendment also sets the recreational mutton snapper bag limit at 5-snapper per day within the 10-snapper aggregate bag limit and increases the commercial and recreational minimum size limit to 18 inches.

Amendment 48 to the Reef Fish FMP including EA, RIR and IRFA, implemented June 2022, modifies status determination criteria for reef fish species with undefined criteria. For stocks assessed across the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils' jurisdictions (goliath grouper, mutton snapper, yellowtail snapper, and black grouper), sets MSST using existing definitions of MSST defined by the South Atlantic Council. Set the MSST = $0.75*B_{MSY}$ for the remaining species.

1.5.2 Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper – South Atlantic

Snapper Grouper FMP (1983)
The Snapper Grouper FMP included provisions to prevent growth overfishing in thirteen species in the snapper grouper complex and established a procedure for preventing overfishing in other species; established minimum size limits for red snapper, yellowtail snapper, red grouper, Nassau grouper, and black sea bass; established a 4-inch trawl mesh size to achieve a 12-inch total length minimum size limit for vermilion snapper; and included additional harvest and gear limitations.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 4 (1992)
This amendment established a 12-inch total length minimum for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 8 (1997)
This amendment established initial eligibility for two limited entry snapper grouper permits: a non-transferable permit with a 225-pound trip limit and transferrable unlimited landings permit in the South Atlantic.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 9 (1998)
Snapper grouper Amendment 9 established a recreational 20-fish snapper aggregate inclusive of all snappers that did not currently have a bag limit for the South Atlantic region.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 11 (1998)
Amendment 11 defined MSY for snapper grouper species, including yellowtail snapper, as a proxy of 30% static spawning potential ratio (SPR), the OY as 40% static SPR and the OFL as the fishing mortality rate (F) in excess of the fishing mortality rate at 30% static SPR, which is the snapper grouper MSY proxy.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 17A (2010)
This amendment required the use of non-stainless steel, and non-offset circle hooks, when fishing for or possessing snapper grouper species with hook and line gear north of 28º N Latitude. The circle hook requirement was not required below 28º N Latitude to exclude the yellowtail fishery, which is unable to use circle hooks.

Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment (2011)
This amendment established ACL Control Rule, ABC levels, ACLs, sector and jurisdictional allocations, and accountability measures for species not undergoing overfishing; including yellowtail snapper.

Comprehensive ACL Amendment (Snapper Grouper Amendment 25)
This amendment specified the jurisdictional apportionment, ABC, ACL, sector allocations, recreational ACTs, and accountability measures for mutton snapper.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 15 (2013)
This amendment revised the total South Atlantic ACL and set it equal to the South Atlantic ABC based on the 2012 Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) stock assessment. Regulatory Amendment 15 also updated both the commercial and recreational sector allocations for the South Atlantic region.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 21 (2014)
Regulatory Amendment 21 modified the minimum stock size threshold (MSST) for select species (including yellowtail snapper) to 75% of spawning stock biomass at maximum sustainable yield (SSB_{MSY}) for the South Atlantic portion of the stock.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 25 (2016)

This amendment modified both the commercial and recreational yellowtail snapper fishing season from a calendar year to August 1 – July 31 in the South Atlantic.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 41

Amendment 41 specified the following for mutton snapper: MSY, MSST, ACL and OY, recreational ACT, increased the minimum size to 18 inches TL , designated spawning months for regulatory purposes, modified the recreational bag limit to 5 fish per person per day, and modified the commercial trip limit to 5 fish per person per day during the spawning months

CHAPTER 2. MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

2.1 Action 1: Modification of Southeastern U.S. Mutton Snapper, Overfishing Limit (OFL), Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Jurisdictional Apportionment and Regional Annual Catch Limits (ACLs)

Alternative 1: No Action. Maintain the current OFL, ABC, jurisdictional apportionment of the ABC, and regional ACLs for southeastern U.S. mutton snapper. The jurisdictional apportionment of the mutton snapper stock ABC by region is based on the formula established in the Generic ACL/Accountability Measures (AM) Amendment and Comprehensive ACL Amendment (weighting 50% to the average catch history from 1990-2008 + 50% to the average catch history from 2006-2008), whereby 82% of the stock ABC is apportioned to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council), and 18% is apportioned to the Gulf Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council). The apportionment for mutton snapper is inclusive of the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS). Each region's stock ACL equals its apportionment of the stock ABC. Catch limits are shown below in pounds (lb) whole weight (ww).

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	**ABC (P* = 0.375)**	**Gulf Apportionment and ABC (18%)**	**South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (82%)**
2025+	850,077	798,300	143,694	654,606

Note: *Alternative 1 is inclusive of MRFSS. The SEDAR 79 (2024) stock assessment used the State of Florida's State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS) for recreational private vessel landings, the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) for headboat landings. Because the SEDAR 79 stock assessment, and the SSCs' catch limit recommendations from that assessment, are considered to be consistent with the best scientific information available, Alternative 1 is not a viable alternative.*

Alternative 2: Modify the OFL and ABC and retain the current jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC for southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and establish regional ACLs based on the recommendations of the Councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSCs) for 2026 – 2028 and subsequent years. Each region's ACL will be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC. For mutton snapper, 82% of the stock ABC is apportioned to the South Atlantic Council, and 18% is apportioned to the Gulf Council. Landings and quota monitoring for mutton snapper will be inclusive of SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings. Catch limits shown below are in pounds (lb) whole weight (ww) and rounded to the nearest whole pound.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)	Gulf Apportionment and ABC/ACL (18%)	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (82%)
2026	3,363,706	2,725,359	490,565	2,234,794
2027	3,313,030	2,752,377	495,428	2,256,949
2028	3,270,355	2,772,615	499,071	2,273,544

Alternative 3: Modify the OFL and ABC and the jurisdictional apportionment of the mutton snapper ABC and the regional ACLs using the average of historic and recent landings, and the following reference period, based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2026 – 2028 and subsequent years. Each region's ACL will be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC. Landings and quota monitoring for mutton snapper will be inclusive of SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings. Catch limits shown below are in lb ww and rounded to the nearest whole pound.

Option 3a: Use 50% of the average landings from 2004 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023. This method apportions 9% of the stock ABC to the Gulf Council, and 91% to the South Atlantic Council.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)	Gulf Apportionment and ABC/ACL (9%)	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (91%)
2026	3,363,706	2,725,359	245,282	2,480,077
2027	3,313,030	2,752,377	247,714	2,504,663
2028	3,270,355	2,772,615	249,535	2,523,080

Option 3b: Use 50% of the average landings from 2014 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023. This method apportions 8% of the stock ABC to the Gulf Council, and 92% to the South Atlantic Council.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)	Gulf Apportionment and ABC/ACL (8%)	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (92%)
2026	3,363,706	2,725,359	218,029	2,507,330
2027	3,313,030	2,752,377	220,190	2,532,187
2028	3,270,355	2,772,615	221,809	2,550,806

Discussion:

The SEDAR 79 (2024) stock assessment of southeastern U.S. mutton snapper estimated the stock to be not overfished or experiencing overfishing as of 2023. The Councils' SSCs reviewed the stock assessment in February 2025, and recommended updated OFL and ABC values.

Mutton snapper is a single stock throughout its range and is managed by the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, with the stock ABC being apportioned between the Councils. The SEDAR 79 stock assessment used SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings, and is considered to be consistent with the best scientific information available. Because the current jurisdictional apportionment of the mutton snapper stock ABC is inclusive of recreational estimate from MRFSS, the Councils are considering options to update this jurisdictional apportionment, and by extension, their regional ACLs for mutton snapper.

Alternative 1 would maintain the current OFL, ABC, jurisdictional apportionment of the ABC, and regional ACLs for southeastern U.S. mutton snapper. In 2012, the Councils created comprehensive amendments to their fishery management plans to set ACLs for numerous stocks (GMFMC and SAFMC 2011). In these amendments, the jurisdictional apportionment of the mutton snapper stock ABC by region was based on weighting 50% to the average catch history from 1990-2008 + 50% to the average catch history from 2006-2008. The result was a jurisdictional apportionment of 82% of the mutton snapper stock ABC to the South Atlantic Council, and 18% apportioned to the Gulf Council. Each region's stock ACL equals its apportionment of the stock ABC. Setting the ACL equal to the ABC is common for both Councils when a stock is healthy across its range and overruns of the stock ACL or ABC are uncommon. The apportionment and catch limits described in **Alternative 1** used MRFSS recreational estimates, which are no longer considered consistent with the best scientific information available for mutton snapper (see Appendix A). Further, the Councils' SSCs have made revised OFL and ABC recommendations (see Table 1.3.2) based on the SEDAR 79 (2024) stock assessment of mutton snapper, the results of which are considered to be consistent with the best scientific information available. Because **Alternative 1** is inconsistent with this updated scientific advice, is not a viable alternative.

Alternative 2 would retain the current jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC for mutton snapper and establish regional ACLs based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2026 – 2028 and subsequent years. Like **Alternative 1**, **Alternative 2** would apportion 82% of the mutton snapper stock ABC to the South Atlantic Council, and 18% to the Gulf Council. However, and consistent with the data used in SEDAR 79 and to generate the SSCs' updated catch advice, landings and quota monitoring for mutton snapper will be inclusive of SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings. So, in practice, while **Alternative 2** uses the same percentages as those established in 2012 under **Alternative 1**, **Alternative 2** will use the updated catch advice from the Councils' SSCs. Each Council's regional ACL would be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC, since the mutton snapper stock is healthy and catch limit overruns are uncommon.

Alternative 3 would modify the jurisdictional apportionment of the mutton snapper ABC and the regional ACLs using the average of historic and recent landings. This method provides options for two reference periods of landings, and then weights equally at 50% each the average landings from the entire reference period, and then 50% from the most recent three years of the same reference period. **Alternative 3** would establish this modified jurisdictional apportionment and the regional ACLs based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2026 – 2028

and subsequent years. Like **Alternative 2**, **Alternative 3** would monitor landings and set catch limits inclusive of SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings. **Alternative 3** offers two options for reference periods: 2004 – 2023 (**Option 3a**), and 2014 – 2023 (**Option 3b**). Applying the average of historic and recent landings approach to the 20-year reference period in **Option 3a** (50% of the average landings from 2004 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023) results in 9% of the mutton snapper stock ABC being apportioned to the Gulf Council, and 91% to the South Atlantic Council. Using the 10-year reference period in **Option 3b** (50% of the average landings from 2014 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023) results in 8% of the mutton snapper stock ABC being apportioned to the Gulf Council, and 92% to the South Atlantic Council. Despite including twice as much landings history as **Option 3a**, **Option 3b** results in a nearly identical jurisdictional apportionment of the ABC between the Councils. Each region's ACL would be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC, since the mutton snapper stock is healthy and catch limit overruns are uncommon. By using the most recent three years in each half of the historic and recent landings approach (**Options 3a** and **3b**), the most recent trends in the fishery are most influential in determining the outcome of the apportionment. This is in contrast to **Alternative 2**, which uses a percentage that was informed by a much older reference period (50% to the average catch history from 1990-2008 + 50% to the average catch history from 2006-2008). Thus, while **Alternative 2** may provide consistency in methodology for determining the jurisdictional apportionment, the options in **Alternative 3** are more likely to capture recent changes in fishery dynamics and be more representative of future mutton snapper landings. For that same reason, **Option 3b** may also be more likely to capture the recent changes as a more recent time series is considered.

Councils' Conclusions:

2.2 Action 2: Modification of Southeastern U.S. Yellowtail Snapper, OFL, ABC, Jurisdictional Apportionment and Regional ACLs

Alternative 1: No Action. Maintain the current OFL, ABC, jurisdictional apportionment of the ABC, and regional ACLs for southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper. The jurisdictional apportionment of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC by region is based on the formula established in the Generic ACL/AM Amendment and Comprehensive ACL Amendment (weighting 50% to the average catch history from 1993-2008 + 50% to the average catch history from 2006-2008), whereby 75% of the stock ABC is apportioned to the South Atlantic Council, and 25% is apportioned to the Gulf Council. The apportionment for yellowtail snapper was inclusive of MRFSS. The South Atlantic Council's regional ACL equals its apportionment of the stock ABC. The Gulf Council's regional ACL is reduced by 11% from its jurisdictional apportionment of the ABC using the Gulf Council's ACL/ACT Control Rule. Catch limits are shown below in lb ww.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (P* = 0.375)	Gulf Apportionment and ABC (25%)	Gulf ACL (89% of Gulf ABC)	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (75%)
2025+	4,510,000	4,050,000	1,012,000	901,125	3,037,500

Note: *Alternative 1 is inclusive of MRFSS. The SEDAR 96 (2025) stock assessment uses SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings. Because the SEDAR 96 stock assessment, and the SSCs' catch limit recommendations from that assessment, are considered to be consistent with the best scientific information available, Alternative 1 is not a viable alternative.*

Alternative 2: Modify the OFL and ABC and retain the current jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC for southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper and establish regional ACLs based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2026 – 2028 and subsequent years. The South Atlantic Council's regional ACL will be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC. For yellowtail snapper, 75% of the stock ABC is apportioned to the South Atlantic Council, and 25% is apportioned to the Gulf Council. Landings and quota monitoring for yellowtail snapper will be inclusive of SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings. Catch limits shown below are in lb ww and rounded to the nearest whole pound.

> **Option 2a:** The Gulf regional ACL will be reduced 11% from the Gulf jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC, consistent with the buffer established in the Gulf Generic ACL/Accountability Measures Amendment in 2012.
>
> **Option 2b:** The Gulf regional ACL will be set equal to the Gulf jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)	Gulf Apportionment and ABC/ACL (2b) (25%)	Gulf ACL @ 89% of Gulf ABC (2a)	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (75%)
2026	4,495,187	3,925,031	981,258	873,320	2,943,773
2027	4,364,600	3,913,426	978,357	870,738	2,935,070
2028+	4,307,856	3,918,634	979,659	871,897	2,938,976

Alternative 3: Modify the OFL and ABC and the jurisdictional apportionment of the yellowtail snapper ABC and the regional ACLs using the average of historic and recent landings, based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2026 – 2028 and subsequent years. The South Atlantic Council's regional ACL will be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC. Landings and quota monitoring for yellowtail snapper will be inclusive of SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings. Catch limits shown below are in lb ww and rounded to the nearest whole pound.

Select one:

Option 3a: The Gulf regional ACL will be reduced 11% from the Gulf jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC, consistent with the buffer established in the Gulf Generic ACL/Accountability Measures Amendment in 2012.

Option 3b: The Gulf regional ACL will be set equal to the Gulf jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC.

And select one:

Option 3c: Use 50% of the average landings from 2004 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023. This method apportions 16% of the stock ABC to the Gulf Council, and 84% to the South Atlantic Council.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)	Gulf Apportionment and ABC/ACL (3b) (16%)	Gulf ACL @ 89% of Gulf ABC (3a)	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (84%)
2026	4,495,187	3,925,031	628,005	558,924	3,297,026
2027	4,364,600	3,913,426	626,148	557,272	3,287,278
2028+	4,307,856	3,918,634	626,981	558,013	3,291,653

Option 3d: Use 50% of the average landings from 2014 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023. This method apportions 15% of the stock ABC to the Gulf Council, and 85% to the South Atlantic Council.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)	Gulf Apportionment and ABC/ACL (2b) (15%)	Gulf ACL @ 89% of Gulf ABC (2a)	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (85%)
2026	4,495,187	3,925,031	588,755	497,291	3,336,276
2027	4,364,600	3,913,426	587,014	522,442	3,326,412
2028+	4,307,856	3,918,634	587,795	523,138	3,330,839

Discussion:

The SEDAR 96 (2025) stock assessment of southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper estimated the stock to be not overfished or experiencing overfishing as of 2023. The Councils' SSCs reviewed the stock assessment in February 2025, and recommended updated OFL and ABC values. Yellowtail snapper is a single stock throughout its range and is managed by the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, with the stock ABC being apportioned between the Councils. The SEDAR 96 stock assessment used SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP units for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS units for headboat landings, and is considered to be consistent with the best scientific information available. Because the current jurisdictional apportionment of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC is inclusive of recreational estimates from MRFSS, the Councils are considering options to update this jurisdictional apportionment, and by extension, their regional ACLs for yellowtail snapper. Additionally, the Gulf regional ACL for yellowtail snapper is set 11% below its apportionment of the yellowtail snapper ABC (GMFMC 2012). This action contains options to reconsider that buffer.

Alternative 1 would maintain the current OFL, ABC, jurisdictional apportionment of the ABC, and regional ACLs for southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper. Like for mutton snapper in Action 1, in 2012 (GMFMC and SAFMC 2012), the Councils created the jurisdictional apportionment of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC by region was based on weighting 50% to the average catch history from 1993-2008 + 50% to the average catch history from 2006-2008. The result was a jurisdictional apportionment of 75% of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC to the South Atlantic Council, and 25% apportioned to the Gulf Council. The South Atlantic Council's stock ACL is set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC. Also, in 2012 (GMFMC 2012), the Gulf Council used its ACL/ACT Control Rule to reduce its regional ACL by 11% relative to its apportionment of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC. The Gulf Council performed this same measure for several stocks along with yellowtail snapper that were popularly targeted, but at the time did not previously have ACLs. Setting the ACL equal to the ABC is common for both Councils when a stock is healthy across its range and overruns of the stock ACL or ABC are uncommon. Also, like mutton snapper, the apportionment and catch limits described in **Alternative 1** were inclusive of MRFSS, which is no longer considered consistent with the best scientific information available for yellowtail snapper (see Appendix A). Further, the Councils' SSCs have made revised OFL and ABC recommendations (see Table 1.4.2) based on the SEDAR 96 (2025) stock assessment of yellowtail snapper, the results of which are considered to

be consistent with the best scientific information available. Because **Alternative 1** is inconsistent with this updated scientific advice, is not a viable alternative.

Of note, the fishing season in the Gulf and South Atlantic for yellowtail snapper begins on August 1 and closes on July 31 of the following year (GMFMC/SAFMC 2016). Thus, the current catch limits under **Alternative 1** apply to that fishing year. For **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3**, in order to apply the current fishing year regulations to the SSC-proposed catch limits from Table 1.4.2, the stock OFL and stock ABC for yellowtail snapper for 2026 will apply to the 2026/2027 fishing year; the OFL and ABC for 2027 to the 2027/2028 fishing year; and the OFL and ABC for 2028 to the 2028/2029 fishing year and subsequent fishing years.

Table 2.2.1. SSCs recommended OFL and ABC values for yellowtail snapper, based on the results of SEDAR 96 (2025) and using an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at $F_{30\%SPR}$. Catch limits are in lb ww and are shown as applicable to the current yellowtail snapper fishing season regulations.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	**ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)**
2024/2025	*5,076,490*	*3,955,300*
2025/2026	*4,767,230*	*3,973,088*
2026/2027	4,495,187	3,925,031
2027/2028	4,364,600	3,913,426
2028/2029+	4,307,856	3,918,634

Alternative 2 would retain the current jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC for yellowtail snapper and establish regional ACLs based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2026 – 2028 and subsequent years. Like **Alternative 1**, **Alternative 2** would apportion 75% of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC to the South Atlantic Council, and 25% to the Gulf Council. However, and consistent with the data used in SEDAR 96 and to generate the SSCs' updated catch advice, landings and quota monitoring for yellowtail snapper will use SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings. So, in practice, while **Alternative 2** uses the same percentages as those established in 2012 under **Alternative 1**, **Alternative 2** will use the updated catch advice from the Councils' SSCs. The South Atlantic Council's regional ACL will be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC, since the stock is healthy and catch limit overruns are uncommon. As stated under **Alternative 1**, the Gulf Council typically adopts a similar approach when a stock is healthy and catch limit overruns are uncommon. Here in **Alternative 2**, two options for modifying the Gulf regional ACL relative to the Gulf Council's apportionment of the stock ABC are presented. **Option 2a** would retain the current 11% buffer between the Gulf Council's apportionment of the stock ABC and the Gulf regional ACL, which was established under the Generic ACL/AM Amendment (GMFMC 2012). Of note, if the current Gulf landings for 2020/2021 to 2023/2024, and the results of the SEADR 96 (2025) stock assessment, are applied to the Gulf ACL/ACT Control Rule for yellowtail snapper, the buffer between the Gulf ACL and Gulf ACT would decrease to 8%. **Option 2b**, in recognition of the health of the yellowtail snapper stock per the SEDAR 96 stock assessment, would set the Gulf regional ACL equal to the Gulf Council's apportionment of the stock ABC for yellowtail snapper.

Alternative 3 would modify the jurisdictional apportionment of the yellowtail snapper ABC and the regional ACLs using the average of historic and recent landings. **Alternative 3** would establish this modified jurisdictional apportionment and the regional ACLs based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2026 – 2028 and subsequent years. Like **Alternative 2**, **Alternative 3** would monitor landings and set catch limits using SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings. **Alternative 3** would retain the South Atlantic Council's regional ACL being set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC. Also, like **Alternative 2**, two options for modifying the Gulf regional ACL relative to the Gulf Council's apportionment of the stock ABC are presented in **Alternative 3**. **Option 3a** would retain the current 11% buffer between the Gulf Council's apportionment of the stock ABC and the Gulf regional ACL, which was established under the Generic ACL/AM Amendment (GMFMC 2012). **Option 3b**, in recognition of the health of the yellowtail snapper stock per the SEDAR 96 stock assessment, would set the Gulf regional ACL equal to the Gulf Council's apportionment of the stock ABC for yellowtail snapper. For determining the jurisdictional apportionment, **Alternative 3** offers two options for reference periods: 2004 – 2023 (**Option 3c**), and 2014 – 2023 (**Option 3d**). Applying the average of historic and recent landings approach to the 20-year reference period in **Option 3c** (50% of the average landings from 2004 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023) results in 16% of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC being apportioned to the Gulf Council, and 84% to the South Atlantic Council. Using the 10-year reference period in **Option 3d** (50% of the average landings from 2014 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023) results in 15% of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC being apportioned to the Gulf Council, and 85% to the South Atlantic Council. Like for mutton snapper, despite including twice as much landings history as **Option 3a**, **Option 3b** results in a nearly identical jurisdictional apportionment of the ABC between the Councils. Using the average of historic and recent landings approach focuses on the most recent trends in the fishery when determining the outcome of the apportionment. This is in contrast to **Alternative 2**, which uses a percentage that was informed by a much older reference period (50% to the average catch history from 1993-2008 + 50% to the average catch history from 2006-2008). Thus, while **Alternative 2** may provide consistency in methodology for determining the jurisdictional apportionment, the options in **Alternative 3** are more likely to capture recent changes in fishery dynamics and be more representative of future yellowtail snapper landings. For that same reason, **Option 3d** may also be more likely than **Option 3c** to capture the recent changes as a more recent time series is considered.

Councils' Conclusions:

2.3 Action 3: Modification of Southeastern U.S. Mutton Snapper Sector Allocations in the South Atlantic

Alternative 1: No Action. Maintain the sector allocations for southeastern U.S. mutton snapper in the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction. The commercial sector is allocated 17.02% of the South Atlantic regional ACL, and the recreational sector is allocated 82.98%. These sector allocations are calculated by weighting 50% to the average catch history from 1990-2008 + 50% to the average catch history from 2006-2008. Values are in lb ww and numbers of fish and are rounded to the nearest whole pound for the commercial sector and the nearest whole fish for the recreational sector. This sector allocation would be applied to the updated catch limits as defined in Action 1. The South Atlantic Council's apportionment of the stock ABC for 2026 is used to demonstrate differences between the alternatives in Action 1 and this Alternative.

	Action 1 Alternative: Jurisdictional ABC/ACL	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL	South Atlantic Commercial ACL (17.02%) lb ww	South Atlantic Recreational ACL (82.98%) lb ww
2026+	Alternative 2	2,234,794 (82%)	380,362	1,854,425
2026+	Alternative 3, Option 3a	2,480,077 (91%)	422,109	2,057,968
2026+	Alternative 3, Option 3b	2,507,330 (92%)	426,748	2,080,582

Discussion:

Pending SAFMC direction to staff. South Atlantic recreational ACL will be converted to numbers of fish for this action and rulemaking.

Councils' Conclusions:

2.4 Action 4: Modification of Southeastern U.S. Yellowtail Snapper Sector Allocations in the South Atlantic

Alternative 1: No Action. Maintain the sector allocations for southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction. The commercial sector is allocated 52.56% of the South Atlantic regional ACL, and the recreational sector is allocated 47.44%. These sector allocations are calculated by weighting 50% to the average catch history from 1993-2008 + 50% to the average catch history from 2006-2008. Values are in lb ww and rounded to the nearest whole pound. This sector allocation would be applied to the updated catch limits as defined in Action 1. The South Atlantic Council's apportionment of the stock ABC for 2026 is used to demonstrate differences between the alternatives in Action 1 and this Alternative.

	Action 1 Alternative: Jurisdictional ABC/ACL	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL lb ww	South Atlantic Commercial ACL (52.56%) lb ww	South Atlantic Recreational ACL (47.44%) lb ww
2026+	Alternative 2	2,943,773 (75%)	1,547,247	1,396,526
2026+	Alternative 3, Option 3a	3,297,026 (84%)	1,732,917	1,564,109
2026+	Alternative 3, Option 3b	3,336,276 (85%)	1,753,547	1,582,729

Discussion:

Pending SAFMC direction to staff. South Atlantic recreational ACL will be converted to numbers of fish for this action and rulemaking.

Councils Conclusions:

CHAPTER 3. REFERENCES

To be updated.

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APPENDIX A. RECREATIONAL DATA COLLECTION PROGRAMS

Federal Data Collection Programs

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) created the MRFSS in 1979. In the Gulf, MRFSS collected recreational catch and effort data, including DWG species, beginning in 1981. MRFSS included both offsite telephone surveys and onsite interviews at marinas and other points where recreational anglers fish. In 2008, MRIP replaced MRFSS to meet increasing demand for more precise, accurate, and timely recreational catch estimates. Until 2013, recreational catch, effort, and participation were estimated through a suite of independent but complementary surveys: telephone surveys of households and for-hire vessel operators that collected information about recreational fishing activity and an angler intercept survey that collected information about the fish that were caught.

MRIP Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) began incorporating a new survey design in 2013. This new design addressed concerns regarding the validity of the survey approach, specifically that trips recorded during a given time period are representative of trips for a full day, by extending the time period dockside samplers stayed at an assigned location (Foster et al. 2018). The more complete temporal coverage with the new survey design provides for consistent increases or decreases in APAIS angler catch rate statistics, which are used in stock assessments and management, for at least some species (NMFS 2019).

To assess fishing effort in the for-hire component, MRIP samplers contact charter vessel operators (a weekly sample of 10% of the fleet) by telephone to conduct the For-Hire Telephone Survey (FHTS) for fishing effort. Charter vessel operators are required to report all trips taken during selected weeks (effort only) whenever they are selected to participate in this portion of the MRIP survey. The FHTS has a stratified design, with for-hire vessels as sampling units, and is stratified by state, sub-state region (applicable to Florida only), vessel type (charter or headboat [as defined by the USCG]), and sample week within the two-month wave.

MRIP transitioned from the legacy Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) to a new mail survey (Fishing Effort Survey; FES) in 2015, and in 2018, MRIP-FES replaced MRIP-CHTS for the private angler mode. Both survey methods collect data needed to estimate marine recreational fishing effort (number of fishing trips) by shore and private/rental boat anglers on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. MRIP-CHTS used random-digit dialing of homes in coastal counties to contact anglers. The new mail-based FES uses angler license and registration information as one way to identify and contact anglers (supplemented with data from the U.S. Postal Service, which includes virtually all U.S. households). Because FES and CHTS are so different, NMFS conducted side-by-side testing of the two methods and found that, in general, total recreational fishing effort estimates generated from the FES are higher — and in some cases substantially higher — than the CHTS estimates (NMFS 2019). This is because the FES is designed to measure fishing activity more accurately than the CHTS, albeit while recognizing a greater degree of uncertainty in those landings estimates. This increase in estimated effort is not

because there was a sudden rise in fishing effort, but rather because FES better targets actual fishery participants through the directed mail survey. Likewise, the increase in uncertainty about the effort estimates reflects uncertainty that was also present in CHTS but went unaccounted due to biases that were identified as FES was developed. NMFS developed a calibration model to allow historic effort estimates using MRIP-CHTS to be compared to new estimates from MRIP-FES.

State of Florida's Supplemental Effort Survey

In 2017, the State of Florida formally created the Gulf Reef Fish Survey to monitor private angling landings and discards of select reef fish species harvested in state and federal waters in the Gulf. In 2020, that survey was expanded statewide and renamed the State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS), and additional species were added. SRFS was created to be compatible with MRIP-CHTS; however, calibrated historical landings for SRFS are somewhat larger for the recreational sector than that estimated by MRIP-CHTS, but much lower than estimated by MRIP-FES. SRFS reports landings and discards monthly in numbers, with a conversion to weight based on that used by MRIP. SRFS uses a combination of dockside intercepts from SRFS and APAIS to estimate catch-per-unit-effort from private recreational vessels. In order to obtain complete estimates of recreational catch for stock assessment, SRFS private recreational landings and discard estimates have to be combined with recreational shore and charter for-hire catch informed by MRIP-FES, as well as headboat catch informed by the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS). Thus, when "SRFS" is referred to further in this document with respect to SEDAR 72, it encompasses all of these sources of data combined. SRFS/GRFS (Gulf Reef Fish Survey) has been running in some capacity since 2015, and full capacity since 2017.

2023 MRIP-FES Pilot Study and 2024 Comprehensive Study

At the August 2023 Council meeting, the NMFS Office of Science and Technology (OST) discussed the release of a pilot study (NMFS 2023[3]), which evaluated potential respondents' bias (e.g., recall error) in the mail portion of the recreational FES survey used to estimate effort. The 2023 pilot study evaluated this bias for a portion of the year across several states, and preliminary results suggest the order of the questions in the survey led to overestimation of fishing effort by MRIP-FES. As a result of this, NMFS OST conducted a more comprehensive pilot study which began in 2024 and is expected to end data collection in 2025. NMFS OST plans to produce a public report with key findings and estimate comparisons in summer 2025 and determine if a new design will be implemented in 2026, pending study results and peer review. In mid-2026, NMFS OST is expecting to produce calibrated historical effort estimates to reflect the findings of the updated survey design for use in future stock assessments and fisheries management. Prior to when data calibration is finalized in spring 2026, any expectation about results would be speculative. After the updated survey data are finalized, it will then be available

[3] https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/recreational-fishing-data/fishing-effort-survey-research-and-improvements

for evaluation by data users (e.g., the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Southeast Regional Office, and the Council).