Amendment 44 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

Yellowtail Snapper

Scoping Document

Background

The status of the southeastern yellowtail snapper stock was assessed through the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process in 2019 (SEDAR 64), with data through 2017. Yellowtail snapper is considered a single stock in the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf). The assessment found the stock **not overfished nor undergoing overfishing**.

The current acceptable biological catch (ABC) for yellowtail snapper is based on the previous yellowtail snapper stock assessment (SEDAR 27A 2012). That assessment used landings information that has since been revised. Therefore, a new acceptable biological catch needs to be adopted that is based on the latest stock assessment and latest revised landings data.

The ABC for a stock is recommended by a Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). Because the yellowtail snapper stock is distributed across two Council's jurisdictions (South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico), both SSCs had to agree on a recommendation for ABC. The South Atlantic Council reviewed the SSCs' recommendations in December 2020. This amendment is being developed jointly with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council but the summary of actions presented in this document pertain to the South Atlantic region.

What are the possible actions in Amendment 44?

Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 considers the following:

- Modify the jurisdictional allocation of the acceptable biological catch (ABC) between the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regions
- Adjust the total annual catch limit (ACL) and annual optimum yield (OY) for the South Atlantic
- Revise sector allocations and sector ACLs
- Establish commercial management measures

When would any changes take place?

Amendment 44 will be developed during the remainder of 2021 and 2022. Changes are expected to take place in mid-2023.

What is the current and recommended acceptable biological catch?

The current ABC for yellowtail snapper is based on results of the SEDAR 27A (2012) stock assessment and is 4.13 million pounds whole weight.

The ABC is split 75% to the South Atlantic and 25% to the Gulf of Mexico. This jurisdictional split/allocation is based on 50% of average landings from 1993-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008. At the time this allocation was adopted, available landings included those from the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey. This survey was used until 2008 to estimate recreational landings. In 2008, the survey methodology was improved, and the program became the current Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Below are the current ABCs for the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico:

South Atlantic ABC = 3,037,500 pounds whole weight
Gulf of Mexico ABC = 1,012,500 pounds whole weight

The survey methodology used by MRIP was again revised to improve estimates of recreational effort. The telephone survey of coastal households (Costal Household Telephone Survey, CHTS) was replaced by a mail-based survey, the Fishing Effort Survey (FES) in (2018). This change influenced recreational landings estimates. **The latest yellowtail snapper stock assessment (SEDAR 64 2019) includes the revised recreational landings that are based on the current survey (MRIP-FES) and is thus based on the best scientific information available.**

In October 2020, the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico SSCs issued an ABC recommendation based on the latest stock assessment (Table 1). The ABCs decrease over time as removals from the population cause the biomass to move closer to the level that produces maximum sustainable yield.

Table 1. Annual combined (South Atlantic and Gulf) recommended ABCs for yellowtail snapper. Values are in millions of pounds whole weight (mp ww) and MRIP-FES units.

Year	ABC (mp ww)
2021	4.655
2022	4.242
2023	3.991
2024	3.836
2025	3.736

Note: ABC reflects the calendar year. Fishing year for yellowtail snapper for both commercial and recreational sectors is August 1 through July 31.

What are the possible actions for the South Atlantic?

1. Modify the allocation for yellowtail snapper between the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils' Jurisdictions

Purpose of Action: To divide the recommended yellowtail snapper ABC between the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regions

> **Option 1 (No Change).** Do not modify the jurisdictional allocation for yellowtail snapper between the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils' jurisdictions. **The current jurisdictional allocation between the South Atlantic and the Gulf is 75% and 25% of the ABC, respectively**. The allocation was established

using the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey data and based on 50% of average landings from 1993-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008.

Option 2. Modify the jurisdictional allocation for yellowtail snapper between the South Atlantic and Gulf using Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey data and based on 50% of average landings from 1993-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008. **The resulting allocations would be 81% of the ABC to the South Atlantic and 19% to the Gulf.**

Note: For both options above, recreational landings from Monroe County, Florida, are attributed to the South Atlantic. Commercial landings are attributed to the location of reporting.

Discussion:

Option 1 would **retain the current jurisdictional allocation percentages** between the South Atlantic and the Gulf as 75% and 25% of the ABC, respectively, that is based on 50% of average landings from 1993-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008. This formula was applied to landings as of 2011 (when the Councils implemented changes to address the Reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act) to obtain the current ABC allocation in weight of fish. As explained previously, the allocation used recreational landings estimated by MRFSS, which has been since replaced by MRIP and the methodology improved.

Annual ABCs for the South Atlantic and Gulf under **Option 1 (No Change)** are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Annual yellowtail snapper ABCs for the South Atlantic and Gulf based on current jurisdictional allocation **percentages** and recommended ABC (with revised landings). Values are in millions of pounds whole weight and include recreational landings estimates from MRIP-FES.

Year	Total ABC	South Atlantic ABC (75%)	Gulf ABC (25%)
2021	4.655	3.491	1.164
2022	4.242	3.182	1.061
2023	3.991	2.993	0.998
2024	3.836	2.877	0.959
2025+	3.736	2.802	0.934

Option 2 would use the **current allocation formula** but apply it to the **revised landings** that incorporate the MRIP-FES methodology. Under this scenario, the South Atlantic would be allocated approximately 81% of the ABC, and the Gulf would be allocated approximately 19%.

Annual ABCs for the South Atlantic and Gulf under Option 2 are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Annual yellowtail snapper ABCs for the South Atlantic and Gulf based on current jurisdictional allocation **formula** and recommended ABC (with revised landings). Values are millions of pounds whole weight and MRIP-FES units.

Year	Total ABC	South Atlantic ABC (81.39%)	Gulf ABC (18.61%)
2021	4.655	3.789	0.866
2022	4.242	3.453	0.789
2023	3.991	3.248	0.743
2024	3.836	3.122	0.714
2025+	3.736	3.041	0.695

2. Revise the yellowtail snapper total annual catch limits (ACL) and annual optimum yield (OY) in the South Atlantic

Purpose of Action: To set the total ACL and annual OY for the South Atlantic. Because the jurisdictional allocation has not yet been determined, the options below present scenarios for both allocations options in the previous action (75/25 and 81/19 for the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, respectively).

Option 1 (No Change). The total ACL and annual OY for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic is equal to the **current South Atlantic ABC.** The current ABC for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic is 3,037,500 pounds whole weight (lbs ww).

Option 2. If the South Atlantic allocation were retained at 75% of the ABC:

2a. The total ACL and annual OY are set **equal** to the recommended ABCs

2b. The total ACL and annual OY are set **at 90%** of the recommended ABCs

2c. The total ACL and annual OY are set **at 80%** of the recommended ABCs

2d. The total ACL and annual OY are set at the **lowest recommended ABC and maintained constant**

Option	Fishing Year	ABC (mp)	Total ACL (mp)
2a	2022/2023	3.182	3.182
2b	2022/2023	3.182	2.864
2c	2022/2023	3.182	2.546
2d	2022/2023+	2.802	2.802

Note: catch levels are only shown for 2022/2023 fishing year for simplicity. Refer to Tables 2 and 3 above for proposed catch levels through the 2025/2026 fishing year.

Option 3. If the South Atlantic allocation were to change to 81% of the ABC:

3a. The total ACL and annual OY are set **equal** to the recommended ABCs

3b. The total ACL and annual OY are set **at 90%** of the recommended ABCs

3c. The total ACL and annual OY are set **at 80%** of the recommended ABCs
3d. The total ACL and annual OY are set at the **lowest recommended ABC and maintained constant**

Option	Fishing Year	ABC (mp)	Total ACL (mp)
3a	2022/2023	3.453	3.453
3b	2022/2023	3.453	3.108
3c	2022/2023	3.453	2.762
3d	2022/2023+	3.041	3.041

Note: catch levels are only shown for 2022/2023 fishing year for simplicity. Refer to Tables 2 and 3 above for proposed catch levels through the 2025/2026 fishing year.

Discussion:

Option 1 would continue to specify catch levels for yellowtail snapper based on data that is no longer considered the best scientific information available (BSIA).

Option 2 and its sub-options corresponds to the Council retaining the jurisdictional allocation **percentages** and retaining the 75% South Atlantic allocation. From there, the total ACL could be set equal to the ABC for that year or a buffer of 10% or 20% could be implemented to account for management uncertainty. Additionally, the total ACL could be set at a constant level (the lowest of the ABCs since the Council cannot set an ACL that is higher than the ABC recommendation).

Option 3 and its sub-options apply to a jurisdictional allocation to the South Atlantic of 81.39% of the recommended ABC as a result of applying the current allocation **formula.** The sub-options are the same as under Option 2.

3. Revise South Atlantic sector allocations

Purpose of Action: To adjust the allocations to the commercial and recreational sector based on the revised total ACL.

Option 1 (No Action). Retain the existing sector allocation **percentages (52.56% commercial and 47.44% recreational**) for yellowtail snapper for the South Atlantic and apply to the **updated South Atlantic total ACL**. The allocation is based on 50% of average landings from 1986-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008 using recreational landings estimates from the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Program.

What are the current allocations and ACLs?

Commercial (52.56%) = 1,596,510 lbs ww

Recreational (47.44%) = 1,440,990 lbs ww

Option 2. Revise the sector allocations for yellowtail snapper for the South Atlantic. The **commercial sector would be allocated 40.73%** of the South Atlantic total ACL and the **recreational sector would be allocated 59.27%**. The allocation is based **applying the existing formula** of 50% of average landings from 1986-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008 to revised landings including recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey.

Are there more options that should be considered?

Discussion:

Option 1 applies the current **percent** sector allocation to the total ACL under either a 75% or an 81.39% allocation to the South Atlantic (Table 4). Resulting sector ACLs are shown for fishing year 2022/2023 for two total ACL scenarios (equal to the annual ABC equal to the lowest recommended ABC and held constant). Data used to calculate sector allocations include revised recreational landings as estimated by MRIP-FES, and include landings from Monroe County, FL.

Table 4. Sector ACLs (in millions of pounds) for fishing year 2022/2023 under current allocation for two (highest and lowest) total ACL scenarios and two jurisdictional allocation scenarios.

Total ACL Option	Total ACL (mp)	Commercial ACL (52.56%) (mp)	Recreational ACL (47.44%) (mp)
75% allocation to the South Atlantic			
Equal to ABC	3.182	1.672	1.509
Equal to lowest ABC and held constant	2.802	1.473	1.329
81.39% allocation to the South Atlantic			
Equal to ABC	3.453	1.815	1.638
Equal to lowest ABC and held constant	3.041	1.598	1.443

Option 2 applies the **formula**: 50% of average landings from 1986-2008 + 50% of average landings from 2006-2008 to the **revised (MRIP-FES) landings** under either a 75% or an 81.39% allocation to the South Atlantic (Table 5). Resulting sector ACLs are shown for fishing year 2022/2023 for two total ACL scenarios (equal to the annual ABC equal to the lowest recommended ABC and held constant). Data used to calculate sector allocations include revised recreational landings as estimated by MRIP-FES, and include landings from Monroe County, FL.

Table 5. Sector ACLs (in millions of pounds) for fishing year 2022/2023 under modified allocation for two (highest and lowest) total ACL scenarios and two jurisdictional allocation scenarios.

Total ACL Option	Total ACL (mp)	Commercial ACL (40.73%) (mp)	Recreational ACL (59.27%) (mp)
75% allocation to the South Atlantic			
Equal to ABC	3.182	1.296	1.885
Equal to lowest ABC and held constant	2.802	1.141	1.660
81.39% allocation to the South Atlantic			
Equal to ABC	3.453	1.406	2.047
Equal to lowest ABC and held constant	3.041	1.239	1.802

How would the adjusted catch levels affect season length for each sector?

This analysis investigates when the commercial and recreational sectors will be expected to close under the proposed sector allocation changes for Options 1 and 2 using observed landings between 2014 and 2020 for both sectors (Table 6). **This analysis reflects an 81% jurisdictional allocation to the South Atlantic. If the allocation were to remain at 75% of the ABC, the sector ACLs would be lower and presumably closures would happen sooner.**

Table 6. Commercial and recreational landings in pounds (lb) ww of yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic for fishing years 2012-2020.

Yellowtail Snapper Commercial and Recreational Landings			
Fishing Year	**Rec. Landings (lb ww)**	**Comm. Landings (lb ww)**	**Total Landings (lb ww)**
2012	1,129,915	1,439,586	2,569,501
2013	1,695,188	1,328,974	3,024,162
2014	2,122,485	1,544,038	3,666,523
2015	1,495,150	1,652,438[a]	3,147,588
2016*	1,184,513	1,393,495	2,578,008
2016/2017	1,491,509	2,336,970[b]	3,828,479
2017/2018	1,414,730	1,703,541[c]	3,118,270
2018/2019	1,325,465	1,662,102[d]	2,987,567
2019/2020	1,309,326	1,435,167	2,744,493

*The fishing season for yellowtail snapper was modified in Regulatory Amendment 25, which took effect on August 12, 2016. For this reason, 2016 includes January through August 12, 2016 landings and 2016/17 fishing season landings are provided separately.

[a] In-season closure for commercial sector from October 31, 2015 to December 31, 2015.

[b] In-season closure for commercial sector from June 3, 2017 to July 31, 2017.

[c] In-season closure for commercial sector from June 5, 2018 to July 31, 2018.

[d] In-season closure for commercial sector from June 7, 2019 to July 31, 2019.

Source: SEFSC Commercial ACL Dataset (April 5, 2021) and SEFSC Recreational ACL Dataset (May 11, 2021).

Commercial Sector

Monthly South Atlantic commercial yellowtail snapper landings were averaged from 2018 through 2020 to project future landings for January and February months. Due to atypical landings in response to the 2020 pandemic, future landings were projected using average landings from 2017 through 2019 for March through May and August through December. Landings from 2014 through 2016 were used to project future landings for June and July due to in-season closures in 2017 through 2019 (Figure 1). Changes to the commercial fishing year (Regulatory Amendment 25, 2013) were assumed to have minimal impact on monthly fishing behavior, and no adjustments were made to monthly landings in 2016. Monthly predicted

landings were cumulative summed for the fishing year (August 1 through July 31) until the landings met the ACL.

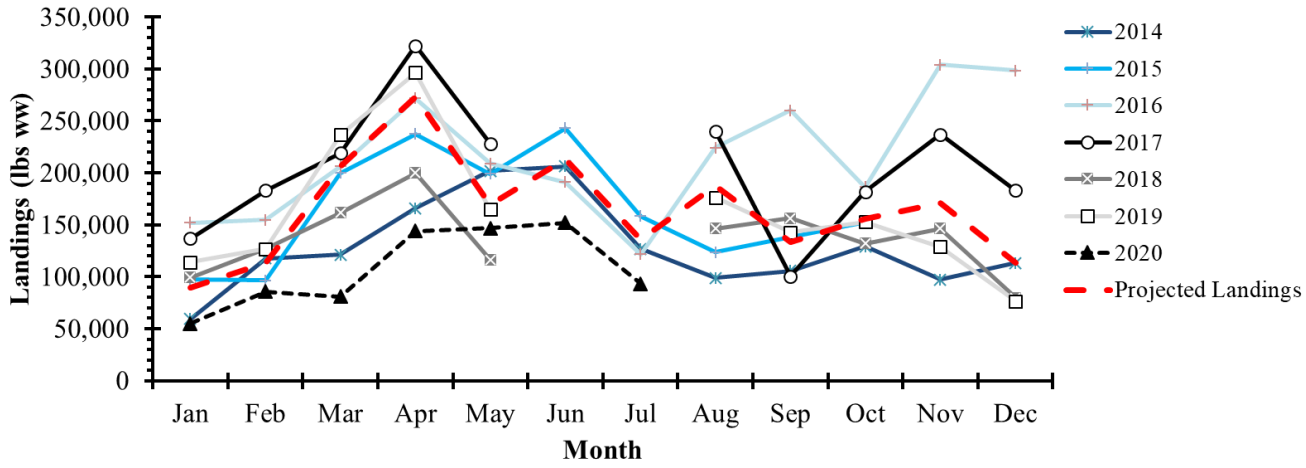

Figure 1. South Atlantic yellowtail snapper monthly commercial landings (lb ww) for 2014-2020, and projected future landings. Source: SEFSC Commercial ACL Dataset (April 5, 2021).

Based on the projected future commercial landings of yellowtail snapper under the proposed commercial ACLs the commercial sector would close as described in Table 7.

Table 7. The projected South Atlantic yellowtail snapper commercial and recreational landings (in millions of pounds whole weight) and closure dates expected with each proposed annual catch limit alternative.

Option 1 (No Action): 52.56% commercial and 47.44% recreational								
Year	Commercial ACL	Projected Commercial Landings	Commercial Closure Date	Recreational ACL	Projected Recreational Landings	Recreational Closure Date	Total Landings	% Combined ACL Landed
2021/2022	1.991	1.960	No Closure	1.797	1.345	No Closure	3.788	88%
2022/2023	1.815	1.815	**June 29**	1.638	1.345	No Closure	3.453	92%
2023/2024	1.707	1.707	**June 14**	1.541	1.345	No Closure	3.248	94%
2024/2025	1.641	1.641	**June 5**	1.481	1.345	No Closure	3.122	96%
2025+	1.598	1.598	**May 29**	1.443	1.345	No Closure	3.041	97%
Option 2: 40.73% commercial and 59.27% recreational								
Year	Commercial ACL	Projected Commercial Landings	Commercial Closure Date	Recreational ACL	Projected Recreational Landings	Recreational Closure Date	Total Landings	% Combined ACL Landed
2021/2022	1.543	1.543	**May 19**	2.246	1.345	No Closure	3.789	76%
2022/2023	1.406	1.406	**April 27**	2.047	1.345	No Closure	3.453	80%
2023/2024	1.323	1.323	**April 17**	1.925	1.345	No Closure	3.248	82%
2024/2025	1.272	1.272	**April 12**	1.851	1.345	No Closure	3.123	84%
2025+	1.238	1.238	**April 8**	1.802	1.345	No Closure	3.040	85%

Commercial Trip Limits

Figures 2 and 3 show the distribution of commercial trips in the South Atlantic for yellowtail snapper based on data from August 2014 to August 2019. Most commercial trips landed 200 pounds or less of yellowtail snapper during this period. However, a notable number of trips landed at least 1,500 pounds of yellowtail snapper (Figure 2). These trips contributed the most to the overall pounds of yellowtail snapper landed commercially from 2014 through 2019 (Figure 3) accounting for 30% of total pounds on average with a range between 21% to 38%.

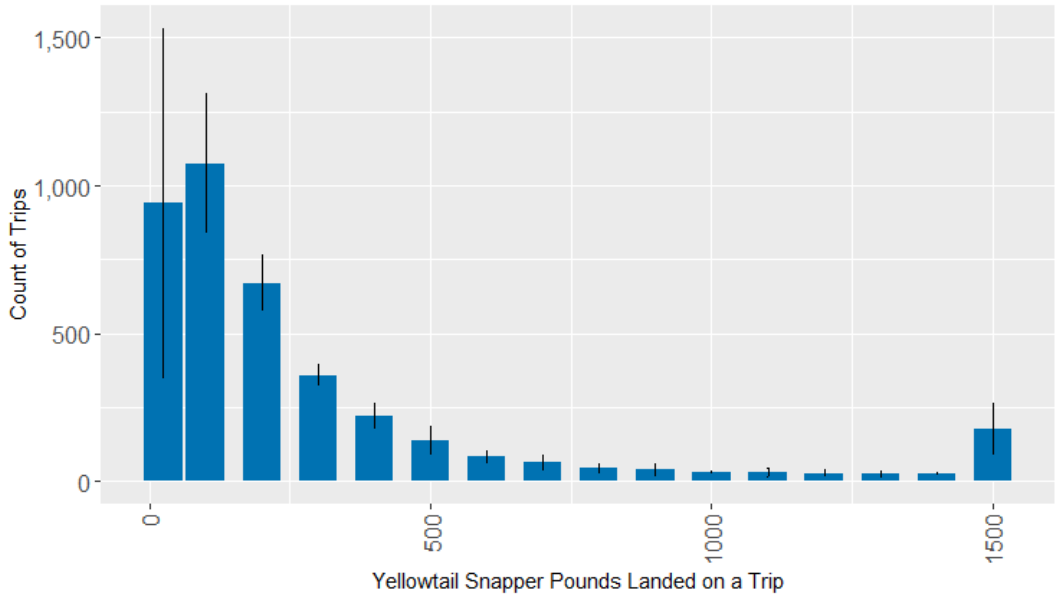

Figure 2. Pounds per trip of yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic from July 2014 through August 2019. Data are from the satl_sero1420_jan21 logbook file. Error bars are 1.96 * standard deviation to represent 95% confidence interval. The first bin on the left is 1-50 lbs and then each subsequent bin represents 51-150 lbs.

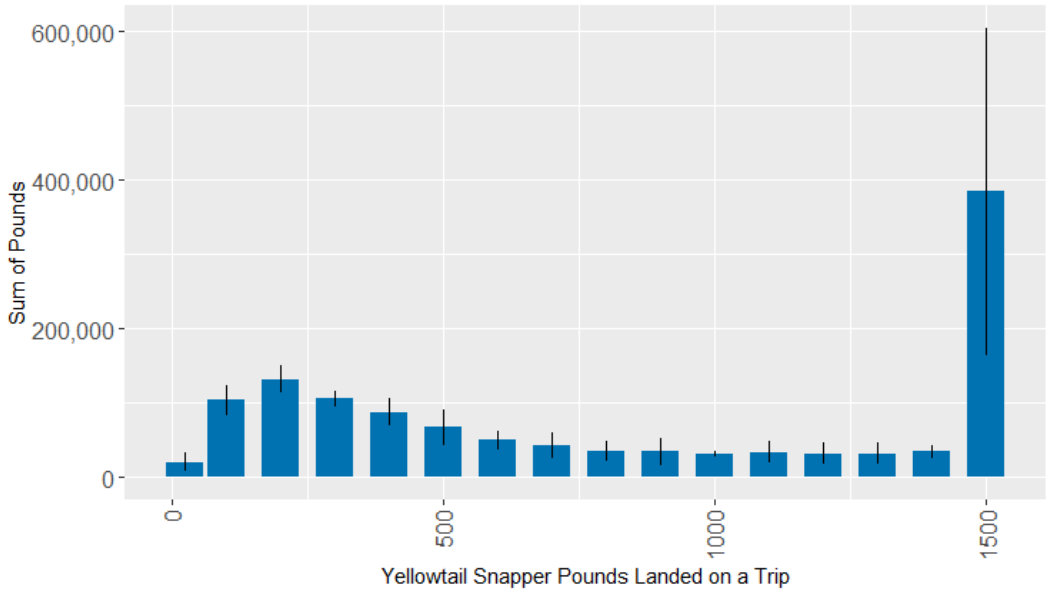

Figure 3. Cumulative pounds of yellowtail snapper per trip in the South Atlantic from July 2014 through August 2019. Data are from the satl_sero1420_jan21 logbook file. Error bars are 1.96 * standard deviation to represent 95% confidence interval. The first bin on the left is 1-50 lbs and then each subsequent bin represents 51-150 lbs.

What management measures could help keep commercial landings from reaching the ACL?

The Council is requesting feedback from commercial fishermen on the following:

Should there be a commercial trip limit trip during May 15 to July 31 to coincide with the yellowtail snapper spawning season?

What would be a reasonable trip limit for the commercial sector, and should there be a trip limit step-down after 75% of ACL is met is met?

Should there be a trip limit for part-time fishermen? Would 500 or 400 pounds be appropriate?

Should there be a trip limit for multi-day fishermen who operate dually permitted vessels (SA and Gulf)? Would 3,500 lbs per week be appropriate?

Recreational Sector

This dataset includes landings from the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) and Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). MRIP waves were used to estimate to monthly landings by assuming equal daily catch rates for months within a wave, and then SRHS landings were added back in. Average monthly landings from 2018-2020 were used as a proxy for future landings for most months, except for March and April when 2017-2019 data were used due to atypical landings in response to the 2020 pandemic (Figure 4). Changes to the recreational fishing year (Regulatory Amendment 25, 2013) were assumed to not have impacted monthly fishing behavior since the recreational sector has never reached their ACL.

Based on the cumulatively summed projected recreational landings of yellowtail snapper, the recreational sector would not be expected to close under the proposed recreational ACLs (Table 7).

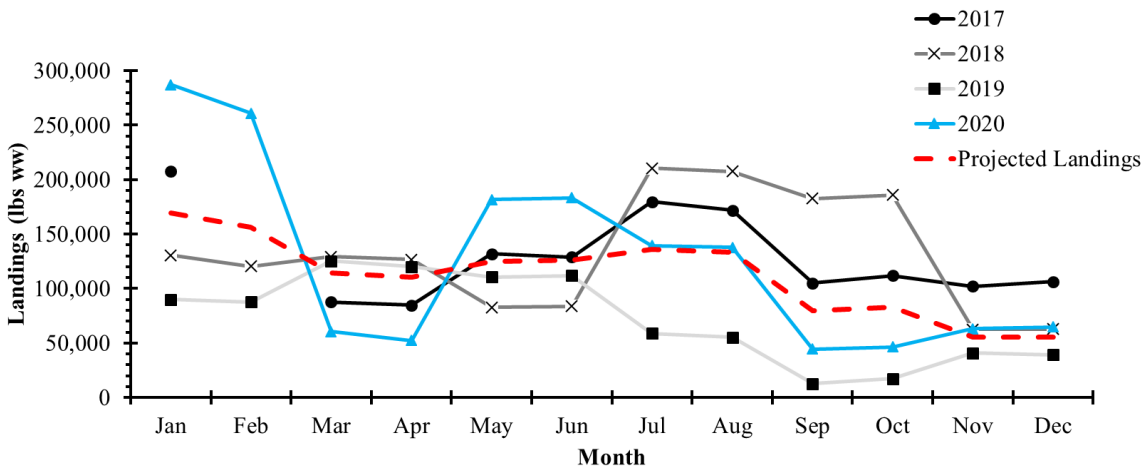

Figure 4. South Atlantic yellowtail snapper monthly recreational landings (lb ww) for 2017-2020, and projected future landings. Source: SEFSC Recreational ACL Dataset (May 11, 2021).

How to Comment

Via Webinar: webinars will be held on November 2 & 3, 2021 at 6:00 PM. Links to register for the webinars:

Tue, Nov 2, 2021, 6 PM
Wed, Nov 3, 2021, 6 PM

Written comments online: may be submitted on **Amendment 44** using the online public comment form at the following link:

- Submit Comment
- Read Public Comment

Written comments must be received by 5:00 PM on Friday, **November 5, 2021.**

Written comments by mail: Send comments to John Carmichael, Executive Director, SAFMC, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201, N. Charleston, SC 29405.

Written comments by fax: 843/769-4520.