

# Amendment 51

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



## Catch Level Adjustments, Allocations, and Management Modifications for Snowy Grouper



### **Environmental Assessment, Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis, and Regulatory Impact Review**

**September 2022**

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
4055 Faber Place Drive; Suite 201  
North Charleston, SC 29405

Award Number FNA15NMF4410010

## **Amendment 51**

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

---

**Proposed actions:** The actions in Amendment 51 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region would modify management of South Atlantic snowy grouper. Actions would revise annual catch limits, sector allocations, management measures for the commercial and recreational sectors, and accountability measures, for the recreational sector.

#### **Responsible Agencies and Contact Persons**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| South Atlantic Fishery Management Council                          | 843-571-4366                                     |
| 4055 Faber Place, Suite 201  | 843-769-4520 (fax)                               |
| North Charleston, South Carolina 29405                             | <a href="http://www.safmc.net">www.safmc.net</a> |
| IPT lead: Alyson Iberle  |  |
| <a href="mailto:allie.iberle@safmc.net">allie.iberle@safmc.net</a> |  |

|  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| National Marine Fisheries Service                                  | 727-824-5305              |
| Southeast Regional Office  | 727-824-5308 (fax)        |
| 263 13 <sup>th</sup> Avenue South                                  | <a href="#">NMFS SERO</a> |
| St. Petersburg, Florida 33701                                      |                           |
| IPT lead: Rick DeVictor  |                           |
| <a href="mailto:rick.devictor@noaa.gov">rick.devictor@noaa.gov</a> |                           |

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared using the 2020 CEQ NEPA Regulations. The effective date of the 2020 CEQ NEPA Regulations was September 14, 2020, and reviews begun after this date are required to apply the 2020 regulations unless there is a clear and fundamental conflict with an applicable statute. 85 Fed. Reg. at 43372-73 (§§ 1506.13, 1507.3(a)). This EA began on [DATE] and accordingly proceeds under the 2020 regulations.

## Table of Contents

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Table of Contents .....   | III  |
| List of Appendices .....  | vii  |
| List of Tables .....  | VIII |
| List of Figures .....   | XII  |
| Summary .....   | 1    |
| Chapter 1. Introduction .....   | 4    |
| 1.1 What actions are being proposed in this plan amendment? .....   | 4    |
| 1.2 Who is proposing the amendment? .....   | 4    |
| 1.3 Where is the project located? .....   | 5    |
| 1.4 Why is the Council considering action (Purpose and need statement)? .....   | 6    |
| 1.5 What are the acceptable biological catch and overfishing limit<br>recommendations for snowy grouper? .....  | 6    |
| 1.6 How has recreational data collection changed in the southeast? .....  | 8    |
| 1.7 What is the history of management for the snowy grouper fishery? .....  | 9    |
| Chapter 2. Proposed Actions and Alternatives .....  | 11   |
| 2.1 Action 1. Revise the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, annual<br>catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper to reflect the new<br>overfishing limit and updated acceptable biological catch recommendations | 11   |
| 2.1.1 Alternatives .....  | 11   |
| 2.1.2 Comparison of Alternatives: .....   | 13   |
| 2.2 Action 2. Revise sector allocations and annual catch limits for snowy grouper<br>14   | 14   |
| 2.2.1 Alternatives .....  | 14   |
| 2.2.2 Comparison of Alternatives: .....   | 16   |
| 2.3 Action 3. Modify the snowy grouper recreational season .....  | 17   |
| 2.3.1 Alternatives .....  | 17   |
| 2.3.2 Comparison of Alternatives: .....   | 17   |
| 2.4 Action 4. Revise the snowy grouper recreational accountability measures... 19   | 19   |
| 2.4.1 Alternatives .....  | 19   |
| 2.4.2 Comparison of Alternatives: .....   | 20   |
| Chapter 3. Affected Environment .....   | 21   |
| 3.1 Habitat Environment .....   | 21   |
| 3.1.1 Essential Fish Habitat .....  | 21   |
| 3.1.2 Habitat Areas of Particular Concern .....   | 22   |
| 3.2 Biological and Ecological Environment .....   | 23   |
| 3.2.1 Snowy Grouper .....   | 23   |
| 3.2.2 Bycatch .....   | 26   |
| 3.2.3 Other Species Affected .....  | 26   |
| 3.2.4 Protected Species .....   | 27   |
| 3.3 Economic Environment .....  | 29   |
| 3.3.1 Commercial Sector .....   | 29   |
| 3.3.2 Recreational Sector .....   | 33   |
| 3.4 Social Environment .....  | 41   |
| 3.4.1 Snowy Grouper Commercial Sector .....   | 41   |

- 3.4.2 Snowy Grouper Recreational Sector..... 46
- 3.4.3 Environmental Justice..... 48
- 3.5 Administrative Environment..... 51
  - 3.5.1 Federal Fishery Management..... 51
  - 3.5.2 State Fishery Management..... 51
  - 3.5.3 Enforcement..... 52
- Chapter 4. Environmental Effects and Comparison of Alternatives..... 53
  - 4.1 Action 1. Revise the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper to reflect the new overfishing limit and updated acceptable biological catch recommendations 53
  - 4.2 Action 2. Revise the snowy grouper sector allocations and sector annual catch limits 60
  - 4.3 Action 3. Modify snowy grouper recreational season ..... 67
  - 4.4 Action 4. Modify snowy grouper recreational accountability measures ..... 72
    - 4.4.2 Economic Effects..... 73
- Chapter 5. DRAFT Council’s Rationale for the Preferred Alternatives..... 76
  - 5.1 Action 1. Revise the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper to reflect the new overfishing limit and updated acceptable biological catch recommendations 76
    - 5.1.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) Comments and Recommendations..... 76
    - 5.1.2 Law Enforcement AP Comments and Recommendations..... 76
    - 5.1.3 Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) Comments and Recommendations..... 76
    - 5.1.4 Public Comments and Recommendations ..... 76
    - 5.1.5 South Atlantic Council’s Draft Rationale ..... 76
    - 5.1.6 How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery? ..... 77
  - 5.2 Action 2. Revise the snowy grouper sector allocations and sector annual catch limits 78
    - 5.2.1 Snapper Grouper AP Comments and Recommendations ..... 78
    - 5.2.2 Law Enforcement AP Comments and Recommendations..... 78
    - 5.2.3 SSC Comments and Recommendations..... 78
    - 5.2.4 Public Comments and Recommendations ..... 78
    - 5.2.5 South Atlantic Council’s Draft Rationale ..... 78
    - 5.2.6 How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery? 79
  - 5.3 Action 3. Modify the snowy grouper recreational season ..... 80
    - 5.3.1 Snapper Grouper AP Comments and Recommendations ..... 80
    - 5.3.2 Law Enforcement AP Comments and Recommendations..... 80
    - 5.3.3 SSC Comments and Recommendations..... 80
    - 5.3.4 Public Comments and Recommendations ..... 80
    - 5.3.5 South Atlantic Council’s Draft Rationale ..... 80
    - 5.3.6 How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery? 81
  - 5.4 Action 4. Modify the snowy grouper recreational accountability measures . 82

- 5.4.1 Snapper Grouper AP Comments and Recommendations ..... 82
- 5.4.2 Law Enforcement AP Comments and Recommendations..... 82
- 5.4.3 SSC Comments and Recommendations..... 82
- 5.4.4 Public Comments and Recommendations ..... 82
- 5.4.5 South Atlantic Council’s Draft Rationale ..... 82
- 5.4.6 How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper  
Fishery? 83
- Chapter 6. Cumulative Effects ..... 84
  - 6.1 Affected Area ..... 84
  - 6.2 Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions Impacting the  
Affected Area ..... 84
  - 6.3 Consideration of Climate Change and Other Non-Fishery Related  
Issues 87
  - 6.4 Overall Impacts Expected from Past, Present, and Future Actions ..... 88
  - 6.5 Monitoring and Mitigation..... 89
- Chapter 7. List of Interdisciplinary Plan Team (IPT) Members ..... 90
- Chapter 8. Agencies and Persons Consulted..... 91
- Chapter 9. References ..... 90
- Appendix A. Other Applicable Laws..... 1
- Appendix B. Regulatory Impact Review ..... 1
- Appendix C. Regulatory Flexibility Analysis..... 1
- Appendix D. Essential Fish Habitat and Ecosystem Based Fishery Management ..... 1
  - I. EFH and EFH-HAPC Designations and Cooperative Habitat Policy  
Development and Protection..... 1
  - II. Habitat Conservation and Fishery Ecosystem Plans..... 2
  - III. Ecosystem Approach to Conservation and Management of Deep-water  
Ecosystems..... 3
  - IV. FEP II Development ..... 3
  - V. FEP II Dashboard (In transition to new Habitat and Ecosystem Page) ..... 4
  - VI. NOAA EBFM Activities Supporting FEP II..... 4
  - VII. Regional Habitat and Ecosystem Partners..... 5
  - VIII. Regional Ecosystem Modeling in the South Atlantic ..... 5
  - IX. Tools supporting Habitat Conservation and EBFM in the South Atlantic Region  
6
  - IX. Ecosystem-Based Action, Future Challenges and Needs ..... 7
- Appendix E. Actions and Alternatives Removed from Consideration ..... 1
- Appendix F. Data Analyses ..... 1
  - 1.1 Commercial ACL Analysis..... 1
  - 1.2 Commercial Season Closure Analysis for the Snowy Grouper Fishery .. 3
  - 1.3 Recreational ACL Analysis ..... 6
  - Data 6
  - 1.4 Recreational Season Closure Analysis..... 9
- Appendix G. Bycatch Practicability Analysis ..... 1
  - Background 1
  - 1. Population Effects for the Bycatch Species ..... 2
    - 1.1 Amount and Type of Bycatch and Discards ..... 2

1.2 Practicability of Management Measures in Directed Fisheries Relative to their Impact on Bycatch and Bycatch Mortality ..... 7

2. Ecological Effects Due to Changes in Bycatch ..... 10

3. Changes in the Bycatch of Other Fish Species and Resulting Population and Ecosystem Effects ..... 12

4. Effects on Marine Mammals and Birds ..... 12

5. Changes in Fishing, Processing, Disposal, and Marketing Costs ..... 12

6. Changes in Fishing Practices and Behavior of Fishermen ..... 13

7. Changes in Research, Administration, and Enforcement Costs and Management Effectiveness ..... 13

8. Changes in the Economic, Social, or Cultural Value of Fishing Activities and Non-Consumptive Uses of Fishery Resources ..... 13

9. Changes in the Distribution of Benefits and Costs ..... 14

10. Social Effects ..... 14

11. Conclusion ..... 14

Appendix H. Fishery Impact Statement ..... 1

Appendix I. History of Management ..... 1

Appendix J. Allocation Review Trigger Policy ..... 1

Appendix K. Stock Projections ..... 1

## **List of Appendices**

***TO BE COMPLETED***

- Appendix A.** Other Applicable Law
- Appendix B.** Regulatory Impact Review
- Appendix C.** Regulatory Flexibility Analysis
- Appendix D.** Essential Fish Habitat and Ecosystem Based Fishery Management
- Appendix E.** Actions and Alternatives Remove from Consideration
- Appendix F.** ABC Assessment Projections
- Appendix G.** Data Analyses
- Appendix H.** Bycatch Practicability Analysis
- Appendix I.** History of Management
- Appendix J.** Allocations Review Trigger Policy
- Appendix K.** Stock Projections

## **List of Tables**

### ***TO BE COMPLETED***

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| Table 1.5.1. South Atlantic snowy grouper OFL and ABC recommendations (in pounds and numbers of fish) based on management starting in 2023. ....   | 7        |
| Table 1.5.2. South Atlantic snowy grouper stock status criteria recommendations based on the results of SEDAR 36 Update 2020 (SSC Meeting Report, April 2020).....   | 7        |
| Table 3.2.1. South Atlantic snowy grouper commercial landings and ACLs in lbs gw, 2015-2019. Snowy grouper ACL and percent of the ACL landed are presented in lbs gw.....  | 26       |
| Table 3.2.2. South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings and ACLs in numbers of fish, 2015-2019. Snowy grouper ACL and percent of the ACL landed are presented in numbers of fish. ....   | 26       |
| Table 3.3.1.1. Number of vessels, number of trips, and landings (lbs gw) by year for South Atlantic snowy grouper.....   | 30       |
| Table 3.3.1.2. Number of vessels and ex-vessel revenue by year (2021 dollars)* for South Atlantic snowy grouper.....   | 30       |
| Table 3.3.1.3. Purchase statistics for dealers that bought South Atlantic snowy grouper landings (2021 dollars).....   | 31       |
| Table 3.3.1.4. Average annual business activity (2015 through 2019) associated with the commercial harvest of snowy grouper in the South Atlantic. All monetary estimates are in 2021 dollars.*.....   | 33       |
| Table 3.3.2.1. South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational target trips, by mode and state, 2015-2019.*.....   | 35       |
| Table 3.3.2.2. South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational catch trips, by mode and state, 2015-2019.....  | 35       |
| Table 3.3.2.3. South Atlantic headboat angler days and percent distribution by state (2015 through 2019).....  | 36       |
| Table 3.3.2.4. South Atlantic headboat angler days and percent distribution by month (2015 through 2019).....  | 37       |
| Table 3.3.2.5. Trip-level economics for offshore trips by South Atlantic charter vessels and Southeast headboats in 2017 (2021 dollars). ....  | 38       |
| Table 3.3.2.6. Estimated annual average economic impacts (2015-2019) from South Atlantic recreational snowy grouper target trips, by state and mode, using state-level multipliers. All monetary estimates are in 2021 dollars (in thousands)..... | 40       |
| Table 3.4.1 Distribution of commercial snapper grouper unlimited and 225-lb trip-limited permits among the top permit-holding communities in the South Atlantic during 2019. ....  | 42       |
| Table 3.4.3. Distribution of South Atlantic for-hire/headboat snapper grouper permits among the top 20 permit-holding communities in the region: 2019 (SERO Access Permit Database). 47<br>50  | 47<br>50 |
| Table 4.1.1.1. The total ACL for snowy grouper under Alternatives 1 (No Action) – 5 in pounds gutted weight and number of fish. ....   | 53       |
| Table 0.2. Percent difference between the total ACLs in Action 1 compared to 5-year average landings from fishing years 2015 to 2019 <sup>a</sup> . ....   | 55       |
| Table 0.2.3. Estimated change in potential landings (lbs gw) to the commercial sector from Action 1.....   | 56       |

Table 0.2.4. Estimated change in potential net economic benefits to the commercial sector (PS) from Action 1 (2021 \$). ..... 56

Table 0.2.5. Estimated change in potential landings (numbers of fish) to the recreational sector from Action 1. .... 56

Table 0.2.6. Estimated change in potential net economic benefits to the recreational sector (CS) from Action 1 (2021 \$). ..... 56

Table 0.2.7. Estimated change in potential net economic benefits (recreation and commercial combined) from Action 1 (2021 \$)<sup>a</sup>. ..... 57

Table 4.2.1.1. The commercial sector allocations for snowy grouper based on the revised total ACL from Preferred Alternative 2 in Action 1. The commercial season is split into two seasons. Season 1 is from January 1 – June 31 and it receives 70% of the total commercial ACL. Season 2 is from July 1 – December 31 and it receives 30% of the total commercial ACL. .... 60

Table 4.2.1.2. The recreational sector allocations for snowy grouper based on the revised total ACL from Preferred Alternative 2 in Action 1. Recreational allocations were determined using an average weight from SEDAR 36 Update (8.93 lbs gw). .... 61

Table 4.3.1.3. Average number of snowy grouper landed by the recreational sector by wave from the South Atlantic based on a three-year average (2017 to 2019) and a five-year average (2015 to 2019). Landings include trips reported from Monroe County, FL. The confidence interval was developed based on the standard deviation of the three years. .... 67

Table 4.3.1.4. The projected South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings (number of fish) and closure dates expected for each Alternative of Action 3 using a three-year (2017-2019) and five-year (2015-2019) average. The recreational ACL options considered here assume sector allocations of 87.55% commercial and 12.45% recreational (Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 2). Source: SEFSC MRIP FES Recreational ACL Database [March 17, 2022]. ..... 68

Table G.1.1.1 The predicted percent change in landings per trip from the current 200-lb gw trip limit. .... 2

Table G.1.1.2. The projected 2023 closure dates with an ACL of 99,562 lbs gw for snowy grouper by season with different trip limit options and 95% confidence interval (CI). Note that 70% of the ACL is allocated to the January through June season and 30% to the July through December season. .... 2

Table G.1.2.1. The predicted percent change in landings per trip from the current 200-lb gw trip limit. .... 4

5

Table G.1.2.2. The projected closure dates with each ACL option for snowy grouper by season with different trip limit options and 95% confidence interval (CI). Note that 70% of the ACL is allocated to the January through June season and 30% to the July through December season. .... 5

Figure G.1.3.1. Recreational landings of Snowy Grouper (number of fish) by year and wave from 2010 to 2019 for the South Atlantic region. Landings include trips reported from Key West, FL up to the Virginia and North Carolina border. .... 8

8

Table G.1.3.1. Average number of Snowy Grouper landed by the recreational sector by wave from the South Atlantic from 2015 to 2019. The landings included trips reported from

Monroe County, FL. The confidence interval was developed based on the standard deviation of the five years. .... 9

Matter, Vivian M. and Matthew A. Nuttall. 2020. Recreational Survey Data for Snowy Grouper in the South Atlantic. 2020-SEDAR36U-WP01. SEDAR, North Charleston, SC. 21 pp. .... 9

Table G.1.4.2. The projected South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings (number of fish) and closure dates expected for each Alternative of Action 5 using a three-year (2017-2019) and five-year (2015-2019) average. The recreational ACL options considered here assume current sector allocations of 17% recreational and 83% commercial (Alternative 1 of Action 2). Source: SEFSC MRIP FES Recreational ACL Database [March 17, 2022]. 11

Table G.1.4.3. The projected South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings (number of fish) and closure dates expected for each Alternative of Action 5 using a three-year (2017-2019) and five-year (2015-2019) average. The recreational ACL options considered here assume current sector allocations of 12.45% recreational and 87.55% commercial (Alternative 2 of Action 2). Source: SEFSC MRIP FES Recreational ACL Database [March 17, 2022]. .... 12

Table G.1.4.4. The projected South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings (number of fish) and closure dates expected for each Alternative of Action 5 using a three-year (2017-2019) and five-year (2015-2019) average. The recreational ACL options considered here assume current sector allocations of 26.64% recreational and 73.36% commercial (Alternative 3 of Action 2). Source: SEFSC MRIP FES Recreational ACL Database [March 17, 2022]. .... 13

Table G.1.1.1. Top ten species with mean estimated South Atlantic commercial discards (number of fish) during snapper grouper trips (defined as trips with >50% of landings from snapper grouper stocks), sorted from largest to smallest, by gear, for the 2015-2019 period. 2

Table G.1.1.2. The percentage of unexpanded discards for each discard reason out of the total number of self-reported discards reported to the Supplemental Discard Logbook for the top ten snapper grouper species discarded in the South Atlantic from 2015 through 2019. Some percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. .... 4

Table G.1.1.3. From 2015 through 2019, the top ten species with discards reported on trips capturing a snapper grouper species by recreational mode. Species are sorted by number of total discards for each mode from 2015-2019. .... 5

Table G.1.1.4. South Atlantic snapper grouper headboat, charter, and private mean annual estimates of landings and discards (2015-2019). Headboat and MRIP (charter and private) landings and discards are in numbers of fish. .... 6

Table G.2.2.1. Release mortality rates of select recreationally and commercially important snapper-grouper species from recent stock assessments. .... 11

Table J-1. Next year for allocation reviews (as of 2019) for SAFMC managed species. .... 2

Table K-1. Projection results with fishing mortality rate fixed at  $F = P*27.5$  ( $F=75.3\%F_{MSY}$ ) starting in 2023. R = number of age-1 recruits (in 1000s), F = fishing mortality rate (per year), S = spawning stock (mt), L = removals (landings and discards) expressed in numbers (n, in 1000s) or whole weight (w, in 1000 lb). The extension base indicates expected values (deterministic) from the base run; the extension med indicates median values from the stochastic projections. The pr.rebuild indicates the number of runs above the  $L_{MSY}$  benchmark. .... 1

Table K-2. Projection results with fishing mortality rate fixed at  $F = P*50$  ( $F=F_{MSY}$ ) starting in 2023. R = number of age-1 recruits (in 1000s), F = fishing mortality rate (per year), S =

spawning stock (mt), L = removals (landings and dead discards) expressed in numbers (n, in 1000s) or whole weight (w, in 1000 lb). The extension base indicates expected values (deterministic) from the base run; the extension med indicates median values from the stochastic projections. The pr.rebuild indicates the number of runs above the  $L_{MSY}$  benchmark. .... 1

DRAFT

## List of Figures

**TO BE COMPLETED**

Figure 1.3.1. Jurisdictional boundaries of the Council. .... 5

Figure 3.2.1.2. Estimated time series of spawning stock biomass (SSB) and fishing mortality (F) relative to benchmarks. Solid line indicates estimates from base run of the Beaufort Assessment Model; gray error bands indicate 5<sup>th</sup> and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the ensemble modeling. Top panel: SSB relative to the minimum stock size threshold (MSST); if less than 1, stock is overfished. Middle panel: SSB relative to SSB<sub>MSY</sub>; if less than 1, stock is overfished. Bottom panel: F relative to F<sub>MSY</sub>; if > 1 stock is undergoing overfishing. *Source: SEDAR 36 Update (2020)*. .... 25

Figure 3.4.1 Distribution of regional *landings*. Top South Atlantic commercial snowy grouper landings communities: 2015 through 2019. *Source: SEFSC, Community ALS File*. .... 44

Figure 3.4.2 Distribution of regional landings *value*. Top South Atlantic commercial snowy grouper landings communities: 2015 through 2019. *Source: SEFSC, Community ALS File*. .... 44

Figure 3.4.3 Measures of engagement and reliance among the leading commercial snowy grouper landings communities in the South Atlantic during 2019. *Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database*. .... 45

Figure 3.4.4 Measures of community involvement in the South Atlantic recreational fishing industry during 2019. *Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database*. .... 48

Figure 3.4.5 Social vulnerability measures for communities extensively involved in ..... 50

South Atlantic commercial snapper grouper fishing operations. *Source: SERO CSVI Database*. 50

Figure 3.4.6 Social vulnerability measures for South Atlantic communities most extensively involved in the region’s recreational fishing sectors. *Source: SERO CSVI Database*. .... 50

Figure 4.3.1.1. South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings by month from 2017-2019 and projected landings. All of the landing projections assume no landings between January 1 - April 30 and September 1 – December 31 for the season closure. *Source: SEFSC MRIP FES Recreational ACL Database [March 17, 2022]*. .... 67

69

Figure 4.3.1.2. Spawning proportion by month. *Source: Kolmos et al. (2019)*. .... 69

Figure G.1.1.1 The percent of commercial trips (n=3,249) harvesting snowy grouper by bin from 2016 through 2019. *Source: SEFSC commercial logbook [May 6, 2021]*. .... 1

Figure G.1.2.1. The percent of commercial trips (n=3,249) harvesting snowy grouper by bin from 2016 through 2019. *Source: SEFSC commercial logbook [May 6, 2021]*. .... 4

Figure G.1.2.2. The predicted monthly snowy grouper landings (lbs gw) based on current trip limits with 95% confidence interval. *Source: SEFSC commercial ACL file [September 29, 2021]*. .... 5

Figure G.1.3.2. Average number of Snowy Grouper landed in recreational sector by wave from the South Atlantic from 2015 to 2019. The landings included trips reported from Monroe County, FL. Blue bars represent the average landings and lines represent the 95% confidence interval. .... 8

Figure G.1.1.1. Expanded self-reported commercial discards (numbers of fish) for the top ten species discarded during snapper grouper trips (defined as trips with >50% of landings from snapper grouper stocks) from 2010-2019 for all gear types. .... 3

*Source:* SEFSC Coastal Logbook (accessed May 2020) and Discard Logbook (accessed May 2020). .... 3

DRAFT

## Summary

**TO BE COMPLETED**

### Why is the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council considering action?

The latest stock assessment (SEDAR 36 Update 2020) indicated the snowy grouper stock is undergoing overfishing and remains overfished. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) must develop measures to end overfishing immediately and continue to rebuild the stock consistent with the current rebuilding plan. In addition, the assessment used revised estimates for recreational catch from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) based on the Fishing Effort Survey (FES). In 2018, the MRIP fully transitioned its estimation of recreational effort to the mail-based FES. Previous estimates of recreational catch for snowy grouper were made using MRIP's Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) methodology. The latter was not as reliable and robust compared to the new FES survey method (see Section 1.6). Updated projections of catch and data changes incorporated in the assessment provided information to update the overfishing limit (OFL), acceptable biological catch (ABC), annual optimum yield (OY), and annual catch limits (ACL).

The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) has recommended a new acceptable ABC based on results of the stock assessment, and the total ACL and annual OY must be adjusted accordingly. The Council cannot set the ABC and total ACL above their SSC's ABC recommendation. In addition, sector allocations need to be revised because of revisions to recreational catch and effort estimates as explained above. Management measures also need to be adjusted to constrain commercial and recreational harvest to the new fishing levels. Finally, the Council is revising recreational accountability measures (AM) to ensure they are effective at keeping recreational landings from exceeding the recreational ACL and correct for overages when they occur.

#### Purpose and Need

**Purpose:** The *purpose* of this fishery management plan amendment is to revise the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, annual catch limits, and sector allocations for South Atlantic snowy grouper based on the results of the most recent stock assessment and modify management and accountability measures.

**Need:** The *need* for this fishery management plan amendment is to end overfishing of South Atlantic snowy grouper, continue to rebuild the stock, and achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

### What actions are being proposed in this plan amendment?

Amendment 51 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region proposes five actions. Below are the Council's preferred alternatives for each action.

**Action 1: Revise the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper to reflect the new overfishing limit and updated acceptable biological catch recommendations**

**Purpose of Action:** The SSC recommended a new OFL and ABC based on results of the SEDAR 36 Update (2020) and the total ACL and annual OY must be adjusted accordingly. The Council cannot set the total ACL above their SSC's recommended ABC

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

**Action 2: Revise the snowy grouper sector allocations and sector annual catch limits**

**Purpose of Action:** The Council's Allocations Trigger Policy states the Council will review sector allocations upon completion of a stock assessment. In addition, recreational landings estimates have been revised to adopt the new FES methodology. This action allows the Council to consider how to allocate the total ACL between the commercial and recreational sectors from 2023 onwards under the revised catch levels.

**Preferred Alternative 2:** Allocate 12.45% of the revised total annual catch limit for snowy grouper to the recreational sector and 87.55% of the revised total annual catch limit for snowy grouper to the commercial sector.

**Action 3: Modify the snowy grouper recreational season**

**Purpose of Action:** Because the snowy grouper total ACL is being adjusted to address the recent stock assessment and resulting stock status, the Council can adjust management measures to address overfishing and constrain harvest to the proposed commercial ACL.

**Preferred Alternative 2.** The recreational snowy grouper season is May 1 to June 30.

**Action 4: Modify snowy grouper recreational accountability measures**

**Purpose of Action:** Because of the needed reduction in catch levels, the Council is considering a revision to the recreational AM that would be more effective than the

current one in keeping catch at the proposed level. In addition, the trigger for the AM may be revised through this action.

**Preferred Alternative 3.** Remove the current recreational in-season accountability measures. If recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, reduce the length of the following year's recreational fishing season by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational annual catch limit from being exceeded in the following year. However, the length of the recreational season will not be reduced if the Regional Administrator determines, using the best scientific information available, that it is not necessary.

DRAFT

## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1 What actions are being proposed in this plan amendment?

The actions in Amendment 51 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP) would modify management of South Atlantic snowy grouper. Actions include revising OFL, ABC, annual catch limits (ACL), sector allocations, accountability measures (AM), and management measures for the commercial and recreational sectors.

### 1.2 Who is proposing the amendment?

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) is responsible for managing snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region. The Council develops the amendment and submits it to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) who determines whether to approve the amendment and publish a rule to implement the amendment on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce. NMFS is an agency of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration within the Department of Commerce. Guided by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the Council works with NMFS and other partners to sustainably manage fishery resources in the South Atlantic.

The Council and NMFS are also responsible for making this document available for public comment. The draft environmental assessment (EA) was made available to the public during the scoping process, public hearings, and Council meetings. The EA/amendment will be made available for comment during the rulemaking process.

#### *South Atlantic Fishery Management Council*

- Responsible for conservation and management of fish stocks in the South Atlantic Region.
- Consists of 13 voting members who are appointed by the Secretary of Commerce, 1 representative from each of the 4 South Atlantic states, the Southeast Regional Administrator of NMFS, and 4 non-voting members.
- Responsible for developing fishery management plans and amendments under the Magnuson-Stevens Act; recommends actions to NMFS for implementation.
- Management area is from 3 to 200 nautical miles off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida through Key West, except for Mackerel which is from New York to Florida, and Dolphin-Wahoo, which is from Maine to Florida.

### 1.3 Where is the project located?

Management of the federal snapper grouper fishery located off the southeastern United States (South Atlantic) in the 3-200 nautical miles U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is conducted under the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 1983) (Figure 1.3.1). There are 55 species managed by the Council under the Snapper Grouper FMP.

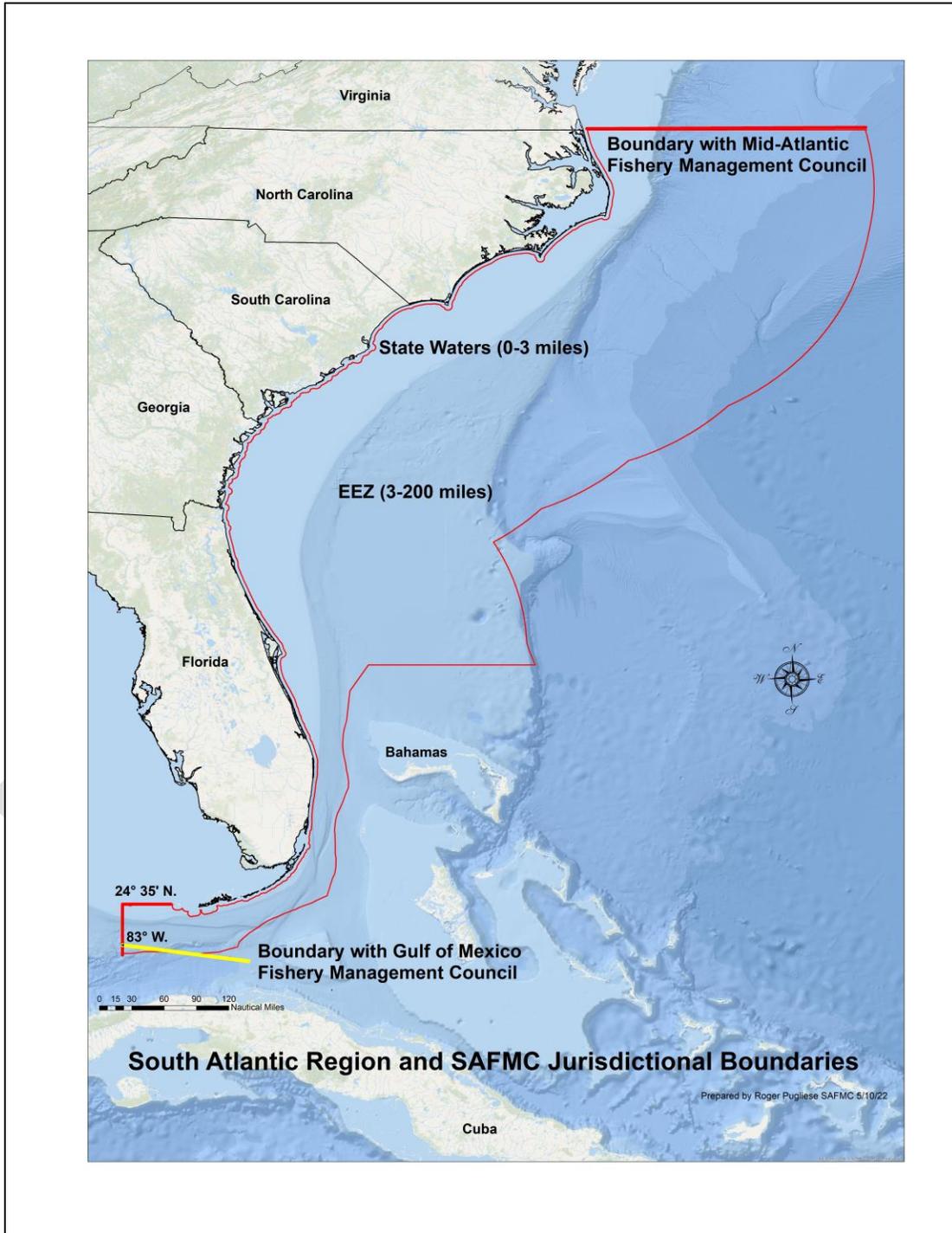


Figure 1.3.1. Jurisdictional boundaries of the Council.

## 1.4 Why is the Council considering action (Purpose and need statement)?

**Purpose:** The *purpose* of this fishery management plan amendment is to revise the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, annual catch limits, and sector allocations for South Atlantic snowy grouper based on the results of the most recent stock assessment and modify management and accountability measures.

**Need:** The *need* for this fishery management plan amendment is to end overfishing of South Atlantic snowy grouper, continue to rebuild the stock, and achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

The Council is considering action to respond to the most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic snowy grouper (SEDAR 36 2020). The findings of the assessment indicated that the South Atlantic snowy grouper stock is overfished and undergoing overfishing. The most recent update assessment (SEDAR 36 Update) was finalized in 2021, using data through 2018. The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee reviewed the SEDAR 36 Update and determined that the assessment is based on the best scientific information available. The 2021 stock assessment determined that South Atlantic snowy grouper remains overfished because  $SSB_{2018}$  (690 mt) is less than the minimum stock size threshold (MSST) (1,431 mt) and is subject to overfishing because  $F_{2016-2018}$  (0.114) is greater than the maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT) (0.101) (Figure 1). Therefore, NMFS has determined management action is necessary for snowy grouper in the South Atlantic region as the stock is undergoing overfishing and remains overfished.

Amendment 15A (2006) established a 34-year rebuilding plan projecting the stock to be rebuilt in 2039. Stock projections provided in SEDAR 36 Update (2021) projected the stock to have a  $P_{rebuild}$  of 0.504 in 2039 (Table 1.4.1). These projections show adequate progress within the rebuilding plan in accordance with National Standard 1 (50 CFR 600.310(j)(3)(iv)). The rebuilding plan will not be revised through Amendment 51 to the snapper grouper fishery management plan. See Appendix K for rebuilding projections.

The Council received notification from NMFS (via letter dated June 10, 2021) of the status of the snowy grouper stock and indicated management has not made adequate progress in rebuilding the population. Following notification that a stock is undergoing overfishing and overfished, the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act requires the Council to develop a fishery management plan amendment with actions that end overfishing immediately and rebuild the affected stock.

## 1.5 What are the acceptable biological catch and overfishing limit recommendations for snowy grouper?

The Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the snowy grouper stock assessment (SEDAR 36 Update 2020) at their January 2021 meeting. The assessment followed a standard approach with data through 2018 and incorporated the revised estimates for recreational catch (Fishing Effort Survey). The current acceptable biological catch (ABC) is inclusive of Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) units to account for private recreational and charter catch and effort while the updated ABC would be inclusive of Fishing Effort Survey (FES) units for these landings. The SSC found that the assessment was conducted using the best scientific information available, was adequate for determining stock status and supporting fishing level recommendations and addressed uncertainty consistent with expectations and available information.

The SSC provided OFL and ABC recommendations for 2023 through 2026 (Table 1.5.1). During their September 2021 meeting, the Council decided to continue to express the commercial ACL in pounds gutted weight and the recreational ACL in numbers of fish. Recommendations are based on landings in total removals. According to the SEDAR 36 Update, 95.4% of total removals of snowy grouper are landings and 4.6% are dead discards. Landings recommendations have been calculated to account for dead discards (highlighted in blue).

**Table 1.5.1.** South Atlantic snowy grouper OFL and ABC recommendations (in pounds and numbers of fish) based on management starting in 2023.

| Year | OFL in Removals (lbs ww) | OFL Removals (lbs gw) | OFL in Removals (numbers of fish) | OFL in Landings (lbs gw) | OFL in Landings (numbers of fish) |
|------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2023 | 194,000                  | 164,407               | 21,000                            | 156,844                  | 20,034                            |
| 2024 | 193,000                  | 163,559               | 20,000                            | 156,035                  | 19,080                            |
| 2025 | 192,000                  | 162,712               | 20,000                            | 155,227                  | 19,080                            |
| 2026 | 188,000                  | 159,322               | 20,000                            | 151,993                  | 19,080                            |
| Year | ABC Removals (lbs ww)    | ABC Removals (lbs gw) | ABC Removals (numbers of fish)    | ABC in Landings (lbs gw) | ABC in Landings (numbers of fish) |
| 2023 | 148,000                  | 125,424               | 16,000                            | 119,654                  | 15,264                            |
| 2024 | 150,000                  | 127,119               | 16,000                            | 121,272                  | 15,264                            |
| 2025 | 152,000                  | 128,814               | 16,000                            | 122,889                  | 15,264                            |
| 2026 | 152,000                  | 128,814               | 16,000                            | 122,889                  | 15,264                            |

NOTE: Number of fish remain the same throughout the time period for the ABC because it is assumed that fish moving through age classes gain weight therefore increasing the available poundage, however this does not increase the number of fish.

**Table 1.5.2.** South Atlantic snowy grouper stock status criteria recommendations based on the results of SEDAR 36 Update 2020 (SSC Meeting Report, April 2020).

| Criteria   | Deterministic | Probabilistic |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Overfished evaluation (SSB/SSB <sub>MSY</sub> )                  | 0.48          | 0.5           |
| Overfishing evaluation (F <sub>current</sub> /F <sub>MSY</sub> ) | 1.24          | 1.08          |

|  |          |          |
|--|----------|----------|
| MFMT ( $F_{MSY}$ )                     | 0.1      | 0.1      |
| SSB <sub>MSY</sub> (Total Biomass, mt) | 1,908.00 | 1,930.90 |
| MSST (Total Biomass, mt)               | 1,430.80 | 1,448.20 |
| MSY (1000 lbs.)                        | 532      | 533.6    |
| Y at 75% $F_{MSY}$ (1000 lbs.)         | 518.5    | 519.3    |

## 1.6 How has recreational data collection changed in the southeast?

The Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) was created in 1979 by NMFS. The program included the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS), which consists of onsite interviews at marinas and other points where recreational anglers fish, to determine catch. MRFSS also included CHTS, which used random digit dialing of homes in coastal counties to contact anglers to determine fishing effort. In 2000, the For-Hire Survey (FHS) was implemented to incorporate for-hire effort due to lack of coverage of charter boat anglers by the CHTS. The FHS used a directory of all known charter boats and a weekly telephone sample of the charter boat operators to obtain effort information.

MRIP<sup>1</sup> replaced MRFSS in 2013 to meet increasing demand for more precise, accurate, and timely recreational catch estimates. MRIP is a more scientifically sound methodology for estimating catch because it reduces some sources of potential bias as compared to MRFSS, resulting in more accurate catch estimates. Specifically, CHTS was improved to better estimate private angling effort. Instead of random telephone calls, MRIP-CHTS used targeted calls to anglers registered with a federal or state saltwater fishing registry. The MRIP also incorporated a new survey design for APAIS 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 (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 2021).

MRIP also transitioned from the legacy CHTS to a new mail survey (FES) beginning in 2015, and in 2018, the FES replaced the CHTS. 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. 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 the FES and CHTS are so different, NMFS conducted side-by-side testing of the two methods from 2015 to 2018 and developed calibration procedures to convert the historical catch estimates (MRFSS, MRIP-CHTS, MRIP-APAIS [collectively MRFSS]) into MRIP-FES. In general, landings estimates are higher using the MRIP-FES as compared to the MRFSS estimates. This is because the FES is designed to more accurately measure fishing activity than the CHTS, not because there was a sudden rise in fishing effort. NMFS developed a calibration model to adjust historic effort estimates so that they can be accurately compared to new estimates from the FES. The new

<sup>1</sup> <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2021-09/MRIP-Survey-Design-and-Statistical-Methods-2021-09-15.pdf/>

effort estimates alone do not lead to definitive conclusions about stock size or status in the past or at current. NMFS determined that the MRIP-FES data, when fully calibrated to ensure comparability among years and across states, produced the best available data for use in stock assessments and management (NMFS 2021).

## **1.7 What is the history of management for the snowy grouper fishery?**

Snapper grouper regulations in the South Atlantic were first implemented in 1983. The reader is referred to Appendix I for the management history of the species in the Snapper Grouper FMP. Below are amendments to the Snapper Grouper FMP addressing snowy grouper within the South Atlantic EEZ.

### **Snapper Grouper FMP (1983)**

The 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 (TL) minimum size limit for vermilion snapper; and included additional harvest and gear limitations.

### **Amendment 6 (1993)**

The amendment established a separate total allowable catch (TAC) level for golden tilefish and snowy grouper. Incidental catch was estimated at 96,000 pounds and was deducted from the total TAC prior to the start of the fishing year. This amendment also established a commercial trip limit of 2,500 lbs gutted weight for snowy grouper.

### **Amendment 11 (1998)**

The amendment modified the Snapper Grouper FMP to make definitions of MSY, optimum yield (OY), overfishing, and overfished consistent with National Standard Guidelines. Amendment 11 also identified and defined fishing communities, addressed bycatch management measures, and defined the snowy grouper  $F_{msy}$  proxy as  $F_{30\%SPR}$ .

### **Amendment 13C (2006)**

The amendment reduced the commercial annual quota from 344,508 pounds gutted weight to 84,000 pounds gutted weight and modified the commercial trip limit from 2,500 pounds gutted weight to 275 pounds gutted weight in year one; 175 pounds gutted weight in year 2; and 100 pounds gutted weight year 3 and onward. This amendment also reduced the recreational bag limit from 5 per person per day to 1 per person per day.

### **Amendment 15A (2008)**

Following the results of SEDAR 4 (2006) which indicated the stock was both overfished and experiencing overfishing, the amendment established a new rebuilding plan and status determination criteria for snowy grouper with the stock projected to be rebuilt in 2039.

### **Amendment 15B (2008)**

Based on landings from 1986-2005 from ALS, MRFSS, and headboat databases to set allocations of 95% to the commercial sector and 5% to the recreational sector.

**Amendment 17B (2010)**

Amendment 17B modified the recreational bag limit from one per person per day to one per vessel per day and implemented a recreational accountability measure (AM) that would shorten the following fishing year if the recreational ACL was exceeded. This amendment also prohibited the harvest of six deepwater species, including snowy grouper, seaward of 240 feet to reduce bycatch of speckled hind and warsaw grouper.

**Regulatory Amendment 11 (2011)**

The amendment eliminated the 240-foot harvest prohibition for six deepwater species including snowy grouper.

**Regulatory Amendment 20 (2015)**

Following SEDAR 36 (2013) which indicated the stock remained overfished but was no longer experiencing overfishing, the amendment modified the snowy grouper rebuilding strategy to maintain a constant fishing mortality rate of  $F=75\%F_{MSY}$  throughout the rebuilding timeframe with the ABC changing each year until 2019, after which it would remain in place until modified. The amendment also modified the ACL to equal the ABC and OY, increased the trip limit to 200 lbs gw, and modified the recreational fishing season from the calendar year to May through August. The Council applied its existing allocation formula to the landings data used in SEDAR 36 and adjusted the allocations to 83% commercial and 17% recreational.

## Chapter 2. Proposed Actions and Alternatives

### TO BE COMPLETED

### 2.1 Action 1. Revise the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper to reflect the new overfishing limit and updated acceptable biological catch recommendations

#### 2.1.1 Alternatives

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper are equal to the current acceptable biological catch level (218,848 pounds whole weight, 185,464 pounds gutted weight). The current acceptable biological catch level and overfishing limit are inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program’s Coastal Household Telephone Survey.

**Preferred Alternative 2.** The total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper is equal to the **updated** acceptable biological catch level. The updated acceptable biological catch level and overfishing limit are inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program’s Fishing Effort Survey.

| Year | OFL (lbs gw) | ABC (lbs gw) | ACL (lbs gw) | Annual OY (lbs gw) |
|------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
| 2023 | 156,844.00   | 119,654      | 119,654      | 119,654            |
| 2024 | 156,035.00   | 121,272      | 121,272      | 121,272            |
| 2025 | 155,227.00   | 122,889      | 122,889      | 122,889            |
| 2026 | 151,993.00   | 122,889      | 122,889      | 122,889            |

| Year | OFL (numbers of fish) | ABC (numbers of fish) | ACL (numbers of fish) | Annual OY (numbers of fish) |
|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2023 | 20,034                | 15,264                | 15,264                | 15,264                      |
| 2024 | 19,080                | 15,264                | 15,264                | 15,264                      |
| 2025 | 19,080                | 15,264                | 15,264                | 15,264                      |
| 2026 | 19,080                | 15,264                | 15,264                | 15,264                      |

**Alternative 3.** The total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper is equal to 95% of the updated acceptable biological catch level. The updated acceptable biological

catch level and overfishing limit are inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program’s Fishing Effort Survey.

| Year | OFL (lbs gw) | ABC (lbs gw) | ACL (lbs gw) | Annual OY (lbs gw) |
|------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
| 2023 | 156,844      | 119,654      | 113,956      | 113,956            |
| 2024 | 156,035      | 121,272      | 115,208      | 115,208            |
| 2025 | 155,227      | 122,889      | 116,745      | 116,745            |
| 2026 | 151,993      | 122,889      | 116,745      | 116,745            |

| Year | OFL (numbers of fish) | ABC (numbers of fish) | ACL (numbers of fish) | Annual OY (numbers of fish) |
|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2023 | 20,034                | 15,264                | 14,501                | 14,501                      |
| 2024 | 19,080                | 15,264                | 14,501                | 14,501                      |
| 2025 | 19,080                | 15,264                | 14,501                | 14,501                      |
| 2026 | 19,080                | 15,264                | 14,501                | 14,501                      |

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

| Year | OFL (lbs gw) | ABC (lbs gw) | ACL (lbs gw) | Annual OY (lbs gw) |
|------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
| 2023 | 156,844      | 119,654      | 107,959      | 107,959            |
| 2024 | 156,035      | 121,272      | 109,145      | 109,145            |
| 2025 | 155,227      | 122,889      | 110,600      | 110,600            |
| 2026 | 151,993      | 122,889      | 110,600      | 110,600            |

| Year | OFL (numbers of fish) | ABC (numbers of fish) | ACL (numbers of fish) | Annual OY (numbers of fish) |
|------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2023 | 20,034                | 15,264                | 13,738                | 13,738                      |
| 2024 | 19,080                | 15,264                | 13,738                | 13,738                      |
| 2025 | 19,080                | 15,264                | 13,738                | 13,738                      |
| 2026 | 19,080                | 15,264                | 13,738                | 13,738                      |

**Discussion:**

The updated ABC and OFL recommendations from the SSC are based on the results of the SEDAR 36 Update 2020 snowy grouper stock assessment. The assessment included updated

estimates of recreational fishing effort resulting from the Fishing Effort Survey (FES; Sections 1.5 and 1.6).

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** would retain the current ABC, OFL, total ACL, and annual OY implemented through Regulatory Amendment 20 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP; SAFMC 2015). **Preferred Alternative 2** would implement the ABC and OFL recommended by the SSC and would have ABC=ACL=OY. **Alternatives 3 and 4** would also adopt the ABC and OFL recommended by the SSC but would add a 5% and 10% buffer, respectively, between the ABC and total ACL and annual OY.

### 2.1.2 Comparison of Alternatives:

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** would no longer be based on the best scientific information available (BSIA) and, therefore, is not a viable alternative for consideration in this plan amendment because of the results from SEDAR 36 Update and the recommendations from the SSC. Relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Alternative 2** through **Alternative 4** would be expected to end overfishing as they do not exceed the SSC's recommended ABCs and OFLs and would be expected to result in positive biological effects to the snowy grouper stock. **Preferred Alternative 2** could result in the least biological benefit to the snowy grouper stock as there would be no buffer between the SSC's recommended ABCs and the total ACLs and OYs. Biological benefits resulting from **Alternatives 3 and 4** would increase as the buffer increases. Although **Preferred Alternative 2** would allow the greatest amount of harvest of the action alternatives considered, it is equal to the SSC's ABC recommendation and BSIA and represents a catch level that does not result in overfishing and is consistent with rebuilding within the timeline selected in Action 1.

Reducing the ABCs, total ACLs and OYs from the current level, as proposed under **Preferred Alternative 2** through **Alternative 4**, would result in smaller ACLs (Action 3) for the commercial and recreational sectors. As such, the ACLs would be constraining on the sectors thereby resulting in reduced landings. Total short-term economic benefits for both commercial and recreational vessels would be highest under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, followed in turn by **Preferred Alternative 2, Alternative 3, and Alternative 4.**

## 2.2 Action 2. Revise sector allocations and annual catch limits for snowy grouper

### 2.2.1 Alternatives

Note: The revised sector annual catch limits in Alternatives 1 (No Action) through 4 reflect the revised total annual catch limit in Alternative 2 of Action 1. The revised total annual catch limit includes recreational landings from the MRIP using the FES method used in the latest assessment (SEDAR 36 Update 2020).

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Retain the current commercial sector and recreational sector allocations as 83% and 17%, respectively, of the revised total annual catch limit for snowy grouper. Apply these percentages to the revised total annual catch limit.

| Year  | Total ACL (lbs gw) | Total Commercial ACL (lbs gw) 83% | Season 1 (70%) | Season 2 (30%) |
|-------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| 2023  | 119,654            | 99,313                            | 69,518         | 29,794         |
| 2024  | 121,272            | 100,656                           | 70,459         | 30,197         |
| 2025  | 122,889            | 101,999                           | 71,399         | 30,599         |
| 2026* | 122,889            | 101,999                           | 71,399         | 30,599         |

| Year  | Total ACL (numbers of fish) | Recreational ACL (numbers of fish) <sup>2</sup> 17% |
|-------|-----------------------------|---|
| 2023  | 15,264                      | 2,278   |
| 2024  | 15,264                      | 2,309   |
| 2025  | 15,264                      | 2,339   |
| 2026* | 15,264                      | 2,339   |

\* The 2026 ACL would remain in place until modified.

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Allocate 87.55% of the revised total annual catch limit for snowy grouper to the commercial sector and 12.45% of the revised total annual catch limit for snowy grouper to the recreational sector.

---

<sup>2</sup> ABC/OFL recommendations in pounds whole weight are converted to pounds gutted weight using a 1.18 NMFS conversion factor. According to SEDAR 36 Update, 95.4% of total removals of snowy grouper are landings and 4.6% are dead discards. Landings recommendations have been calculated to account for dead discards. Recreational allocations in numbers of fish were determined using an average weight from 2016-2018 from SEDAR 36 Update (8.93 lbs gw).

| Year  | Total ACL (lbs gw) | Total Commercial ACL (lbs gw)<br>87.55% | Season 1 (70%) | Season 2 (30%) |
|-------|--------------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| 2023  | 119,654            | 104,757                                 | 73,330         | 31,427         |
| 2024  | 121,272            | 106,174                                 | 74,322         | 31,852         |
| 2025  | 122,889            | 107,589                                 | 75,313         | 32,277         |
| 2026* | 122,889            | 107,589                                 | 75,313         | 32,277         |

| Year  | Total ACL (numbers of fish) | Recreational ACL (numbers of fish) <sup>2</sup><br>12.45% |
|-------|-----------------------------|---|
| 2023  | 15,264                      | 1,668   |
| 2024  | 15,264                      | 1,691   |
| 2025  | 15,264                      | 1,713   |
| 2026* | 15,264                      | 1,713   |

\* The 2026 ACL would remain in place until modified.

**Alternative 3.** Allocate 73.36% of the revised total annual catch limit for snowy grouper to the commercial sector and 26.64% of the revised total annual catch limit for snowy grouper to the recreational sector.

| Year  | Total ACL (lbs gw) | Total Commercial ACL (lbs gw)<br>73.36% | Season 1 (70%) | Season 2 (30%) |
|-------|--------------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| 2023  | 119,654            | 87,778                                  | 61,445         | 26,333         |
| 2024  | 121,272            | 88,965                                  | 62,276         | 26,690         |
| 2025  | 122,889            | 90,151                                  | 63,106         | 27,045         |
| 2026* | 122,889            | 90,151                                  | 63,106         | 27,045         |

| Year  | Total ACL (numbers of fish) | Recreational ACL (numbers of fish) <sup>2</sup><br>26.64% |
|-------|-----------------------------|---|
| 2023  | 15,264                      | 3,570   |
| 2024  | 15,264                      | 3,618   |
| 2025  | 15,264                      | 3,666   |
| 2026* | 15,264                      | 3,666   |

\* The 2026 ACL would remain in place until modified.

**Discussion:**

The Council’s [Allocations Trigger Policy](#) states the Council will review sector allocations upon completion of a stock assessment. In addition, recreational landings estimates have been revised to adopt the new FES methodology (Section 1.6). This action allows the Council to consider how

to allocate the total ACL between the commercial and recreational sectors from 2023 onwards under the revised catch levels.

The current sector allocations for snowy grouper were implemented through Regulatory Amendment 20 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2015). The Council used the average landings from 1986 through 2005 to determine the 83% commercial 17% recreational allocation. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would retain the allocation percentages but apply them to the updated ACL determination in Action 2. **Alternative 2** would use the average landings of updated (FES recreational landings) from 1986-2005 to determine the allocation percentages and apply those percentages to the updated ACL determination in Action 1.

**Alternative 3** would use the allocations formula adopted through the Comprehensive ACL Amendment (SAFMC 2011) for unassessed species. This formula has been used to allocate the total ACL for some assessed species such as golden tilefish and red porgy. The formula is as follows:

$$\text{Sector Allocation Percentage} = ((\text{sector's mean landings 2006 to 2008}) * 0.5) + ((\text{sector's mean landings 1986 to 2008}) * 0.5)$$

### 2.2.2 Comparison of Alternatives:

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, sector allocations would remain at 83 percent of the ACL for the commercial sector and 17 percent for the total recreational sector. **Preferred Alternative 2** would result in a shift of 4.55 percent to the commercial sector. **Alternative 3** would result in a shift of 9.64 percent to the recreational sector. Because the difference between percentages for **Alternative 1, 2, and 3** differ little, biological effects between alternatives are not expected to differ substantially.

Allocations that allow for more fish to be landed can result in increased positive social and economic effects. For the commercial sector the highest economic and social benefits result from **Preferred Alternative 2** followed by **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Alternative 3**. For the recreational sector the highest economic and social benefits result from **Alternative 3**, followed by **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2**.

## 2.3 Action 3. Modify the snowy grouper recreational season

### 2.3.1 Alternatives

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The recreational snowy grouper season is May 1 to August 31.

**Preferred Alternative 2.** The recreational snowy grouper season is May 1 to June 30.

**Alternative 3.** The recreational snowy grouper season is July 1 to August 30.

#### Discussion:

Updated acceptable biological catch levels recommended by the SSC, based on the SEDAR 36 Update (2020) will result in a reduction in harvest. The season is currently monitored in waves, with each wave containing 2 months and a total of 6 waves in the calendar year. The current season spans two waves, wave 3 and 4 of the Marine Recreational Information Program's survey. The average number of snowy grouper landed from the MREP FES from 2015-2019 were used to predict the season length under updated catch levels based on **Preferred Alternative 2** from **Action 2**. These landings indicated that the length of the season would be approximately less than one two-month wave.

**Alternative 2** would shorten the season to a single two-month wave, with the season open during wave 3 from May 1 through June 30. **Alternative 3** would also shorten the season to a single two-month wave, but the season would be open during wave 4, July 1 through August 30.

### 2.3.2 Comparison of Alternatives:

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, the current four-month season, it would be expected that the recreational ACL will be met before the end of the recreational season as a result of the reduced catch levels. This alternative would rely on the effectiveness of the recreational accountability measure to ensure the recreational ACL is not exceeded. Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** biological benefits are expected to be greater under **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** as they shorten the season to 2 months, constraining harvest and potentially preventing ACL overages. **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** may cause an increase in snowy grouper discards as recreational fishermen continue to fish for blueline tilefish (See section 4.1.1 for co-catch information).

Fewer economic benefits can be expected when a sector ACL is not fully harvested, therefore under **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** there is potential for the ACL to not be fully harvested. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** provides the longest season and therefore the greatest opportunity to harvest the full ACL. Participation in the South Atlantic snowy grouper fishery is typically peaks in May and August but can vary regionally, therefore **Preferred Alternative 2** would allow for recreational access when during a time when participation is high with potentially lower chance of accountability measures being triggered when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. **Alternative 2** and **3** would be less likely to exceed the recreational ACL and trigger the recreational accountability measures, which generally have a negative social effect. **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** also reduce harvest during the spawning

season when compared to a four-month season, which could contribute to rebuilding goals and provide long-term social benefits. See section 4.3.1 for spawning season information.

Administrative effects may be greater with a shorter season, as overages and thus the actions needed to prevent or correct for them would be more likely for either single wave alternative (**Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3**). There is currently an in-season accountability measure for the recreational snowy grouper fishery that closes the current season if the recreational ACL is met or expected to be met. If this closure instituted, then the closure would need to be announced and NMFS would need to determine if the current post-season accountability measure was also triggered.

DRAFT

## 2.4 Action 4. Revise the snowy grouper recreational accountability measures

### 2.4.1 Alternatives

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** If recreational landings reach or are projected to reach the recreational annual catch limit, recreational harvest of snowy grouper is closed for the remainder of the fishing year, regardless of stock status, unless National Marine Fisheries Service determines that no closure is necessary based on the best scientific information available.

If recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, then during the following fishing year recreational landings will be monitored for a persistence in increased landings. If the total annual catch limit is exceeded that year and snowy grouper are overfished, the length of the recreational fishing season and the recreational annual catch limit are reduced by the amount of the recreational annual catch limit overage.

**Alternative 2.** For the snowy grouper recreational sector, National Marine Fisheries Service will annually announce the recreational fishing season start and end dates in the *Federal Register* and by other methods, as deemed appropriate. The fishing season will start on (date) and end on the date National Marine Fisheries Service projects the recreational annual catch limit will be met.

**Preferred Alternative 3.** Remove the current recreational in-season accountability measures. If recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, reduce the length of the following year's recreational fishing season by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational annual catch limit from being exceeded in the following year. However, the length of the recreational season will not be reduced if the Regional Administrator determines, using the best scientific information available, that it is not necessary.

**Alternative 4.** Retain the current recreational in-season accountability measures. If recreational landings exceed the recreational annual catch limit, reduce the length of the following year's recreational fishing season by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational annual catch limit from being exceeded in the following year. However, the length of the recreational season will not be reduced if the Regional Administrator determines, using the best scientific information available, that it is not necessary.

#### **Discussion:**

Due to the reductions in allowable harvest proposed in this plan amendment and snowy grouper's overfished status, it is likely that recreational AMs would be triggered for this species in the future.

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** would retain an in-season closure and a potential payback provision for an overage of the sector ACL, if the total ACL were exceeded, that would reduce the sector ACL by the amount of the overage. Since the commercial AM is likely to be triggered under the

proposed reduced catch level, the total ACL may become a “moving target” if payback is triggered in the commercial sector.

Under **Alternative 2**, the season would begin May 1 (Preferred Alternative 2, Action 3). NMFS would announce the length of the recreational season annually prior to the start date each year, with an end date corresponding to when the recreational ACL is projected to be met for that year.

**Preferred Alternative 3** would remove the potential “double penalty” of a reduction in the season length and a payback of the overage if the total ACL was exceeded. Under this alternative, the AM would not be tied to the total ACL or stock status, but rather only to the recreational ACL. Since the commercial AM is likely to be triggered under the proposed catch level reductions, the proposed modification would ensure that overages in the commercial sector do not in turn affect the catch level for the recreational sector. The reduced season length would apply to the fishing season in the year following an overage. **Alternative 4** would retain the current in-season AM, but like **Preferred Alternative 3**, the post-season AM would not be tied to the total ACL or stock status, but rather only to the recreational ACL.

#### 2.4.2 Comparison of Alternatives:

Biological benefits would be expected to be greater for the alternative that provides the most timely and realistic option chosen to trigger and implement an AM. Biological benefits to the snowy grouper stock would be greatest under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, followed by **Alternative 2**, **Alternative 4**, and **Preferred Alternative 3**.

By curtailing harvest and fishing activity to prevent ACL overages, recreational AMs can indirectly negatively affect net revenues of for-hire operations and consumer surplus on recreational fishing trips. Over the long term, these measures help reduce the risk of overfishing a stock to the point of depletion, which can result in long-term economic benefits through sustained harvest and fishing activity as well as the foregone need for more stringent restrictive management measures needed to rebuild a depleted stock. In terms of potential short-term negative economic effects to the recreational sector, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would have the highest potential negative economic effects, followed by **Alternative 2**, **Alternative 4**, and **Preferred Alternative 3**.

AMs can also have direct and indirect social effects because, when triggered, it can restrict harvest in the current or subsequent fishing seasons. While the negative effects are usually short-term, they may at times induce other indirect effects through changes in fishing behavior or business operations that could have long-term social effects. In terms of potential short-term social effects to fishing communities, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would have the highest negative social effects, followed by **Alternative 2**, **Alternative 4**, and **Preferred Alternative 3**.

Administrative burdens such as data monitoring, rulemaking, outreach, and enforcement would be similar for **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternative 2**, **Preferred Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 4**.

# Chapter 3. Affected Environment

## *TO BE COMPLETED*

This section describes the affected environment in the proposed project area. The affected environment is divided into four major components:

- **Habitat environment** (Section 3.1)
- **Biological and Ecological environment** (Section 3.2)
- **Economic and Social environment** (Sections 3.3)
- **Administrative environment** (Section 3.4)

### 3.1 Habitat Environment

Information on the habitat utilized by species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit (Snapper Grouper FMU) and managed through the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region is included in Volume II of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP; SAFMC 2009) and the FEP II Dashboard (under revision) which are incorporated here by reference. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) designated essential fish habitat (EFH) and EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (EFH-HAPC) are presented in the [SAFMC User Guide](#). Web Services and spatial representations of EFH and other habitat related layers are accessible through the Council's [SAFMC Atlas](#), a platform for searching and visualizing GIS data relevant to the Council's mission and download of GIS layers and information on regional partners is available through the [SAFMC Digital Dashboard](#).

#### 3.1.1 Essential Fish Habitat

EFH is defined in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) as “those waters and substrates necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity” (16 U.S. C. 1802(10)). EFH for species in the Snapper Grouper FMU includes coral reefs, live/hard bottom, submerged aquatic vegetation, artificial reefs and medium to high profile outcroppings on and around the shelf break zone from shore to at least 600 ft (but to at least 2000 ft for wreckfish) where the annual water temperature range is sufficiently warm to maintain adult populations of members of this largely tropical complex. EFH includes the spawning area in the water column above the adult habitat and the additional

---

<sup>2</sup> The FEP can be found at: <http://safmc.net/ecosystem-management/fishery-ecosystem-plan/>.

pelagic environment, including *Sargassum*, required for larval survival and growth up to and including settlement. In addition, the Gulf Stream is an EFH because it provides a mechanism to disperse snapper grouper larvae.

For specific life stages of estuarine dependent and nearshore snapper grouper species, EFH includes areas inshore of the 100-foot contour, such as attached macroalgae; submerged rooted vascular plants (seagrasses); estuarine emergent vegetated wetlands (saltmarshes, brackish marsh); tidal creeks; estuarine scrub/shrub (mangrove fringe); oyster reefs and shell banks; unconsolidated bottom (soft sediments); artificial reefs; and coral reefs and live/hard bottom.

### 3.1.2 Habitat Areas of Particular Concern

EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (EFH-HAPCs) for species in the snapper-grouper management unit include medium to high profile offshore hard bottoms where spawning normally occurs; localities of known or likely periodic spawning aggregations; nearshore hard bottom areas; The Point, The Ten Fathom Ledge, and Big Rock (North Carolina); The Charleston Bump (South Carolina); mangrove habitat; seagrass habitat; oyster/shell habitat; all coastal inlets; all state-designated nursery habitats of particular importance to snapper grouper (e.g., Primary and Secondary Nursery Areas designated in North Carolina); pelagic and benthic *Sargassum*; Hoyt Hills for wreckfish; the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern; all hermatypic coral habitats and reefs; manganese outcroppings on the Blake Plateau; and Council-designated Artificial Reef Special Management Zones (SMZs). Areas that meet the criteria for EFH-HAPCs include habitats required during each life stage (including egg, larval, post-larval, juvenile, and adult stages).

EFH-HAPCs for golden tilefish includes irregular bottom comprised of troughs and terraces inter-mingled with sand, mud, or shell hash bottom. Mud-clay bottoms in depths of 150-300 meters are HAPC. Golden tilefish are generally found in 80-540 meters, but most commonly found in 200-meter depths.

EFH-HAPC for blueline tilefish includes irregular bottom habitats along the shelf edge in 45-65 meters depth; shelf break; or upper slope along the 100-fathom contour (150-225 meters); hardbottom habitats characterized as rock overhangs, rock outcrops, manganese-phosphorite rock slab formations, or rocky reefs in the South Atlantic Bight; and the Georgetown Hole (Charleston Lumps) off Georgetown, SC.

EFH-HAPCs for the snapper grouper complex include the following deepwater marine protected areas (MPAs) as designated in Snapper Grouper Amendment 14: Snowy Grouper Wreck MPA, Northern South Carolina MPA, Edisto MPA, Charleston Deep Artificial Reef MPA, Georgia MPA, North Florida MPA, St. Lucie Hump MPA, and East Hump MPA.

The Council established the special management zone (SMZ) designation process in 1983 in the Snapper Grouper FMP, and SMZs have been designated in federal waters off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida since that time. The purpose of the original SMZ designation process, and the subsequent specification of SMZs, was to protect snapper grouper populations at the relatively small, permitted artificial reef sites and “create fishing opportunities that would not otherwise exist.” Thus, the SMZ designation process was centered around

protecting the relatively small habitats, which are known to attract desirable snapper grouper species.

Similarly, in the Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1 (CE-BA 1; SAFMC 2010), the Council designated EFH areas and EFH-HAPCs under the Snapper Grouper FMP. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, FMPs are required to describe and identify EFH and to minimize the adverse effects of fishing on such habitat to the extent practicable. An EFH-HAPC designation adds an additional layer to the EFH designation. Under the Snapper Grouper FMP, EFH-HAPCs are designated based upon ecological importance, susceptibility to human-induced environmental degradation, susceptibility to stress from development, or rarity of habitat type. The Council determined in CE-BA 1 that the Council-designated SMZs met the criteria to be EFH-HAPCs for species included in the Snapper Grouper FMP. Since CE-BA 1, the Council has designated additional SMZs in the Snapper Grouper FMP including Spawning SMZs. The SMZ and EFH-HAPC designations serve similar purposes in pursuit of identifying and protecting valuable and unique habitat for the benefit of fish populations, which are important to both fish and fishers. Therefore, the Council determined that a designated SMZ meets the criteria for an EFH-HAPC designation, and the Council intends that all SMZs designated under the Snapper Grouper FMP also be designated as EFH-HAPCs under the Snapper Grouper FMP.

## 3.2 Biological and Ecological Environment

### 3.2.1 Snowy Grouper

#### 3.2.1.1 Life History

The snowy grouper, *Epinephelus niveatus*, is a commercially important deep-water species that occurs in the western Atlantic from Massachusetts to Brazil, including Bermuda, Cuba, the Bahamas, and the Gulf of Mexico (Carpenter 2002). Stray specimens have been collected in the Canadian Atlantic (Scott and Scott 1988). Along the coast of the southeast United States, adult snowy grouper are predominantly found on the upper continental slope (> 75 m; Lee et al. 1985) at depths of 116-259 m (Low and Ulrich 1983; Moore and Labisky 1984; Parker and Ross 1986), whereas juveniles are more common at shallower depths (Moore and Labisky 1984). Low and Ulrich (1983) and Wyanski et al. (2000) noted a positive correlation between total length (TL) and water depth off South Carolina. Snowy grouper feed on fish, crabs and other crustaceans, squid, and snails (Heemstra and Randall 1993). Information on predators of snowy grouper is limited.

Snowy grouper are protogynous; fish begin life as females and the older and larger fish in the population are males. Female snowy grouper reach sexual maturity between the ages of three and eight years (Wyanski et al. 2000), most by the age of five years (Moore and Labisky 1984) to seven years (Wyanski et al. 2000). Wyanski et al. (2000) found evidence that the number of males in the population decreased between the 1970s and the 1990s off North Carolina and South Carolina, which may have been a function of the removal of older and larger snowy grouper through fishing pressure. The maximum age of snowy grouper reported by Wyanski et al. (2013) is 35 years. The spawning season for snowy grouper is from April through September (Wyanski et al. 2000, 2013). Snowy grouper are slow growing, reaching a size of 1.2 m (4 ft) in length and 30 kg (66 lbs) in weight (Heemstra and Randall 1993).

### 3.2.1.2 Stock Status

The Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process is a cooperative Fishery Management Council initiative to improve the quality and reliability of fishery stock assessments in the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and U.S. Caribbean. SEDAR seeks improvements in the scientific quality of stock assessments, constituent and stakeholder participation in assessment development, transparency in the assessment process, and a rigorous and independent scientific review of completed stock assessments.

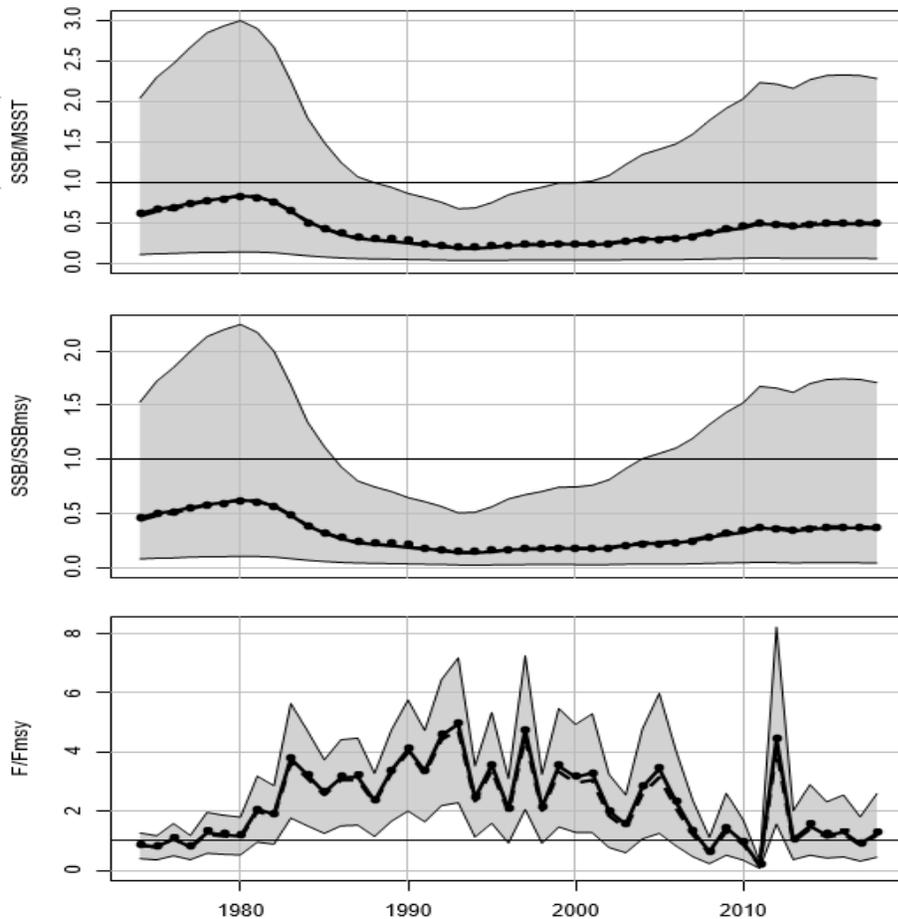


SEDAR is organized around three public workshops. First is the Data Workshop, during which fisheries monitoring and life history data are reviewed and compiled. Second is the Assessment Workshop, which may be conducted via a workshop and several webinars, during which assessment models are developed and population parameters are estimated using the information provided from the Data Workshop. Third and final is the Review Workshop, during which independent experts review the input data, assessment methods, and assessment products. The completed assessment, including the reports of all three workshops and all supporting documentation, are then forwarded to the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The SSC considers whether the assessment represents the best available science and develops fishing level recommendations for Council consideration.

In 2004, the snowy grouper stock was assessed through the SEDAR process as a benchmark assessment (SEDAR 4). The assessment indicated that the stock was overfished and undergoing overfishing. The Council and NMFS implemented management measures to end overfishing in Amendment 13C to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper-Grouper FMP). In addition, Amendment 15A to the Snapper-Grouper FMP implemented a 34-year rebuilding plan that began in 2006.

In 2013, the snowy grouper stock was assessed through SEDAR 36 as a standard assessment. The assessment indicated that the snowy grouper stock was no longer undergoing overfishing, remained overfished, and was rebuilding. In response to SEDAR 36, the Council and NMFS modified the annual catch limits and management measures through Regulatory Amendment 20 to the Snapper-Grouper FMP. Also, two commercial fishing seasons were implemented through Regulatory Amendment 27 to the Snapper-Grouper FMP.

The most recent update assessment (SEDAR 36 Update) was finalized in 2021, using data through 2018. The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee reviewed the SEDAR 36 Update and determined that the assessment is based on the best scientific information available. The 2021 stock assessment determined that South Atlantic snowy grouper remains overfished because  $SSB_{2018}$  (690 mt) is less than the minimum stock size threshold (MSST) (1,431 mt), and is subject to overfishing because  $F_{2016-2018}$  (0.114) is greater than the maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT) (0.101) (Figure 1). Therefore, NMFS has determined management action is necessary for snowy grouper in the South Atlantic region as the stock is undergoing overfishing and remains overfished.



**Figure 3.2.1.2.** Estimated time series of spawning stock biomass (SSB) and fishing mortality (F) relative to benchmarks. Solid line indicates estimates from base run of the Beaufort Assessment Model; gray error bands indicate 5<sup>th</sup> and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the ensemble modeling. Top panel: SSB relative to the minimum stock size threshold (MSST); if less than 1, stock is overfished. Middle panel: SSB relative to SSB<sub>MSY</sub>; if less than 1, stock is overfished. Bottom panel: F relative to F<sub>MSY</sub>; if > 1 stock is undergoing overfishing. *Source: SEDAR 36 Update (2020).*

As discussed in the stock assessment report, an updated estimate of natural mortality (M) at age is likely the primary driver of any differences between SEDAR 36 and the SEDAR 36 Update. The lower M is based on new information that was incorporated into the SEDAR 36 Update. The new information indicates that snowy grouper live longer than considered in SEDAR 36 based on recent bomb-radiocarbon validated estimates. The numerical estimates of the MSST and the MFMT have been revised through this assessment based on the lower M, even though the status determination criteria equations remained the same.

### 3.2.1.3 Landings

#### *Commercial*

Commercial landings have been increasing within the last 5 years. Commercial landings are tracked in pounds gutted weight. From 2015-2019 the commercial sector used on average 107.8% of the commercial ACL each fishing year (Table 3.2.1).

**Table 3.2.1.** South Atlantic snowy grouper commercial landings and ACLs in lbs gw, 2015-2019. Snowy grouper ACL and percent of the ACL landed are presented in lbs gw.

| Year | Season                           | ACL Closure        | Landings (lbs gw) | ACL (gw) | % ACL |
|------|----------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------|-------|
| 2019 | Jan 1 – June 31, July 1 - Dec 31 | August 3, 2019     | 151,889           | 144,315  | 105.2 |
| 2018 | Jan 1 – June 31, July 1 - Dec 31 | July 24, 2018      | 146,874           | 144,315  | 101.8 |
| 2017 | Jan 1 – June 31, July 1 - Dec 31 | June 22, 2017      | 135,825           | 135,380  | 100.3 |
| 2016 | Jan 1 – June 31, July 1 - Dec 31 | June 14, 2016      | 149,385           | 125,760  | 118.8 |
| 2015 | Jan 1 – June 31, July 1 - Dec 31 | September 22, 2015 | 130,088           | 115,451  | 112.7 |

Source: SEFSC Commercial ACL Database [April 26, 2022]

### *Recreational*

Recreational landings have been variable within the last 5 years. Recreational landings are tracked in numbers of fish. From 2015-2019. The recreational sector used on average 76.9% of the recreational ACL during the open season.

**Table 3.2.2.** South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings and ACLs in numbers of fish, 2015-2019. Snowy grouper ACL and percent of the ACL landed are presented in numbers of fish.

| Year | Season         | ACL Closure       | Landings (numbers of fish) | ACL (numbers of fish) | % ACL |
|------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| 2019 | May 1 - Aug 31 | none              | 1,946                      | 5,315                 | 37.0  |
| 2018 | May 1 - Aug 32 | none              | 2,766                      | 4,983                 | 56.0  |
| 2017 | May 1 - Aug 33 | none              | 1,834                      | 4,819                 | 38.1  |
| 2016 | May 1 - Aug 34 | none              | 9,746                      | 4,483                 | 214.4 |
| 2015 | May 1 - Aug 35 | September 1, 2015 | 1,621                      | 4,152                 | 39.0  |

Source: SEFSC Commercial ACL Database [April 26, 2022]

Note: Recreational landings are estimated using the MRIP CHTS method.

### **3.2.2 Bycatch**

The implications of bycatch on the snowy grouper stock and snapper grouper fishery are discussed in Appendix G (Bycatch Practicability Analysis [BPA]).

### **3.2.3 Other Species Affected**

This amendment indirectly affects other species in the Snapper Grouper FMU (blueline and golden tilefish) that are caught while fishing for snowy grouper. For summary information on other snapper grouper species that may be affected by the actions in this plan amendment, refer to Section 3.2.5 in [Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27](#) to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2019a).

3) I am fine with your additions to Section 2.3.2 (Administrative Effects): Just put the word "preferred" in front of "Alternative 2".

Administrative effects may be greater with a shorter season, as overages and thus the actions needed to prevent or correct for them would be more likely for either single wave alternative (**PREFERRED Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3**). There is currently an in-season accountability

measure for the recreational snowy grouper fishery that closes the current season if the recreational ACL is met or expected to be met. If this closure instituted, then the closure would need to be announced and NMFS would need to determine if the current post-season accountability measure was also triggered.

### 3.2.4 Protected Species

NMFS manages marine protected species in the Southeast region under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). There are 29 ESA-listed species or Distinct Population Segments (DPS) of marine mammals, sea turtles, fish, and corals managed by NMFS that may occur in federal waters of the South Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico. There are 91 stocks of marine mammals managed within the Southeast region plus the addition of the stocks such as North Atlantic right whales (NARW), and humpback, sei, fin, minke, and blue whales that regularly or sometimes occur in Southeast region managed waters for a portion of the year (Hayes et al. 2017). All marine mammals in U.S. waters are protected under the MMPA. The MMPA requires that each commercial fishery be classified by the number of marine mammals they seriously injure or kill. NMFS's List of Fisheries (LOF)<sup>3</sup> classifies U.S. commercial fisheries into three categories based on the number of incidental mortality or serious injury they cause to marine mammals.

Five of the marine mammal species (sperm, sei, fin, blue, and NARW) protected by the MMPA, are also listed as endangered under the ESA. In addition to those five marine mammals, six species or DPSs of sea turtles [green (the North Atlantic DPS and the South Atlantic DPS), hawksbill, Kemp's ridley, leatherback, and the Northwest Atlantic DPS of loggerhead]; nine species or DPSs of fish (the smalltooth sawfish; five DPSs of Atlantic sturgeon; Nassau grouper; oceanic whitetip shark, and giant manta ray); and seven species of coral (elkhorn coral, staghorn coral, rough cactus coral, pillar coral, lobed star coral, mountainous star coral, and boulder coral) are also protected under the ESA and occur within the action area of the snapper grouper fishery. Portions of designated critical habitat for NARW, the Northwest Atlantic DPS of loggerhead sea turtles, and *Acropora* corals occur within the Council's jurisdiction.

NMFS completed a formal consultation and resulting biological opinion (Bi-Op) on the conservation regulations under the ESA and the authorization of the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery in federal waters under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, including the fishery managed by the FMP, on threatened and endangered species and designated critical habitat dated December 1, 2016. NMFS concluded that the activities addressed in the consultation are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any threatened or endangered species.

Since completing the December 2016 Bi-Op, NMFS published several final rules that listed additional species and designated critical habitat. NMFS has reinitiated formal consultation to address these listings and concluded the authorization of the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery in federal waters during the re-initiation period will not violate ESA Sections 7(a)(2) or 7(d). For summary information on the protected species that may be adversely affected by the snapper grouper fishery and how they are affected refer to Section 3.2.5 in Vision Blueprint

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/marine-mammal-protection-act-list-fisheries/>

Regulatory Amendment 27 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (SAFMC 2019a).

DRAFT

## 3.3 Economic Environment

### 3.3.1 Commercial Sector

Economic information pertaining to the commercial snapper grouper fishery is provided in Amendment 29 (SAFMC 2020), Buck (2018), and Overstreet et al. (2018) and is incorporated herein by reference. Select updates to this information specific to snowy grouper are provided below. The major sources of data summarized in this section are the NMFS Southeast Regional Office (SERO) Permits Information Management System (PIMS) and the SEFSC's Socioeconomic Panel<sup>4</sup> data set. Inflation adjusted values are reported in 2021 dollars.

#### Permits

Any fishing vessel that harvests and sells any of the snapper grouper species from the South Atlantic EEZ must have a valid South Atlantic commercial snapper grouper permit, which is a limited access permit. As of August 26, 2021, there were 579 valid or renewable<sup>5</sup> South Atlantic Snapper Grouper unlimited permits and 112 valid or renewable 225-lb trip-limited permits. Commercial harvest of snapper grouper species in the EEZ may only be sold to dealers with a federal dealer permit. As of August 26, 2021, there were 379 entities with a federal Gulf and South Atlantic Dealers (GSAD) permit.

#### Landings, Value, and Effort

The number of federally permitted commercial vessels that landed South Atlantic snowy grouper was fairly stable from 2015 through 2019 (Table 3.3.1.1). Landings of snowy grouper increased substantially from 2015 through 2016, then leveled off through 2019. On average (2015 through 2019), vessels that landed snowy grouper did so on approximately 21% of their South Atlantic trips and snowy grouper accounted for approximately 6.1% of their annual all species revenue, including revenue from Gulf of Mexico trips (Table 3.3.1.1 and Table 3.3.1.2). Average all species vessel-level revenue for these vessels decreased from 2015 through 2019 by 18% overall (Table 3.3.1.2). The average annual price per pound gw of snowy grouper steadily increased from \$5.33 (2021 dollars) in 2015 to \$6.17 in 2019, with an annual average of \$5.78.

Estimates of net revenue specific to the vessels affected by this amendment are not readily available; however, it is assumed there is an overlap between these vessels and vessels that participate in the commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery in general. C. Liese (NMFS SEFSC, pers. comm. 2022) generated annual vessel-level estimates of costs (as a percentage of revenue) and net revenue from operations for vessels that harvested snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic. Estimates of producer surplus (PS) can be calculated from the cost information. PS is total annual revenue minus the costs for fuel, other supplies, hired crew, and the opportunity cost of an owner's time as captain. Net revenue from operations, which most closely represents economic profits to the owner(s), is total annual revenue minus

---

<sup>4</sup> This data set is compiled by the SEFSC Social Science Research Group from Federal Logbook System data, supplemented by average prices calculated from the Accumulated Landings System. Because these landings are self-reported, they may diverge slightly from dealer-reported landings presented elsewhere.

<sup>5</sup> A renewable permit is an expired limited access permit that cannot be actively fished, but can be renewed for up to one year after expiration.

the costs for fuel, other supplies, hired crew, vessel repair and maintenance, insurance, overhead, and the opportunity cost of an owner’s time as captain, as well as the vessel’s depreciation. According to C. Liese (NMFS SEFSC, pers. comm. 2022), PS for commercial vessels that harvested South Atlantic snapper grouper species was approximately 38% of their annual gross revenue, on average, from 2014 through 2018. Net revenue from operations was 8% of their annual gross revenue, on average, during this period. Applying these percentages to the results provided in Table 3.3.1.2 would result in an estimated per vessel average annual PS of \$31,341 (2021 dollars) and an average annual net revenue from operations of \$6,598 per year.

**Table 3.3.1.1.** Number of vessels, number of trips, and landings (lbs gw) by year for South Atlantic snowy grouper.

| Year    | # of vessels that caught snowy grouper (> 0 lbs gw) | # of trips that caught snowy grouper | snowy grouper landings (lbs gw) | Other species' landings jointly caught w/ snowy grouper (lbs gw) | # of South Atlantic trips that only caught other species | Other species' landings on South Atlantic trips w/o snowy grouper (lbs gw) | All species landings on Gulf trips (lbs gw) |
|---------|---|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| 2015    | 170   | 1,357                                | 121,619                         | 970,632  | 4,591  | 3,365,564  | 390,840                                     |
| 2016    | 162   | 1,133                                | 142,678                         | 790,698  | 4,619  | 3,272,443  | 272,649                                     |
| 2017    | 152   | 1,042                                | 135,217                         | 684,037  | 4,393  | 2,912,407  | 82,439                                      |
| 2018    | 156   | 1,180                                | 140,660                         | 686,737  | 4,367  | 2,778,507  | 211,386                                     |
| 2019    | 163   | 1,224                                | 142,631                         | 651,792  | 4,367  | 2,529,455  | 196,036                                     |
| Average | 161   | 1,187                                | 136,561                         | 756,779  | 4,467  | 2,971,675  | 230,670                                     |

Source: SEFSC-SSRG Socioeconomic Panel (January 2022 version).

Note 1: South Atlantic trips refer to trips taken in Council jurisdictional waters and Gulf trips refer to trips taken in Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council jurisdictional waters.

**Table 3.3.1.2.** Number of vessels and ex-vessel revenue by year (2021 dollars)\* for South Atlantic snowy grouper.

| Year | # of vessels that caught snowy grouper (> 0 lbs gw) | Dockside revenue from snowy grouper | Dockside revenue from 'other species' jointly caught w/ snowy grouper | Dockside revenue from 'other species' caught on South Atlantic trips w/o snowy grouper | Dockside revenue from 'all species' caught on Gulf trips | Total dockside revenue | Average total dockside revenue per vessel |
|------|---|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|------------------------|---|
| 2015 | 170   | \$647,831                           | \$3,532,034   | \$9,586,753  | \$1,234,085  | \$15,000,703           | \$88,239                                  |
| 2016 | 162   | \$789,232                           | \$3,178,487   | \$9,401,785  | \$956,154  | \$14,325,658           | \$88,430                                  |
| 2017 | 152   | \$802,757                           | \$2,783,097   | \$9,184,467  | \$212,430  | \$12,982,751           | \$85,413                                  |
| 2018 | 156   | \$833,498                           | \$2,664,880   | \$7,963,620  | \$667,629  | \$12,129,626           | \$77,754                                  |

| Year    | # of vessels that caught snowy grouper (> 0 lbs gw) | Dockside revenue from snowy grouper | Dockside revenue from 'other species' jointly caught w/ snowy grouper | Dockside revenue from 'other species' caught on South Atlantic trips w/o snowy grouper | Dockside revenue from 'all species' caught on Gulf trips | Total dockside revenue | Average total dockside revenue per vessel |
|---------|---|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|------------------------|---|
| 2019    | 163   | \$879,469                           | \$2,422,528   | \$7,916,448  | \$605,752  | \$11,824,197           | \$72,541                                  |
| Average | 161   | \$790,558                           | \$2,916,205   | \$8,810,615  | \$735,210  | \$13,252,587           | \$82,475                                  |

Source: SEFSC-SSRG Socioeconomic Panel (January 2022 version).

**Dealers**

The information in Table 3.3.1.3 illustrates the purchasing activities of dealers that bought South Atlantic snowy grouper landings from vessels during 2015 through 2019.<sup>6</sup> Like vessels, dealer participation in particular fisheries is fluid, and not all dealers purchased snowy grouper in each year during this time. On average, from 2015 through 2019, snowy grouper purchases comprised approximately 0.9% of all purchases made by these dealers. The average annual value of total purchases per snowy grouper dealer was fairly stable from 2015 through 2019, with a 5-year low in 2018 (Table 3.3.1.3). Although not shown in the table, the maximum annual value of all purchases made by a single snowy grouper dealer from 2015 through 2019 was \$11 million (2021 dollars) in 2019.

**Table 3.3.1.3. Purchase statistics for dealers that bought South Atlantic snowy grouper landings (2021 dollars).**

| Year    | Number of Dealers | Snowy Grouper landed lbs gw | Snowy Grouper Purchases | Other South Atlantic Purchases | Gulf Purchases | Average purchases value per dealer |
|---------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|
| 2015    | 86                | 140,764                     | \$ 721,770              | \$ 84,384,105                  | \$ 16,251,494  | \$ 1,178,574                       |
| 2016    | 80                | 165,081                     | \$ 861,276              | \$ 94,796,000                  | \$ 16,418,675  | \$ 1,400,949                       |
| 2017    | 76                | 136,400                     | \$ 830,401              | \$ 92,895,602                  | \$ 8,416,862   | \$ 1,343,985                       |
| 2018    | 76                | 147,612                     | \$ 902,925              | \$ 76,626,100                  | \$ 7,586,151   | \$ 1,119,937                       |
| 2019    | 76                | 152,516                     | \$ 941,406              | \$ 82,048,983                  | \$ 15,188,287  | \$ 1,291,825                       |
| Average | 79                | 148,475                     | \$ 851,556              | \$ 86,150,158                  | \$ 12,772,294  | \$ 1,267,054                       |

Source: SEFSC Fishing Communities Web Query Tool (Version May 29, 2022 Years: 2014-2021).

**Imports**

<sup>6</sup> The estimates in this table are based on Accumulated Landings System data, which tends to produce slightly different estimates of landings and ex-vessel value for greater amberjack than the SEFSC-SSRG socio-economic panel database.

Imports of seafood products compete in the domestic seafood market and have in fact dominated many segments of the seafood market. Imports affect the price for domestic seafood products and tend to set the price in the market segments in which they dominate. Seafood imports have downstream effects on the local fish market. At the harvest level for grouper species, imports affect the returns to fishermen through the ex-vessel prices they receive for their landings. As substitutes to the domestic production of grouper species, imports tend to cushion the adverse economic effects on consumers resulting from a reduction in domestic landings. The following describes the imports of fish products that directly compete with the domestic harvest of grouper species. Imports data for snowy grouper, in particular, are not available.

Imports of fresh grouper ranged from 10.7 million lbs product weight (pw) to 12.5 million lbs pw from 2015 through 2019. During this time, total revenue from fresh grouper imports ranged from approximately \$50.2 million (2021 dollars) to \$57.5 million. Imports of fresh grouper primarily originated in Mexico, Central America, or South America and entered the U.S. through the ports of Miami, Florida and Tampa, Florida. On average (2015 through 2019), monthly imports of fresh grouper were mostly stable with a peak in July. Imports of frozen grouper ranged from 0.8 million lbs pw to 4.6 million lbs pw during 2015 through 2019. The annual value of these imports ranged from approximately \$1.7 million (2021 dollars) to \$6.2 million, with a peak in 2018. Imports of frozen grouper primarily originated in Mexico and India. The majority of frozen grouper imports entered the U.S. through the ports of Miami, Florida, Tampa, Florida, and New York, New York. On average (2015 through 2019), monthly imports of frozen groupers were greatest during the months of January through March and July.

### **Business Activity**

The commercial harvest and subsequent sales and consumption of fish generates business activity as fishermen expend funds to harvest the fish and consumers spend money on goods and services, such as seafood purchased at a local fish market and served during restaurant visits. These expenditures spur additional business activity in the region(s) where the harvest and purchases are made, such as jobs in local fish markets, grocers, restaurants, and fishing supply establishments. In the absence of the availability of a given species for purchase, consumers would spend their money on substitute goods, such as other finfish or seafood products, and services, such as visits to different food service establishments. As a result, the analysis presented below represents a distributional analysis only; that is, it only shows how economic effects may be distributed through regional markets and should not be interpreted to represent the impacts if these species are not available for harvest or purchase.

Estimates of the U.S. average annual business activity associated with the commercial harvest of snowy grouper in the South Atlantic were derived using the model developed for and applied in NMFS (2021) and are provided in Table 3.3.1.4.<sup>7</sup> This business activity is characterized as jobs (full- and part-time), income impacts (wages, salaries, and self-employed income), output impacts (gross business sales), and value-added impacts, which represent the contribution made to the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP). These impacts should not be added together because this would result in double counting. These results are based on average relationships developed through the analysis of many fishing operations that harvest many different species. Separate

---

<sup>7</sup> A detailed description of the input/output model is provided in NMFS (2011).

models to address individual species are not available. For example, the results provided here apply to a general “reef fish” category, rather than just snowy grouper, and a harvester job is “generated” for approximately every \$35,237 (2021 dollars) in ex-vessel revenue. These results contrast with the number of harvesters (vessels) with recorded landings of snowy grouper presented in Table 3.3.1.1.

**Table 3.3.1.4.** Average annual business activity (2015 through 2019) associated with the commercial harvest of snowy grouper in the South Atlantic. All monetary estimates are in 2021 dollars.\*

| Species       | Average Ex-vessel Value (\$ thousands) | Total Jobs | Harvester Jobs | Output (Sales) Impacts (\$ thousands) | Income Impacts (\$ thousands) | Value Added (\$ thousands) |
|---------------|--|------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| snowy grouper | \$791                                  | 95         | 22             | \$7,840                               | \$2,879                       | \$4,068                    |

Source: Calculated by NMFS SERO using the model developed for and applied in NMFS (2021).

\*Converted to 2021 dollars using the annual, not seasonally adjusted GDP implicit price deflator provided by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

### 3.3.2 Recreational Sector

The recreational sector is comprised of the private and for-hire modes. The private mode includes anglers fishing from shore (all land-based structures) and private/rental boats. The for-hire mode is composed of charter vessels and headboats. Charter vessels generally carry fewer passengers and charge a fee on an entire vessel basis, whereas headboats carry more passengers and payment is per person. The type of service, from a vessel- or passenger-size perspective, affects the flexibility to search different fishing locations during the course of a trip and target different species because larger concentrations of fish are required to satisfy larger groups of anglers.

#### Permits

For anglers to fish for or possess snapper grouper species in or from the South Atlantic EEZ on for-hire vessels, those vessels are required to have an open access South Atlantic Snapper-Grouper Charter/Headboat permit (snapper grouper for-hire permit). As of August 26, 2021, there were 1,930 valid for-hire snapper grouper permits. This sector operates as an open access fishery and not all permitted vessels are necessarily active in the fishery. Some vessel owners may have obtained open access permits as insurance for uncertainties in the fisheries in which they currently operate.

Although the for-hire permit application collects information on the primary method of operation, the permit itself does not identify the permitted vessel as either a headboat or a charter vessel and vessels may operate in both capacities. However, only federally permitted headboats are required to submit harvest and effort information to the NMFS Southeast Region Headboat

Survey (SRHS).<sup>8</sup> Participation in the SRHS is based on determination by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) that the vessel primarily operates as a headboat. As of February 22, 2022, 66 South Atlantic headboats were registered in the SRHS (K. Brennan, NMFS SEFSC, pers. comm. 2022). The majority of these headboats were located in Florida/Georgia (41), followed by North Carolina (14) and South Carolina (11). As a result, of the 1,930 vessels with snapper grouper for-hire permits, up to 66 may primarily operate as headboats.

There are no specific permitting requirements for recreational anglers to harvest snapper grouper species. Instead, anglers are required to possess either a state recreational fishing permit that authorizes saltwater fishing in general or be registered in the federal National Saltwater Angler Registry system, subject to appropriate exemptions. As a result, it is not possible to identify with available data how many individual anglers would be expected to be affected by this proposed amendment.

### Angler Effort

Recreational effort derived from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) database can be characterized in terms of the number of trips as follows:

- Target effort - The number of individual angler trips, regardless of duration, where the intercepted angler indicated that the species or a species in the species group was targeted as either the first or the second primary target for the trip. The species did not have to be caught.
- Catch effort - The number of individual angler trips, regardless of duration and target intent, where the individual species or a species in the species group was caught. The fish did not have to be kept.
- Total recreational trips - The total estimated number of recreational trips in the South Atlantic, regardless of target intent or catch success.

Estimates of snowy grouper target and catch effort are provided in Table 3.3.2.1 and Table 3.3.2.2, respectively. It is important to note that in 2018, MRIP transitioned from the old Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) to a new mail-based fishing effort survey (FES). The estimates presented in Table 3.3.2.1 and Table 3.3.2.2 are calibrated to the MRIP FES and may be greater than estimates that are non-calibrated.<sup>9</sup> As shown in these tables, there were minimal amounts of target or catch trips recorded for snowy grouper in Florida and North Carolina from

---

<sup>8</sup> All federal charter/headboat permit holders, including charter vessel owners or operators, are required to comply with the new Southeast For-Hire Electronic Reporting Program as of January 2021. Under this program, all such permit holders must submit logbooks weekly, by 11:59 pm, local time, the Tuesday following a reporting week (Monday-Sunday). Those vessels selected to report to the SRHS (i.e., federally permitted headboats) will continue to submit their reports under the new requirements directly to the SRHS program. For more information, see: [https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/recreational-fishing-data/southeast-hire-electronic-reporting-program?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/recreational-fishing-data/southeast-hire-electronic-reporting-program?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)

<sup>9</sup> As of August 2018, all directed trip estimate information provided by MRIP (public use survey data and directed trip query results) for the entire time series were updated to account for both the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) design change in 2013, as well as the transition from the CHTS to the FES in 2018. Back-calibrated estimates of directed effort are not available. For more information, see: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/recreational-fishing-data/recreational-fishing-estimate-updates>

2015 through 2019 and none for Georgia and South Carolina. Because snowy grouper is a rare event species in MRIP, these estimates are imprecise and should be viewed accordingly.

**Table 3.3.2.1.** South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational target trips, by mode and state, 2015-2019.\*

|                            | FL    | GA | NC | SC | Total |
|----------------------------|-------|----|----|----|-------|
| <b>Charter Mode</b>        |       |    |    |    |       |
| 2015                       | 0     | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
| 2016                       | 0     | 0  | 76 | 0  | 76    |
| 2017                       | 146   | 0  | 0  | 0  | 146   |
| 2018                       | 0     | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
| 2019                       | 0     | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
| Average                    | 29    | 0  | 15 | 0  | 44    |
| <b>Private/Rental Mode</b> |       |    |    |    |       |
| 2015                       | 0     | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
| 2016                       | 0     | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
| 2017                       | 2,203 | 0  | 0  | 0  | 2,203 |
| 2018                       | 0     | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
| 2019                       | 0     | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
| Average                    | 441   | 0  | 0  | 0  | 441   |
| <b>All Modes</b>           |       |    |    |    |       |
| 2015                       | 0     | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
| 2016                       | 0     | 0  | 76 | 0  | 76    |
| 2017                       | 2,348 | 0  | 0  | 0  | 2,348 |
| 2018                       | 0     | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
| 2019                       | 0     | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0     |
| Average                    | 470   | 0  | 15 | 0  | 485   |

Source: MRIP database, SERO, NMFS (May 2022).

\*Headboat data are unavailable.

Note 1: These estimates are in MRIP FES units.

Note 2: There were no target trips recorded for the shore mode.

**Table 3.3.2.2.** South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational catch trips, by mode and state, 2015-2019.

|                   | FL | GA | NC    | SC | Total |
|-------------------|----|----|-------|----|-------|
| <b>Shore Mode</b> |    |    |       |    |       |
| 2015              | 0  | 0  | 2,341 | 0  | 2,341 |
| 2016              | 0  | 0  | 0     | 0  | 0     |
| 2017              | 0  | 0  | 0     | 0  | 0     |
| 2018              | 0  | 0  | 0     | 0  | 0     |
| 2019              | 0  | 0  | 0     | 0  | 0     |
| Average           | 0  | 0  | 468   | 0  | 468   |

|                            | FL    | GA | NC    | SC | Total |
|----------------------------|-------|----|-------|----|-------|
| <b>Charter Mode</b>        |       |    |       |    |       |
| 2015                       | 447   | 0  | 1,162 | 0  | 1,609 |
| 2016                       | 982   | 0  | 1,164 | 0  | 2,146 |
| 2017                       | 0     | 0  | 2,171 | 0  | 2,171 |
| 2018                       | 530   | 0  | 1,126 | 0  | 1,655 |
| 2019                       | 4,260 | 0  | 1,249 | 0  | 5,509 |
| Average                    | 1,244 | 0  | 1,374 | 0  | 2,618 |
| <b>Private/Rental Mode</b> |       |    |       |    |       |
| 2015                       | 3,801 | 0  | 847   | 0  | 4,648 |
| 2016                       | 632   | 0  | 3,297 | 0  | 3,929 |
| 2017                       | 0     | 0  | 0     | 0  | 0     |
| 2018                       | 1,517 | 0  | 394   | 0  | 1,911 |
| 2019                       | 0     | 0  | 0     | 0  | 0     |
| Average                    | 1,190 | 0  | 908   | 0  | 2,098 |
| <b>All Modes</b>           |       |    |       |    |       |
| 2015                       | 4,248 | 0  | 4,350 | 0  | 8,598 |
| 2016                       | 1,614 | 0  | 4,462 | 0  | 6,075 |
| 2017                       | 0     | 0  | 2,171 | 0  | 2,171 |
| 2018                       | 2,046 | 0  | 1,520 | 0  | 3,566 |
| 2019                       | 4,260 | 0  | 1,249 | 0  | 5,509 |
| Average                    | 2,434 | 0  | 2,750 | 0  | 5,184 |

Source: MRIP database, SERO, NMFS (May 2022).

\*Headboat data are unavailable.

Note 1: These estimates are in MRIP FES units.

Similar analysis of recreational angler trips is not possible for the headboat mode because headboat data are not collected at the angler level. Estimates of effort by the headboat mode are provided in terms of angler days, or the total number of standardized full-day angler trips.<sup>10</sup> From 2015 through 2019, headboat effort in the South Atlantic, in terms of angler days, decreased substantially in Florida through Georgia (39% decline) and in North Carolina (32% decline). In South Carolina, there were modest fluctuations in headboat effort during this time period (Table 3.3.2.3). Headboat effort was the highest, on average, during the summer months of June through August (Table 3.3.2.4).

**Table 3.3.2.3.** South Atlantic headboat angler days and percent distribution by state (2015 through 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Headboat trip categories include half-, three-quarter-, full-, and 2-day trips. A full-day trip equals one angler day, a half-day trip equals .5 angler days, etc. Angler days are not standardized to an hourly measure of effort and actual trip durations may vary within each category.

|                | Angler Days |        |        | Percent Distribution |       |       |
|----------------|-------------|--------|--------|----------------------|-------|-------|
|                | FL/GA*      | NC     | SC     | FL/GA                | NC    | SC    |
| <b>2015</b>    | 194,979     | 22,716 | 39,702 | 75.8%                | 8.8%  | 15.4% |
| <b>2016</b>    | 196,660     | 21,565 | 42,207 | 75.5%                | 8.3%  | 16.2% |
| <b>2017</b>    | 126,126     | 20,170 | 36,914 | 68.8%                | 11.0% | 20.1% |
| <b>2018</b>    | 120,560     | 16,813 | 37,611 | 68.9%                | 9.6%  | 21.5% |
| <b>2019</b>    | 119,712     | 15,546 | 41,470 | 67.7%                | 8.8%  | 23.5% |
| <b>Average</b> | 151,607     | 19,362 | 39,581 | 71.3%                | 9.3%  | 19.3% |

\*East Florida and Georgia are combined for confidentiality purposes.

Source: NMFS SRHS (March, 2021).

**Table 3.3.2.4.** South Atlantic headboat angler days and percent distribution by month (2015 through 2019).

|             | Jan                         | Feb    | Mar    | Apr    | May    | Jun    | Jul    | Aug    | Sep    | Oct    | Nov    | Dec    |
|-------------|-----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
|             | <b>Headboat Angler Days</b> |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| <b>2015</b> | 12,661                      | 11,148 | 21,842 | 25,128 | 25,172 | 36,907 | 42,558 | 30,772 | 15,649 | 13,375 | 9,623  | 12,562 |
| <b>2016</b> | 9,818                       | 12,243 | 23,872 | 22,217 | 27,374 | 37,454 | 45,744 | 29,223 | 17,061 | 9,202  | 12,820 | 13,404 |
| <b>2017</b> | 7,693                       | 10,066 | 13,382 | 17,448 | 19,377 | 27,050 | 33,356 | 21,037 | 6,684  | 8,928  | 8,929  | 9,260  |
| <b>2018</b> | 4,428                       | 9,862  | 14,080 | 15,167 | 13,264 | 29,038 | 30,235 | 26,233 | 9,715  | 8,072  | 7,673  | 7,217  |
| <b>2019</b> | 7,746                       | 8,476  | 15,186 | 15,566 | 19,368 | 26,587 | 32,914 | 20,177 | 6,716  | 9,011  | 8,587  | 6,394  |
| <b>Avg</b>  | 8,469                       | 10,359 | 17,672 | 19,105 | 20,911 | 31,407 | 36,961 | 25,488 | 11,165 | 9,718  | 9,526  | 9,767  |
|             | <b>Percent Distribution</b> |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| <b>2015</b> | 5%                          | 4%     | 8%     | 10%    | 10%    | 14%    | 17%    | 12%    | 6%     | 5%     | 4%     | 5%     |
| <b>2016</b> | 4%                          | 5%     | 9%     | 9%     | 11%    | 14%    | 18%    | 11%    | 7%     | 4%     | 5%     | 5%     |
| <b>2017</b> | 4%                          | 5%     | 7%     | 10%    | 11%    | 15%    | 18%    | 11%    | 4%     | 5%     | 5%     | 5%     |
| <b>2018</b> | 3%                          | 6%     | 8%     | 9%     | 8%     | 17%    | 17%    | 15%    | 6%     | 5%     | 4%     | 4%     |
| <b>2019</b> | 4%                          | 5%     | 9%     | 9%     | 11%    | 15%    | 19%    | 11%    | 4%     | 5%     | 5%     | 4%     |
| <b>Avg</b>  | 4%                          | 5%     | 8%     | 9%     | 10%    | 15%    | 18%    | 12%    | 5%     | 5%     | 5%     | 5%     |

Source: NMFS SRHS (March, 2021).

### Economic Value

Participation, effort, and harvest are indicators of the value of saltwater recreational fishing. However, a more specific indicator of value is the satisfaction that anglers experience over and above their costs of fishing. The monetary value of this satisfaction is referred to as consumer surplus (CS). The value or benefit derived from the recreational experience is dependent on several quality determinants, which include fish size, catch success rate, and the number of fish kept. These variables help determine the value of a fishing trip and influence total demand for recreational fishing trips. The estimated values of the CS per fish for a second<sup>11</sup>, third, fourth,

<sup>11</sup> The study only considered trips with at least one fish caught and kept in its experimental design; thus, an estimated value for the first caught and kept fish is not available.

and fifth grouper kept on a trip are approximately \$115, \$77, \$57, and \$45, respectively (Carter and Liese 2012; values updated to 2021 dollars).<sup>12</sup>

The foregoing estimates of economic value should not be confused with economic impacts associated with recreational fishing expenditures. Although expenditures for a specific good or service may represent a proxy or lower bound of value (a person would not logically pay more for something than it was worth to them), they do not represent the net value (benefits minus cost), nor the change in value associated with a change in the fishing experience.

Estimates of average annual gross revenue for charter vessels and headboats in 2009 are provided in Holland et al. (2012). In 2021 dollars, the average annual gross revenue for a South Atlantic headboat was approximately \$234,000, while the average annual gross revenue for a South Atlantic charter vessel was approximately \$132,000. However, a more recent estimate of average annual gross revenue for South Atlantic headboats is available from D. Carter (pers. comm., March 15, 2018). D. Carter (pers. comm., March 15, 2018) recently estimated that average annual gross revenue for South Atlantic headboats was approximately \$320,560 (2021 dollars) in 2017. This estimate is likely the best current estimate of annual gross revenue for South Atlantic headboats, as it is based on a relatively large sample and is more recent. The difference in the Holland et al. (2012) and Carter (pers. comm., March 15, 2018) estimates for headboats suggests that the estimate for charter vessels based on Holland et al. (2012) is likely an underestimate of current average annual revenue for charter vessels in the South Atlantic. Estimates of annual producer surplus (PS) and economic profit for South Atlantic charter vessels and headboats are not available.

With regard to for-hire trips, economic value can be measured by PS per angler trip, which represents the amount of money that a vessel owner earns in excess of the cost of providing the trip. Estimates of revenue, costs, and trip net revenue for trips taken by charter vessels and headboats in 2017 are available from Souza and Liese (2019). They also provide estimates of trip net cash flow per angler trip, which are an approximation of PS per angler trip. According to Table 3.3.2.5, after accounting for transactions fees, supply costs, and labor costs, net revenue per trip was 40% of revenue for South Atlantic charter vessels and 54% of revenue for Southeast headboats or \$583 and \$1,912 (2021 dollars), respectively. Given the average number of anglers per trip for each fleet, PS per trip is estimated to be \$124 for South Atlantic charter vessels and \$72 for Southeast headboats (Table 3.3.2.5).

**Table 3.3.2.5.** Trip-level economics for offshore trips by South Atlantic charter vessels and Southeast headboats in 2017 (2021 dollars).

|  | <u>South Atlantic<br/>Charter Vessels</u> | <u>Southeast<br/>Headboats*</u> |
|--|---|---------------------------------|
| <b>Revenue</b>                         | 100%                                      | 100%                            |
| <b>Transaction Fees (% of revenue)</b> | 3%  | 6%                              |

<sup>12</sup> Converted to 2021 dollars using the annual, not seasonally adjusted GDP implicit price deflator provided by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

|  | <u>South Atlantic<br/>Charter Vessels</u> | <u>Southeast<br/>Headboats*</u> |
|--|---|---------------------------------|
| <b>Supply Costs (% of revenue)</b>                                   | 29%                                       | 19%                             |
| <b>Labor Costs (% of revenue)</b>                                    | 28%                                       | 22%                             |
| <b>Net Revenue per trip including<br/>Labor costs (% of revenue)</b> | 40%                                       | 54%                             |
| <b>Net Revenue per Trip</b>  | \$583                                     | \$1,912                         |
| <b>Average # of Anglers per Trip</b>                                 | 4.7                                       | 26.6                            |
| <b>Trip Net Cash Flow per Angler Trip</b>                            | \$124                                     | \$72                            |

Source: Souza and Liese (2019).

\*Although Souza and Liese (2019) break headboats out by sub-region, the South Atlantic sample size is small and thus estimates for Southeast headboats in general (Gulf and South Atlantic combined) are presented here.

### Business Activity

The desire for recreational fishing generates economic activity as consumers spend their income on various goods and services needed for recreational fishing. This income spurs economic activity in the region where recreational fishing occurs. It should be clearly noted that, in the absence of the opportunity to fish, the income would presumably be spent on other goods and services and these expenditures would similarly generate economic activity in the region where the expenditure occurs. As such, the analysis below represents a distributional analysis only. Estimates of the business activity (economic impacts) associated with recreational angling for South Atlantic snowy grouper were calculated using average trip-level impact coefficients derived from the 2017 Fisheries Economics of the U.S. report (NMFS 2021) and underlying data provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Science and Technology. Economic impact estimates in 2017 dollars were adjusted to 2021 dollars using the annual, not seasonally adjusted GDP implicit price deflator provided by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Business activity (economic impacts) for the recreational sector is characterized in the form of jobs (full- and part-time), income impacts (wages, salaries, and self-employed income), output impacts (gross business sales), and value-added impacts (contribution to the GDP in a state or region). Estimates of the average annual economic impacts (2015-2019) resulting from South Atlantic recreational snowy grouper target trips are provided in Table 3.3.2.6. As shown in the table, these economic impacts are small given the low level of target effort for snowy grouper. The average impact coefficients, or multipliers, used in the model are invariant to the “type” of effort (e.g., target or catch) and can therefore be directly used to measure the impact of other effort measures such as snowy grouper catch trips. To calculate the multipliers from Table 3.3.2.6, simply divide the desired impact measure (sales impact, value-added impact, income impact or employment) associated with a given state and mode by the number of target trips for that state and mode.

The estimates provided in Table 3.3.2.6 only apply at the state-level. Addition of the state-level estimates to produce a regional (or national) total may underestimate the actual amount of total business activity, because state-level impact multipliers do not account for interstate and interregional trading. It is also important to note, that these economic impacts estimates are based on trip expenditures only and do not account for durable expenditures. Durable expenditures cannot be reasonably apportioned to individual species or species groups. As such, the estimates provided in Table 3.3.2.6 may be considered a lower bound on the economic activity associated with those trips that targeted snowy grouper.

Estimates of the business activity associated with headboat effort are not available. Headboat vessels are not covered in MRIP, so, in addition to the absence of estimates of target effort, estimation of the appropriate business activity coefficients for headboat effort has not been conducted.

**Table 3.3.2.6.** Estimated annual average economic impacts (2015-2019) from South Atlantic recreational snowy grouper target trips, by state and mode, using state-level multipliers. All monetary estimates are in 2021 dollars (in thousands).

|                     | NC                         | SC  | GA  | FL   |
|---------------------|----------------------------|-----|-----|------|
|                     | <b>Charter Mode</b>        |     |     |      |
| Target Trips        | 15                         | 0   | 0   | 29   |
| Value Added Impacts | \$7                        | \$0 | \$0 | \$7  |
| Sales Impacts       | \$12                       | \$0 | \$0 | \$12 |
| Income Impacts      | \$4                        | \$0 | \$0 | \$4  |
| Employment (Jobs)   | 0                          | 0   | 0   | 0    |
|                     | <b>Private/Rental Mode</b> |     |     |      |
| Target Trips        | 0                          | 0   | 0   | 441  |
| Value Added Impacts | \$0                        | \$0 | \$0 | \$13 |
| Sales Impacts       | \$0                        | \$0 | \$0 | \$19 |
| Income Impacts      | \$0                        | \$0 | \$0 | \$6  |
| Employment (Jobs)   | 0                          | 0   | 0   | 0    |
|                     | <b>All Modes</b>           |     |     |      |
| Target Trips        | 15                         | 0   | 0   | 470  |
| Value Added Impacts | \$7                        | \$0 | \$0 | \$20 |
| Sales Impacts       | \$12                       | \$0 | \$0 | \$31 |
| Income Impacts      | \$4                        | \$0 | \$0 | \$11 |
| Employment (Jobs)   | 0                          | 0   | 0   | 0    |

Source: Effort data from MRIP; economic impact results calculated by NMFS SERO using NMFS (2021) and underlying data provided by the NOAA Office of Science and Technology. Note: There were no shore mode target trips recorded for snowy grouper.

### 3.4 Social Environment

This section describes select social, demographic, and geographic aspects of the snowy grouper fisheries addressed by the amendment, providing essential background for social effects analysis in Chapter 4. Quantitative description is limited to the five-year time-series (2015 through 2019) preceding the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. Trends in commercial and recreational landings and permit issuance are provided to aid in describing the geographic distribution of fishing effort, with emphasis on identifying communities where fleets are most deeply engaged in the pursuit of snowy grouper, also known as chocolate grouper. Description of community-level involvement in the fishery sectors of interest is provided to meet the requirements of National Standard 8 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which calls for examination of linkages between fishery resources and human communities when regulatory changes are under consideration. Finally, this section addresses environmental justice concerns, with a focus on identifying community-level social vulnerabilities to prospective regulatory change.

#### 3.4.1 Snowy Grouper Commercial Sector

Kolmos et al. (2019:308) describe snowy grouper in relation to habitat, asserting that mature individuals tend to inhabit rocky ridges and terraces on the upper continental slope of the South Atlantic states, typically at depths between ~500 and 850 feet. Using observational data from a variety of sources, the recent work of Paxton et al. (2021) confirms such habitat affinities and supports findings that snowy grouper aggregate around hard-bottom features such as deep-water wrecks and reefs (Johnson et al. 2020).

The deep-water affinities of snowy grouper bear implications for both commercial harvesters and recreational fishing enthusiasts in the South Atlantic. Considerable depth, rugged bathymetry, and often-challenging offshore current and surface conditions combine to influence the nature and extent of fishing effort, time at sea, gear requirements, and costs associated with ocean travel. Safety-at-sea considerations take on added importance in deep-water zones along the Continental Shelf where assistance can be relatively more difficult and timelier to attain than in nearshore areas. Notably, such factors vary across the management region and its sub-regions. For example, captains and crew departing north of Cape Hatteras and along the South Florida coastline and Florida Keys can reach deep-water snowy grouper grounds relatively quickly, while vessels leaving from ports where the shelf is much wider travel considerably greater distances to reach waters of sufficient depth and suitable bathymetry. As discussed in Buck (2018:47), South Atlantic vessels involved in commercial South Atlantic snapper grouper fisheries are on average just over 31 feet in length overall, utilize some 375 horsepower in total, and have an average fuel capacity of 292 gallons.

Snowy grouper behavior is an important consideration among commercial harvesters, particularly behavior related to aggregation. Knowledge of preferred prey, feeding patterns at depth, and ecological attributes of areas where the fish are known or thought likely to aggregate are often carefully guarded forms of information among individual captains and/or social networks of captains involved in the fishery. Given the depths and hard-bottom habitats involved, entanglement of “deep-drop” gear is a threat to operational efficiency and is therefore stringently avoided. Heavy mainline and leader are considered indispensable when multiple fish are on the line.

Captains in Southeast North Carolina report that deep-water wintertime trips for snowy grouper often also yield other deepwater species in the snapper grouper complex. This is in keeping with the logbook-derived findings of Buck (2018:63), who describes snowy grouper as a driving element of deep-water trips that often also involve harvest of yellowedge grouper and blueline and golden tilefish. The author asserts that snowy grouper is a principal deep-water target species during regulatory Season One (January through April) north of Florida, with electric reels and some longline gear used, and also during Season Two (May through August), with electric reels gears the principal gear type used in that region. Snowy grouper is also described as a principal target species during Seasons One and Two in the Florida Keys, with electric reels the principal gear used during both seasons. Snowy grouper is harvested in other Florida waters, but typically incidental to other deepwater species in the snapper grouper complex (Buck, (2018:60-73). Bottom longlines are legally deployed only north of St. Lucie Inlet in Florida, and only at depths of 300 feet or greater. Such gear is often used north of Cape Hatteras. Spearfishing is allowable in the absence of rebreathers, although the depths involved and the need for suitable ocean conditions limit use of this approach. Dehooking and descending devices are required on vessels pursuing snowy grouper and other deep-water species in the snapper grouper complex. Commercial captains may harvest no more than 200 lbs of snowy grouper (gutted weight) per trip (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council 2022).

**Commercial Landings by State**

Based on 2019 data, nearly 44.7% of the snowy grouper resource was landed at ports in Florida during 2019, followed by 43.5% at ports in North Carolina, and 11.8% at ports in South Carolina. No commercial landings of snowy grouper were received at ports along the Georgia coastline during 2019 or during the remainder of the 2015 through 2019 time-series. Florida landings exceed those in North Carolina during each year the time-series, with the exception of 2018 when the North Carolina commercial fleet landed 39.1% of the regional total. Just over 37.5% of the total volume of landings was harvested by Florida-based commercial vessels that year (SEFSC Community ALS File, May 2022).

**South Atlantic Commercial Snapper Grouper Permits by State and Community**

Commercial captains must possess an unlimited or trip-limited snapper grouper permit in order to legally participate in the snowy grouper fishery. The distribution of such permits therefore indicates states and ports from which participants in the fishery typically operate. A total of 543 unlimited snapper grouper permits were issued during 2019. At 67.2%, most unlimited permits were issued to residents or persons with mailing addresses in Florida that year, followed by 20.9% in North Carolina, 8.8% in South Carolina, and 1.4% in Georgia. Two or fewer unlimited permits were issued to persons in Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia during 2019. As was the case throughout the time-series, most 225-lb. trip-limited permits were held for use by persons operating from coastal communities in Florida. A high percentage of both permit types are held by fishery participants active in the Florida Keys (Table 3.4.1).

**Table 3.4.1** Distribution of commercial snapper grouper unlimited and 225-lb trip-limited permits among the top permit-holding communities in the South Atlantic during 2019.

| <b>Leading Communities:<br/>Unlimited Permits</b> | <b>Permits</b> | <b>Leading Communities:<br/>225-lb Trip-Limited Permits</b> | <b>Permits</b> |
|---|----------------|---|----------------|
| Key West, Florida                                 | 95             | Key West, Florida   | 12             |
| Key Largo, Florida                                | 28             | Marathon, Florida   | 10             |

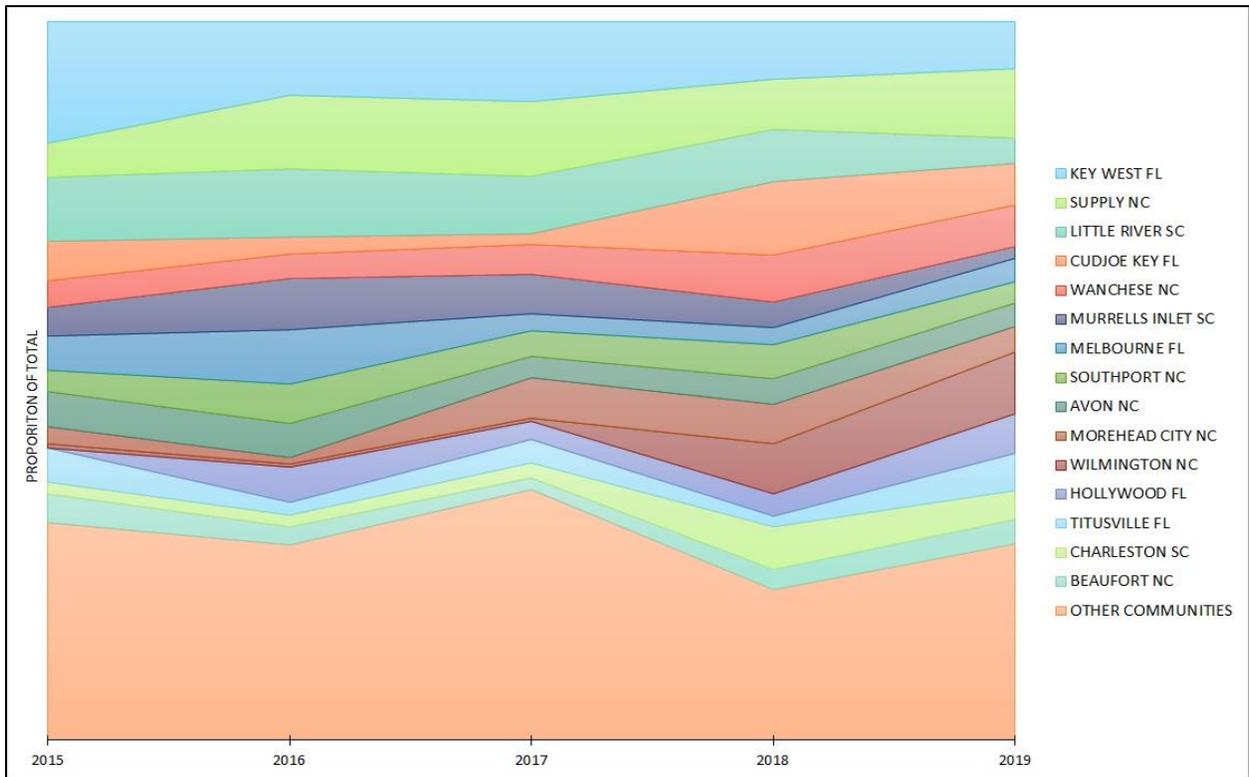
| Leading Communities:<br>Unlimited Permits | Permits | Leading Communities:<br>225-lb Trip-Limited Permits | Permits |
|---|---------|---|---------|
| Miami, Florida                            | 23      | Miami, Florida                                      | 9       |
| Marathon, Florida                         | 21      | Jupiter, Florida                                    | 6       |
| Murrells Inlet, South Carolina            | 16      | Big Pine Key, Florida                               | 5       |
| Southport, North Carolina                 | 14      | Key Largo, Florida                                  | 4       |
| Little River, South Carolina              | 14      | Hatteras, North Carolina                            | 3       |
| Jacksonville, Florida                     | 14      | Wilmington, North Carolina                          | 3       |
| Port Canaveral, Florida                   | 13      | West Palm Beach, Florida                            | 3       |
| Jupiter, Florida                          | 13      | Middle Torch Key, Florida                           | 2       |
| Beaufort/Morehead City, North Carolina    | 12      | Fort Pierce, Florida                                | 2       |
| Sebastian, Florida                        | 12      | St. Augustine, Florida                              | 2       |
| Sneads Ferry, North Carolina              | 11      | Boca Raton, Florida                                 | 2       |
| Fort Pierce, Florida                      | 10      | Cudjoe Key, Florida                                 | 2       |
| Ponce Inlet, Florida                      | 10      | Summerland Key, Florida                             | 2       |
| Mayport, Florida                          | 10      | Little Torch Key, Florida                           | 2       |
| Fort Pierce, Florida                      | 10      | Fort Lauderdale, Florida                            | 2       |
| Holden Beach, North Carolina              | 9       | Sebastian, Florida                                  | 2       |
| Islamorada, Florida                       | 9       | --  | --      |
| Big Pine Key, Florida                     | 9       | --  | --      |

Source: NMFS SERO Sustainable Fisheries (SF) Access permits database.

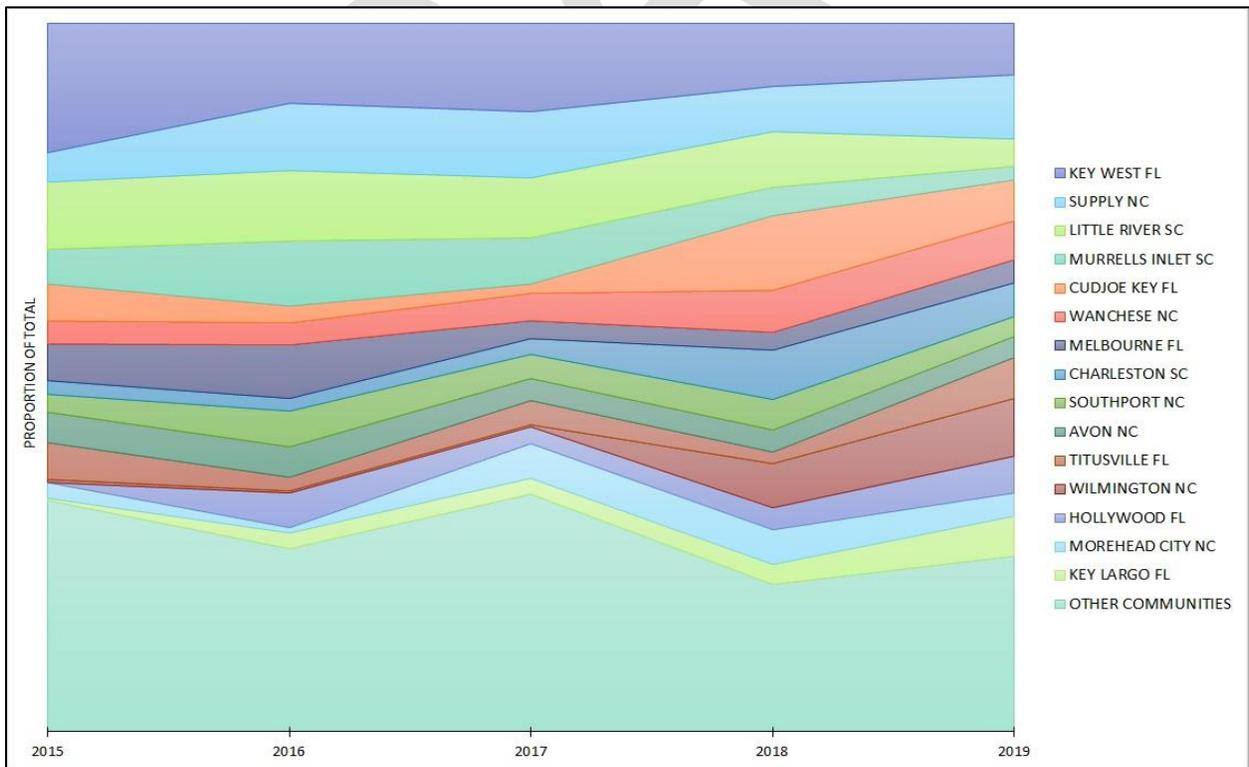
### Regional Quotient of South Atlantic Snowy Grouper Commercial Landings

Figures 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 depict the distribution of commercial landings and associated ex-vessel value of landings among the fifteen communities in the South Atlantic with the greatest share of snowy grouper landings during the time-series. Each distribution is expressed here as a regional quotient, or the share of community landings and ex-vessel values divided by landings and values for the overall region. Communities are presented in the graphic based on a ranking of average landings and average values over the period of interest. Data derive from the SEFSC Community ALS File (accessed May 2022).

As can be discerned from Figure 3.4.1, commercial vessels operating from Key West collectively account for the greatest proportion of community-specific snowy grouper landings during the time-series. However, commercial vessels operating from the town of Supply in southeastern North Carolina vie closely with Key West during the time-series and account for the bulk of landings in 2019. Of note, captains and crew operating from ports in southeast North Carolina and northeast South Carolina travel many scores of ocean miles to reach suitable snowy grouper fishing grounds, whereas those operating from the Keys reach suitable grounds after relatively little travel time at sea.



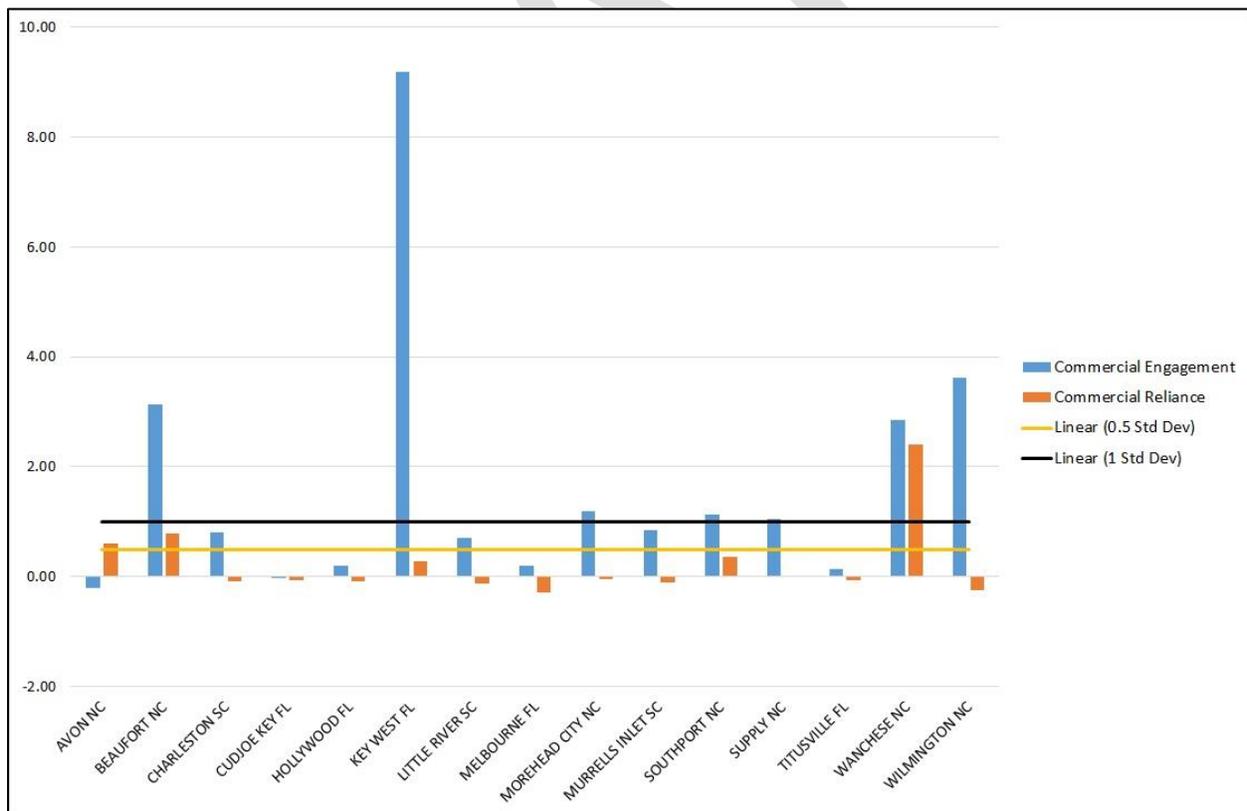
**Figure 3.4.1** Distribution of regional *landings*. Top South Atlantic commercial snowy grouper landings communities: 2015 through 2019. Source: SEFSC, Community ALS File.



**Figure 3.4.2** Distribution of regional landings *value*. Top South Atlantic commercial snowy grouper landings communities: 2015 through 2019. Source: SEFSC, Community ALS File.

**Community Engagement & Reliance: South Atlantic Commercial Snowy Grouper Fishery**

As depicted in Figure 3.4.3, the Florida community of Key West, along with the North Carolina communities of Beaufort, Morehead City, Wanchese, and Wilmington score highly in terms of relative extent of engagement in the South Atlantic snowy grouper fishery. The measure of engagement provided here is a generalizable composite indicator based on: (a) pounds of fish landed by the local commercial fleets—in this case, pounds averaged over the time series, (b) associated ex-vessel revenue (as presented above), and (c) the number of commercial fishery participants and seafood dealers present in a given community. Readers may consult Jacob et al. (2013), Jepson and Colburn (2013), and Hospital and Leong 2021 for discussion of the underlying rationale and approach for using indicators to assess local engagement in and reliance on regional marine fisheries. The measure of reliance used here incorporates the same variables noted above, divided by the total local population figure. Both measures are useful means for indicating where any prospective effects of snowy grouper management actions are likely to be experienced. Notably, the Florida community of Key West far exceeds the one standard deviation threshold for *engagement* in South Atlantic commercial fisheries, and the North Carolina community of Wanchese scores above the threshold for local *reliance* on regional commercial fisheries. The latter measure suggests limited local economic alternatives to the fishing and seafood industry in Wanchese, a rural waterfront town of some 1,522 residents (U.S. Census Bureau 2020a). Five unlimited commercial snapper grouper permits were held by Wanchese residents during 2019.



**Figure 3.4.3** Measures of engagement and reliance among the leading commercial snowy grouper landings communities in the South Atlantic during 2019. Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database.

### 3.4.2 Snowy Grouper Recreational Sector

Experienced participants in the for-hire and private vessel South Atlantic recreational fishing sectors generally pursue snowy grouper using deep-drop gear and techniques suited to the considerable depths and hard-bottom habitats involved. As is the case for the commercial harvest sector, allowable gears include vertical hook-and-line gear, including handlines and bandit gear. Again, use of electric reels is common. Spearfishing gear may be used in the absence of rebreathers (as conditions allow), and a functional dehooking tool and descending device are required onboard. The daily bag limit is one (1) fish per recreational vessel.

Many for-hire captains travel to deep-water snowy grouper grounds with readiness to pursue additional deep-water adapted species in the snapper grouper complex. Depending on area and season, these may include yellowedge grouper, queen snapper, blackfin snapper, golden and blueline tilefish, and others. Also depending on area, season, and the nature of the bite (or lack thereof), for-hire and private vessel captains may pursue other snapper grouper species in relatively shallow water as a component of deep-water trips, particularly if fishing in the deeper zones is unsuccessful. Certain captains also pursue pelagic species using troll gear prior to and/or following focused pursuit of snowy grouper and other snapper grouper species in their respective habitats.

Environmental knowledge and positioning technology are core dimensions of success and safety-at-sea in the deep-water snowy grouper for-hire fishery, with most captains also striving to provide an enjoyable experience to their patrons regardless of catch. All safe and effective offshore fishing excursions, recreational or commercial, involve adequate preparation at harbor and coordination of social interaction at sea. Acquisition, maintenance, and trip-specific preparation of vessel, engine, gear, bait, ice or other means for refrigeration, fishing rigs, fuel and oil, redundant communications, and weather prediction/reporting technologies, along with U.S. Coast Guard-required safety equipment, are among the basic requisites. Challenges and capacity to respond to problems at sea can be magnified in the offshore zone. Ocean experience increases only over time and fishing experience grows only with lines in the water. In the case of for-hire captains, such experience and any associated success can generate benefits beyond the clearly economic, including enhanced social status.

#### Recreational Snowy Grouper Landings by State

Based on annual landings data generated through the NMFS Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES), the greatest proportion of estimated snowy grouper recreational landings occurred along the east coast of Florida during the 2015 through 2019 time-series. Nearly 55% of landings were attributable to recreational fishery participants active in North Carolina during 2016—the sole year in which North Carolina landings exceeded those reported by recreational participants in Florida. Florida participants caught 51.8% of the total count of snowy grouper estimated for 2017, 80.6% for 2018, and 79.5% for 2019. Distance to snowy grouper grounds apparently limits recreational landings by participants in Georgia and South Carolina (SERO MRIP-FES File, accessed May 2022).

#### For-Hire Permits

For-hire captains pursuing snowy grouper must possess a South Atlantic snapper grouper charter/headboat permit. A total of 2,183 such permits were issued during 2019, the vast majority to residents or persons with mailing addresses in the South Atlantic states. The total

number of permits issued increased steadily during the 2015 through 2019 time-series, with 1,779 permits issued in 2015, 1,867 in 2016, 1,982 in 2017, and 2,126 in 2018.

Table 3.4.3 below depicts the distribution of South Atlantic snapper grouper charter/headboat permits among the leading permit-holding communities during 2019. Of note in the table, the greatest proportion of such permits were held by residents or persons with postal addresses in Key West, with 198 held in the community during 2019, down from a high of 206 in 2018. As indicated in Table 3.4.1 and in Figure 3.4.2, Key West-based commercial and for-hire captains and crew are predominate in terms of level of participation in South Atlantic snapper grouper fisheries. This calls for additional social description of place. As of April 1, 2020, Key West was home to 24,649 permanent residents (U.S. Census Bureau 2020b), but with a characteristically large expansion of the local population as seasonal residents and tourists arrive during the winter months. Key West is the southernmost city in the mainland U.S., with a consistently mild tropical-maritime climate (NOAA 2021). The combination of favorable winter climate, close proximity to deep-water fishing grounds, and increasing rates of seasonal residence and visitation following a period of gentrification initiated in decades past (Shivlani 2014), help explain the disproportionate extent of for-hire fishing opportunities and services available in the community.

**Table 3.4.3.** Distribution of South Atlantic for-hire/headboat snapper grouper permits among the top 20 permit-holding communities in the region: 2019 (SERO Access Permit Database)

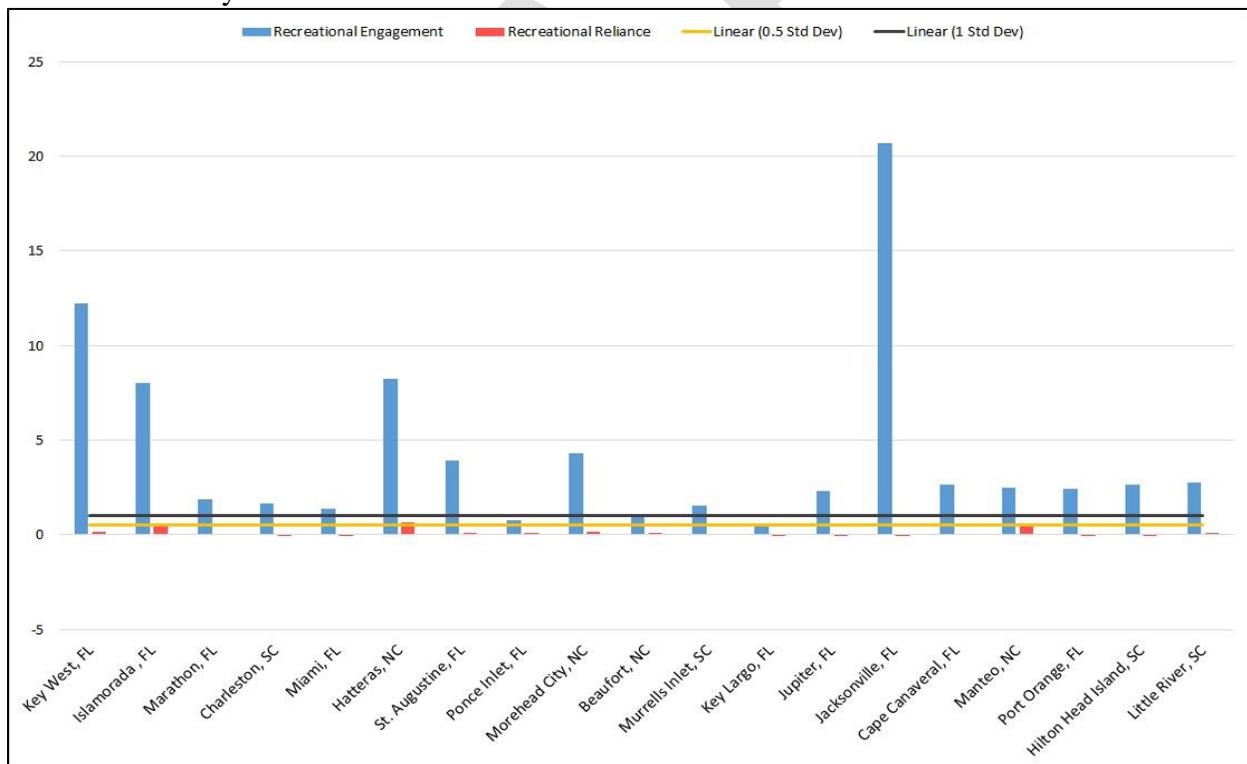
| State          | Leading Communities    | Permits in 2019 |
|----------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Florida        | Key West               | 198             |
| Florida        | Islamorada             | 97              |
| Florida        | Marathon               | 82              |
| Florida        | Port Canaveral         | 76              |
| South Carolina | Charleston             | 60              |
| Florida        | Miami                  | 45              |
| North Carolina | Hatteras               | 44              |
| Florida        | St. Augustine          | 40              |
| Florida        | Ponce Inlet            | 36              |
| North Carolina | Beaufort/Morehead City | 36              |
| South Carolina | Murrells Inlet         | 33              |
| Florida        | Key Largo              | 32              |
| Florida        | Jupiter                | 32              |
| Florida        | Jacksonville           | 30              |
| Florida        | Naples                 | 29              |
| Florida        | Cape Canaveral         | 28              |
| North Carolina | Manteo                 | 26              |
| Florida        | Port Orange            | 25              |
| South Carolina | Hilton Head island     | 24              |
| South Carolina | Little River           | 21              |

### Community Engagement & Reliance: South Atlantic Recreational Snowy Grouper Fishery

The full range of data indicative of involvement in the South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational sector is not readily available at the level of the community. As such, it is not possible with

available information to identify communities that are specifically engaged in, and/or reliant on recreational fishing for this deep-water species in particular. Given that information regarding community-specific interaction with any given species is limited, NOAA Fisheries social scientists developed indices of utility for identifying communities where recreational fishing is an important component of the local economy in general (see Jacob et al. 2013; Jepson and Colburn 2013; Hospital and Leong 2021). Based on these indices, the communities depicted in Figure 3.4.4 are those in the South Atlantic region where residents are most clearly engaged in the recreational fishing industry in general. In this case, additional specificity is provided in that the communities depicted are those most extensively involved in the snapper grouper for-hire sectors, of which the snowy grouper fishery is an important component.

The measure of engagement depicted in Figure 3.4.4 derives from the number of recreational fishing permits and vessels actively used by residents in a given community, while the measure of reliance derives from the same variables divided by the total local population figure. Particularly high levels of involvement in South Atlantic recreational fisheries are characteristic of Jacksonville, Key West, Melbourne Beach, and Islamorada in Florida, and Hatteras and Nags Head in North Carolina. Of note, Nags Head is the only municipality that meets the one standard deviation threshold for reliance on the recreational fishing industry, indicating the importance of for-hire and private recreational fishing and related services and opportunities in this small Outer Banks community.



**Figure 3.4.4** Measures of community involvement in the South Atlantic recreational fishing industry during 2019. Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database.

### 3.4.3 Environmental Justice

Established in 1994, Executive Order 12898 (the order) requires federal agencies to examine the human health and socioeconomic implications of federal actions among low-income and

minority groups and populations around the nation. The order requires that such agencies conduct programs, policies, and activities in a manner that ensures no individuals or populations are excluded, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination due to race, color, or nation of origin. Of particular relevance in the context of marine fisheries, federal agencies are further required to collect, maintain, and analyze data regarding patterns of consumption of fish and wildlife among persons who rely on such foods for purposes of subsistence. In sum, the principal intent of the order is to require assessment and due consideration of any “disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations in the United States and its territories.”

Various forms of data are available to indicate the presence of environmental justice issues among minority and low-income populations and/or indigenous communities potentially affected by federal regulatory and other actions. With the intent of enhancing capacity to determine whether environmental justice issues may be affecting communities around the U.S. where fishing-related industry is an important aspect of the local economy, NMFS social scientists undertook an extensive series of deliberations and review of pertinent data and literature. The scientists ultimately selected key social, economic, and demographic variables that could function to identify social vulnerabilities at the community level of analysis (see Jacob et al. 2013; Jepson and Colburn 2013). Census data such as community-specific rates of poverty, number of households maintained by single females, number of households with children under the age of five, rates of crime, and rates of unemployment exemplify the types of information chosen to aid in community analysis. Pertinent variables were subsequently used to develop composite indices that could be applied to assess vulnerability to environmental, regulatory, and other sources of change among the nation’s fishing- and/or seafood-oriented communities.

As provided in the following figures, three composite indices—termed here as poverty, population composition, and personal disruption—are applied to indicate relative degrees of vulnerability among communities most thoroughly engaged in the South Atlantic commercial snapper grouper fisheries of which the commercial snowy grouper fishery is an important element. Mean standardized scores for each community are provided along the y-axis, with means for the vulnerability measures and threshold standard deviations depicted along the x-axis. Scores exceeding the .5 standard deviation level indicate local social vulnerability to regulatory and other sources of change. As can be discerned from Figure 3.4.5 below, five of the top snapper grouper commercial landings communities—Hollywood in Florida, and Avon, Beaufort, Morehead City, and Wilmington in North Carolina—exceed the designated vulnerability threshold for one or more indices. Finally, Figure 3.4.6 depicts social vulnerability measures for communities most extensively involved in the for-hire snapper grouper sectors in the South Atlantic. The data presented here indicate social vulnerability especially in Miami and Jupiter in Florida; Hatteras, Morehead City, and Beaufort in North Carolina, and Little River in South Carolina. Both figures derive from data available in the SERO Community Social Vulnerability Indicators (CSVI) Database.

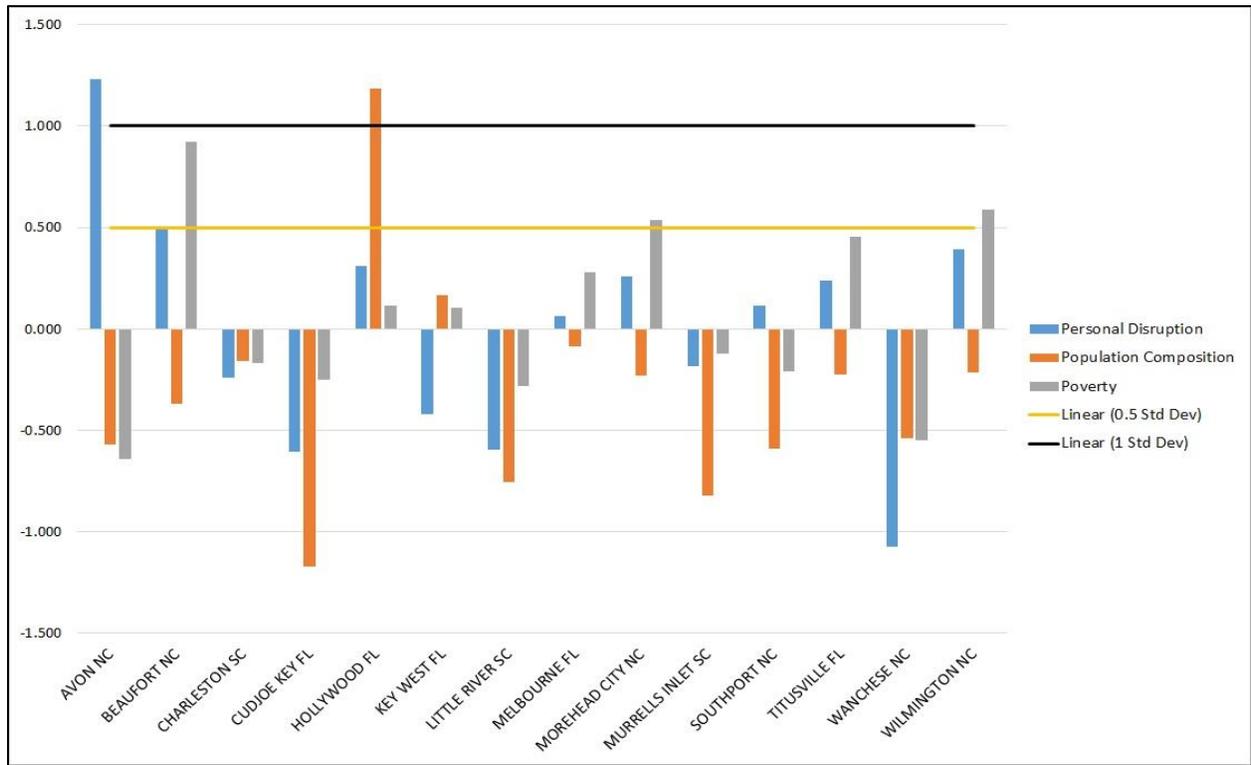


Figure 3.4.5 Social vulnerability measures for communities extensively involved in South Atlantic commercial snapper grouper fishing operations. Source: SERO CSVI Database.

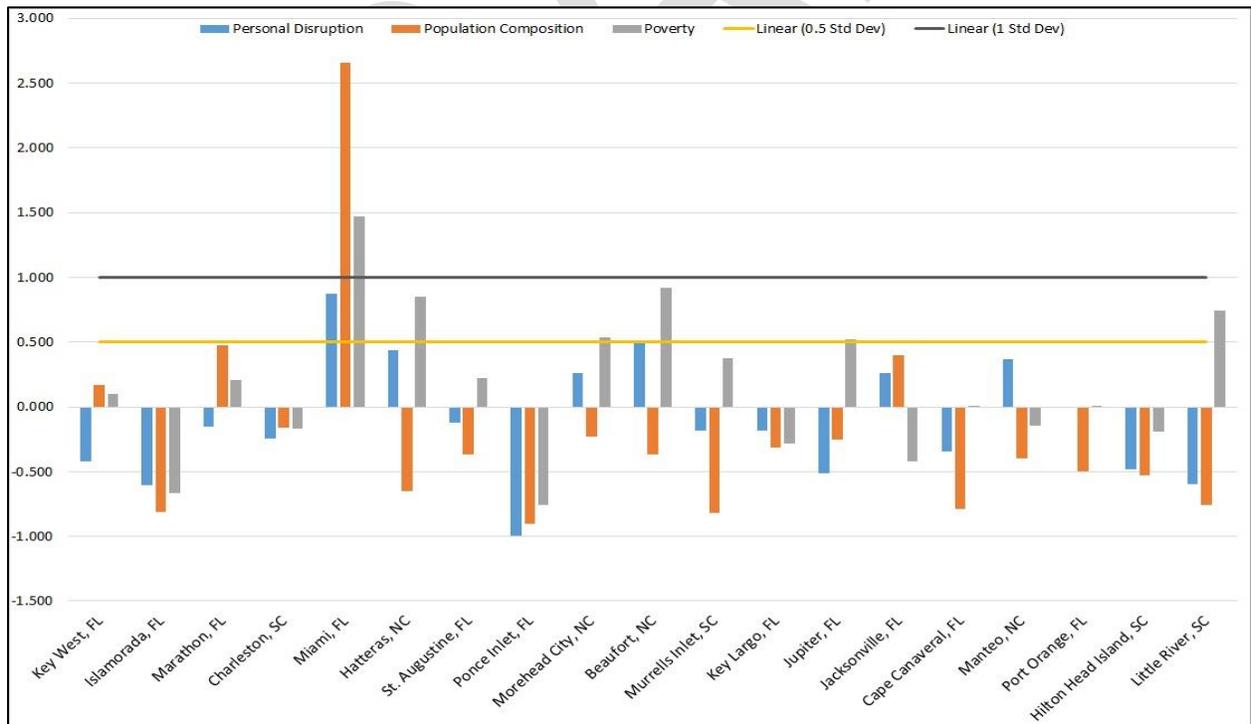


Figure 3.4.6 Social vulnerability measures for South Atlantic communities most extensively involved in the region's recreational fishing sectors. Source: SERO CSVI Database.

### **3.5 Administrative Environment**

#### **3.5.1 Federal Fishery Management**

Federal fishery management is conducted under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.), originally enacted in 1976 as the Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Magnuson-Stevens Act claims sovereign rights and exclusive fishery management authority over most fishery resources within the EEZ, an area extending 200 nm from the seaward boundary of each of the coastal states, and authority over U.S. anadromous species and continental shelf resources that occur beyond the U.S. EEZ.

Responsibility for federal fishery management decision-making is divided between the U.S. Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) and eight regional fishery management councils that represent the expertise and interests of constituent states. Regional councils are responsible for preparing, monitoring, and revising management plans for fisheries needing management within their jurisdiction. The Secretary is responsible for collecting and providing the data necessary for the councils to prepare fishery management plans and for promulgating regulations to implement proposed plans and amendments after ensuring that management measures are consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and with other applicable laws. In most cases, the Secretary has delegated this authority to NMFS.

The Council is responsible for conservation and management of fishery resources in federal waters of the U.S. South Atlantic. These waters extend from 3 to 200 mi offshore from the seaward boundary of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida to Key West. The Council has thirteen voting members: one from NMFS; one each from the state fishery agencies of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida; and eight public members appointed by the Secretary. On the Council, there are two public members from each of the four South Atlantic States. Non-voting members include representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), State Department, and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). The Council has adopted procedures whereby the non-voting members serving on the Council Committees have full voting rights at the Committee level but not at the full Council level. The Council also established two voting seats for the Mid-Atlantic Council on the South Atlantic Mackerel Committee. Council members serve three-year terms and are recommended by state governors and appointed by the Secretary from lists of nominees submitted by state governors. Appointed members may serve a maximum of three consecutive terms.

Public interests also are involved in the fishery management process through participation on Advisory Panels and through council meetings, which, with few exceptions for discussing personnel and legal matters, are open to the public. The Council uses its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) to review the data and science being used in assessments and fishery management plans/amendments. In addition, the regulatory process is in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, in the form of “notice and comment” rulemaking.

#### **3.5.2 State Fishery Management**

The state governments of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida have the authority to manage fisheries that occur in waters extending three nautical miles from their respective shorelines. North Carolina’s marine fisheries are managed by the Marine Fisheries

Division of the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality. The Marine Resources Division of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources manages South Carolina's marine fisheries. Georgia's marine fisheries are managed by the Coastal Resources Division of the Department of Natural Resources. The Division of Marine Fisheries Management of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is responsible for managing Florida's marine fisheries. Each state fishery management agency has a designated seat on the South Atlantic Council. The purpose of state representation at the Council level is to ensure state participation in federal fishery management decision-making and to promote the development of compatible regulations in state and federal waters.

The South Atlantic states are also involved through ASMFC in management of marine fisheries. This commission was created to coordinate state regulations and develop management plans for interstate fisheries. It has significant authority, through the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act and the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act, to compel adoption of complementary state regulations to conserve coastal species. The ASFMC is also represented at the Council but does not have voting authority at the Council level.

NMFS's State-Federal Fisheries Division is responsible for building cooperative partnerships to strengthen marine fisheries management and conservation at the state, inter-regional, and national levels. This division implements and oversees the distribution of grants for two national (Inter-jurisdictional Fisheries Act and Anadromous Fish Conservation Act) and two regional (Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act and Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act) programs. Additionally, it works with the ASMFC to develop and implement cooperative State-Federal fisheries regulations.

### **3.5.3 Enforcement**

Both the NMFS Office for Law Enforcement (NOAA/OLE) and the USCG have the authority and the responsibility to enforce Council regulations. NOAA/OLE agents, who specialize in living marine resource violations, provide fisheries expertise and investigative support for the overall fisheries mission. The USCG is a multi-mission agency, which provides at sea patrol services for the fisheries mission.

Neither NOAA/OLE nor the USCG can provide a continuous law enforcement presence in all areas due to the limited resources of NOAA/OLE and the priority tasking of the USCG. To supplement at sea and dockside inspections of fishing vessels, NOAA entered into Cooperative Enforcement Agreements with all but one of the states in the Southeast Region (North Carolina), which granted authority to state officers to enforce the laws for which NOAA/OLE has jurisdiction. In recent years, the level of involvement by the states has increased through Joint Enforcement Agreements, whereby states conduct patrols that focus on federal priorities and, in some circumstances, prosecute resultant violators through the state when a state violation has occurred.

The NOAA Office of General Counsel Penalty Policy and Penalty Schedule is available online at <http://www.gc.noaa.gov/enforce-office3.html>.

# Chapter 4. Environmental Effects and Comparison of Alternatives

*TO BE COMPLETED*

## 4.1 Action 1. Revise the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper to reflect the new overfishing limit and updated acceptable biological catch recommendations

### 4.1.1 Biological Effects

#### *Expected effects to snowy grouper and co-occurring species*

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** would retain a total ACL that exceeds the most recent acceptable biological catch (ABC) and overfishing limit (OFL) recommendations of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and would not end overfishing of snowy grouper (Table 4.1.1). **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would no longer be based on best scientific information available (BSIA) and, therefore, is not a viable alternative. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would be expected to result in adverse biological effects to the snowy grouper stock as it would not end overfishing. Potential adverse impacts from overfishing (fishing mortality too high) include a decrease in the average age and size structure, decline in recruitment, and reduced stock resilience to environmental perturbations.

| Alternatives*   |
|---|
| 1. (No Action). Current ACL and annual OY are equal to the ABC.   |
| 2. <b>Revise the ACL and annual OY to EQUAL the updated ABC. The 2026 ACL and annual OY would remain in place until modified.</b> |
| 3. Revise the ACL and annual OY to 95% of the updated ABC. The 2026 ACL and annual OY would remain in place until modified.       |
| 4. Revise the ACL and annual OY to 90% of the updated ABC. The 2026 ACL and annual OY would remain in place until modified.       |
| *See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.  |

**Table 4.1.1.1.** The total ACL for snowy grouper under Alternatives 1 (No Action) – 5 in pounds gutted weight and number of fish.

| Alternative (lbs gw)        | 2023    | 2024    | 2025    | 2026*   | Numbers of Fish 2023-2026* |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------------------------|
| Alternative 1 (No Action)** | 185,464 | 185,464 | 185,464 | 185,464 | NA                         |
| Preferred Alternative 2***  | 119,654 | 121,272 | 122,889 | 122,889 | 15,264                     |
| Alternative 3***            | 113,956 | 115,208 | 116,745 | 116,745 | 14,501                     |
| Alternative 4***            | 107,959 | 109,145 | 110,600 | 110,600 | 13,738                     |

Note: Given the timing of amendment development, new catch levels would likely be effective during 2023 fishing year. Number of fish remain the same throughout the time period because it

is assumed that fish moving through age classes gain weight therefore increasing the available poundage, however this does not increase the number of fish.

\*The 2026 ACL will remain in place until modified

\*\*Current ABC=ACL and this represents CHTS estimates for recreational data.

\*\*\*Represents FES estimates for recreational data.

Relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Alternative 2** through **Alternative 4** would be expected to end overfishing as they do not exceed the SSC recommended ABCs and would be expected to result in positive biological effects to the snowy grouper stock. Over the long term, reducing harvest of snowy grouper to help improve the age structure of the population would be expected to allow the stock to be less susceptible to adverse environmental conditions that might affect recruitment success. **Preferred Alternative 2** would result in the least biological benefit to the snowy grouper stock as there would be no buffer between the ABCs and the total ACLs. Biological benefits resulting from **Alternatives 3** and **4** would increase as the buffer increases. Although **Preferred Alternative 2** would allow the greatest amount of harvest of the action alternatives considered, it is based on the SSC's ABC recommendation and BSIA and represents a catch level that does not result in overfishing.

Lower ACLs from **Preferred Alternative 2**, **Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 4** could also result in earlier closures of snowy grouper for both the commercial and recreational sectors because there are in-season accountability measures for both sectors. Early closures could increase regulatory discards. As release mortality for snowy grouper is estimated to be 100% (SEDAR 36 Update), fishing mortality would increase with the increase in regulatory discards. Early closures could result in bycatch of snowy grouper if fishermen target co-occurring species (i.e., blueline tilefish, yellowedge grouper, and silk snapper) after the closure occurs. However, adverse effects are expected to be relatively minor as discards comprise a relatively minor component of the over total mortality. During the SEDAR 36 Update, total removals were estimated to comprise on average 95.4% landings and 4.6% dead discards. This could indicate that snowy grouper can be effectively targeted, which would make noteworthy increases in bycatch due to fishery closures less likely to occur. Substantial changes in fishing effort or behavior are not expected as a result of this action, thus the proposed ACLs under this action would not be expected to result in any biological effects, positive or negative, on co-occurring species (refer to BPA in Appendix G).

#### 4.1.2 Economic Effects

In general, ACLs that allow for more fish to be landed can result in increased positive economic effects if harvest increases without notable effects on the stock of a species. The ACL does not directly impact the fishery for a species unless harvest changes, fishing behavior changes, or the ACL is exceeded, thereby potentially triggering AMs such as harvest closures or other restrictive measure. In the case of snowy grouper, the revised ACLs being considered in **Preferred Alternative 2** through **Alternative 4** would be constraining on harvest and are projected to reduce landings of snowy grouper for both the commercial and recreational sectors.

As noted in Section 4.1.1, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** is not a viable alternative. Although not viable since it does not implement BSIA, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would be expected to be constraining on harvest when compared to recent 5-year average landings. The ACL is set equal to the ABC in **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2**, with the differences

between the two in part occurring due to the current versus updated ABC and how the non-headboat recreational component of the total ACL would be accounted for moving forward. Specifically, the current ABC is inclusive of CHTS units to account for private recreational and charter landings while the updated ABC would be inclusive of FES units for these landings. Projections that allow for conversion between both units for the recreational sector are not available, as there is no forward-looking conversion between the two units. As such, a direct comparison of **Alternative 1 (No Action)** to **Preferred Alternative 2** is not possible. This applies to comparisons of **Alternative 1 (No Action)** to **Alternatives 3 and 4** as well since these two alternatives also incorporate the updated ABC and thus FES units. As a proxy for the status quo (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**), the five-year (2015- 2019) average landings of snowy grouper are compared to **Preferred Alternative 2**, **Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 4** to estimate the economic effects of each alternative.

The potential revised total ACLs for snowy grouper when implemented in **Preferred Alternative 2**, **Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 4** would be constraining on harvest (Table 4.1.2.1; Table 4.1.2.2). **Alternative 4** would provide the lowest total ACL, thus would be expected to most severely limit harvest and there would be elevated negative economic effects anticipated from this alternative. **Alternative 3** offers a comparatively higher ACL and **Preferred Alternative 2** would provide the highest ACL. From an economic benefits perspective, **Preferred Alternative 2** would provide the highest potential economic benefits of the viable alternatives being considered followed by **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4** (Table 4.1.2.2).

**Table 0.1.** South Atlantic snowy grouper landings for fishing years 2015 to 2019.

| <b>Fishing Year</b> | <b>Commercial landings (lbs gw)</b> | <b>Recreational landings<sup>a</sup> (lbs gw)</b> | <b>Total landings (lbs gw)</b> |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| 2015                | 130,088                             | 56,850  | 186,938                        |
| 2016                | 149,385                             | 76,960  | 226,346                        |
| 2017                | 135,825                             | 14,134  | 149,959                        |
| 2018                | 146,874                             | 28,557  | 175,430                        |
| 2019                | 151,889                             | 21,623  | 173,512                        |
| 5-year average      | 142,812                             | 39,625  | 186,938                        |

<sup>a</sup>Recreational landings are inclusive of FES estimates. Assumes a conversion ratio of 1.18 to convert pounds whole weight to pounds gutted weight.

**Table 0.2.** Percent difference between the total ACLs in **Action 1** compared to 5-year average landings from fishing years 2015 to 2019<sup>a</sup>.

| <b>Fishing Year</b> | <b>Percent difference between the ACL and 5-year average annual landings for Preferred Alternative 2</b> | <b>Percent difference between the ACL and 5-year average annual landings for Alternative 3</b> | <b>Percent difference between the ACL and 5-year average annual landings for Alternative 4</b> |
|---------------------|--|--|--|
| 2023                | <b>-31%</b>  | -34%   | -38%   |
| 2024                | <b>-30%</b>  | -34%   | -37%   |
| 2025                | <b>-29%</b>  | -33%   | -36%   |
| 2026+               | <b>-29%</b>  | -33%   | -36%   |

<sup>a</sup>**Alternative 1 (No Action)** is tracked in part using CHTS estimates for charter and private recreational landings while **Alternatives 2 (Preferred)** through **4** would be tracked in part using FES estimates for charter and private recreational landings. As such, the economic effects of **Alternative 1 (No Action)** cannot be directly compared in a quantitative manner to the other alternatives since the accounting methods used to track the CHTS and FES are vastly different and are not forward projecting. Thus, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** cannot be considered in this analysis.

The estimated change in potential landings by sector under **Preferred Alternative 2** through **Alternative 4** are provided in Table 4.1.2.3 and Table 4.1.2.5. Table 4.1.2.4 and Table 4.1.2.6 show the resulting estimated change in net economic benefits by sector and Table 4.1.2.7 shows the estimated change in net economic benefits for **Action 1** in aggregate for both sectors combined. In the 2023 fishing year, **Preferred Alternative 2** is estimated to result in a decrease in potential net economic benefits of \$120,169 for the commercial sector, a decrease in potential net economic benefits of \$309,994 for the recreational sector, and a decrease in potential net economic benefits of \$430,163 for both sectors combined (2021 \$). By the 2026 fishing year and beyond, **Preferred Alternative 2** is estimated to result in a decrease in potential net economic benefits of \$114,262 for the commercial sector, a decrease in potential net economic benefits of \$302,979 for the recreational sector, and a decrease in potential net economic benefits of \$417,241 for both sectors combined (2021 \$).

**Table 0.2.3.** Estimated change in potential landings (lbs gw) to the commercial sector from **Action 1**.

| Fishing Year | Preferred Alternative 2 | Alternative 3 | Alternative 4 |
|--------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 2023         | -54,622                 | -59,352       | -64,329       |
| 2024         | -53,279                 | -58,312       | -63,345       |
| 2025         | -51,937                 | -57,037       | -62,137       |
| 2026+        | -51,937                 | -57,037       | -62,137       |

**Table 0.2.4.** Estimated change in potential net economic benefits to the commercial sector (PS) from **Action 1** (2021 \$).

| Fishing Year | Preferred Alternative 2 | Alternative 3 | Alternative 4 |
|--------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 2023         | -\$120,169              | -\$130,573    | -\$141,524    |
| 2024         | -\$117,214              | -\$128,287    | -\$139,358    |
| 2025         | -\$114,262              | -\$125,481    | -\$136,701    |
| 2026+        | -\$114,262              | -\$125,481    | -\$136,701    |

**Table 0.2.5.** Estimated change in potential landings (numbers of fish) to the recreational sector from **Action 1**.

| Fishing Year | Preferred Alternative 2 | Alternative 3 | Alternative 4 |
|--------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 2023         | -2,696                  | -2,810        | -2,923        |
| 2024         | -2,665                  | -2,780        | -2,896        |
| 2025         | -2,635                  | -2,752        | -2,869        |
| 2026+        | -2,635                  | -2,752        | -2,869        |

**Table 0.2.6.** Estimated change in potential net economic benefits to the recreational sector (CS) from **Action 1** (2021 \$).

| Fishing Year | Preferred Alternative 2 | Alternative 3 | Alternative 4 |
|--------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|
|--------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|

|       |                   |            |            |
|-------|-------------------|------------|------------|
| 2023  | <b>-\$309,994</b> | -\$323,093 | -\$336,191 |
| 2024  | <b>-\$306,429</b> | -\$319,706 | -\$332,983 |
| 2025  | <b>-\$302,979</b> | -\$316,428 | -\$329,878 |
| 2026+ | <b>-\$302,979</b> | -\$316,428 | -\$329,878 |

**Table 0.2.7.** Estimated change in potential net economic benefits (recreation and commercial combined) from **Action 1** (2021 \$)<sup>a</sup>.

| <b>Fishing Year</b> | <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b> | <b>Alternative 3</b> | <b>Alternative 4</b> |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 2023                | <b>-\$430,163</b>              | -\$453,666           | -\$477,715           |
| 2024                | <b>-\$423,643</b>              | -\$447,993           | -\$472,341           |
| 2025                | <b>-\$417,241</b>              | -\$441,909           | -\$466,579           |
| 2026+               | <b>-\$417,241</b>              | -\$441,909           | -\$466,579           |

<sup>a</sup>**Alternative 1 (No Action)** is tracked in part using CHTS estimates for charter and private recreational landings while **Alternatives 2 (Preferred)** through **4** would be tracked in part using FES estimates for charter and private recreational landings. As such, the economic effects of **Alternative 1 (No Action)** cannot be directly compared in a quantitative manner to the other alternatives since the accounting methods used to track the CHTS and FES are vastly different and are not forward projecting. Thus, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** cannot be considered in this analysis.

Assumptions used in calculating these estimates include application of the status quo allocation of the total ACL (83% commercial, 17% recreational) to the new ACL for each alternative to estimate economic benefits. This allocation is then compared to the baseline scenario (i.e. a proxy for **Alternative 1 (No Action)**) to determine the gap between the baseline scenario and the ACL by sector under the assumption that both sectors would fully harvest their respective ACLs. For the commercial sector, the current sector ACL of 153,935 lbs gw is used as the baseline scenario since the units measuring this portion of the total ACL are not changing due to this action. For the recreational sector, 5-year average landings (2015-2019; 4,974 fish) in FES terms are used as the baseline scenario since a forward looking conversion of CHTS and FES units is not available that would allow direct comparison of the current recreational sector ACL under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, which is in CHTS terms, to the resulting new recreational sector ACL under **Alternatives 2 (Preferred)** through **4**.

To estimate the change in potential net economic benefits for the commercial sector, the difference in the current and potential future commercial portion of the total ACL applied to the appropriate price (\$5.78/lbs gw; Tables 3.3.1.2 and 3.3.1.3) along with a scaling factor of 38% of gross revenue (Section 3.3.1; NMFS SEFSC, pers. comm. 2022) to estimate PS for the commercial sector. It is assumed that the ex-vessel price will not change due to the change in commercial landings. Although there are no currently available estimates of the demand elasticity for snowy grouper, it is assumed that there would be no expected change to consumer surplus from the commercial perspective since there is likely a high degree of substitutability of snowy grouper for other species. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above for commercial vessels.

To estimate net economic benefits for the recreational sector, a consumer surplus (CS) estimate of \$115 for the second grouper kept on a recreational trip is used (2021 \$; Section 3.3.2). This marginal value estimate is used as it is closest to the current retention limit of one fish per vessel. A weight of 8.93 lbs gw per snowy grouper and a conversion rate of 1.18 is used to convert the recreational portion of the buffer from lbs gw to lbs ww and then to numbers of fish. It is assumed that changes in the recreational portion of the total ACL would only affect catch per trip and not the overall number of trips taken due to the low retention limit for snowy grouper and a large number of potential substitute target species. This includes no direct change to for-hire fishing activity and thus no change in direct economic effects for the for-hire component of the recreational sector. As such, there are no estimated changes in producer surplus (PS) provided for the recreational sector.

#### 4.1.3 Social Effects

The ACL for any stock does not directly affect resource users unless the ACL is met or exceeded, in which case AMs that restrict, or close harvest could negatively impact the commercial, for-hire, and private recreational sectors. AMs can have significant direct and indirect social effects because, when triggered, can restrict harvest in the current season or subsequent seasons. While the negative effects are usually short-term, they may at times induce other indirect effects through changes in fishing behavior or business operations that could have long-term social effects, such as increased pressure on another species, or fishermen having to stop fishing altogether due to regulatory closures. However, restrictions on harvest contribute to sustainable management goals, and are expected to be beneficial to fishermen and communities in the long term. Generally, the higher the ACL the greater the short-term social benefits that would be expected to accrue if harvest is sustainable.

Communities that would be most affected by changes to the OFL, ABC, and ACL for snowy grouper are detailed in Section 3.4. Fishing communities in Florida, followed closely by those in North Carolina, see the highest landings of snowy grouper. Specifically, Key West, Florida; Supply, North Carolina; and Little River, South Carolina see the highest commercial snowy grouper landings and are highly engaged in commercial fishing efforts. Recreationally, the communities of Key West, Florida; and Hatteras, North Carolina have a large number for for-hire permits and are highly engaged in the recreational fishing industry, with the latter being more reliant than other communities.

Under **Preferred Alternative 2**, **Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 4** the ACL for snowy grouper would be based on the most recent stock assessment and updated MRIP estimates. Adjustments in an ACL based on updated information are necessary to ensure continuous social benefits over time. Specifically, updated information ensures the sustainability of fishing activities which can stabilize business operations and planning for the future. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would not update the snowy grouper ACL based on current information and would not provide the social benefits associated with up-to-date scientific information.

In general, a higher ACL would lower the chance of triggering a recreational or commercial AM and result in the lowest level of negative effects on the recreational and commercial sectors. Additionally, higher ACLs may provide opportunity for commercial and recreational fishermen to expand their harvest providing social benefits associated with increased income to fishing businesses within the community and higher trip satisfaction. Among the action alternatives,

**Preferred Alternative 2** would be the most beneficial for fishermen, followed by **Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 4**.

#### **4.1.4 Administrative Effects**

Reducing the total ACL and annual OY for snowy grouper through **Preferred Alternative 2** through **4** would not have effects on the administrative environment, outside of the requisite public notices. However, in general, the lower the ACL, the more likely it is to be met (if no additional harvest restrictions are implemented), and the more likely an AM would be triggered. Since it is expected that both the commercial and recreational ACL would be met and an in-season closure is expected to occur under each of the alternatives, the administrative effects are likely going to be minimal and the same across the viable alternatives.

## 4.2 Action 2. Revise the snowy grouper sector allocations and sector annual catch limits

### 4.2.1 Biological Effects

#### *Expected effects to snowy grouper and co-occurring species*

Biological effects are not expected to be substantially different between **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Alternative 2**, and **Alternative 3** since the allocation percentages would be similar and do not affect the total ACL specified in Action 2 (**Table 4.2.1**). Because of the reductions in catch levels in **Action 1**, all alternatives are constraining on harvest regardless of an increase in sector allocation. **Preferred Alternative 2** would allocate a higher percentage to the commercial sector. When considering discards, any sector that receives a lower sector ACL could have increased discards as an in-season closure may occur earlier and snowy grouper may be discarded when fishing for co-occurring species, such as blueline tilefish. Under **Preferred Alternative 2** the recreational sector allocation is decreased from the current allocation, therefore increased recreational discards could occur. The opposite would result from **Alternative 3** as the commercial sector allocation would be lower than the current allocation, therefore an increase in commercial discards is possible. Discards are not expected to change under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. According to the SEDAR 36 Update assessment, snowy grouper discard mortality is 100% for both sectors, therefore no significant difference in discard mortality is expected. In addition, substantial changes in fishing effort or behavior are not expected as a result of this action, thus the proposed sector ACLs under this action would not be expected to result in any biological effects, positive or negative, on co-occurring species (refer to BPA in Appendix G).

**Alternatives\***

1. (No Action). Apply the current allocation percentages to the revised total ACL. Total ACL is allocated 83% to the commercial sector and 17% to the recreational sector and.
- 2. Based on average landings from 1986 to 2005, the total ACL is allocated 87.55% to the commercial and 12.45% to the recreational sector.**
3. Using the Allocations Formula, 73.36% of the total ACL is allocated to the commercial sector and 26.64% to the recreational sector.

\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.

**Table 4.2.1.1.** The commercial sector allocations for snowy grouper based on the revised total ACL from Preferred Alternative 2 in Action 1. The commercial season is split into two seasons. Season 1 is from January 1 – June 31 and it receives 70% of the total commercial ACL. Season 2 is from July 1 – December 31 and it receives 30% of the total commercial ACL.

| Alternative                            | Year  | Total ACL (lbs gw) | Total Commercial ACL (lbs gw) | Season 1 (70%) (lbs gw) | Season 2 (30%) (lbs gw) |
|--|-------|--------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Alternative 1 (No Action) 83%</b>   | 2023  | 119,654            | 99,313                        | 69,518                  | 29,794                  |
|  | 2024  | 121,272            | 100,656                       | 70,459                  | 30,197                  |
|  | 2025  | 122,889            | 101,999                       | 71,399                  | 30,599                  |
|  | 2026* | 122,889            | 101,999                       | 71,399                  | 30,599                  |
| <b>Preferred Alternative 2, 87.55%</b> | 2023  | 119,654            | 104,757                       | 73,330                  | 31,427                  |
|  | 2024  | 121,272            | 106,174                       | 74,322                  | 31,852                  |

|                              |       |         |         |        |        |
|------------------------------|-------|---------|---------|--------|--------|
|                              | 2025  | 122,889 | 107,589 | 75,313 | 32,277 |
|                              | 2026* | 122,889 | 107,589 | 75,313 | 32,277 |
| <b>Alternative 3, 73.36%</b> | 2023  | 119,654 | 87,778  | 61,445 | 26,333 |
|                              | 2024  | 121,272 | 88,965  | 62,276 | 26,690 |
|                              | 2025  | 122,889 | 90,151  | 63,106 | 27,045 |
|                              | 2026* | 122,889 | 90,151  | 63,106 | 27,045 |

\*The 2026 ACL will remain in place until modified.

**Table 4.2.1.2.** The recreational sector allocations for snowy grouper based on the revised total ACL from Preferred Alternative 2 in Action 1. Recreational allocations were determined using an average weight from SEDAR 36 Update (8.93 lbs gw).

| Alternative                            | Year  | Total ACL<br>(numbers of fish) | Total Recreational ACL<br>(numbers of fish) |
|--|-------|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>Alternative 1 (No Action) 83%</b>   | 2023  | 15,264                         | 2,278                                       |
|  | 2024  | 15,264                         | 2,309                                       |
|  | 2025  | 15,264                         | 2,339                                       |
|  | 2026* | 15,264                         | 2,339                                       |
| <b>Preferred Alternative 2, 87.55%</b> | 2023  | 15,264                         | 1,668                                       |
|  | 2024  | 15,264                         | 1,691                                       |
|  | 2025  | 15,264                         | 1,713                                       |
|  | 2026* | 15,264                         | 1,713                                       |
| <b>Alternative 3, 73.36%</b>           | 2023  | 15,264                         | 3,570                                       |
|  | 2024  | 15,264                         | 3,618                                       |
|  | 2025  | 15,264                         | 3,666                                       |
|  | 2026* | 15,264                         | 3,666                                       |

\*The 2026 ACL will remain in place until modified.

Snowy grouper was the second most discarded snapper grouper species during snapper grouper trips (defined as trips with >50% of landings from snapper-grouper stocks), sorted from largest to smallest, by gear, for the 2015-2019 period (reference SBRM review). However, landings and discards of snowy grouper using long-line gear (13%) is substantially less than landings using handlines and other gear (87%) (SEDAR 36 Update).

**Alternative 3** would allocate a higher percentage to the recreational sector. **Alternative 3** would decrease in the recreational ACL by 1,289 fish in 2023. Between 2015-2020, less than 40% of the recreational ACL was caught each year for the exception of two years during that time period. However, as a result of the reduced catch levels of **Action 1**, the recreational ACL of **Alternative 3** may still be constraining and could result in the ACL being fully harvested.

#### 4.2.2 Economic Effects

In general, sector ACLs that allow for more fish to be landed can result in increased positive economic effects if harvest increases without notable effects on the stock of a species. The ACL does not directly impact the fishery for a species unless harvest changes, fishing behavior changes, or the ACL is exceeded, thereby potentially triggering AMs such as harvest closures or other restrictive measure. In the case of snowy grouper, the revised sector allocations and resulting ACLs being considered in **Alternatives 1 (No Action)** through **Alternative 3** would be

constraining on harvest for both sectors and shifts between sectors would create distributional economic effects by sector, depending on the allocation.

Commercial Sector

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** would maintain the current commercial allocation of 83% of the total ACL. **Preferred Alternative 2** would result in a comparatively higher commercial sector allocation and sector ACLs (87.55% of the total ACL). **Alternative 3** would result in a comparatively lower commercial sector allocation and sector ACL (73.36% of the total ACL). All of the commercial ACL alternatives in **Action 2** are estimated to be constraining based on the average annual landings over the last five years of available data (Table 4.2.2.1) and are all lower than the current sector ACL of 153,935 lbs gw, therefore it is assumed that the commercial sector could fully harvest its ACL, if conditions allowed, and there would be more potential landings of snowy grouper under **Preferred Alternative 2** relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. These relatively increased landings would be expected to comparatively increase total potential PS for the commercial sector. Conversely, **Alternative 3** would allow lower potential commercial landings which would comparatively decrease total potential PS for the commercial sector. When compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Alternative 2** would result in an estimated increase in PS of \$11,977 in fishing year 2023 and an increase in PS of \$12,298 by fishing year 2026. Comparatively, **Alternative 3** would result in an estimated decrease in PS of \$25,377 in fishing year 2023 and a decrease in PS of \$26,066 by fishing year 2026 (2021 \$) (Table 4.2.2.2). Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above.

**Table 0.1.** Percent difference between the commercial sector ACLs in **Action 2** compared to 5-year average landings of snowy grouper from 2015-2019 and comparison of sector ACLs.

| Fishing Year                     | Commercial sector ACL (lbs gw) | Percent difference between 5-year average landings and the sector ACL | Difference from Alternative 1 (No Action) sector ACL (lbs gw) |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Alternative 1 (No Action)</b> |                                |   |   |
| 2023                             | 99,313                         | -30%  | -   |
| 2024                             | 100,656                        | -30%  | -   |
| 2025                             | 101,999                        | -29%  | -   |
| 2026+                            | 101,999                        | -29%  | -   |
| <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b>   |                                |   |   |
| 2023                             | 104,757                        | -27%  | 5,444   |
| 2024                             | 106,174                        | -26%  | 5,518   |
| 2025                             | 107,589                        | -25%  | 5,590   |
| 2026+                            | 107,589                        | -25%  | 5,590   |
| <b>Alternative 3</b>             |                                |   |   |
| 2023                             | 87,778                         | -39%  | -11,535   |

|       |        |      |         |
|-------|--------|------|---------|
| 2024  | 88,965 | -38% | -11,691 |
| 2025  | 90,151 | -37% | -11,848 |
| 2026+ | 90,151 | -37% | -11,848 |

<sup>a</sup>Assumes the total ACL in Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 1 to determine the sector ACL.

**Table 0.2.** Estimated change in potential net economic benefits for the commercial sector (PS) from the alternatives in **Action 2** compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**(2021 \$).

| Fishing Year | Preferred Alternative 2 | Alternative 3 |
|--------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| 2023         | <b>\$11,977</b>         | -\$25,377     |
| 2024         | <b>\$12,140</b>         | -\$25,720     |
| 2025         | <b>\$12,298</b>         | -\$26,066     |
| 2026+        | <b>\$12,298</b>         | -\$26,066     |

Assumptions used in calculating the estimates in Table 4.2.2.2 include a comparison of the sector ACL in **Alternative 1 (No Action)** to the appropriate sector ACL resulting from the other alternatives. To estimate the change in potential net economic benefits, the difference in lbs gw is applied to the appropriate price (\$5.78/lbs gw; Tables 3.3.1 and 3.3.2) along with a scaling factor of 38% of gross revenue (Section 3.3.1.2; NMFS SEFSC, pers. comm. 2022) to estimate PS for the commercial sector. It is assumed that the ex-vessel price will not change due to the change in commercial landings. Although there are no currently available estimates of the demand elasticity for snowy grouper, it is assumed that there would be no expected change to CS from the commercial perspective since there is likely a high degree of substitutability of snowy grouper for other species. The total ACL for which the sector ACLs are based upon is derived from Preferred Alternative 2 in Action 1.

Recreational Sector

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** would maintain the current recreational allocation of 17% of the total ACL. **Preferred Alternative 2** would result in a comparatively lower recreational sector allocation and sector ACLs (12.45% of the total ACL). **Alternative 3** would result in a comparatively higher recreational sector allocation and sector ACL (26.64% of the total ACL). The recreational ACLs in **Action 2** are estimated to be constraining based on the average annual landings over the last five years of available data (Table 4.2.2.3), and it is assumed that the recreational sector could fully harvest its ACL if conditions allowed. There would be lower potential landings of snowy grouper under **Preferred Alternative 2** relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. These relatively decreased landings would be expected to comparatively decrease total CS for the recreational sector. Conversely, **Alternative 3** would result in a comparatively greater potential recreational landings which would comparatively increase total potential CS for the recreational sector. When compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Alternative 2** would result in an estimated decrease in CS of \$70,150 in fishing year 2023 and an decrease in CS of \$71,990 by fishing year 2026, followed by **Preferred Alternative 3** with an estimated increase in CS of \$148,580 in fishing year 2023 and an increase in CS of \$152,605 by fishing year 2026 (2020 \$). Comparatively, **Alternative 5** would result in the largest estimated decrease in CS of \$201,462 in fishing year 2023/24 and a decrease in CS of \$166,317 by fishing year 2026/27, followed by **Alternative 4** with an estimated decrease in CS of \$93,613 in fishing year 2023/24 and a decrease in CS of \$77,282 by fishing year 2026/27 (2020 \$) (Table 4.2.2.4).

**Table 0.3.** Percent difference between the recreational sector ACLs in **Action 2** compared to 5-year average landings of snowy grouper from 2015-2019 and comparison of sector ACLs.

| Fishing Year                     | Recreational sector ACL (numbers of fish) | Percent difference between 5-year average landings and the sector ACL | Difference from Alternative 1 (No Action) (numbers of fish) |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Alternative 1 (No Action)</b> |   |   |   |
| 2023                             | 2,278                                     | -54%  | -   |
| 2024                             | 2,309                                     | -54%  | -   |
| 2025                             | 2,339                                     | -53%  | -   |
| 2026+                            | 2,339                                     | -53%  | -   |
| <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b>   |   |   |   |
| <b>2023</b>                      | <b>1,668</b>                              | <b>-66%</b>   | <b>-610</b>   |
| <b>2024</b>                      | <b>1,691</b>                              | <b>-66%</b>   | <b>-618</b>   |
| <b>2025</b>                      | <b>1,713</b>                              | <b>-66%</b>   | <b>-626</b>   |
| <b>2026+</b>                     | <b>1,713</b>                              | <b>-66%</b>   | <b>-626</b>   |
| <b>Alternative 3</b>             |   |   |   |
| 2023                             | 3,570                                     | -28%  | 1,292   |
| 2024                             | 3,618                                     | -27%  | 1,309   |
| 2025                             | 3,666                                     | -26%  | 1,327   |
| 2026+                            | 3,666                                     | -26%  | 1,327   |

<sup>a</sup>Assumes the total ACL in Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 1 to determine the sector ACL.

**Table 0.4.** Estimated change in potential net economic benefits for the recreational sector (CS) from the alternatives in **Action 2** compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (2021 \$).

| Fishing Year | Preferred Alternative 2 | Alternative 3 |
|--------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| 2023         | -\$70,150               | \$148,580     |
| 2024         | -\$71,070               | \$150,535     |
| 2025         | -\$71,990               | \$152,605     |
| 2026+        | -\$71,990               | \$152,605     |

Assumptions used in calculating the estimates in Table 4.2.2.4 include a comparison of the sector ACL in **Alternative 1 (No Action)** to the appropriate sector ACL resulting from the other alternatives in numbers of fish. To estimate the change in potential net economic benefits, a consumer surplus (CS) estimates of \$115 for the second grouper kept on a recreational trip is used (2021 \$; Section 3.3.2). This marginal value estimate is used as it is closest to the current retention limit of one fish per vessel. It is assumed that changes in the recreational portion of the total ACL would only affect catch per trip and not the overall number of trips taken due to the low bag limit for snowy grouper and a large number of potential substitute target species. This includes no direct change to for-hire fishing activity and thus no change in direct economic effects for the for-hire component of the recreational sector. As such, there are no estimated

changes in producer surplus (PS) provided for the recreational sector. The total ACL for which the sector ACLs are based upon is derived from Preferred Alternative 2 in Action 1.

Total

In general, higher ACLs allow for increased harvest when fishery conditions allow, thereby increase net economic benefits. Thus, under this notion, the alternatives in **Action 2** can be ranked for the commercial sector from a short-term economic perspective with **Preferred Alternative 2** resulting in the highest potential benefits followed by **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, and **Alternative 3**. For the recreational sector, the ranking would be the opposite with **Alternative 3** resulting in the highest potential benefits followed by **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2**. In terms of total estimated net economic benefits for the action, the same ranking would apply as stated for the recreational sector. In comparison to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Alternative 2** would decrease net economic benefits by \$58,173 and **Alternative 3** would increase net economic benefits by \$123,203 in the 2023 fishing year (Table 4.2.2.5)(2021 \$).

**Table 0.5.** Estimated change in potential net economic benefits from the alternatives in **Action 2** compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (2021 \$).

| <b>Fishing Year</b> | <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b> | <b>Alternative 3</b> |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| 2023                | <b>-\$58,173</b>               | \$123,203            |
| 2024                | <b>-\$58,930</b>               | \$124,815            |
| 2025                | <b>-\$59,692</b>               | \$126,539            |
| 2026+               | <b>-\$59,692</b>               | \$126,539            |

**4.2.3 Social Effects**

Sector allocations exist for the recreational and commercial sectors already, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would maintain the current allocation percentages. Under **Preferred Alternative 2** there would be an increase in the commercial percentage and under **Alternative 3** there would be a decrease in the commercial percentage compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Both alternatives could have some negative social effects if recreational and commercial fishermen, respectively, have a negative perception of this change due to the decrease in fishing opportunity and concerns about long-term social effects, especially if other actions further decreased harvest opportunities.

As mentioned above, there can be many different social effects that result as allocations are discussed further, and perceptions are formed. In the past there has been some resistance to further decreasing a given sector’s percentage allocation. It is difficult to predict the social effects with any allocation scheme as it would depend upon other actions in conjunction with this one. A reduction in allocation for one sector may be compounded by a restrictive choice of ABC or ACL (**Action 1**) and may have further effects that could be either negative or positive depending upon the combination of management actions. Therefore, the choice of an allocation would need to be assessed with other actions within this amendment to determine the overall social effects and whether short-term losses are offset by any long-term biological gains.

Based on **Action 1-Preferred Alternative 2** and recent commercial and recreational landings, all of the proposed commercial or recreational ACLs are expected to be met, resulting in triggering of the AMs (**Action 4**). Modifications to recreational management measures (**Actions 3 and 4**) are anticipated to decrease landings and length the season, but not to the extent that would prevent a recreational closure.

#### **4.2.4 Administrative Effects**

Administrative effects would not vary between **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Alternative 2**, and **Alternative 3** because the sector allocations are similar and an in-season closure is predicted for both sectors. Administrative burdens depending on the recreational AM (Action 5) would relate to data monitoring, outreach, and enforcement of a short fishing season. Other administrative burdens that may result would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement.

### 4.3 Action 3. Modify snowy grouper recreational season

#### 4.3.1 Biological Effects

*Expected effects to snowy grouper and co-occurring species*

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** would keep the recreational season as four months. **Preferred Alternatives 2 and 3** would reduce the season to two months. These two alternatives would be expected to result in beneficial impacts to the stock as season would be shorter and the fishing mortality would be lower compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. From 2015 to 2019, the average landings were highest during the snowy grouper recreational fishing season May through August (Figure 4.3.1.1) (Table 4.3.1.1). Therefore, the biological effects could be greater with **Alternative 3** compared to **Alternative 2** as it would be closing the months with the highest catch. But the effects may be similar between the two alternatives if fishermen shift effort to other months.

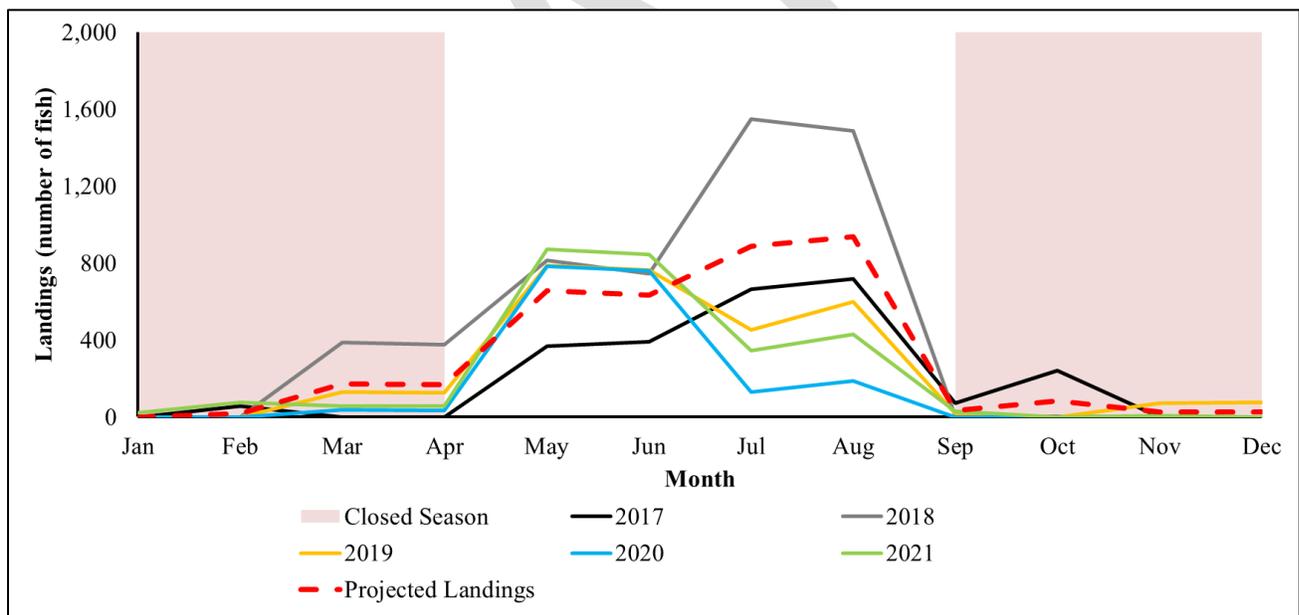
**Alternatives\***

1 (No Action). The snowy grouper recreational season is May 1 through August 31.

**2. The snowy grouper recreational season is May 1 through June 30<sup>th</sup>.**

3. The snowy grouper recreational season is July 1 through August 30<sup>th</sup>.

\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.



**Figure 4.3.1.1.** South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings by month from 2017-2019 and projected landings. All of the landing projections assume no landings between January 1 - April 30 and September 1 – December 31 for the season closure. Source: SEFSC MRIP FES Recreational ACL Database [March 17, 2022].

**Table 4.3.1.3.** Average number of snowy grouper landed by the recreational sector by wave from the South Atlantic based on a three-year average (2017 to 2019) and a five-year average (2015 to 2019). Landings include trips reported from Monroe County, FL. The confidence interval was developed based on the standard deviation of the three years.

| Wave           | Three Year Average (2017-2019) | Confidence Interval | Average Number Per Month |
|----------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Jan-Feb        | 20                             | 0 - 598             | 10                       |
| Mar-Apr        | 342                            | 0 - 806             | 11                       |
| <b>May-Jun</b> | <b>1,290</b>                   | <b>0 - 3,120</b>    | <b>645</b>               |
| <b>Jul-Aug</b> | <b>1,824</b>                   | <b>938 - 2,710</b>  | <b>912</b>               |
| Sep-Oct        | 116                            | 0 - 270             | 58                       |
| Nov-Dec        | 0                              | 0 - 126             | 0                        |
| Wave           | Five Year Average (2015-2019)  | Confidence Interval | Average Number Per Month |
| Jan-Feb        | 351                            | 0 – 1,372           | 176                      |
| Mar-Apr        | 395                            | 0 – 1,256           | 198                      |
| <b>May-Jun</b> | <b>2,354</b>                   | <b>0 – 5,520</b>    | <b>1,177</b>             |
| <b>Jul-Aug</b> | <b>1,674</b>                   | <b>138 – 3,210</b>  | <b>837</b>               |
| Sep-Oct        | 45                             | 0 - 230             | 23                       |
| Nov-Dec        | 30                             | 0 - 163             | 15                       |

**Table 4.3.1.4.** The projected South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings (number of fish) and closure dates expected for each Alternative of Action 3 using a three-year (2017-2019) and five-year (2015-2019) average. **The recreational ACL options considered here assume sector allocations of 87.55% commercial and 12.45% recreational (Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 2).** Source: SEFSC MRIP FES Recreational ACL Database [March 17, 2022].

| Alternative 1 (No Action): May 1 – August 31   | Recreational ACL (numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average Closure Date | 3-Year Average Days Open | 5-Year Average Closure Date | 5-Year Average Days Open |
|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2023   | 1,668                               | 14-Jul                      | 74                       | 13-Jun                      | 43                       |
| 2024   | 1,691                               | 14-Jul                      | 74                       | 13-Jun                      | 43                       |
| 2025   | 1,713                               | 15-Jul                      | 75                       | 14-Jun                      | 44                       |
| 2026   | 1,713                               | 15-Jul                      | 75                       | 14-Jun                      | 44                       |
| Alternative 2: Wave 3 Option (May 1 – June 31) | Recreational ACL (numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average Closure Date | 3-Year Average Days Open | 5-Year Average Closure Date | 5-Year Average Days Open |
| 2023   | 1,668                               | No Closure (1,290 fish)     | 61                       | 13-Jun                      | 43                       |
| 2024   | 1,691                               | No Closure (1,290 fish)     | 61                       | 13-Jun                      | 43                       |
| 2025   | 1,713                               | No Closure (1,290 fish)     | 61                       | 14-Jun                      | 44                       |
| 2026   | 1,713                               | No Closure (1,290 fish)     | 61                       | 14-Jun                      | 44                       |
| Alternative 3: Wave 4 Option (July 1 – Aug 31) | Recreational ACL (numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average Closure Date | 3-Year Average Days Open | 5-Year Average Closure Date | 5-Year Average Days Open |
| 2023   | 1,668                               | 26-Aug                      | 56                       | 31-Aug                      | 60                       |
| 2024   | 1,691                               | 27-Aug                      | 57                       | No Closure (1,674 fish)     | 61                       |

|      |       |        |    |                         |    |
|------|-------|--------|----|-------------------------|----|
| 2025 | 1,713 | 28-Aug | 58 | No Closure (1,674 fish) | 61 |
| 2026 | 1,713 | 28-Aug | 58 | No Closure (1,674 fish) | 61 |

**Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would likely result in beneficial effects to the stock by reducing the mortality on spawning snowy grouper if fishing effort is reduced by the shorten seasons. Kolmos et al. (2019) noted that spawning across sizes and ages increased May through August (Figure 4.3.1.2). A spawning season closure could be considered to allow snowy grouper an increased chance of spawning before they may be harvested and decrease fishing pressure on snowy grouper when they are spawning.

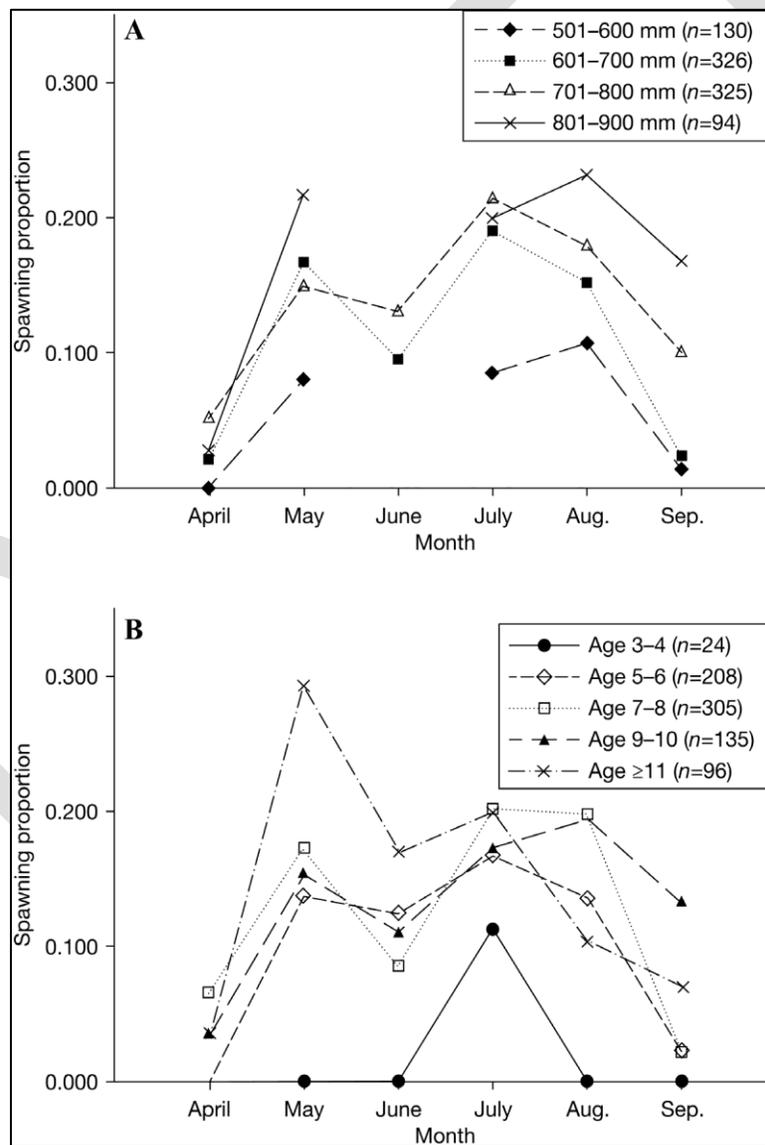


Figure 4.3.1.2. Spawning proportion by month. Source: Kolmos et al. (2019).

### 4.3.2 Economic Effects

Generally, prolonged time periods when recreational harvest is allowed can result in increased economic benefits. Allowing the recreational harvest to be open for longer periods of time can help ensure that the ACL is harvested each year and all associated economic benefits from that harvest to recreational anglers is incurred. Conversely, this also creates unpredictability in season length and when harvest will close if the accountability measure is triggered.

If the ACL is not fully harvested during the established season, it can lead to fewer short-term economic benefits, thus there is the potential for **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** to have lower economic benefits than **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** provides the longest fishing season (4 months), thus the greatest opportunity to fully harvest the ACL and the highest potential short-term economic benefits, followed by **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** (two months).

When using 5-year average landings as a baseline (Table 4.3.1.1), removing the months of July and August (**Preferred Alternative 2**) from the recreational fishing season for snowy grouper would result in an estimated reduction in landings of 1,674 fish and a removing the months of June and July (**Alternative 3**) would result in an estimated reduction in landings of 2,354 fish. Applying a CS estimate of \$115 per snowy grouper (2021 \$; Section 3.3.2) to these reductions in harvest provides an estimated reduction of \$192,510 in net economic benefits under **Preferred Alternative 2** and 270,710 in net economic benefits under **Alternative 3** (Table 4.3.2.1). These quantitative economic effects may be at least partially captured in the economic effects described in Action 1 and Action 2 for the recreational sector, since prohibiting harvest for the recreational sector would contribute to the reduction in recreational landings noted for those two actions. Thus, the quantitative effects in Table 4.3.2.1 are not necessarily additive to the effects shown in Action 1 and 2, but rather show the estimated economic effects of **Action 3** all other conditions remaining the same.

**Table 4.3.2.1.** Estimated reduction in landings and CS from the Alternatives in **Action 3**.

| Alternative                    | Estimated reduction in landings<br>(#s of fish) | Estimated reduction in CS<br>(2021 \$) |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Alternative 1 (No Action)      | 0   | \$0                                    |
| <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b> | <b>-1,674</b>                                   | <b>-\$192,510</b>                      |
| Alternative 3                  | -2,354  | -\$270,710                             |

### 4.3.3 Social Effects

Shortening the recreational season could change the level of access to snowy grouper during periods when they are available and when participation in the snowy grouper portion of the snapper grouper fishery is highest. However, long-term biological benefits of maintaining a healthy stock would contribute to future fishing opportunities for both the commercial and recreational sectors.

The social effects of **Preferred Alternative 2**, and **Alternative 3** compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would depend on when recreational effort is the highest for snowy grouper. Generally, access to snowy grouper for recreational participants will depend on the season length specified. **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** propose two-month seasons. Participation in the snowy grouper portion of the snapper grouper fishery has historically been highest during wave three (May and June) followed by wave four (July and August) (Figure 4.4.1.1). **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3**, would allow recreational anglers and for-hire businesses access to snowy grouper when participation has been highest. Additionally, **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would reduce harvest during the snowy grouper spawning season when compared to the four-month season in **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Contributing to rebuilding goals for snowy grouper would be expected to contribute to the sustainability of harvest and the health of the snowy grouper stock and provide for long-term social benefits.

Considering the proposed recreational allocation (**Preferred Alternative 2**, Action 3) and peak harvest of snowy grouper, **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** are anticipated to result in similar season lengths (less than one wave) and thus similar social benefits for South Atlantic fishing communities. However, social benefits for individual communities highly engaged in the recreational harvest of snowy grouper (Section 3.4) will vary based on when participation in the fishery is the highest in that community.

#### 4.3.4 Administrative Effects

Administrative effects may be greater with **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3**, compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, as the seasons are shorter under these two alternatives and the probability of an in-season closures are greater. Administrative burdens associated with recreational fishing seasons would be related to distributing information, education, and enforcement

## 4.4 Action 4. Modify snowy grouper recreational accountability measures

### 4.4.1 Biological Effects

#### *Expected effects to snowy grouper and co-occurring species*

Biological benefits would be expected to be greater for the alternative that provides the most timely and realistic option chosen to trigger and implement an AM. Action 5 would revise the recreational AMs for snowy grouper. The proposed AMs range from implementing an in-season closure to announcing the length of the season. If a recreational fishing season is shortened as a result of a triggered AM, this action could increase regulatory discards in the fishery.

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, an in-season closure would likely be triggered due to the proposed reduction in the recreational ACL. In addition, because snowy grouper are overfished, an overage of the total ACL would trigger a reduction in the length of the recreational season and a payback of the overage in the subsequent fishing year.

A similar AM to that proposed under **Alternative 2** is currently in place in the South Atlantic for black sea bass. Action 4 would reduce the length of the current recreational season. Analyses show the recreational ACL would likely be met earlier. Therefore, the timeframes in Action 4 would be the “book-ends” within which recreational harvest of snowy grouper would be allowed based on how long NMFS determines the season can last. Under this scenario, if the recreational ACL was not met within that timeframe, a reopening would not occur since recreational landings estimates would not be available in-season to conduct additional projections for a reopening. **Alternative 2** would result in biological benefit to the stock in that it is likely to prevent overages of the recreational ACL. However, this alternative would not correct for an overage if it were to occur due to an unforeseen increase in recreational effort.

**Preferred Alternative 3** would remove the recreational in-season AM and would eliminate two triggers from the post-season AM (overfished status and total exceeded). Removing the in-season AM would likely result in adverse effects to the stock compared to **Alternative 1 (No**

#### Alternatives\*

1 (No Action). In-season closure if landings reach or are projected to reach the recreational ACL. If landings exceed the ACL, then monitor landings the following year. If the total ACL is exceeded and snowy grouper are overfished, reduce the length of the recreational fishing season and the recreational ACL by the amount of the overage.

2. NMFS will annually announce the recreational fishing season start and end dates. The fishing season will start on May 1 and end on the date NMFS projects the recreational ACL will be met.

**3. Remove the recreational in-season closure. If the recreational ACL is exceeded and the total ACL is exceeded, reduce the length of the following year’s recreational fishing season by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational ACL from being exceeded in the following year.**

4. Retain the recreational in-season closure. If the recreational ACL is exceeded and the total ACL is exceeded, reduce the length of the following year’s recreational fishing season by the amount necessary to prevent the recreational ACL from being exceeded in the following year.

\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated

**Action**) since the mechanism to prevent the ACL from being exceeded would be removed. However, **Preferred Alternative 3** could result in beneficial effects to the snowy grouper stock compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, since the post-season AMs would be effective regardless of the stock status and whether the total was exceeded. It is not possible to determine the overall directional effect of **Preferred Alternative 3** compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

**Alternative 4** is the same as Alternative 3, but it would retain the in-season closure. Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternative 4** would likely result in beneficial effects to the snowy grouper stock since it retains the in-season AM and would reduce some of the criteria to determine whether the post-season AM is triggered. However, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would reduce the recreational ACL following an overage whereas that is not the case with **Alternative 4**. Biological benefits to the snowy grouper stock would be similar amongst the alternatives. It is difficult to rank the alternatives according to the expected adverse effects to the biological stock as each alternative contains attributes that could lead to both beneficial and adverse effects when compared to the other alternatives.

If a recreational fishing season is shortened as a result of a triggered AM, this action could increase regulatory discards in the fishery. However, substantial changes to fishing activity or behavior are not expected; thus, no changes in bycatch are expected for Action 4.

#### 4.4.2 Economic Effects

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** would retain an in-season closure and a potential payback provision for an overage of the sector ACL that would reduce the sector ACL by the amount of the overage while snowy grouper are overfished. This alternative is the most stringent of the AMs being considered, thus it would likely result in the greatest potential for short-term negative economic effects but long-term economic benefits.

**Alternative 2** would result in a fishing season that is announced annually with set start and end dates. This AM would limit overall long-term harvest of snowy grouper but could result in economic benefits that mitigate the short-term cost of the AM itself by allowing more time to adjust to the changing harvest regulations. There would also be no safeguard in place to prevent the total ACL from being exceeded with the removal of an in-season closure. This could result in short-term economic benefits for the recreational sector due to increased harvest and long-term potential economic costs to fishery participants. If a reduced fishing season is implemented in Action 4, these potential economic effects would be largely mitigated. Additionally, this alternative does not have a payback provision for an overage of the sector ACL, making the potential for short-term negative economic effects lower in comparison to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

The economic effects of **Preferred Alternative 3** would likely be similar to those of **Alternative 2**, but the AM for this alternative would be triggered with a single year of landings rather than be in place every year. There would be no safeguard in place to prevent the total ACL from being exceeded with the removal of an in-season closure. Additionally, there would be no further restricted fishing season annually, outside of what is set in Action 4, thus potential harvest is likely higher under **Preferred Alternative 3** in comparison to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Alternative 2**. This could result in short-term economic benefits for the recreational sector due

to increased harvest and long-term potential economic costs to fishery participants. If a reduced fishing season is implemented in Action 4, these potential economic effects would be largely mitigated. The economic effects of **Alternative 4** would likely be similar to those of **Preferred Alternative 3**, but there would be lower potential short-term benefits and long-term costs since the in-season closure to harvest would still remain.

In terms of potential short-term negative economic effects to the recreational sector, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would have the highest potential negative economic effects since there is a payback provision, followed by **Alternative 4**, **Alternative 2**, and **Preferred Alternative 3**.

#### 4.4.3 Social Effects

AMs can have direct and indirect social effects because, when triggered, can restrict harvest in the current season or subsequent seasons. While the negative effects are usually short-term, they may at times induce other indirect effects through changes in fishing behavior or business operations that could have long-term social effects. Some of those effects are similar to other thresholds being met and may involve switching to other species or discontinuing fishing altogether. Those restrictions usually translate into reduced opportunity for harvest, which in turn can change fishing behaviors. Those behaviors can increase pressure on other stocks or amplify conflict. While these negative effects are usually short term, they may at times induce other indirect effects that can have a lasting effect on a community.

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** would not modify the current recreational AMs for snowy grouper (in-season closure, post-season season length reduction if overfished and stock ACL is exceeded). Inconsistent closure dates may make it challenging for for-hire businesses to plan their fishing activities. Overall, longer seasons result in increased fishing opportunities for the recreational sector and increased revenue opportunities for the for-hire sector. Reducing the season length is anticipated to result in direct negative social effects associated with loss of access to the resource.

Alternatively, **Alternative 2** would have NMFS announce the length of the recreational season for snowy grouper in the *Federal Register* prior to the start date each year, with an end date corresponding to when the recreational ACL is projected to be met for that year. While the end date for snowy grouper may shift each year, announcing at the beginning of the season would allow private anglers and for-hire businesses to plan their activities around the closure in advance. Alternatively, this process does not provide for a reopening should landings fall below the recreational ACL which may result in foregone fishing opportunities if landings occur at a slower rate than projected.

**Preferred Alternative 3** would remove the in-season closure as well as the two triggers for reducing the following fishing season (total ACL exceeded and stock overfished status). Removing the in-season closure would prevent the direct and in-direct negative social effects associated with restricted harvest during a current season. However, removal of the two triggers for season reduction in subsequent years may result in the fishing season varying significantly from year to year due to changes in fishing behavior or environmental conditions affecting current year harvest. Inconsistent fishing seasons can make it challenging for private anglers and for-hire business to plan their fishing activities through the long-term.

Similar to **Preferred Alternative 3**, **Alternative 4** would remove the two triggers for reducing the following fishing season (total ACL exceeded and stock overfished status) but would retain the in-season closure. Retaining the in-season closure would result in direct and in-direct negative social effects associated with restricted harvest during a current season. Additionally, removal of the two triggers for season reduction in subsequent years in combination with the in-season closure may result in the fishing season may vary significantly from year to year.

#### 4.4.4 Administrative Effects

Administrative burdens such as data monitoring, rulemaking, outreach, and enforcement would be similar for **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, and **Alternatives 2-4**. **Alternative 2** would require a season announcement notice in the *Federal Register* annually prior to the season start date. If the post-season AM is triggered, **Preferred Alternatives 3 and 4**, would also require a season announcement notice for a reduced season length. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Alternative 4** would both require announcements for the in-season AMs are triggered.

## **Chapter 5. DRAFT Council's Rationale for the Preferred Alternatives**

### ***TO BE COMPLETED***

#### **5.1 Action 1. Revise the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for snowy grouper to reflect the new overfishing limit and updated acceptable biological catch recommendations**

##### **5.1.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) Comments and Recommendations**

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) met October 2021 and April 2022. In October 2021, the AP noted concerns over the reduction in harvest levels and the ability to reach snowy grouper depths.

In April 2022 the AP was given an update on the amendment and selected preferred alternative. The AP did not have additional comments specific to revising the ABC, total ACL and annual OY.

##### **5.1.2 Law Enforcement AP Comments and Recommendations**

The Law Enforcement AP convened on February 10, 2022. The AP received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations pertaining to revising the ABC, total ACL and annual OY.

##### **5.1.3 Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) Comments and Recommendations**

***TO BE COMPLETED FOLLOWING THE FALL 2022 SSC MEETING***

##### **5.1.4 Public Comments and Recommendations**

A joint scoping hearing including Amendments 52 and 53 was held on February 1, 2, and 3, 2022 via webinar. One commentor expressed concerns over increasing discards with the new reduced catch levels, especially as fishermen continue to target blueline tilefish.

##### **5.1.5 South Atlantic Council's Draft Rationale**

The OY is a long-term average amount of desired yield from a stock, stock complex, or fishery that will provide the greatest overall benefit to the Nation, particularly with respect to food production and recreational opportunities, and considering the protection of marine ecosystems. The Magnuson-Stevens Act does not preclude OY from being equal to the acceptable biological catch or the total annual catch limit. The Magnuson-Stevens Act indicates that optimum yield "is prescribed as such on the basis of the maximum sustainable yield from the fishery, as reduced by any relevant economic, social, or ecological factor." The South Atlantic Council has been

frequently setting optimum yield equal to the acceptable biological catch and below the maximum sustainable yield to provide greater assurance that overfishing is prevented, the long-term average biomass is near or above the biomass that would produce the maximum sustainable yield ( $B_{MSY}$ ), and overfished stocks are rebuilt within the allotted timeframe for the species in question. While snowy grouper is overfished and experiencing overfishing, the Council decided to forego a precautionary buffer between the ACL (and OY) and the acceptable biological catch (ABC) and instead rely on the rebuilding plan established in Amendment 15A (2008) as well as management measure modifications to prevent overfishing and ensure the stock is rebuilt within the rebuilding timeframe. The current rebuilding plan has a timeframe of 34 years, projecting the stock to be rebuilt in 2039. Stock projections provided in SEDAR 36 Update (2021) projected the stock to have a  $P_{rebuild}$  of 0.504 in 2039 (Table 1.4.1). These projections show adequate progress within the rebuilding plan in accordance with National Standard 1 (50 CFR 600.310(j)(3)(iv)).

In general, an ACL cannot exceed the ABC and may be set annually or on a multiyear plan basis. Annual catch limits in coordination with accountability measures (AMs) must prevent overfishing. The National Standard 1 guidelines specify that Councils can choose to account for management uncertainty by setting the ACL below the ABC but states that annual catch limits may typically be set very close to the ABC. The Commercial Landings Monitoring System came online in June 2012 and is now being used to track commercial landings of federally managed fish species. This system is able to track individual dealer reports, track compliance with reporting requirements, project harvest closures using five different methods, and analyze why annual catch limits are exceeded. The improved commercial monitoring mechanisms now in place in the South Atlantic Region are expected to reduce the likelihood of commercial ACL overages. Additionally, a Joint Dealer Reporting Amendment, which was implemented on August 7, 2014, has increased the required reporting frequency for dealers to once per week, and requires a single dealer permit for all finfish dealers in the Southeast Region. On January 27, 2014, the Generic For-Hire Reporting Amendment was implemented (78 FR 78779), which required all federally permitted headboats in the South Atlantic to report landings information electronically and on a weekly basis. The Commercial Landings Monitoring System and actions in the Joint Generic Dealer and Generic For-Hire Reporting amendments are expected to provide more timely and accurate data reporting and would thus reduce the incidence of quota overages.

The South Atlantic Council concluded that **Preferred Alternative 2**, best meets the purpose to update the ABC and ACL for the snowy grouper component of the snapper grouper fishery based on the results of the most recent stock assessment. The preferred alternatives also best meet the objectives of the Snapper Grouper FMP, as amended, while complying with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable law.

### **5.1.6 How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery?**

This action does not directly respond to objectives in the Vision Blueprint as adjusting catch levels to end overfishing is a mandate under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

## **5.2 Action 2. Revise the snowy grouper sector allocations and sector annual catch limits**

### **5.2.1 Snapper Grouper AP Comments and Recommendations**

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) met October 2021 and April 2022. During both the October 2021 and April 2022 meetings The AP did not have additional comments specific to revising the snowy grouper allocations.

### **5.2.2 Law Enforcement AP Comments and Recommendations**

The Law Enforcement AP convened on February 10, 2022. The AP received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations pertaining to revising allocations.

### **5.2.3 SSC Comments and Recommendations**

**TO BE COMPLETED FOLLOWING THE FALL 2022 SSC MEETING**

### **5.2.4 Public Comments and Recommendations**

A joint scoping hearing including Amendments 52 and 53 was held on February 1, 2, and 3, 2022 via webinar. During the webinar some commenters expressed that they were opposed to any revision of allocations which resulted in a higher allocation to the recreational sector.

### **5.2.5 South Atlantic Council's Draft Rationale**

Snowy grouper landings in the South Atlantic predominantly come from the commercial sector. From 1986-2020 commercial landings have exceeded recreational landings all years with the exception of two years (2007 and 2012). Because of the way the fishery operates, the allocations between sectors have historically been higher for the commercial sector. In 2015, through Regulatory Amendment 20, the current allocations of 83% commercial and 17% recreational were established. These allocations were determined using average commercial and recreational landings from 1986 to 2005. The recreational landings stream used to determine these allocations were the Marine Recreational Information Program's (MRIP) Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS).

Through this amendment the Council has updated the total allowable catch limit based on the updated ABC and OFL. The updated ABC includes recreational landings estimates from the MRIP Fishing Effort Survey (FES) method. Allocations are being modified to incorporate this updated landing stream. The Council discussed the date range which they felt most appropriately represented the fishery when determining allocations. Ultimately, they decided that the method used to determine the current allocations (average landings from 1986-2005) was the most appropriate and chose **Preferred Alternative 2** which recalculated allocations based on this method, using recreational landings from the MRIP FES. This results in an allocation of 87.55% to the commercial sector and 12.45% to the recreational sector.

### **5.2.6 How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery?**

This action addresses actions under Strategy 6.1: *Support management approaches that consider the mechanics of designing allocation strategies under Objective 6 – Develop management measures that support optimal sector allocations for the Snapper Grouper Fishery*

DRAFT

### 5.3 Action 3. Modify the snowy grouper recreational season

#### 5.3.1 Snapper Grouper AP Comments and Recommendations

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) met October 2021 and April 2022. During the October 2021 meeting the AP discussed the need for a private recreational stamp or endorsement, especially for deepwater species such as snowy grouper.

During the April 2022 meeting the AP continued to discuss recreational season alternatives. They noted recreational geographic differences which should be considered when altering the recreational season in addition to a possible depth closure. The AP noted concerns over the 100% discard mortality used in the assessment as fishermen have experienced successful descending of snowy grouper.

#### 5.3.2 Law Enforcement AP Comments and Recommendations

The Law Enforcement AP convened on February 10, 2022. The AP received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations pertaining to modifying the recreational season

#### 5.3.3 SSC Comments and Recommendations

**TO BE COMPLETED FOLLOWING THE FALL 2022 SSC MEETING**

#### 5.3.4 Public Comments and Recommendations

A joint scoping hearing including Amendments 52 and 53 was held on February 1, 2, and 3, 2022 via webinar. Two comments were received that suggested gear restrictions for the recreational sector, which could reduce dead discards. Another commenter noted that recreational fishermen often catch more than one snowy at a time, suggesting that the recreational bag limit be increased to reduce dead discards. Two commenters noted that there needs to be more recreational oversight, suggesting that a recreational permit be established.

#### 5.3.5 South Atlantic Council's Draft Rationale

Substantial reductions in harvest are needed to end overfishing and increase the likelihood of rebuilding the snowy grouper stock. Shortening the time recreational fishing is allowed for snowy grouper in the South Atlantic region contributes to ensuring recreational catches do not exceed the adjusted ACL. The Council selected the May through June (**Preferred Alternative 2**) season because it would shorten the season but allow for when recreational landings of snowy grouper typically increase and during the open blueline tilefish season.

The longer the open season, the higher the likelihood that the ACL could be exceeded. Therefore, **Preferred Alternative 2**, which would implement a 2-month season in May and June, is the best choice to ensure landings remain below the ACL and overfishing is prevented. Additionally, under **Preferred Alternative 2**, recreational fishing would not be occurring during late summer, when weather events tend to be more disruptive of fishing activity. The Council determined that **Preferred Alternative 2** would best meet the purpose of ending overfishing of the snowy grouper stock and achieving OY, while minimizing adverse social and

economic effects. **Preferred Alternative 2** best meets the goals and objectives of the Snapper Grouper FMP, as amended, while complying with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable law.

### **5.3.6 How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery?**

This action addresses Strategy 4.1: *Consider management approaches that consider catch limits, seasons, and the biology of the fishery in order to minimize bycatch of snapper grouper species.* under Objective 4 - *Develop management measures that reduce and mitigate discards.*

DRAFT

## 5.4 Action 4. Modify the snowy grouper recreational accountability measures

### 5.4.1 Snapper Grouper AP Comments and Recommendations

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) met October 2021 and April 2022. During the October 2021 meeting the AP recommended the current accountability measure (AM) triggers remain in place due to the small number of recreational landings.

During the April 2022 meeting the AP recommended, through a motion that the Council add an alternative that would retain the in-season AM while removing the stock status trigger from the post-season AM.

### 5.4.2 Law Enforcement AP Comments and Recommendations

The Law Enforcement AP convened on February 10, 2022. The AP received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations pertaining to modifying the recreational accountability measures.

### 5.4.3 SSC Comments and Recommendations

**TO BE COMPLETED FOLLOWING THE FALL 2022 SSC MEETING**

### 5.4.4 Public Comments and Recommendations

A joint scoping hearing including Amendments 52 and 53 was held on February 1, 2, and 3, 2022 via webinar. One comment was received that stressed the importance of a functioning recreational AM for the snowy grouper fishery.

### 5.4.5 South Atlantic Council's Draft Rationale

Given the modification to the recreational season being proposed in this amendment, the Council is proposing modifying the recreational accountability measures accordingly. **Preferred Alternative 3** is the most suitable among the alternatives considered for a short recreational season. Eliminating the in-season closure when the recreational ACL is met or is projected to be met makes the most sense as data are not available in time to implement in-season management under the proposed two-month season using landings from the current fishing year. Council members agreed that it would also be appropriate to uncouple the post-season recreational accountability measure (payback of the overage if the ACL is exceeded) from the total ACL to prevent potential disruptions to the commercial sector because of post-season paybacks. **Preferred Alternative 3** also maintains the intent to reduce the season length the following year in the event of an overage.

The Council determined that **Preferred Alternative 3** would best meet the purpose of preventing overfishing of the snowy grouper stock. **Preferred Alternative 3** best meets the goals and objectives of the Snapper Grouper FMP, as amended, while complying with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable law.

### **5.4.6 How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery?**

This action does not directly address management objectives in the Vision Blueprint. Establishing AMs to prevent overfishing is a mandate under the Magnuson-Stevens Act

DRAFT

## Chapter 6. Cumulative Effects

While this environmental assessment (EA) is being prepared using the 2020 Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations, the cumulative effects discussed in this section meet the two-part standard for “reasonable foreseeability” and “reasonably close causal connection” required by the new definition of effects or impacts. Below is the five-step cumulative effects analysis that identifies criteria that must be considered in an EA.

### 6.1 Affected Area

The immediate impact area would be the federal 200-mile limit of the Atlantic off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida to Key West, which is also the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council’s (Council) area of jurisdiction. In light of the available information, the extent of the boundaries would depend upon the degree of fish immigration/emigration and larval transport, whichever has the greatest geographical range. The ranges of affected species are described in Volume II of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan.<sup>13</sup> For the proposed actions found in Amendment 51 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP), the cumulative effects analysis includes an analysis of data from 2017 through the present.

### 6.2 Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions Impacting the Affected Area

#### *Past Actions*

Amendment 36 to the Snapper Grouper FMP, effective on July 31, 2017, was implemented to establish new spawning special management zones (SMZ) to protect spawning areas for snapper grouper species.

Amendment 37 to the Snapper Grouper FMP, effective on August 24, 2017, modified the hogfish fishery management unit in response to genetically different stocks along the South Atlantic, specified fishing levels for the two stocks, established a rebuilding plan for the Florida Keys/East Florida stock, and established or revised management measures for both hogfish stocks such as size limits, recreational bag limits, and commercial trip limits.

Amendment 43 to the Snapper Grouper FMP, effective on July 26, 2017, specified recreational and commercial annual catch limits (ACL) for red snapper beginning in 2018.

Abbreviated Framework 1 to the Snapper Grouper FMP, effective on August 27, 2018, was implemented to address overfishing of red grouper, and reduced the commercial and recreational ACLs for red grouper in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

---

<sup>13</sup> <http://safmc.net/ecosystem-management/fishery-ecosystem-plan/>

Abbreviated Framework 2 to the Snapper Grouper FMP, effective on May 9, 2019, revised fishing levels for black sea bass and vermilion snapper in response to the latest stock assessments for those species in the South Atlantic.

Amendment 42 to the Snapper Grouper FMP, effective on January 8, 2020, added three newly approved sea turtle release devices and updated the regulations to simplify and clarify the specifications for other release gear requirements. The new devices and updates provide more options to fulfill the requirements for sea turtle release gear on board vessels with commercial and charter/for-hire snapper grouper permits in the South Atlantic. The amendment also streamlines the procedure to implement newly approved devices and handling procedures in the future.

Regulatory Amendment 27 (Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 27) to the Snapper Grouper FMP, effective on February 26, 2020, addresses specific action items in the 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the commercial sector of the snapper grouper fishery. The framework amendment revised commercial regulations for blueline tilefish, snowy grouper, greater amberjack, red porgy, vermilion snapper, almaco jack, Other Jacks Complex (lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish), queen snapper, silk snapper, blackfin snapper, and gray triggerfish. Actions include modifying fishing seasons, trip limits, and minimum size limits.

Regulatory Amendment 30 to the Snapper Grouper FMP, effective on March 9, 2020, revised the rebuilding plan for red grouper, extended the annual spawning closure for that species off North and South Carolina, and established a commercial trip limit.

Regulatory Amendment 26 (Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26) to the Snapper Grouper FMP, effective on March 30, 2020, addresses specific action items in the 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the recreational sector of the snapper grouper fishery. The framework amendment modified the 20-fish aggregate bag limits, and minimum size limits for certain species.

Regulatory Amendment 29 to the Snapper Grouper FMP, effective July 15, 2020, modified gear requirements for South Atlantic snapper grouper species. Actions included requirements for descending and venting devices, and modifications to requirements for circle hooks and powerheads.

Abbreviated Framework 3 to the Snapper Grouper FMP, effective August 17, 2020, revised fishing levels for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic region.

### ***Present Actions***

Comprehensive Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rule Amendment (Amendment 45 to the Snapper Grouper FMP) would modify the ABC control rule, specify an approach for determining the acceptable risk of overfishing and the probability of rebuilding success for overfished stocks, allow phase-in of ABC changes, and allow carry-over of unharvested catch. This amendment will continue being developed in 2021.

Amendment 46 to the Snapper Grouper FMP proposes actions to focus on private recreational permit requirements and reporting.

Amendment 49 to the Snapper Grouper FMP addresses the results of the latest stock assessment for the greater amberjack stock in the South Atlantic region.

Amendment 50 to the Snapper Grouper FMP addresses the results of the latest stock assessment for the red porgy stock in the South Atlantic region. Red porgy was determined to be overfished and experiencing overfishing.

Amendment 52 to the Snapper Grouper FMP addresses the results of the latest stock assessment for the golden tilefish stock in the South Atlantic region as well as modifications to management measures for blueline tilefish. It was determined that golden tilefish are no longer experiencing overfishing.

Amendment 53 to the Snapper Grouper FMP addresses the results of the latest stock assessment for the gag stock in the South Atlantic region. Gag was determined to be overfished and undergoing overfishing.

Regulatory Amendment 35 to the Snapper Grouper addresses the results of the latest stock assessment for the red snapper stock in the South Atlantic as well as management measures to reduce release mortality within the snapper grouper fishery. Red snapper was determined to be overfished and experiencing overfishing.

#### ***Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions***

Amendment 44 to the Snapper Grouper FMP will address the results of the latest stock assessment for the yellowtail snapper stock in the southeast.

#### ***Expected Impacts from Past, Present, and Future Actions***

The intent of Amendment 51 is to modify management of South Atlantic snowy grouper. Actions include revising annual catch limits (ACL) and overfishing limits (OFL), sector allocations, recreational accountability measures (AM), and management measures for the recreational sector. Development of Amendment 51 is a response to the most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic snowy grouper (SEDAR 36 Update 2021). The proposed actions in Amendment 51 are not expected to result in significant cumulative adverse biological or socio-economic effects (see Chapter 4). In recent years, participants in the snapper grouper fishery and associated businesses have experienced some negative economic and social impacts due to changes in ACLs and early closures during the fishing years. Factors such as distance to fishing grounds, weather, and water temperature affect availability of species to the recreational fleets in different parts of the Council's jurisdiction. The proposed actions could result in increased regulatory discards of snowy grouper. However, the proposed actions would end overfishing and support the current rebuilding plan in place.

When combined with the impacts of past, present, and future actions affecting the snapper grouper fishery, minor cumulative impacts are likely to accrue. For example, there could be beneficial cumulative effects from the actions in this amendment, in addition to future proposed actions to reduce overfishing of snapper grouper species, require the use of descending devices,

and reducing bycatch. Also, there may be cumulative socio-economic effects by promoting access to the fishery which would improve recreational fishing opportunities and benefits to associated businesses and communities; however, the actions in this amendment are not expected to result in significant cumulative adverse biological or socio-economic effects to the snapper grouper fishery when combined with the impacts of past, present, and future actions (see Chapter 4).

### **6.3 Consideration of Climate Change and Other Non-Fishery Related Issues**

#### *Climate Change*

Global climate changes could have significant effects on Atlantic fisheries, though the extent of these effects on the dolphin and wahoo, snapper grouper, and golden crab fisheries is not known at this time. The Environmental Protection Agency's climate change webpage (<https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/marine-species-distribution>), and NOAA's Office of Science and Technology climate webpage (<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/climate>), provides background information on climate change, including indicators which measure or anticipate effects on oceans, weather and climate, ecosystems, health and society, and greenhouse gases. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report (February 28, 2022), U.S. Global Change Research Program (USGCRP)'s Fourth Climate Assessment (2018), and the Ecosystem Status Report for the U.S. South Atlantic Region (Craig et al. 2021) also provide a compilation of scientific information on climate change. Those findings are summarized below.

Ocean acidification, or a decrease in surface ocean pH due to absorption of anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions, affects the chemistry and temperature of the water. Increased thermal stratification alters ocean circulation patterns, and causes a loss of sea ice, sea level rise, increased wave height and frequency, reduced upwelling, and changes in precipitation and wind patterns. Changes in coastal and marine ecosystems can influence organism metabolism and alter ecological processes such as productivity, species interactions, migration, range and distribution, larval and juvenile survival, prey availability, and susceptibility to predators. The "center of biomass," a geographical representation of each species' weight distribution, is being used to identify the shifting of fish populations. Warming sea temperature trends in the southeast have been documented, and animals must migrate to cooler waters, if possible, if water temperatures exceed survivable ranges (Needham et al. 2012). Rising water temperatures, ocean acidification, retreating arctic sea ice, sea level rise, high-tide flooding, coastal erosion, higher storm surge, and heavier precipitation events are projected to continue, putting ocean and marine species at risk, decreasing the productivity of certain fisheries, and threatening communities that rely on marine ecosystems for livelihoods and recreation (USGCRP 2018). Harvesting and habitat changes also cause geographic population shifts. Changes in water temperatures may also affect the distribution of native and exotic species, allowing invasive species to establish communities in areas they may not have been able to survive previously. The numerous changes to the marine ecosystem may cause an increased risk of disease in marine biota. An increase in the occurrence and intensity of toxic algae blooms will negatively influence the productivity of keystone animals, such as corals, and critical coastal ecosystems such as wetlands, estuaries, and coral reefs (Kennedy et al. 2002; IPCC 2022). Free et al. (2019) investigated the impacts of historical warming on marine fisheries production and found that climate change is altering

habitats for marine fishes and invertebrates, but the net effect of these changes on potential food production is unknown.

Climate driven movement of fish stocks is causing commercial, small-scale, artisanal, and recreational fishing activities to shift poleward and diversify harvests (IPCC 2022). In the South Atlantic Region, species richness and abundance of offshore hard bottom reef fishes have generally declined over time while richness and abundance of demersal fishes in soft sediment habitats on the nearshore shelf have increased. Potential explanations for these patterns include changes in harvest (directed and bycatch), trophic interactions, and environment effects on recruitment (Craig et al. 2021). Climate change may impact dolphin and wahoo, snapper grouper species, and golden crab in the future, but the level of impacts cannot be quantified at this time, nor is the time frame known in which these impacts will occur. Public comments stating the lack of large dolphin in the Florida Keys may have to do with the fish moving out of the area in search of suitable temperature and food availability. Studies have shown that seasonal abundance of dolphin along the east coast of the U.S. and Gulf of Mexico is heavily influenced by sea surface temperature and distance to temperature fronts, chlorophyll-*a* concentration, and *Sargassum* mats (Kleisner 2009; Farrell et al. 2014; Merten et al. 2014). Patterns from stock assessments in the South Atlantic Region indicate biomass of most assessed species generally show declines from the 1970s through the 1990s with some species showing signs of recovery beginning in the early to mid-2000s. Recruitment of a number of snapper-grouper species has declined since the early 2010s whereas recruitment of Red Snapper and some pelagic species has increased in recent years (Craig et al. 2021). In the near term, it is unlikely that the actions in Amendment 51 would compound or exacerbate the ongoing effects of climate change on dolphin and wahoo, snapper grouper species, and golden crab.

#### *Weather Variables*

Hurricane season is from June 1 to November 30, and accounts for 97% of all tropical activity affecting the Atlantic basin. These storms, although unpredictable in their annual occurrence, can devastate areas when they occur. Although these effects may be temporary, those fishing-related businesses whose profitability is marginal may go out of business if a hurricane strikes.

## **6.4 Overall Impacts Expected from Past, Present, and Future Actions**

The proposed management actions are summarized in Chapter 2 of this document. Detailed discussions of the magnitude and significance of the impacts of the alternatives on the human environment appear in Chapter 4 of this document. None of the impacts of the actions in this amendment, in combination with past, present, and future actions have been determined to be significant. Although several other management actions, in addition to this amendment, are expected to affect snapper grouper species, any additive effects, beneficial and adverse, are not expected to result in a significant level of cumulative impacts.

The proposed actions would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as these are not in the South Atlantic EEZ. These actions are not likely to result in direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to unique areas, such as significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, park land, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas as the proposed action is not expected to substantially increase fishing effort or the spatial and/or temporal distribution of current fishing effort within the South Atlantic region. The U.S. Monitor, Gray's Reef, and Florida Keys National

Marine Sanctuaries are within the boundaries of the South Atlantic EEZ. The proposed actions are not likely to cause loss or destruction of these national marine sanctuaries because the actions are not expected to result in appreciable changes to current fishing practices. Additionally, the proposed actions are not likely to change the way in which the snapper grouper fishery is prosecuted; therefore, the actions are not expected to result in adverse impacts on health or human safety beyond the status quo.

## **6.5 Monitoring and Mitigation**

Fishery-independent and fishery-dependent data comprise a significant portion of information used in stock assessments. Fishery-independent data are being collected through the Southeast Fishery Information Survey and the Marine Resources Monitoring Assessment and Prediction Program. The effects of the proposed actions are, and would continue to be, monitored through collection of recreational landings data by all the four states in the South Atlantic Region (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina). The National Marine Fisheries Service would continue to monitor and collect information on snapper grouper species for stock assessments and stock assessment updates, life history studies, economic and social analyses, and other scientific observations. The proposed actions relate to the harvest of indigenous species in the Atlantic, and the activities/regulations being altered do not introduce non-indigenous species and are not reasonably expected to facilitate the spread of such species through depressing the populations of native species. Additionally, these alternatives do not propose any activity, such as increased ballast water discharge from foreign vessels, which is associated with the introduction or spread on non-indigenous species.

## Chapter 7. List of Interdisciplinary Plan Team (IPT) Members

| Name                 | Agency/Division | Title                                      |
|----------------------|-----------------|--|
| Rick DeVictor        | SERO/SF         | South Atlantic Branch Chief/IPT Lead       |
| Allie Iberle         | SAFMC           | Fishery Scientist/IPT Lead                 |
| Chip Collier         | SAFMC           | Deputy Director for Science and Statistics |
| Myra Brouwer         | SAFMC           | Deputy Director for Management             |
| David Records        | SERO/SF         | Economist                                  |
| Shepherd Grimes      | NOAA GC         | General Counsel                            |
| John Hadley          | SAFMC           | Economist                                  |
| Ed Glazier           | SERO/SF         | Social Scientist                           |
| Alisha Gray          | SERO/SF         | Data Analyst                               |
| Jenny Lee            | SERO/PR         | Fishery Biologist                          |
| Akbar Marvasti       | SEFSC           | Economist                                  |
| Roger Pugliese       | SAFMC           | Senior Fishery Biologist                   |
| Jeff Pulver          | SERO/SF         | Data Analyst                               |
| Cameron Rhodes       | SAFMC           | Outreach Specialist                        |
| Joelle Godwin        | SERO/SF         | Technical Writer and Editor                |
| Mike Larkin          | SERO/SF         | Data Analyst                               |
| Monica Smit-Brunello | NOAA GC         | General Counsel                            |
| Matthew Walia        | SERO/OLE        | Compliance Liaison Analyst                 |
| Christina Wiegand    | SAFMC           | Social Scientist                           |
| Rob Cheshire         | SEFSC           | Research Analyst                           |
| Manny Antoneras      | SERO/OLE        | Criminal Investigator                      |

NOAA=National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NMFS = National Marine Fisheries Service, SERO = Southeast Regional Office, SF = Sustainable Fisheries Division, PR = Protected Resources Division, HC = Habitat Conservation Division, SEFSC=Southeast Fisheries Science Center, GC = General Counsel

## Chapter 8. Agencies and Persons Consulted

### Responsible Agencies

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Administrative Lead)  
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201  
N. Charleston, South Carolina 29405  
843-571-4366/ 866-SAFMC-10 (TEL)  
843-769-4520 (FAX)  
www.safmc.net

NMFS, Southeast Region  
263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701  
727- 824-5301 (TEL)  
727-824-5320 (FAX)

### List of Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Consulted

SAFMC Law Enforcement Advisory Panel  
SAFMC Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel  
SAFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee  
North Carolina Coastal Zone Management Program  
South Carolina Coastal Zone Management Program  
Georgia Coastal Zone Management Program  
Florida Coastal Zone Management Program  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
South Carolina Department of Natural Resources  
North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries  
North Carolina Sea Grant  
South Carolina Sea Grant  
Georgia Sea Grant  
Florida Sea Grant  
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission  
National Marine Fisheries Service

- Washington Office
- Office of Ecology and Conservation
- Southeast Regional Office
- Southeast Fisheries Science Center

## Chapter 9. References

### **TO BE COMPLETED**

- Alsop, III, F.J. 2001. Smithsonian Handbooks: Birds of North America eastern region. DK Publishing, Inc. New York, NY.
- Buck, K. M. 2018. Socio-economic profile of the snapper grouper commercial fishery in the South Atlantic region. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, Charleston, S.C. 29405.
- Campbell, M.D., W.B. Driggers, B. Sauls, and J.F. Walter. 2014. Release mortality in the red snapper fishery (*Lutjanus campechanus*) fishery: a meta-analysis of 3 decades of research. *Fishery Bulletin*. 112:283-296.
- Carpenter, K.E. (ed.). 2002. The living marine resources of the Western Central Atlantic. Volume 3: Bony fishes part 2 (Opistognathidae to Molidae), sea turtles and marine mammals. FAO Species Identification Guide for Fishery Purposes and American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists Special Publication No. 5. FAO, Rome, pp. 601-1374.
- Carter, D.W. and C. Liese. 2012. The Economic Value of Catching and Keeping or Releasing Saltwater Sport Fish in the Southeast USA. *North American Journal of Fisheries Management*, 32:4, 613-625. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02755947.2012.675943>
- Cooke, S.J., D.P. Philipp, K.M. Dunmall, and J.F. Schreer. 2001. The influence of terminal tackle on injury, handling time, and cardiac disturbance of rock bass. *North American Journal of Fisheries Management*. Vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 333-342.
- Heemstra P.C, and J.E. Randall. 1993. 1993 FAO species catalogue. Vol. 16. Groupers of the world. (Family Serranidae, Subfamily Epinephelinae). An annotated and illustrated catalogue of the grouper, rockcod, hind, coral grouper and lyretail species known to date. FAO Fish. Synops. No. 125, Vol. 16.
- Holland, S. M., C. Oh, S. L. Larkin, and A. W. Hodges. 2012. The operations and economics of the for-hire fishing fleets of the South Atlantic states and the Atlantic coast of Florida. University of Florida. Available: <https://fred.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/Holland.pdf>. (December 2018).
- Hospital J., and K. Leong. 2021. Community participation in Hawai'i fisheries. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-PIFSC-119. 89 pp. Available at: <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/30731>
- Jacob, S., P. Weeks, B. Blount, and M. Jepson. 2013. Development and evaluation of social indicators of vulnerability and resiliency for fishing communities in the Gulf of Mexico. *Marine Policy* 37:86-95. Available here: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0308597X12000759>

Jepson, M. and L. L. Colburn. 2013. Development of social indicators of fishing community vulnerability and resilience in the U.S. Southeast and Northeast Regions. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-F/SPO-129, 64 p. Available here: <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/4438>

Johnson, K. H., A. B. Paxton, J. C. Taylor, J. Hoyt, J. McCord, and W. Hoffman. 2020. Extracting ecological metrics from archeological surveys of shipwrecks using submersible video and laser-line scanning. *Ecosphere*, Volume 11, Number 11, 14 pp. Available here: <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/ecs2.3210>

Kolmos, K. J., Wyanski, D. M., White, D. B., & Mikell, P. P. (2019). Temporal changes in the life history of Snowy Grouper (*Hyporthodus niveatus*) off North and South Carolina, and factors that influence spawning dynamics. *Fishery Bulletin*, 117(4), 308–321. <https://doi.org/10.7755/fb.117.4.4>

Low, R. A. and G. F. Ulrich. 1983. Deep-water demersal finfish resources and fisheries off South Carolina. South Carolina Mar. Resour. Center Tech. Rep. 57, 24 p.

MacLauchlin-Buck, K. 2018. Socio-economic profile of the snapper grouper commercial fishery in the South Atlantic region. Prepared for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Available at: [https://safmc.net/download/SGProfileReport\\_May2018.pdf](https://safmc.net/download/SGProfileReport_May2018.pdf)

Menashes. E. 2015. Closure of Snowy Grouper Recreational Fishery in the South Atlantic. Federal Register. Vol. 80, No. 127, Thursday, July 2, 2015. Rules and Regulation. Available here: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2015-07-02/pdf/2015-16355.pdf>

Moore, C.M. and R.F. Labisky. 1984. Population parameters of a relatively unexploited stock of snowy grouper in the lower Florida Keys. *Trans. Am. Fish. Soc.* 113:322-329.

NMFS. 2011. A Users Guide to the National and Coastal State I/O Model. 2011. [www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/documents/commercial\\_seafood\\_impacts\\_2007-2009.pdf](http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/documents/commercial_seafood_impacts_2007-2009.pdf) (accessed February 2016).

NMFS. 2021. Fisheries Economics of the United States, 2017. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-F/SPO-219, 246 p.

NOAA, National Weather Service. 2021. Florida Keys Climate Data. Available at: <https://www.weather.gov/key/climate>.

Overstreet, E., L. Perruso, and C. Liese. 2018. Economics of the U.S. South Atlantic Snapper-Grouper Fishery - 2016. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-SEFSC-730. 104 p.

Paxton, A. B., S. L. Harter, S. W. Ross, C. M. Schobernd, B. J. Rundle, P. J. Rudershausen, K. H. Johnson, K. W. Shertzer, N. M. Bacheler, J. A. Buckel, G. T. Kellison, and J. C. Taylor. 2021. Four decades of reef observations illuminate deep-water grouper hotspots. *Fish and Fisheries*.

Volume 22, Issue 4. July. Pp. 749-761. Wiley Online Library. Available here:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/faf.12548>

Pulver, J.R. 2017. Sink or Swim? Factors affecting immediate discard mortality for the Gulf of Mexico commercial reef fish fishery. *Fisheries Research*, 188:166-172.

Rudershausen, P.J., J.A. Buckel, and J.E. Hightower. 2014. Estimating reef fish discard mortality using surface and bottom tagging: effects of hook injury and barotrauma. *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences*, 71:514-520.

SAFMC. 2010. Amendment 17A for the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, Charleston, S.C. 29405.

SAFMC. 2011a. Comprehensive Ecosystem Based Amendment 2 for the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region. (Amendment 23 to the Snapper Grouper FMP). South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place, Ste 201, North Charleston, S.C. 29405.

SAFMC. 2011b. Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment for the South Atlantic Region. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, Charleston, S.C. 29405. 755 pp. plus appendices.

SAFMC. 2013. Amendment 31 to the FMP for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region, Amendment 6 to the FMP for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic, and Amendment 22 to the FMP for Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Region. Joint South Atlantic/Gulf of Mexico Generic Charter/Headboat Reporting in the South Atlantic Amendment. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place, Ste 201, North Charleston, S.C. 29405. 207 pp.

SAFMC. 2016. Amendment 36 to the FMP for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place, Ste 201, North Charleston, S.C. 29405. 148 pp.

SAFMC. 2017. Amendment 39 to the FMP for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region, Amendment 9 to the FMP for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic, and Amendment 27 to the FMP for the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Region. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place, Ste 201, North Charleston, S.C. 29405. 221 pp.

SAFMC. 2019. Amendment 42 to the FMP for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place, Ste 201, North Charleston, S.C. 29405. 148 pp.

SAFMC. 2020. Regulatory Amendment 29 to the FMP for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place, Ste 201, North Charleston, S.C. 29405. 148 pp

SAFMC. 2020. Regulatory Amendment 29 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region with Environmental Assessment, Regulatory Impact Review, and Regulatory Flexibility Analysis. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, S.C. 29405.

Scott, W.B. and M.G. Scott. 1988. Atlantic fishes of Canada. *Can. Bull. Fish. Aquat. Sci.* 219, 731 p.

Shivlani, M. 2014. The impacts of fisheries management on the performance and resiliency of the commercial fishing industry and fishing communities in the Florida Keys (Monroe County, Florida) from 1950-2010. Ph.D. dissertation. Florida International University. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2286&context=etd>

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC). 2009. Amendment 16 to the FMP for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, Charleston, S.C. 29405. 608 pp. plus appendices.

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. 2022. Snowy grouper commercial regulations. Available here: <https://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/snowy-grouper/>

Souza, Philip M., Jr. and Christopher Liese. 2019. Economics of the Federal For-Hire Fleet in the Southeast - 2017. NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-SEFSC-740, 42 p.

Stephen, J.A., and P.J. Harris. 2010. Commercial catch composition with discard and immediate release mortality proportions off the southeastern coast of the United States. *Fisheries Research*, 103:18-24.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2020a. Wanchese CDP, North Carolina. Available at: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=1600000US3770920>

U.S. Census Bureau. 2020b. QuickFacts: Key West, Florida. Available here: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/keywestcityflorida/PST045221>

Wilson Jr., R.R., and K.M. Burns. 1996. Potential survival of released groupers caught deeper than 40 m based on shipboard and in-situ observations, and tag-recapture data. *Bulletin of Marine Science*, 58(1):234-247.

Wyanski, D.M., D.B.White, and C.A. Barans. 2000. Growth, population age structure, maturity, spawning of snowy grouper, *Epinephelus niveatus*, off the Atlantic coast of the southeastern United States. *Fish. Bull.* 98:199-218.

Wyanski, D.M., D.B. White, K.J. Kolmos, and P.P. Mikell. 2013. Marine Resources Monitoring, Assessment and Prediction Program: Report on the Status of the Life History of Snowy Grouper, *Hyporthodus niveatus*, for the SEDAR36 Standard Stock Assessment. SEDAR36-WP08. SEDAR, North Charleston, SC. 46 pp.

DRAFT

## Appendix A. Other Applicable Laws

### 1.1 Administrative Procedure Act (APA)

All federal rulemaking is governed under the provisions of the APA (5 U.S.C. Subchapter II), which establishes a “notice and comment” procedure to enable public participation in the rulemaking process. Among other things under the APA, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is required to publish notification of proposed rules in the *Federal Register* and to solicit, consider and respond to public comment on those rules before they are finalized. The APA also establishes a 30-day wait period from the time a final rule is published until it takes effect, with some exceptions. Amendment 50 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 50) complies with the provisions of the APA through the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council’s (Council) extensive use of public meetings, requests for comments and consideration of comments. The proposed rule associated with this plan amendment will have a request for public comments, which complies with the APA, and upon publication of the final rule, unless the rule falls within an APA exception, there will be a 30-day wait period before the regulations are effective.

### 1.2 Information Quality Act (IQA)

The IQA (Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law 106-443)) which took effect October 1, 2002, directed the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to issue government-wide guidelines that “provide policy and procedural guidelines to federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information disseminated by federal agencies.” OMB directed each federal agency to issue its own guidelines, establish administrative mechanisms allowing affected persons to seek and obtain correction of information that does not comply with OMB guidelines, and report periodically to OMB on the number and nature of complaints. The NOAA Section 515 Information Quality Guidelines require a series of actions for each new information product subject to the IQA. Amendment 50 uses the best available information and made a broad presentation thereof. The information contained in this document was developed using best available scientific information. Therefore, this document is in compliance with the IQA.

### 1.3 Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA)

Section 307(c)(1) of the federal CZMA of 1972 requires that all federal activities that directly affect the coastal zone be consistent with approved state coastal zone management programs to the maximum extent practicable. While it is the goal of the Council to have management measures that complement those of the states, federal and state administrative procedures vary and regulatory changes are unlikely to be fully instituted at the same time. The Council believes the actions in this plan amendment are consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the Coastal Zone Management Plans of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. Pursuant to Section 307 of the CZMA, this determination will be submitted to the responsible

state agencies who administer the approved Coastal Zone Management Programs in the States of Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, and North Carolina.

#### **1.4 Executive Order 12612: Federalism**

Executive Order (E.O.) 12612 requires agencies to be guided by the fundamental federalism principles when formulating and implementing policies that have federalism implications. The purpose of the Order is to guarantee the division of governmental responsibilities between the federal government and the states, as intended by the framers of the Constitution. No federalism issues have been identified relative to the actions proposed in this document and associated regulations. Therefore, preparation of a Federalism assessment under E.O. 12612 is not necessary.

#### **1.5 Executive Order 12962: Recreational Fisheries**

E.O. 12962 requires federal agencies, in cooperation with states and tribes, to improve the quantity, function, sustainable productivity, and distribution of U.S. aquatic resources for increased recreational fishing opportunities through a variety of methods. Additionally, the Order establishes a seven-member National Recreational Fisheries Coordination Council responsible for, among other things, ensuring that social and economic values of healthy aquatic systems that support recreational fisheries are considered by federal agencies in the course of their actions, sharing the latest resource information and management technologies, and reducing duplicative and cost-inefficient programs among federal agencies involved in conserving or managing recreational fisheries. The National Recreational Fisheries Coordination Council also is responsible for developing, in cooperation with federal agencies, states and tribes, a Recreational Fishery Resource Conservation Plan to include a five-year agenda. Finally, the Order requires NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a joint agency policy for administering the ESA.

The alternatives considered in this document are consistent with the directives of E.O. 12962.

#### **1.6 Executive Order 13089: Coral Reef Protection**

E.O. 13089, signed by President William Clinton on June 11, 1998, recognizes the ecological, social, and economic values provided by the Nation's coral reefs and ensures that federal agencies are protecting these ecosystems. More specifically, the Order requires federal agencies to identify actions that may harm U.S. coral reef ecosystems, to utilize their program and authorities to protect and enhance the conditions of such ecosystems, and to ensure that their actions do not degrade the condition of the coral reef ecosystem.

The alternatives considered in this document are consistent with the directives of E.O. 13089.

#### **1.7 Executive Order 13158: Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)**

E.O. 13158 was signed on May 26, 2000, to strengthen the protection of U.S. ocean and coastal resources through the use of MPAs. The E.O. defined MPAs as "any area of the marine

environment that has been reserved by federal, state, territorial, tribal, or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein.” It directs federal agencies to work closely with state, local and non-governmental partners to create a comprehensive network of MPAs “representing diverse U.S. marine ecosystems, and the Nation’s natural and cultural resources.”

The alternatives considered in this document are consistent with the directives of E.O. 13158.

### **1.8 National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA)**

Under the NMSA (also known as Title III of the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act of 1972), as amended, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce is authorized to designate National Marine Sanctuaries to protect distinctive natural and cultural resources whose protection and beneficial use requires comprehensive planning and management. The National Marine Sanctuary Program is administered by the Sanctuaries and Reserves Division of NOAA. The NMSA provides authority for comprehensive and coordinated conservation and management of these marine areas. The National Marine Sanctuary Program currently comprises 13 sanctuaries around the country, including sites in American Samoa and Hawaii. These sites include significant coral reef and kelp forest habitats, and breeding and feeding grounds of whales, sea lions, sharks, and sea turtles. The three sanctuaries in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone are the USS Monitor, Gray’s Reef, and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuaries.

The alternatives considered in this document are not expected to have any adverse impacts on the resources managed by the National Marine Sanctuaries.

### **1.9 Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA)**

The purpose of the PRA is to minimize the burden on the public. The PRA is intended to ensure that the information collected under the proposed action is needed and is collected in an efficient manner (44 U.S.C. 3501 (1)). The authority to manage information collection and record keeping requirements is vested with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). This authority encompasses establishment of guidelines and policies, approval of information collection requests, and reduction of paperwork burdens and duplications. The PRA requires NMFS to obtain approval from the OMB before requesting most types of fishery information from the public. Actions in this document are not expected to affect PRA.

### **1.10 Small Business Act (SBA)**

Enacted in 1953, the SBA requires that agencies assist and protect small-business interests to the extent possible to preserve free competitive enterprise. The objectives of the SBA are to foster business ownership by individuals who are both socially and economically disadvantaged; and to promote the competitive viability of such firms by providing business development assistance including, but not limited to, management and technical assistance, access to capital and other forms of financial assistance, business training, and counseling, and access to sole source and limited competition federal contract opportunities, to help firms achieve competitive viability. Because most businesses associated with fishing are considered small businesses, NMFS, in

implementing regulations, must make an assessment of how those regulations will affect small businesses.

**1.11 Public Law 99-659: Vessel Safety**

Public Law 99-659 amended the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to require that a FMP or FMP amendment must consider, and may provide for, temporary adjustments (after consultation with the U.S. Coast Guard and persons utilizing the fishery) regarding access to a fishery for vessels that would be otherwise prevented from participating in the fishery because of safety concerns related to weather or to other ocean conditions. No vessel would be forced to participate in South Atlantic fisheries under adverse weather or ocean conditions as a result of the imposition of management regulations proposed in this amendment. No concerns have been raised by South Atlantic fishermen or by the U.S. Coast Guard that the proposed management measures directly or indirectly pose a hazard to crew or vessel safety under adverse weather or ocean conditions.

DRAFT

## **Appendix B. Regulatory Impact Review**

**TO BE COMPLETED FOR DECEMBER 2022 MEETING**

**DRAFT**

## **Appendix C. Regulatory Flexibility Analysis**

**TO BE COMPLETED FOR DECEMBER 2022 MEETING**

**DRAFT**

## Appendix D. Essential Fish Habitat and Ecosystem Based Fishery Management

**TO BE COMPLETED**

### I. EFH and EFH-HAPC Designations and Cooperative Habitat Policy Development and Protection

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requires federal fishery management Councils and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to designate essential fish habitat (EFH) for species managed under federal fishery management plans (FMP). Federal regulations that implement the EFH program encourage fishery management Councils and NMFS also to designate subsets of EFH to highlight priority areas within EFH for conservation and management. These subsets of EFH are called EFH- Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (EFH-HAPCs or HAPCs) and are designated based on ecological importance, susceptibility to human-induced environmental degradation, susceptibility to stress from development, or rarity of the habitat type. Information supporting EFH and EFH-HAPC designations was updated (pursuant to the EFH Final Rule) in Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) II.

#### a. South Atlantic Council EFH User Guide

The [EFH Users Guide](#) developed during the FEP II development process is available through the FEP II Dashboard and provides a comprehensive list of the designations of EFH and EFH- HAPCs for all species managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) and the clarifications identified during FEP II development. As noted above, additional detailed information supporting the EFH designations appears in FEP, FEP II, and in individual FMPs, and general information on the EFH provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and its implementing regulations (50 CFR 900 [Subparts J](#) and [K](#)). These sources should be reviewed for information on the components of EFH assessments, steps to EFH consultations, and other aspects of EFH program operation.

#### b. South Atlantic Council EFH Policy and EFH Policy Statements Policy for Protection and Restoration of EFH South Atlantic Council Habitat and Environmental Protection Policy

In recognizing that species are dependent on the quantity and quality of their essential habitats, it is the policy of the South Atlantic Council to protect, restore, and develop habitats upon which fisheries species depend; to increase the extent of their distribution and abundance; and to improve their productive capacity for the benefit of present and future generations. For purposes of this policy, “habitat” is defined as the physical, chemical, and biological parameters that are necessary for continued productivity of the species that is being managed. The objectives of the South Atlantic Council policy will

be accomplished through the recommendation of no net loss or significant environmental degradation of existing habitat. A long-term objective is to support and promote a net-gain of fisheries habitat through the restoration and rehabilitation of the productive capacity of habitats that have been degraded, and the creation and development of productive habitats where increased fishery production is probable. The South Atlantic Council will pursue these goals at state, Federal, and local levels. The South Atlantic Council shall assume an aggressive role in the protection and enhancement of habitats important to fishery species and shall actively enter Federal decision-making processes where proposed actions may otherwise compromise the productivity of fishery resources of concern to the South Atlantic Council.

**c. South Atlantic Council EFH Policy Statements**

Considerations to Reduce or Eliminate the Impacts of Non-Fishing Activities on EFH In addition to implementing regulations to protect habitat from degradation due to fishing activities, the South Atlantic Council in cooperation with NMFS, actively comments on non-fishing projects or policies that may impact fish habitat. The South Atlantic Council established a Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Advisory Panel (AP) and adopted a comment and policy development process. Members of the AP serve as the South Atlantic Council's habitat contacts and professionals in the field and have guided the South Atlantic Council's development of the following Policy Statements:

- [EFH Policy Statement on South Atlantic Climate Variability and Fisheries \(December 2016\)](#)
- [EFH Policy Statement on South Atlantic Food Webs and Connectivity \(December 2016\)](#)
- [Protection and Restoration of EFH from Marine Aquaculture \(June 2014\)](#)
- [Protection and Enhancement of Marine Submerged Aquatic Vegetation \(June 2014\)](#)
- [Protection and Restoration of EFH from Beach Dredging and Filling, Beach Re-nourishment and Large Scale Coastal Engineering \(March 2015\)](#)
- [Protection and Restoration of EFH from Energy Exploration, Development, Transportation and Hydropower Re-Licensing \(December 2015\)](#)
- [Protection and Restoration of EFH from Alterations to Riverine, Estuarine and Nearshore Flows \(June 2014\)](#)
- [Policies for the Protection of South Atlantic Marine & Estuarine Ecosystems from Non-Native and Invasive Species \(June 2014\)](#)
- [Policy Considerations for Development of Artificial Reefs in the South Atlantic Region and Protection of Essential Fish Habitat \(September 2017\)](#)

## **II. Habitat Conservation and Fishery Ecosystem Plans**

The South Atlantic Council, views habitat conservation as the foundation in the move to Ecosystem Based Fishery Management (EBFM) in the region. The South Atlantic Council has been proactive in advancing habitat conservation through extensive gear restrictions in all South Atlantic Council FMPs and by directly managing habitat and fisheries affecting those habitats through two FMPs, the [FMP for Coral, Coral Reefs and Live/Hard Bottom Habitat of the South Atlantic Region](#) (Coral FMP) and the [FMP for the Sargassum Fishery of the South Atlantic Region](#). The FMP for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery in the Atlantic represents a proactive FMP which established fishery measures and identified EFH in advance of overfishing or habitat impacts from the fisheries.

Building on the long-term conservation approach, the South Atlantic Council facilitated the evolution of the Habitat Plan into the first FEP to provide a clear description and understanding of the fundamental physical, biological, and human/institutional context of ecosystems within which fisheries are managed and identify information needed and how that information should be used in the context of FMPs. Developing a South Atlantic FEP required a greater understanding of the South Atlantic ecosystem, including both the complex relationships among humans, marine life, the environment, and essential fish habitat and a more comprehensive

understanding of the biological, social, and economic impacts of management necessary to initiate the transition from single species management to EBFM in the region. To support the move towards EBFM, the South Atlantic Council adopted broad goals: (1) maintaining or improving ecosystem structure and function; (2) maintaining or improving economic, (3) social, and cultural benefits from resources; and (4) maintaining or improving biological, economic, and cultural diversity.

### **III. Ecosystem Approach to Conservation and Management of Deep-water Ecosystems**

Through [Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1](#), [Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 2](#), and [Coral Amendment 8](#), the South Atlantic Council established and expanded deep-water coral HAPCs (CHAPCs) and co-designated them as EFH-HAPCs to protect the largest continuous distribution (>23,000 square miles) of pristine deep-water coral ecosystems in the world from fishing and non-fishing activities.

### **IV. FEP II Development**

The South Atlantic Council developed FEP II in cooperation with NMFS, as a mechanism to incorporate ecosystem principles, goals, and policies into the fishery management process, including consideration of potential indirect effects of fisheries on food web linkages when developing harvest strategies and management plans. South Atlantic Council policies developed through the process support data collection, model and supporting tool development, and implementation of FEP II. FEP II and the FEP II Implementation Plan provide a system to incorporate of ecosystem considerations into the management process.

FEP II was developed employing writing and review teams established from the South Atlantic Council's Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management AP, and experts from state, federal, NGOs, academia and other regional organizations and associations. Unlike the original Plan, FEP II is a living continually developing online information system presenting core sections and sections with links to documents or other online systems with detailed updated information on species, habitat, fisheries and research. A core part of the FEP II development process involved engaging the South Atlantic Council's Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management AP and regional experts in developing new sections and ecosystem-specific policy statements to address South Atlantic food webs and connectivity and South Atlantic climate

variability and fisheries. In addition, standing essential fish habitat policy statements were updated and a new artificial reef habitat policy statement was approved. In combination, these statements advance habitat conservation and the move to EBFM in the region. They also serve as the basis for further policy development, consideration in habitat and fish stock assessments and future management of fisheries and habitat. They also support a more comprehensive view of conservation and management in the South Atlantic and identify long-term information needs, available models, tools, and capabilities that will advance EBFM in the region.

## **V. FEP II Dashboard (In transition to new Habitat and Ecosystem Page)**

The FEP II Dashboard and associated online tools provided a clear description of the fundamental physical, biological, human, and institutional context of South Atlantic ecosystems within which fisheries are managed. The Council's new website (under development) will include a new Habitat and Ecosystem page where the FEP II Dashboard layout shown below will be refined and integrated.

- Introduction
- South Atlantic Ecosystem
- South Atlantic Habitats
- Managed Species
- Social and Economic
- Essential Fish Habitat
- SAFMC Managed Areas
- Research & Monitoring
- SAFMC Tools

## **VI. NOAA EBFM Activities Supporting FEP II**

### ***a. NOAA EBFM Policy and Road Map***

To support the move to EBFM, NMFS developed an agency-wide EBFM Policy and Road Map (available through Ecosystem page (under revision) of the FEP II Dashboard that outlines a set of principles to guide actions and decisions over the long-term to: implement ecosystem-level planning; advance our understanding of ecosystem processes; prioritize vulnerabilities and risks of ecosystems and their components; explore and address trade-offs within an ecosystem; incorporate ecosystem considerations into management advice; and maintain resilient ecosystems.

### ***b. FEP II Implementation Plan Structure and Framework***

The Implementation Plan is structured to translate approved policy statements of the South Atlantic Council into actionable items. The plan encompasses chapters beginning with an introduction to the policy statement, a link to the complete policy statement, and a table which translates policies and policy components into potential action items. The

actions within the plan are recommendations for activities that could support the South Atlantic Council's FEP II policies and objectives.

**c. *FEP II Two Year Roadmap***

The FEP II Two Year Roadmap draws from the Implementation Plan and presents three to five priority actions for each of the nine approved policy statements of the South Atlantic Council which would be initiated or completed over the next two years (2019-2020). The Roadmap provides "Potential Partners" and other potential regional collaborators, a focused list of priority actions they could cooperate with the South Atlantic Council on to advance policies supporting the move to EBFM in the South Atlantic region.

**d. *Monitoring/Revisions to FEP II Implementation Plan***

FEP II and this supporting Implementation Plan are considered active and living documents. The Implementation Plan will be reviewed and updated periodically. During their spring meeting in 2021 and every three years following, the Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management AP will engage regional experts as needed, to determine whether additional actions addressing council policies should be added to the implementation plan. The South Atlantic Council's Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Committee will review, revise and refine those recommendations for South Atlantic Council consideration and approval for inclusion into the implementation plan.

## **VII. Regional Habitat and Ecosystem Partners**

The South Atlantic Council, with the Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management AP as the foundation, collaborates with regional partners to create a comprehensive habitat and ecosystem network in the region to enhance habitat conservation and EBFM.

Detailed information and links to partners are highlighted online:

[https://ocean.floridamarine.org/safmc\\_dashboard/partners.html](https://ocean.floridamarine.org/safmc_dashboard/partners.html)

## **VIII. Regional Ecosystem Modeling in the South Atlantic**

**a. *South Atlantic Ecopath with Ecosim Model***

The South Atlantic Council worked cooperatively with the University of British Columbia and the Sea Around Us project to develop a straw-man and preliminary food web models (Ecopath with Ecosim) to characterize the ecological relationships of South Atlantic species, including those managed by the South Atlantic Council. This effort helped the South Atlantic Council and cooperators identify available information and data gaps while providing insight into ecosystem function. More importantly, the model development process provided a vehicle to identify research necessary to better define populations, fisheries, and their interrelationships. While individual efforts were underway in the South Atlantic, only with significant

investment of resources through other programs was a comprehensive regional model further developed.

The current South Atlantic EwE model provides a more complete view of the system and supports potential future evaluations that may be possible with the model. With the model complete and tuned to the available data it can be used to address broad strategic issues and explore “what if” scenarios that could then be used to address tactical decision-making questions such as provide ecosystem context for single species management, address species assemblage questions, and address spatial questions using Ecospace.

A modeling team comprised of FWRI staff, South Atlantic Council staff and other technical experts as needed, will coordinate with members of the original Ecosystem Modeling Workgroup to maintain and further refine the South Atlantic Model.

The Council convened a working group to provide guidance on application of the Ecopath with Ecosim model framework to investigate potential impacts of increased red snapper recruitment on other species in the snapper grouper complex broader South Atlantic Ecosystem. The Working group met in August 2021 to review the model and provide guidance on further development and in September 2021 to review findings and prepare a report for SSC consideration. Results were presented to the SSC in October 2021.

## **IX. Tools supporting Habitat Conservation and EBFM in the South Atlantic Region**

The South Atlantic Council developed a Habitat Conservation and Ecosystem Management Section which provided access to the FEP II Digital Dashboard and associated tools which is under development with the new website. Florida’s FWRI maintains and distributes GIS data, imagery, and documents relevant to habitat conservation and ecosystem-based fishery management in their jurisdiction. Web Services and spatial representations of EFH and other habitat related layers are accessible through the Council’s [SAFMC Atlas](#), a platform for searching and visualizing GIS data relevant to the Council’s mission and download of GIS layers and information on regional partners is available through the [SAFMC Digital Dashboard](#). The online systems provide access to the following Services:

- i. [South Atlantic Fisheries Webservice](#): Provides access to species distribution and spatial presentation of regional fishery independent data from the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (South Atlantic) SEAMAP-SA, the Marine Resources Monitoring, Assessment, and Prediction program (MARMAP), and NOAA Southeast Fishery-Independent Survey (SEFIS).
- ii. [South Atlantic EFH Webservice](#): Provides access to spatial representation of EFH and EFH- HAPCs for South Atlantic Council-managed species and Highly Migratory Species.

- iii. [South Atlantic Managed Areas Service](#): Provides access to spatial presentations of South Atlantic Council and other managed areas in the region.
- iv. [South Atlantic Artificial Reefs Web Application](#): Provides a regional view of artificial reefs locations, contents and imagery associated with programs in the southeastern U.S. overseen by individual states (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina).
- v. South Atlantic [ACCSP Web Map](#) and [Application](#): The web map displays Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) Statistical Areas representing catch and values of Council-managed species across time with the application displaying charts of landings and values for ACCSP Statistical Areas.

## IX. Ecosystem-Based Action, Future Challenges and Needs

One of the greatest challenges to enhance habitat conservation and EBFM in the region is funding high priority research, including comprehensive benthic mapping and ecosystem model and management tool development. In addition, collecting detailed information on fishing fleet dynamics including defining fishing operation areas by species, species complex, and season, as well as catch relative to habitat is critical for assessment of fishery, community, and habitat impacts and for South Atlantic Council use in place-based management measures. Additional resources need to be dedicated to expanding regional coordination of modeling, mapping, characterization of species use of habitats, and full funding of regional fishery independent surveys (e.g., MARMAP, SEAMAP, and SEFIS) which are linking directly to addressing high priority management needs. The FEP II Implementation Plan includes Appendix A to highlight research and data needs excerpted from the [SEAMAP 5 Year Plan](#) because they represent short and long-term research and data needs that support EBFM and habitat conservation in the South Atlantic Region.

Development of ecosystem information systems to support South Atlantic Council management should build on existing tools (e.g., Regional Habitat and Ecosystem GIS and Arc Services) and provide resources to regional cooperating partners for expansion to address long-term South Atlantic Council needs. NOAA should support and build on the regional coordination efforts of the South Atlantic Council as it transitions to a broader management approach. Resources need to be provided to collect information necessary to update information supporting FEP II, which support refinement of EFH designations and spatial representations and future EBFM actions. These are the highest priority needs to support habitat conservation and EBFM, the completion of mapping of near-shore, mid-shelf, shelf edge, and deep-water habitats in the South Atlantic region and refinement in the characterization of species use of habitats.

## **Appendix E. Actions and Alternatives Removed from Consideration**

**Action.** Reduce the snowy grouper commercial trip limit

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The commercial trip limit for snowy grouper is 200 pounds gutted weight.

**Alternative 2.** Reduce the commercial trip limit for snowy grouper to 150 pounds gutted weight.

**Alternative 3.** Reduce the commercial trip limit for snowy grouper to 100 pounds gutted weight.

**Discussion:** The Council acknowledged that reductions in commercial harvest of snowy grouper are needed to achieve updated catch levels. However, input from both the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel and the public during scoping, noted that a trip limit under 200 pounds gutted weight would exclude many commercial fishermen because the trip to depths where snowy are caught would not be worth it. To prevent the adverse social and economic effects of reducing the trip limit the Council removed this action from this amendment. In lieu of reducing the commercial trip limit, the commercial sector will retain both in-season and post season accountability measures to ensure the ACL is not continually exceeded.

## Appendix F. Data Analyses

### 1.1 Commercial ACL Analysis

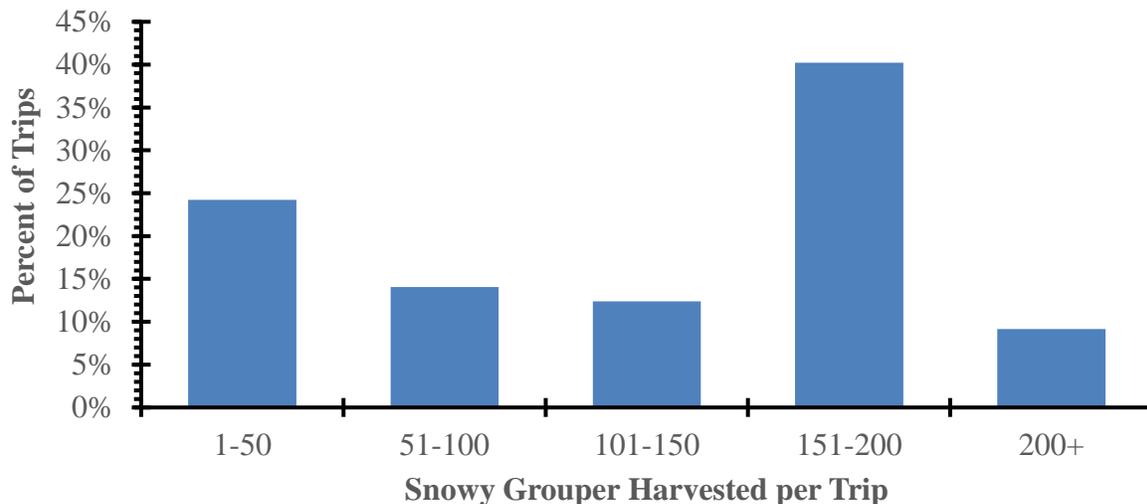
#### Analyses for Amendment 51

#### Jeff Pulver – Southeast Regional Office LAPP/DM Branch

Preliminary analyses are for the 2023 potential commercial annual catch limit (ACL) of 99,562 pounds (lbs) gutted weight (gw) with the current allocation (83% commercial and 17% recreational).

#### Commercial Trip Limits

The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) commercial logbook data (5/6/21) was used to examine trip limits in the South Atlantic snowy grouper commercial fishery. Currently, the fishery has a 200-lb gw trip limit that was implemented in August 2015. From 2016 through 2019, the commercial logbook had 3,249 trips recorded that harvested snowy grouper in the South Atlantic. Greater than 40% of the trips harvesting snowy grouper are estimated to have landed between 151 through 200 lbs gw (**Figure G.1.1.1**). Trips estimated to have harvested greater than 200 lbs gw were normalized to 200 lbs gw when estimating potential trip limit reductions. Estimated reductions from projected landings for potential trip limits are shown in **Table G.1.1.1**.



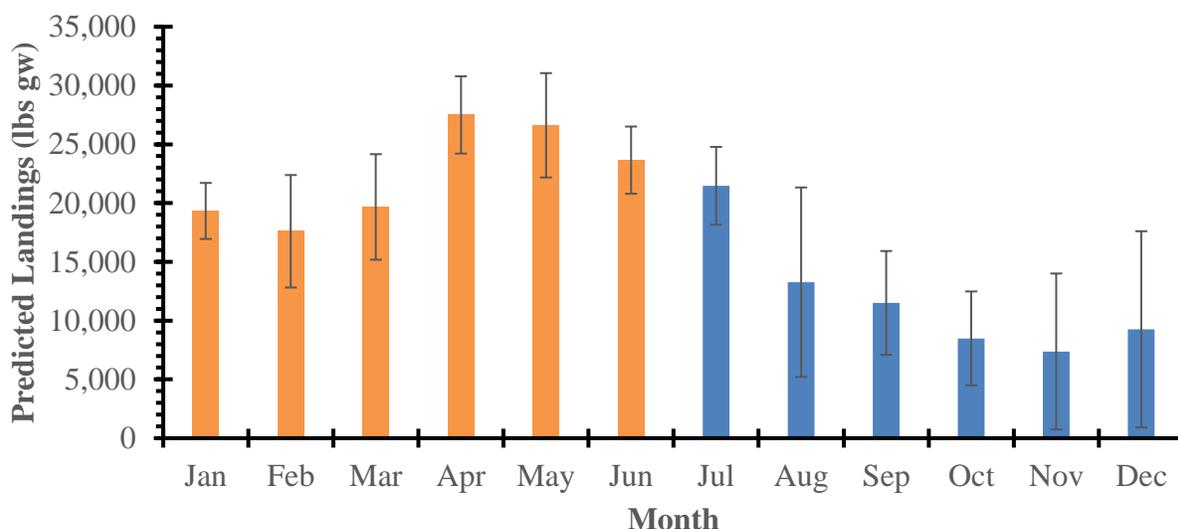
**Figure G.1.1.1** The percent of commercial trips (n=3,249) harvesting snowy grouper by bin from 2016 through 2019. Source: SEFSC commercial logbook [May 6, 2021].

**Table G.1.1.1** The predicted percent change in landings per trip from the current 200-lb gw trip limit.

| Current Trip Limit (lbs gw) | Potential Trip Limit (lbs gw) | Predicted Change in Landings |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 200-lb                      | 150-lb                        | -16%                         |
| 200-lb                      | 100-lb                        | -38%                         |

**Commercial Season Length**

Landings for South Atlantic snowy grouper were obtained from the SEFSC commercial ACL file (4/5/21). Future landings were predicted by taking an average of the most recent three years of data for each month, as the most recent data are believed to be the best approximation of future harvest (**Figure G.1.1.2**). Due to fishery closures in recent years, it was necessary to go back to 2010 for some monthly landings later in the calendar year. All monthly landings prior to August 2015 (when the trip limit was increased from 100 to 200-lb gw) were adjusted using to account for the management change. For months with a closure that had the fishery open for the majority of the days, the landings were expanded using the ratio of total days in the month to those when the fishery was open. Season lengths were projected using daily catch rates with upper and lower 95% confidence intervals with the different trip limit options (**Table G.1.1.2**).



**Figure G.1.1.2.** The predicted monthly snowy grouper landings (lbs gw) based on current trip limits with 95% confidence interval. Source: SEFSC commercial ACL file [April 5, 2021].

**Table G.1.1.2.** The projected 2023 closure dates with an ACL of 99,562 lbs gw for snowy grouper by season with different trip limit options and 95% confidence interval (CI). Note that 70% of the ACL is allocated to the January through June season and 30% to the July through December season.

| Season              | ACL (lbs gw) | Trip Limit (gw) | Closure Date | Season Length (95% CI) |
|---------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------------|
| January 1 – June 30 | 69,693       | 200-lb          | April 15     | Apr 2 – May 1          |

|                      |        |        |             |                     |
|----------------------|--------|--------|-------------|---------------------|
| January 1 – June 30  | 69,693 | 150-lb | April 29    | Apr 15 – May 19     |
| January 1 – June 30  | 69,693 | 100-lb | June 3      | May 14 – No Closure |
| July 1 – December 31 | 29,869 | 200-lb | August 20   | Aug 8 – Sep 28      |
| July 1 – December 31 | 29,869 | 150-lb | September 2 | Aug 16 – Nov 21     |
| July 1 – December 31 | 29,869 | 100-lb | October 8   | Sep 5 – No Closure  |

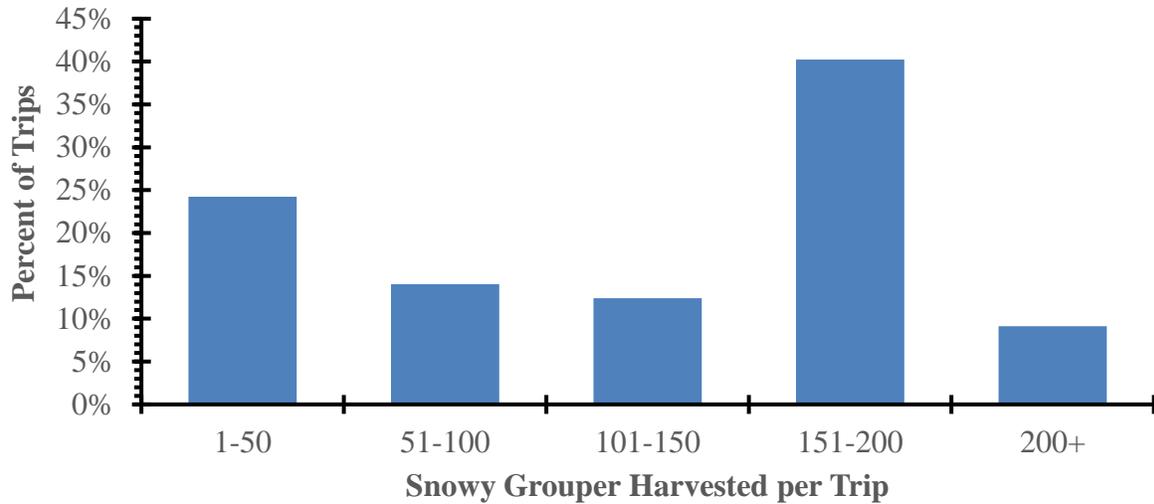
## 1.2 Commercial Season Closure Analysis for the Snowy Grouper Fishery

**Alisha Gray; November 12, 2021**  
**LAPP/DM Branch**  
**Southeast Regional Office**

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) manages snowy grouper in South Atlantic federal waters under the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan (Snapper Grouper FMP). Amendment 51 to the Snapper Grouper FMP proposes to adjust catch levels (annual catch limits), and revise sector allocations. This analysis investigates when the commercial sector will be expected to close under the proposed ACL and sector allocation changes using observed landings in pounds (lbs) gutted weight (ww) between 2015 and 2019.

### Commercial Trip Limits

The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) commercial logbook data (5/6/21) was used to examine trip limits in the South Atlantic snowy grouper commercial fishery. Currently, the fishery has a 200-lb gw trip limit that was implemented in August 2015. From 2016 through 2019, the commercial logbook had 3,249 trips recorded that harvested snowy grouper in the South Atlantic. Greater than 40% of the trips harvesting snowy grouper are estimated to have landed between 151 through 200 lbs gw (**Figure G.1.2.1**). Trips estimated to have harvested greater than 200 lbs gw were normalized to 200 lbs gw when estimating potential trip limit reductions. Estimated reductions from projected landings for potential trip limits are shown in **Table G.1.2.1**.



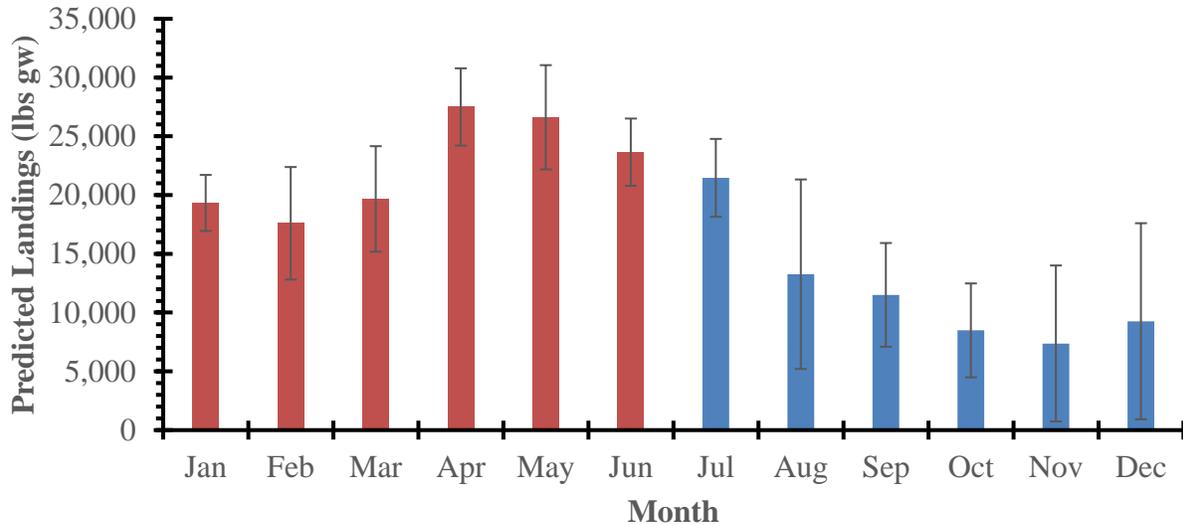
**Figure G.1.2.1.** The percent of commercial trips (n=3,249) harvesting snowy grouper by bin from 2016 through 2019. Source: SEFSC commercial logbook [May 6, 2021].

**Table G.1.2.1.** The predicted percent change in landings per trip from the current 200-lb gw trip limit.

| Current Trip Limit (lbs gw) | Potential Trip Limit (lbs gw) | Predicted Change in Landings |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 200-lb                      | 150-lb                        | -16%                         |
| 200-lb                      | 100-lb                        | -38%                         |

**Commercial Season Length**

Final commercial landings for 2010 through 2020 were provided from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) on September 29, 2021. Monthly South Atlantic commercial snowy grouper landings were averaged from 2017 through 2019 to project future landings for January through May months. Due to fishery closures in months June through December in recent years, it was necessary to go back to 2010 for some monthly landings later in the calendar year. All monthly landings prior to August 2015 (when the trip limit was increased from 100 to 200-lb gw) were adjusted to account for the management change. For months with a closure that had the fishery open for the majority of the days, the landings were expanded using the ratio of total days in the month to those when the fishery was open. Changes to the commercial fishing year in response to regulatory amendment 27 are assumed to have minimal impact on monthly fishing behavior, and no additional adjustments were made to monthly landings to project future landings. Predicted landings are presented in **Figure G.1.2.2**. Season lengths were projected using daily catch rates with upper and lower 95% confidence intervals with the different trip limit options (**Table G.1.2.2**).



**Figure G.1.2.2.** The predicted monthly snowy grouper landings (lbs gw) based on current trip limits with 95% confidence interval. Source: SEFSC commercial ACL file [September 29, 2021].

**Table G.1.2.2.** The projected closure dates with each ACL option for snowy grouper by season with different trip limit options and 95% confidence interval (CI). Note that 70% of the ACL is allocated to the January through June season and 30% to the July through December season.

| <b>Option 1: 83% ACL= 99,562 lbs gw</b>     |              |                     |              |                        |
|---|--------------|---------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Season                                      | ACL (lbs gw) | Trip Limit (lbs gw) | Closure Date | Season Length (95% CI) |
| January 1 – June 30                         | 69,693       | 200                 | April 15     | Apr 2 – May 1          |
| January 1 – June 30                         | 69,693       | 150                 | April 29     | Apr 15 – May 20        |
| January 1 – June 30                         | 69,693       | 100                 | June 3       | May 14 – No Closure    |
| July 1 – December 31                        | 29,869       | 200                 | August 20    | Aug 8 – Sep 29         |
| July 1 – December 31                        | 29,869       | 150                 | September 3  | Aug 16 – Dec 2         |
| July 1 – December 31                        | 29,869       | 100                 | October 8    | Sep 4 – No Closure     |
| <b>Option 2: 87.55% ACL= 109,038 lbs gw</b> |              |                     |              |                        |
| Season                                      | ACL (lbs gw) | Trip Limit (lbs gw) | Closure Date | Season Length (95% CI) |
| January 1 – June 30                         | 76,327       | 200                 | April 22     | Apr 8 – May 11         |
| January 1 – June 30                         | 76,327       | 150                 | May 8        | Apr 23 – May 31        |
| January 1 – June 30                         | 76,327       | 100                 | June 16      | May 25 – No Closure    |
| July 1 – December 31                        | 32,711       | 200                 | August 27    | Aug 12 – Oct 17        |
| July 1 – December 31                        | 32,711       | 150                 | September 11 | Aug 21 – No Closure    |
| July 1 – December 31                        | 32,711       | 100                 | October 24   | Sep 13 – No Closure    |
| <b>Option 3: 73.36% ACL= 88,046 lbs gw</b>  |              |                     |              |                        |
| Season                                      | ACL (lbs gw) | Trip Limit (lbs gw) | Closure Date | Season Length (95% CI) |
| January 1 – June 30                         | 61,632       | 200                 | April 6      | Mar 23 – Apr 21        |
| January 1 – June 30                         | 61,632       | 150                 | April 19     | Apr 5 – May 6          |

|                      |        |     |              |                     |
|----------------------|--------|-----|--------------|---------------------|
| January 1 – June 30  | 61,632 | 100 | May 18       | May 1 – Jun 12      |
| July 1 – December 31 | 26,414 | 200 | August 12    | Aug 3 – Sep 14      |
| July 1 – December 31 | 26,414 | 150 | August 24    | Aug 10 – Oct 8      |
| July 1 – December 31 | 26,414 | 100 | September 21 | Aug 26 – No Closure |

The reliability of these results is dependent upon the accuracy of the underlying data and input assumptions. We have attempted to create a realistic baseline as a foundation for comparisons, under the assumption that projected future landings will accurately reflect actual future landings. These closure dates are our best estimate, but uncertainty still exists as economic conditions, weather events, changes in catch-per-unit effort, fisher response to management regulations, and a variety of other factors may cause departures from any assumption.

### **1.3 Recreational ACL Analysis**

#### **Analyses for Amendment 51**

#### **Chip Collier – South Atlantic Fishery Management Council**

Landings data match landings data included in SEDAR 36 Update working paper 2020–S36Update–WP01 and were similar to the FES monitoring file (MRIP\_FES\_rec81\_21wv1\_11May21w2014\_2020LACreel).

#### **Data**

Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) samples included trips that landed from North Carolina through the Florida Keys as reported in SEDAR 36 Update. The raw intercept data files were downloaded from the MRIP webpage and included trips for sub-region 6 (South Atlantic) plus Monroe County (State =Florida and County = Monroe). Data available included trips back to 1981. Headboat from the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) are available to 1974 and were provided by the survey staff. MRIP landings data match landings data included in SEDAR 36 Update working paper 2020–S36Update–WP01 (Matter and Nuttall 2020) and total recreational landings were similar (within 20 fish each year) to the FES monitoring file (MRIP\_FES\_rec81\_21wv1\_11May21w2014\_2020LACreel).

The IPT suggested the recreational seasonal analysis should include data from 2015 to 2019. This time period matches a regulation change in the fishery when the ACL increased from 521 fish and season was shortened to May through August. Data going back to 2010 were reviewed to see if dramatic shifts occurred in the seasonality of the catch due to the recreational season established in 2015.

The analysis included trips for Monroe County, FL where regulations differ between South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. Some of these trips may have been conducted in the Gulf of Mexico waters, where snowy grouper is included in a 4-grouper aggregate per person. The bag limit for the South Atlantic is one per vessel. It appears the trips were included in the assessment based on comparison of the data set used for this analysis and Table 1 from the SEDAR 36 Update Assessment working paper on recreational data (Matter and Nuttall 2020). Therefore,

these trips were included in the seasonal analysis even though changes to SAFMC regulations would not change the landings of Snowy Grouper on the trips.

### **Review of Recreational Data Available for Snowy Grouper**

Data on recreational trips were limited for Snowy Grouper. On average, 16 MRIP (private and charter boat combined) trips per year (min = 11 and max = 21) were sampled with Snowy Grouper landings and 18 headboat trips (min=8 and max = 33) reported landings of Snowy Grouper from 2015 to 2019. Due to the low sample size and high variability (relative) in landings, any seasonal analysis will have a high degree of uncertainty.

### **Analysis**

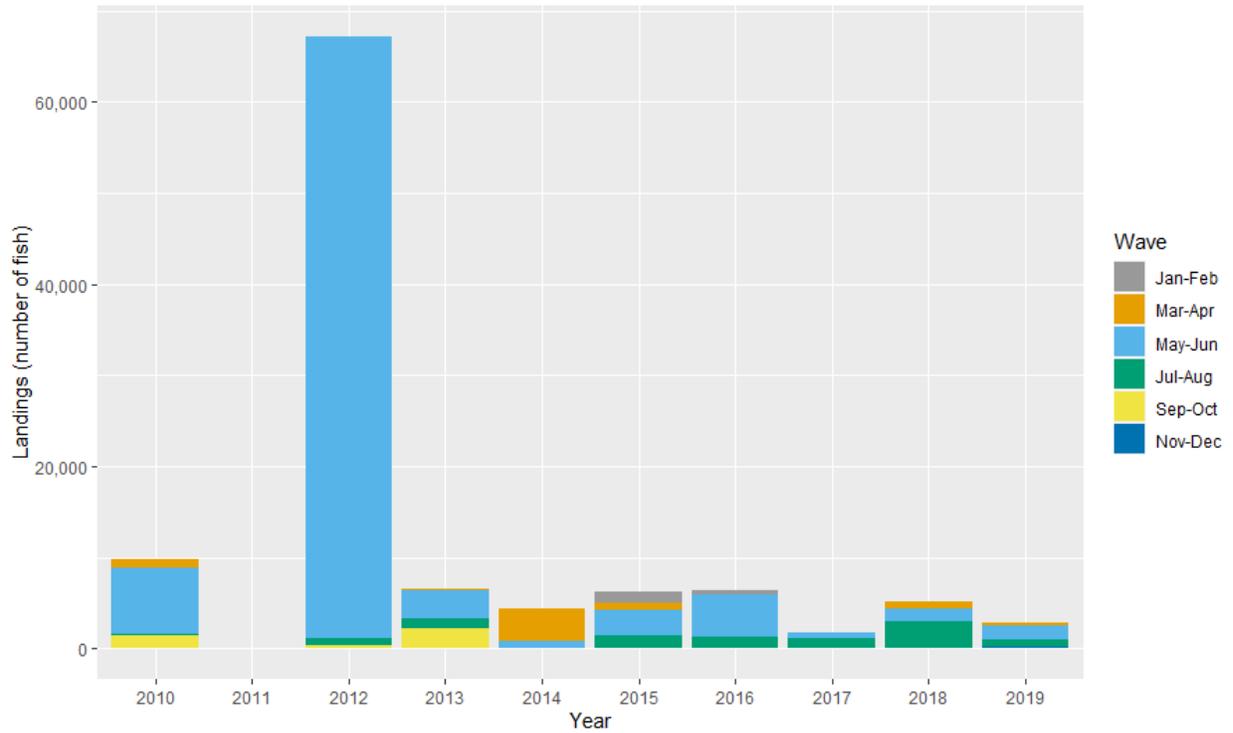
Recreational data from private recreational vessel, charter boats, and headboats were summed up by wave and year from 2015 to 2019. Mean landings were calculated by wave. Confidence intervals were calculated as mean +/- 1.96 \*standard deviation. A minimum value of 0 was used for confidence interval estimates that were less than zero.

### **Results**

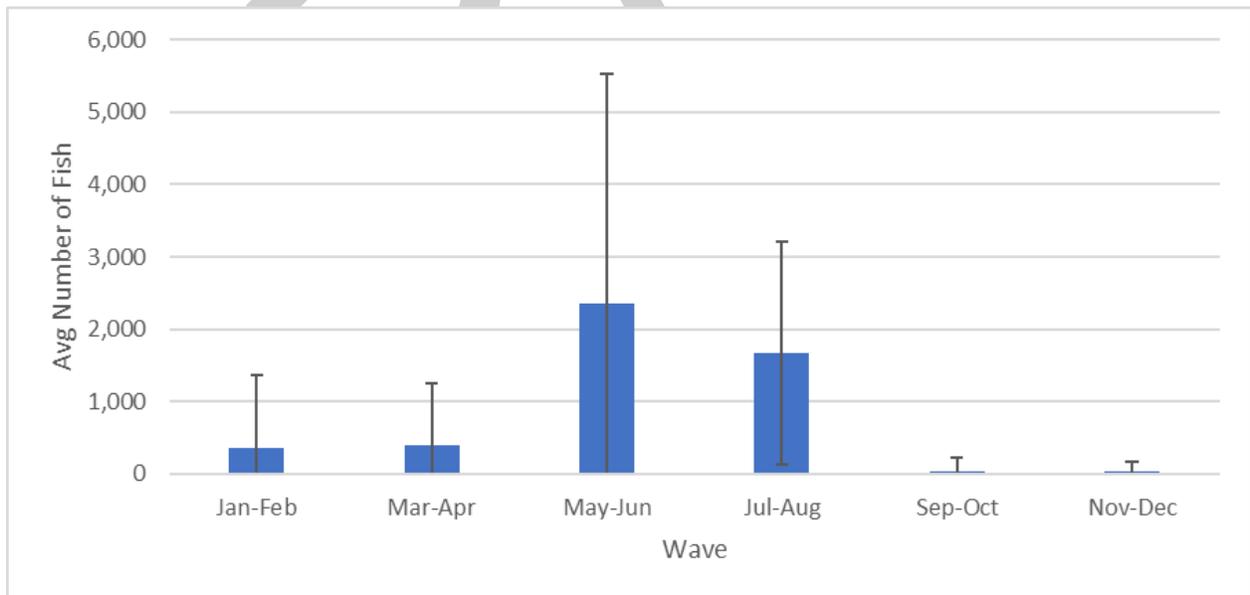
The annual recreational landings of Snowy Grouper have been less than 10,000 fish every year from 2010 to 2019 except 2012 when landings were over 60,000 fish. Charter and private recreational trips (estimated through MRIP) averaged 89% of the total recreational landings over the ten-year timeframe. Snowy Grouper were only observed through MRIP from trips that landed in North Carolina and Florida and most observations by SRHS occurred in North Carolina and Florida from 2010 to 2019. Snowy Grouper have not been observed through MRIP from trips the landed in Georgia since 1993 and South Carolina since 1982.

Recreational landings of Snowy Grouper from 2010 to 2019 tended to be highest in May - June wave or July - August wave (**Figure G.1.3.1**), 2011 included a deepwater closure for part of the year). There were rarely landings from November through February. Prior to the establishment of the recreational season for Snowy Grouper (2015), landings were most common in May through August but were reported in the March – April wave and September – October wave. From 2015 to 2019, the average landings were highest during the Snowy Grouper recreational fishing season May through August (**Figure G.1.3.2, Table G.1.3.1**). Landings were reported in January through April and most of these landings (55%) occurred in 2015, prior to the season being enacted.

There are extremely large confidence intervals based on the standard deviations. This indicates there will be significant uncertainty in estimating any impact from changing the recreational season. The confidence interval for all waves except wave 4 (July – August) are set to a minimum of zero to avoid negative numbers (**Table G.1.3.1**).



**Figure G.1.3.1.** Recreational landings of Snowy Grouper (number of fish) by year and wave from 2010 to 2019 for the South Atlantic region. Landings include trips reported from Key West, FL up to the Virginia and North Carolina border.



**Figure G.1.3.2.** Average number of Snowy Grouper landed in recreational sector by wave from the South Atlantic from 2015 to 2019. The landings included trips reported from Monroe

County, FL. Blue bars represent the average landings and lines represent the 95% confidence interval.

**Table G.1.3.1.** Average number of Snowy Grouper landed by the recreational sector by wave from the South Atlantic from 2015 to 2019. The landings included trips reported from Monroe County, FL. The confidence interval was developed based on the standard deviation of the five years.

| Wave    | Average | Confidence Interval | Avg Number Per Month |
|---------|---------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Jan-Feb | 351     | 0 - 1,372           | 175.5                |
| Mar-Apr | 395     | 0 - 1,256           | 197.5                |
| May-Jun | 2,354   | 0 - 5,520           | 1,177.0              |
| Jul-Aug | 1,674   | 138 - 3,210         | 837.0                |
| Sep-Oct | 45      | 0 - 230             | 22.5                 |
| Nov-Dec | 30      | 0 - 163             | 15.0                 |

**Literature Cited**

Matter, Vivian M. and Matthew A. Nuttall. 2020. Recreational Survey Data for Snowy Grouper in the South Atlantic. 2020-SEDAR36U-WP01. SEDAR, North Charleston, SC. 21 pp.

**1.4 Recreational Season Closure Analysis**

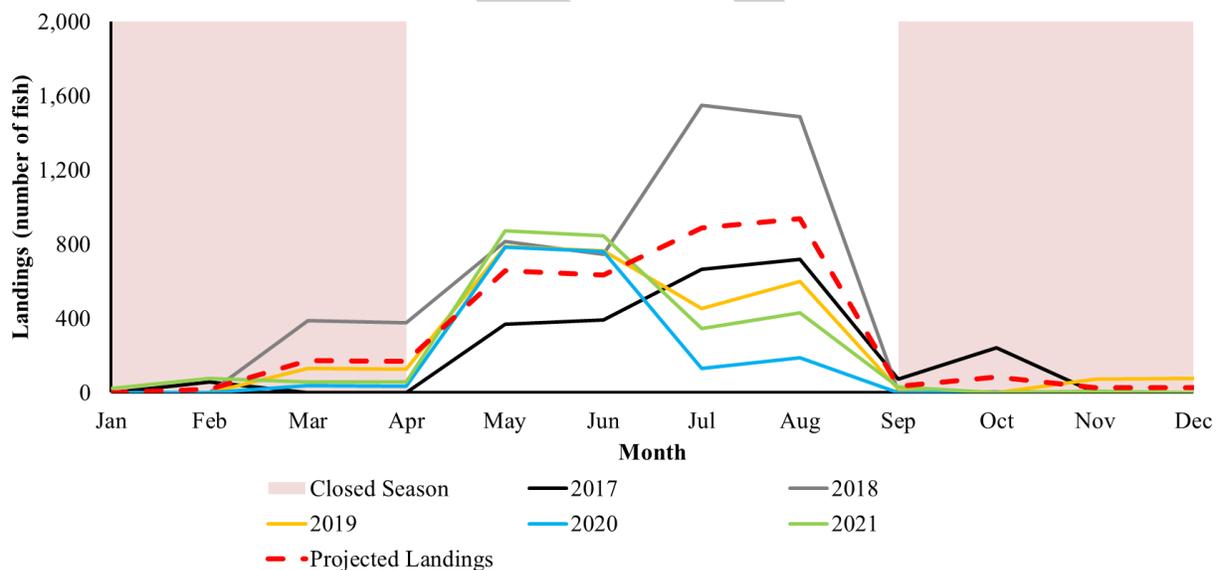
LAPP/DM Branch  
 NOAA Fisheries Service  
 Southeast Regional Office  
 May 2022

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) manages snowy grouper in South Atlantic federal waters under the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan (Snapper Grouper FMP). Amendment 51 to the Snapper Grouper FMP proposes to adjust annual catch limits (ACLs), revise sector allocations, and modify the recreational season. This analysis projects how long the recreational season will be for each of the season alternatives in Action 5 while incorporating the preferred alternatives in Action 1 (Alternative 2: ACL=ABC) and Action 2 (Alternative 1, No Action: 17% recreational and 83% commercial sector allocation). The recreational season will be expected to close under the proposed ACL, season, and sector allocation changes using observed landings in numbers of fish between 2017 and 2019.

*Recreational*

Recreational landings were obtained from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) recreational ACL file (3/17/22; **Figure G.1.4.1**). This dataset includes landings from the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) and Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Monthly predicted landings are required to explore how the proposed ACLs and season

options will impact the fishing season length. SRHS data provide monthly landings estimates whereas MRIP data are provided in two-month waves (e.g., January and February = wave 1, March and April = wave 2, etc.). Monthly landings in January through April and September 1 through December 31 were minimal due to the seasonal closure that runs during those months. To estimate monthly landings, 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. Future landings were predicted by taking an average of 2017 through 2019 landings for each month (Table G.1.4.1). Because snowy grouper landings are quite variable, future landings were also predicted by taking an average of 2015 through 2019 landings for each month for comparison. To estimate future landings in September through November, which have historically been months closed to fishing, a range was provided using the average monthly landings in Wave 3 and Wave 4, since those were observed landings. More recent years (e.g., 2020 and 2021) were not used in predicting future landings due to a decrease in landings seen those years. The decrease in observed landings coincided with pandemic-related disruption in dockside sampling that required MRIP estimations be imputed from previous years. These data were post-stratified to include Monroe County landings in South Atlantic landings. Based on the cumulatively summed projected recreational landings of snowy grouper, the recreational sector will be expected to be open between 61 and 98 days (Table G.1.4.2-G.1.4.4), with variability found depending on which sector allocation option is selected in Action 2.



**Figure G.1.4.1.** South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings by month from 2017-2019 and projected landings. All of the landing projections assume no landings between January 1 - April 30 and September 1 – December 31 for the season closure. Source: SEFSC MRIP FES Recreational ACL Database [March 17, 2022].

**Table G.1.4.1.** Average number of snowy grouper landed by the recreational sector by wave from the South Atlantic based on a three-year average (2017 to 2019) and a five-year average (2015 to 2019). Landings include trips reported from Monroe County, FL. The confidence interval was developed based on the standard deviation of the three years.

**Three-year Average (2017-2019)**

| Wave                                 | Average      | Confidence Interval | Average Number Per Month |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Jan-Feb                              | 20           | 0 - 598             | 10                       |
| Mar-Apr                              | 342          | 0 - 806             | 11                       |
| <b>May-Jun</b>                       | <b>1,290</b> | <b>0 - 3,120</b>    | <b>645</b>               |
| <b>Jul-Aug</b>                       | <b>1,824</b> | <b>938 - 2,710</b>  | <b>912</b>               |
| Sep-Oct                              | 116          | 0 - 270             | 58                       |
| Nov-Dec                              | 0            | 0 - 126             | 0                        |
| <b>Five-year Average (2015-2019)</b> |              |                     |                          |
| Wave                                 | Average      | Confidence Interval | Average Number Per Month |
| Jan-Feb                              | 351          | 0 - 1,372           | 176                      |
| Mar-Apr                              | 395          | 0 - 1,256           | 198                      |
| <b>May-Jun</b>                       | <b>2,354</b> | <b>0 - 5,520</b>    | <b>1,177</b>             |
| <b>Jul-Aug</b>                       | <b>1,674</b> | <b>138 - 3,210</b>  | <b>837</b>               |
| Sep-Oct                              | 45           | 0 - 230             | 23                       |
| Nov-Dec                              | 30           | 0 - 163             | 15                       |

**Table G.1.4.2.** The projected South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings (number of fish) and closure dates expected for each Alternative of Action 5 using a three-year (2017-2019) and five-year (2015-2019) average. The recreational ACL options considered here assume current sector allocations of 17% recreational and 83% commercial (Alternative 1 of Action 2). Source: SEFSC MRIP FES Recreational ACL Database [March 17, 2022].

Note: All alternatives to Action 5 assume the proposed ACLs set equal to the ABC (Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 1). All ACLs and projected landings are in numbers of fish.

\*The recreational ACLs presented are inclusive of recreational landings tracked using the MRIP Fishing Effort Survey.

| <b>Alternative 1 (No Action): May 1 – August 31</b>   |                                     |                             |                          |                             |                          |
|---|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Year  | Recreational ACL (numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average Closure Date | 3-Year Average Days Open | 5-Year Average Closure Date | 5-Year Average Days Open |
| 2023  | 2,278                               | August 4                    | 95                       | June 28                     | 58                       |
| 2024  | 2,309                               | August 5                    | 96                       | June 29                     | 59                       |
| 2025  | 2,339                               | August 6                    | 97                       | June 30                     | 60                       |
| 2026  | 2,339                               | August 6                    | 97                       | June 30                     | 60                       |
| <b>Alternative 2: Wave 3 Option (May 1 – June 31)</b> |                                     |                             |                          |                             |                          |
| Year  | Recreational ACL (numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average Closure Date | 3-Year Average Days Open | 5-Year Average Closure Date | 5-Year Average Days Open |
| 2023  | 2,278                               | No Closure (1,290 fish)     | 60                       | June 28                     | 58                       |
| 2024  | 2,309                               | No Closure (1,290 fish)     | 60                       | June 29                     | 59                       |
| 2025  | 2,339                               | No Closure (1,290 fish)     | 60                       | June 30                     | 60                       |
| 2026  | 2,339                               | No Closure (1,290 fish)     | 60                       | June 30                     | 60                       |
| <b>Alternative 3: Wave 4 Option (July 1 – Aug 31)</b> |                                     |                             |                          |                             |                          |
| Year  | Recreational ACL (numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average Closure Date | 3-Year Average Days Open | 5-Year Average Closure Date | 5-Year Average Days Open |
| 2023  | 2,278                               | No Closure                  | 61                       | No Closure                  | 61                       |

|  |  | (1,824 fish)                   |                             | (1,674 fish)                   |                             |
|--|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2024   | 2,309                                  | No Closure<br>(1,824 fish)     | 61                          | No Closure<br>(1,674 fish)     | 61                          |
| 2025   | 2,339                                  | No Closure<br>(1,824 fish)     | 61                          | No Closure<br>(1,674 fish)     | 61                          |
| 2026   | 2,339                                  | No Closure<br>(1,824 fish)     | 61                          | No Closure<br>(1,674 fish)     | 61                          |
| <b>Overall Season Length Analysis: Wave 3 Option (May 1 – Dec 31)</b>  |  |                                |                             |                                |                             |
| Year   | Recreational ACL<br>(numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 3-Year Average<br>Days Open | 5-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 5-Year Average<br>Days Open |
| 2023   | 2,278                                  | August 4                       | 95                          | June 28                        | 58                          |
| 2024   | 2,309                                  | August 5                       | 96                          | June 29                        | 59                          |
| 2025   | 2,339                                  | August 6                       | 97                          | June 30                        | 60                          |
| 2026   | 2,339                                  | August 6                       | 97                          | June 30                        | 60                          |
| <b>Overall Season Length Analysis: Wave 4 Option (July 1 – Dec 31)</b> |  |                                |                             |                                |                             |
| Year   | Recreational ACL<br>(numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 3-Year Average<br>Days Open | 5-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 5-Year Average<br>Days Open |
| 2023   | 2,278                                  | Sept 8 - Sept 11               | 69 – 72                     | Sept 8 - Sept 11               | 69 – 72                     |
| 2024   | 2,309                                  | Sept 8 - Sept 12               | 69 – 73                     | Sept 9 - Sept 12               | 70 – 73                     |
| 2025   | 2,339                                  | Sept 9 - Sept 12               | 70 – 73                     | Sept 9 - Sept 12               | 70 – 73                     |
| 2026   | 2,339                                  | Sept 9 – Sept 12               | 70 – 73                     | Sept 9 - Sept 12               | 70 – 73                     |

**Table G.1.4.3.** The projected South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings (number of fish) and closure dates expected for each Alternative of Action 5 using a three-year (2017-2019) and five-year (2015-2019) average. The recreational ACL options considered here assume current sector allocations of 12.45% recreational and 87.55% commercial (Alternative 2 of Action 2). Source: SEFSC MRIP FES Recreational ACL Database [March 17, 2022].

| <b>Alternative 1 (No Action): May 1 – August 31</b>   |  |                                |                             |                                |                             |
|---|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Year  | Recreational ACL<br>(numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 3-Year Average<br>Days Open | 5-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 5-Year Average<br>Days Open |
| 2023  | 1,668                                  | July 14                        | 74                          | June 13                        | 43                          |
| 2024  | 1,691                                  | July 14                        | 74                          | June 13                        | 43                          |
| 2025  | 1,713                                  | July 15                        | 75                          | June 14                        | 44                          |
| 2026  | 1,713                                  | July 15                        | 75                          | June 14                        | 44                          |
| <b>Alternative 2: Wave 3 Option (May 1 – June 31)</b> |  |                                |                             |                                |                             |
| Year  | Recreational ACL<br>(numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 3-Year Average<br>Days Open | 5-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 5-Year Average<br>Days Open |
| 2023  | 1,668                                  | No Closure<br>(1,290 fish)     | 61                          | June 13                        | 43                          |
| 2024  | 1,691                                  | No Closure<br>(1,290 fish)     | 61                          | June 13                        | 43                          |
| 2025  | 1,713                                  | No Closure<br>(1,290 fish)     | 61                          | June 14                        | 44                          |
| 2026  | 1,713                                  | No Closure<br>(1,290 fish)     | 61                          | June 14                        | 44                          |
| <b>Alternative 3: Wave 4 Option (July 1 – Aug 31)</b> |  |                                |                             |                                |                             |
| Year  | Recreational ACL<br>(numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 3-Year Average<br>Days Open | 5-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 5-Year Average<br>Days Open |

| 2023   | 1,668                                  | Aug 26                         | 56                          | Aug 31                         | 60                          |
|--|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2024   | 1,691                                  | Aug 27                         | 57                          | No Closure<br>(1,674 fish)     | 61                          |
| 2025   | 1,713                                  | Aug 28                         | 58                          | No Closure<br>(1,674 fish)     | 61                          |
| 2026   | 1,713                                  | Aug 28                         | 58                          | No Closure<br>(1,674 fish)     | 61                          |
| <b>Overall Season Length Analysis: Wave 3 Option (May 1 – Dec 31)</b>  |  |                                |                             |                                |                             |
| Year   | Recreational ACL<br>(numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 3-Year Average<br>Days Open | 5-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 5-Year Average<br>Days Open |
| 2023   | 1,668                                  | July 14                        | 74                          | June 13                        | 43                          |
| 2024   | 1,691                                  | July 14                        | 74                          | June 13                        | 43                          |
| 2025   | 1,713                                  | July 15                        | 75                          | June 14                        | 44                          |
| 2026   | 1,713                                  | July 15                        | 75                          | June 14                        | 44                          |
| <b>Overall Season Length Analysis: Wave 4 Option (July 1 – Dec 31)</b> |  |                                |                             |                                |                             |
| Year   | Recreational ACL<br>(numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 3-Year Average<br>Days Open | 5-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 5-Year Average<br>Days Open |
| 2023   | 1,668                                  | Aug 26                         | 56                          | Aug 31                         | 61                          |
| 2024   | 1,691                                  | Aug 27                         | 57                          | Sept 1                         | 62                          |
| 2025   | 1,713                                  | Aug 28                         | 58                          | Sept 1                         | 62                          |
| 2026   | 1,713                                  | Aug 28                         | 58                          | Sept 1                         | 62                          |

Note: All alternatives to Action 5 assume the proposed ACLs set equal to the ABC (Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 1). All ACLs and projected landings are in numbers of fish.

\*The recreational ACLs presented are inclusive of recreational landings tracked using the MRIP Fishing Effort Survey.

**Table G.1.4.4.** The projected South Atlantic snowy grouper recreational landings (number of fish) and closure dates expected for each Alternative of Action 5 using a three-year (2017-2019) and five-year (2015-2019) average. The recreational ACL options considered here assume current sector allocations of 26.64% recreational and 73.36% commercial (Alternative 3 of Action 2). Source: SEFSC MRIP FES Recreational ACL Database [March 17, 2022].

| <b>Alternative 1 (No Action): May 1 – August 31</b>   |  |                                |                             |                                |                             |
|---|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Year  | Recreational ACL<br>(numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 3-Year Average<br>Days Open | 5-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 5-Year Average<br>Days Open |
| 2023  | 3,570                                  | No Closure<br>(3,115 fish)     | 122                         | Aug 14                         | 105                         |
| 2024  | 3,618                                  | No Closure<br>(3,115 fish)     | 122                         | Aug 16                         | 107                         |
| 2025  | 3,666                                  | No Closure<br>(3,115 fish)     | 122                         | Aug 18                         | 109                         |
| 2026  | 3,666                                  | No Closure<br>(3,115 fish)     | 122                         | Aug 18                         | 109                         |
| <b>Alternative 2: Wave 3 Option (May 1 – June 31)</b> |  |                                |                             |                                |                             |
| Year  | Recreational ACL<br>(numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 3-Year Average<br>Days Open | 5-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 5-Year Average<br>Days Open |
| 2023  | 3,570                                  | No Closure<br>(1,290 fish)     | 61                          | No Closure<br>(2,356 fish)     | 61                          |
| 2024  | 3,618                                  | No Closure                     | 61                          | No Closure                     | 61                          |

|  |  | (1,290 fish)                   |                             | (2,356 fish)                   |                             |
|--|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2025   | 3,666                                  | No Closure<br>(1,290 fish)     | 61                          | No Closure<br>(2,356 fish)     | 61                          |
| 2026   | 3,666                                  | No Closure<br>(1,290 fish)     | 61                          | No Closure<br>(2,356 fish)     | 61                          |
| <b>Alternative 3: Wave 4 Option (July 1 – Aug 31)</b>                  |  |                                |                             |                                |                             |
| Year   | Recreational ACL<br>(numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 3-Year Average<br>Days Open | 5-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 5-Year Average<br>Days Open |
| 2023   | 3,570                                  | No Closure<br>(1,824 fish)     | 62                          | No Closure<br>(1,674 fish)     | 61                          |
| 2024   | 3,618                                  | No Closure<br>(1,824 fish)     | 62                          | No Closure<br>(1,674 fish)     | 61                          |
| 2025   | 3,666                                  | No Closure<br>(1,824 fish)     | 62                          | No Closure<br>(1,674 fish)     | 61                          |
| 2026   | 3,666                                  | No Closure<br>(1,824 fish)     | 62                          | No Closure<br>(1,674 fish)     | 61                          |
| <b>Overall Season Length Analysis: Wave 3 Option (May 1 – Dec 31)</b>  |  |                                |                             |                                |                             |
| Year   | Recreational ACL<br>(numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 3-Year Average<br>Days Open | 5-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 5-Year Average<br>Days Open |
| 2023   | 3,570                                  | Sept 8 – Sept 11               | 130-133                     | Aug 14                         | 105                         |
| 2024   | 3,618                                  | Sept 9 – Sept 12               | 130-132                     | Aug 16                         | 107                         |
| 2025   | 3,666                                  | Sept 10 – Sept 13              | 130-131                     | Aug 18                         | 109                         |
| 2026   | 3,666                                  | Sept 10 – Sept 13              | 130-131                     | Aug 18                         | 109                         |
| <b>Overall Season Length Analysis: Wave 4 Option (July 1 – Dec 31)</b> |  |                                |                             |                                |                             |
| Year   | Recreational ACL<br>(numbers of fish)* | 3-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 3-Year Average<br>Days Open | 5-Year Average<br>Closure Date | 5-Year Average<br>Days Open |
| 2023   | 3,570                                  | Sep 29 – Oct 11                | 91 - 103                    | Sep 25 – Oct 5                 | 87 – 97                     |
| 2024   | 3,618                                  | Sep 30 – Oct 13                | 92 - 105                    | Sep 25 – Oct 6                 | 88 – 99                     |
| 2025   | 3,666                                  | Oct 1 – Oct 14                 | 94 - 106                    | Sep 26 – Oct 6                 | 90 – 100                    |
| 2026   | 3,666                                  | Oct 1 – Oct 14                 | 94 - 106                    | Sep 26 – Oct 6                 | 90 - 100                    |

Note: All alternatives to Action 5 assume the proposed ACLs set equal to the ABC (Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 1). All ACLs and projected landings are in numbers of fish.

\*The recreational ACLs presented are inclusive of recreational landings tracked using the MRIP Fishing Effort Survey.

The reliability of these results is dependent upon the accuracy of the underlying data and input assumptions. We have attempted to create a realistic baseline as a foundation for comparisons, under the assumption that projected future landings will accurately reflect actual future landings. These closure dates are our best estimate, but uncertainty still exists as economic conditions, weather events, changes in catch-per-unit effort, fisher response to management regulations, and a variety of other factors may cause departures from any assumption.

## Appendix G. Bycatch Practicability Analysis

### Background

Amendment 51 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP) would modify management of South Atlantic snowy grouper. Actions include revising annual catch limits (ACL), sector allocations, recreational accountability measures (AM), and management measures for the commercial and recreational sectors. Development of Amendment 51 is a response to the most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic snowy grouper. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) outlines at 50 CFR § 600.350(d) (3) (i) ten factors that should be considered in determining whether a management measure minimizes bycatch or bycatch mortality to the extent practicable.

1. Population effects for the bycatch species.
2. Ecological effects due to changes in the bycatch of that species (effects on other species in the ecosystem).
3. Changes in the bycatch of other species of fish and the resulting population and ecosystem effects.
4. Effects on marine mammals and birds.
5. Changes in fishing, processing, disposal, and marketing costs.
6. Changes in fishing practices and behavior of fishermen.
7. Changes in research, administration, and enforcement costs and management effectiveness.
8. Changes in the economic, social, or cultural value of fishing activities and non-consumptive uses of fishery resources.
9. Changes in the distribution of benefits and costs.
10. Social effects.

#### Bycatch Reporting Requirements and Methodology

For the commercial sector, the vessel reporting requirement is achieved through logbooks. Fishermen with Commercial South Atlantic Unlimited Snapper Grouper or 225-lb Trip Limit Snapper Grouper Permits, who are selected by the Science and Research Director, are required to maintain, and submit fishing records through the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) Commercial Logbook. Discard data are collected using the Supplemental Discard Logbook that is sent to a 20% stratified random sample of the active commercial permit holders in the fishery. In addition to the number of self-reported discards per trip and gear, the SEFSC Supplemental Discard Logbook attempts to quantify the reason why discarding occurs using four codes.<sup>14</sup> Fishermen can specify multiple reasons for a species discarded on the same trip and gear.

- 1) Regulation – Not legal size: Animals that would have been sold, however local or federal size limits forbid it.

---

<sup>14</sup> More information on the discard logbook is available here <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/about/southeast-fisheries-science-center>.

- 2) Regulation – Out of season: Animals that would have been sold, however the local or federal fishing season is closed.
- 3) Regulation – Other: Animals that would have been sold, however a local or federal regulation other than size or season, forbids it (Other than size or season; i.e., protected species, not properly permitted).
- 4) Market conditions: Animals that have no market value (rotten, damaged).

For the recreational sector, estimates of discards from private recreational and charter fishermen are collected through the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP)/Fishing Effort Survey (FES). MRIP/FES replaced the Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey. The Southeast Region Headboat Survey, which includes limited headboat observer sampling, collects discard information from headboat vessels. In addition, in January 2021, NMFS implemented the Southeast For-Hire Electronic Reporting Program, which implemented mandatory electronic reporting of for-hire vessel catch data for over 3,000 vessels in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic. The purpose of this program is to provide more accurate and reliable fisheries information about for-hire catch, effort, and discards.

## **1. Population Effects for the Bycatch Species**

### **1.1 Amount and Type of Bycatch and Discards**

#### Commercial Sector

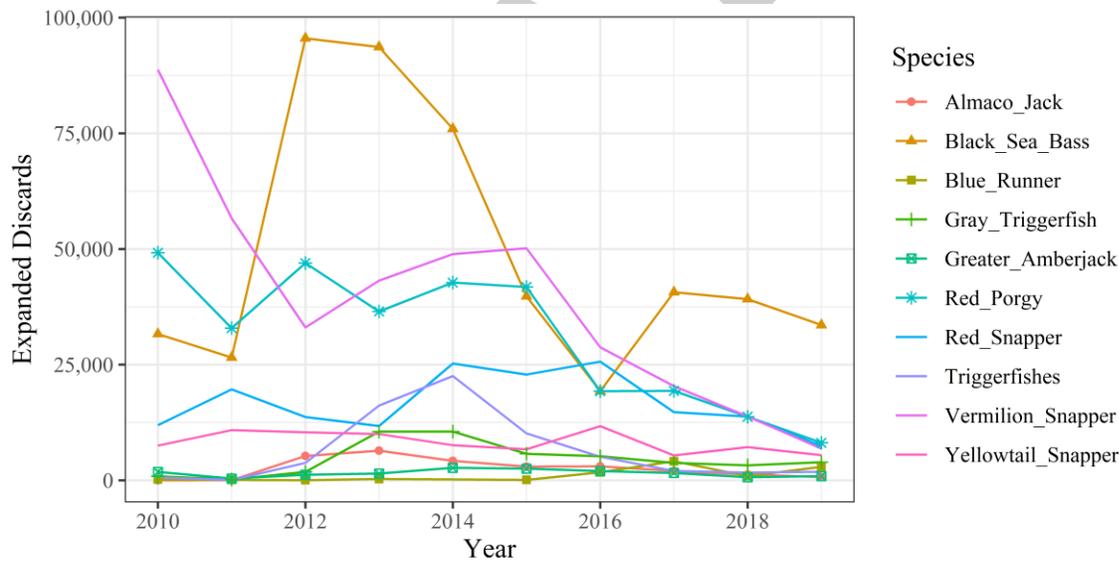
The South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery is characterized by moderately high discards, especially of black sea bass, vermilion snapper, and red porgy (Table G.1.1.1 and Figure G.1.1.1). Most discards originate from handline/electric rig and trap gear, with some discards from trolling gear and relatively low discards from longline and diving gear. Trap/pot gear show high levels of discarded black sea bass, which is the targeted species of this gear type, but low levels of bycatch for other species. It is possible that trip-level reporting leads to the relatively high discard estimates from trolling gear; these may be sets using another gear type (i.e., handline/electric rig) on a trip declared as a trolling gear trip. The ratio of commercial landings to commercial discards is not compared because commercial landings are reported in pounds and discards are reported in numbers of fish.

**Table G.1.1.1.** Top ten species with mean estimated South Atlantic commercial discards (number of fish) during snapper grouper trips (defined as trips with >50% of landings from snapper grouper stocks), sorted from largest to smallest, by gear, for the 2015-2019 period.

| <b>Stock</b>  | <b>Diver</b> | <b>Stock</b>      | <b>Handline / Electric</b> | <b>Stock</b>      | <b>Longline</b> | <b>Stock</b>      | <b>Trap / Pot</b> | <b>Stock</b>   | <b>Troll</b> |
|---------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Gray Snapper  | 133          | Vermilion Snapper | 23,324                     | Red Grouper       | 176             | Black Sea Bass    | 25,581            | Black Sea Bass | 1,114        |
| Hogfish       | 57           | Red Porgy         | 20,337                     | Snowy Grouper     | 157             | Trigger-fishes    | 1,507             | Grunts         | 66           |
| Black Grouper | 28           | Red Snapper       | 16,805                     | Blueline Tilefish | 32              | Vermilion Snapper | 662               | King Mackerel  | 34           |

| Stock              | Diver | Stock              | Handline / Electric | Stock             | Longline | Stock            | Trap / Pot | Stock             | Troll |
|--------------------|-------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------|------------------|------------|-------------------|-------|
| Ocean Triggerfish  | 10    | Black Sea Bass     | 7,797               | Greater Amberjack | 26       | Gray Triggerfish | 407        | White Grunt       | 24    |
| Mutton Snapper     | 8     | Yellowtail Snapper | 7,278               | Red Snapper       | 20       | White Grunt      | 207        | Gag               | 19    |
| Red Grouper        | 5     | Gray Triggerfish   | 3,966               | Red Porgy         | 18       | Grunts           | 161        | Dolphin           | 16    |
| Yellow Jack        | 2     | Triggerfishes      | 2,652               | Triggerfishes     | 5        | Red Porgy        | 94         | Black Grouper     | 13    |
| Yellowtail Snapper | 2     | Almaco Jack        | 2,004               | Golden Tilefish   | 2        | Red Snapper      | 65         | Rock Sea Bass     | 6     |
| Groupers           | 1     | Blue Runner        | 1,956               | Amberjacks        | 1        | Gag              | 23         | Triggerfishes     | 5     |
| King Mackerel      | 1     | Greater Amberjack  | 1,510               | Blackfin Snapper  | 1        | Red Grouper      | 6          | Greater Amberjack | 3     |

Source: SEFSC Coastal Logbook (accessed May 2020) and Discard Logbook (accessed May 2020). Note: Commercial gray triggerfish includes the "triggerfishes, unclassified" category.



**Figure G.1.1.1.** Expanded self-reported commercial discards (numbers of fish) for the top ten species discarded during snapper grouper trips (defined as trips with >50% of landings from snapper grouper stocks) from 2010-2019 for all gear types.

Source: SEFSC Coastal Logbook (accessed May 2020) and Discard Logbook (accessed May 2020).

Of the four discard codes, regulations (i.e., not legal size and out of season) was the most common reason selected for the most commonly discarded snapper grouper species based on self-reported discards (Table G.1.1.2). The minimum size limit appears to be the primary driver of commercial discards for black sea bass, gag, gray snapper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, and yellowtail snapper. Out of season appears to be the primary driver of discards for almaco jack, red porgy, red snapper, and vermilion snapper. Red porgy has the second highest number

of discards in the commercial vertical line component of the snapper grouper fishery, with 78% of discards attributed to “out of season.”

**Table G.1.1.2.** The percentage of unexpanded discards for each discard reason out of the total number of self-reported discards reported to the Supplemental Discard Logbook for the top ten snapper grouper species discarded in the South Atlantic from 2015 through 2019. Some percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

| Species            | Not Legal Size | Out of Season | Other Regulations | Market Conditions |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Almaco Jack        | 4%             | 72%           | 7%                | 17%               |
| Black Sea Bass     | 99%            | 0%            | 0%                | 0%                |
| Gag                | 78%            | 20%           | 0%                | 2%                |
| Gray Snapper       | 91%            | 0%            | 0%                | 8%                |
| Gray Triggerfish   | 59%            | 39%           | 1%                | 0%                |
| Greater Amberjack  | 77%            | 20%           | 3%                | 1%                |
| Red Porgy          | 19%            | 78%           | 2%                | 0%                |
| Red Snapper        | 2%             | 78%           | 20%               | 0%                |
| Vermilion Snapper  | 43%            | 50%           | 7%                | 0%                |
| Yellowtail Snapper | 92%            | 6%            | 2%                | 0%                |

Sources: SEFSC Supplemental Commercial Discard Logbook (May 2020).

#### Recreational Sector

From 2015 through 2019, the most discarded species on trips capturing a snapper grouper species was black sea bass for all three modes (Table G.1.1.3). Red snapper, tomtate, yellowtail snapper, and grunt species were in the top ten for all modes.

**Table G.1.1.3.** From 2015 through 2019, the top ten species with discards reported on trips capturing a snapper grouper species by recreational mode. Species are sorted by number of total discards for each mode from 2015-2019.

| Rank | HEADBOAT                 |              | CHARTER            |              | PRIVATE            |              |
|------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|
|      | Species                  | Discards (N) | Species            | Discards (N) | Species            | Discards (N) |
| 1    | Black Sea Bass           | 2,362,007    | Black Sea Bass     | 1,464,909    | Black Sea Bass     | 40,129,026   |
| 2    | Vermilion Snapper        | 461,562      | Red Snapper        | 601,973      | Gray Snapper       | 21,989,786   |
| 3    | Tomtate                  | 327,379      | Yellowtail Snapper | 529,770      | Pinfish            | 10,632,466   |
| 4    | White Grunt              | 294,025      | Tomtate            | 472,005      | Red Snapper        | 9,907,110    |
| 5    | Yellowtail Snapper       | 278,821      | Vermilion Snapper  | 416,724      | Yellowtail Snapper | 6,926,752    |
| 6    | Red Snapper              | 258,627      | Gray Snapper       | 275,171      | Tomtate            | 6,619,263    |
| 7    | Gray Triggerfish         | 183,024      | Mutton Snapper     | 149,472      | Hardhead Catfish   | 5,036,604    |
| 8    | Blue Runner              | 121,476      | Blue Runner        | 133,872      | Grunt (family)     | 4,961,629    |
| 9    | Grunts (unidentified)    | 99,496       | Grunt (family)     | 128,757      | Atlantic Croaker   | 4,675,997    |
| 10   | Atlantic Sharpnose Shark | 90,504       | Greater Amberjack  | 112,017      | Gray Triggerfish   | 3,828,858    |

Sources: MRIP FES data from SEFSC Recreational ACL Dataset (September 2020); Headboat data from SEFSC Headboat Logbook CRNF files (expanded; July 2020).

Recreational discards of several snapper grouper species are higher than the landings for certain modes of fishing (Table G.1.1.4). Red snapper, black sea bass, red grouper, and tomtate discards are many times higher than their landings across all modes. Across most of the snapper grouper species, the magnitude of private mode discards is much higher compared to the headboat or charter modes. Red pogy recreational discards to landings ratios are 106% in the headboat component, 63% in the charter component, and 77% in the private recreational component.

**Table G.1.1.4.** South Atlantic snapper grouper headboat, charter, and private mean annual estimates of landings and discards (2015-2019). Headboat and MRIP (charter and private) landings and discards are in numbers of fish.

| Species              | HEADBOAT     |              |             | CHARTER      |              |             | PRIVATE      |              |             |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
|                      | Landings (N) | Discards (N) | Ratio (D:L) | Landings (N) | Discards (N) | Ratio (D:L) | Landings (N) | Discards (N) | Ratio (D:L) |
| Almaco Jack          | 8,345        | 1,683        | 20%         | 12,752       | 2,921        | 23%         | 70,012       | 237,235      | 339%        |
| Black Sea Bass       | 48,095       | 472,401      | 982%        | 37,817       | 288,186      | 762%        | 484,547      | 7,953,343    | 1,641%      |
| Gag                  | 679          | 805          | 118%        | 2,387        | 2,257        | 95%         | 21,664       | 57,088       | 264%        |
| Gray Triggerfish     | 39,606       | 36,605       | 92%         | 53,395       | 19,237       | 36%         | 306,482      | 765,772      | 250%        |
| Greater Amberjack    | 3,757        | 3,555        | 95%         | 24,570       | 22,404       | 91%         | 69,007       | 128,035      | 186%        |
| Mutton Snapper       | 15,939       | 15,516       | 97%         | 24,579       | 29,894       | 122%        | 208,691      | 576,812      | 276%        |
| Red Grouper          | 2,577        | 8,675        | 337%        | 3,282        | 8,902        | 271%        | 53,718       | 142,866      | 266%        |
| Red Porgy            | 12,095       | 12,765       | 106%        | 14,248       | 8,922        | 63%         | 109,050      | 83,622       | 77%         |
| Red Snapper          | 2,461        | 51,725       | 2,102%      | 6,033        | 120,395      | 1,996%      | 211,833      | 1,981,423    | 935%        |
| Scamp                | 1,554        | 1,044        | 67%         | 3,174        | 193          | 6%          | 2,775        | 1,458        | 53%         |
| <b>Snowy Grouper</b> | <b>501</b>   | <b>4</b>     | <b>1%</b>   | <b>1,936</b> | <b>165</b>   | <b>9%</b>   | <b>2,536</b> | <b>599</b>   | <b>24%</b>  |
| Tomtate              | 44,536       | 65,476       | 147%        | 13,456       | 94,401       | 702%        | 439,869      | 1,323,853    | 301%        |
| Vermilion Snapper    | 128,029      | 92,312       | 72%         | 73,407       | 83,345       | 114%        | 435,534      | 661,292      | 152%        |
| White Grunt          | 149,852      | 58,805       | 39%         | 26,450       | 8,944        | 34%         | 517,265      | 350,516      | 68%         |
| Whitebone Porgy      | 5,083        | 1,720        | 34%         | 3,475        | 325          | 9%          | 25,948       | 3,740        | 14%         |
| Yellowtail Snapper   | 134,139      | 55,764       | 42%         | 239,421      | 105,954      | 44%         | 1,002,876    | 1,385,351    | 138%        |

Sources: MRIP FES data from SEFSC Recreational ACL Dataset (September 2020); Headboat data from SEFSC Headboat Logbook CRNF files (expanded; July 2020).

## 1.2 Practicability of Management Measures in Directed Fisheries Relative to their Impact on Bycatch and Bycatch Mortality

### Expected Impacts on Bycatch for the Subject Amendment Actions

Action 1 would revise the acceptable biological catch (ABC), total annual catch limit (ACL), and annual optimum yield (OY) for snowy grouper. All of the proposed ABCs, ACLs, and OYs would lead to a reduction in harvest of snowy grouper. The Council selected **Alternative 2** as the preferred alternative, which proposes an ABC, total ACL, and annual OY that are equal to the ABC level recommended by the Council's SSC. Lower ACLs from **Preferred Alternative 2**, **Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 4** could also result in earlier closures of snowy grouper for both the commercial and recreational sectors because there are in-season accountability measures for both sectors. Early closures could increase regulatory discards. As release mortality for snowy grouper is estimated to be 100% (SEDAR 36 Update), fishing mortality would increase with the increase in regulatory discards. Early closures could result in bycatch of snowy grouper if fishermen target co-occurring species (i.e., blueline tilefish, yellowedge grouper, and silk snapper) after the closure occurs. However, adverse effects are expected to be relatively minor as discards comprise a relatively minor component of the over total mortality. During the SEDAR 36 Update, total removals were estimated to comprise on average 95.4% landings and 4.6% dead discards. This could indicate that snowy grouper can be effectively targeted, which would make noteworthy increases in bycatch due to fishery closures less likely to occur. Substantial changes in fishing effort or behavior are not expected as a result of this action, thus the proposed ACLs under this action would not be expected to result in any biological effects, positive or negative, on co-occurring species.

Action 2 would revise the sector allocations for snowy grouper and sector ACLs to reflect the updated ABC level recommended by the Council's SSC and chosen by the Council. **Preferred Alternative 2** would allocate a higher percentage to the commercial sector. When considering discards, any sector that receives a lower sector ACL after reallocation could have increased discards as the in-season closure may occur earlier and snowy grouper may be discarded when fishing for co-occurring species, such as blueline tilefish. Under **Preferred Alternative 2** the recreational sector allocation is decreased from the current allocation, therefore increased recreational discards could occur. The opposite would result from **Alternative 3** as the commercial sector allocation would be lower than the current allocation, therefore an increase in commercial discards is possible. Discards are not expected to change under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. According to the SEDAR 36 Update assessment, snowy grouper discard mortality is 100% for both sectors, therefore no significant difference in discard mortality is expected. In addition, substantial changes in fishing effort or behavior are not expected as a result of this action, thus the proposed sector ACLs under this action would not be expected to result in any biological effects, positive or negative, on co-occurring species.

Action 3 would modify the recreational season for snowy grouper. **Preferred Alternative 2 and Alternative 3**, when compared with **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, could result in more discards. These alternatives would each close two more months, and snowy grouper would need to be returned to the water during the closure if caught when targeting other species such as blueline tilefish. Currently, the snowy grouper recreational season occurs during the same months as the recreational blueline tilefish season, and snowy grouper and blueline tilefish are often caught during the same trip. Snowy grouper discards are not expected to change north of Cape Hatteras North Carolina, as co-occurrence of snowy grouper and blueline tilefish north of Cape Hatteras is not common.

Golden tilefish is considered another deepwater species where fishermen may have to return snowy grouper to the water when target them. In areas where mud bottom is adjacent to rubble bottom, fishermen may catch golden tilefish with snowy grouper and blueline tilefish. Fishery independent surveys report catches of snowy grouper, blueline tilefish, and golden tilefish on the same gear set when short bottom longline gear went across rubble and mud. An example of these areas are pinnacles in 100 fathoms off South Carolina.

Action 4 would revise the recreational AMs for snowy grouper. The proposed AMs range from implementing an in-season closure to announcing the length of the season. If a recreational fishing season is shortened as a result of a triggered AM, this action could increase regulatory discards in the fishery. However, substantial changes to fishing activity or behavior are not expected; thus, no changes in bycatch are expected for Action 4.

*Past, Current, and Future Actions to Prevent Bycatch and Improve Monitoring of Harvest, Discards, and Discard Mortality*

Actions taken in the Snapper Grouper FMP related to management of snowy grouper, including actions that could reduce bycatch and bycatch mortality of snowy grouper and other snapper grouper species, are outlined in this amendment. Other past, current, and future actions that could prevent bycatch and/or improve monitoring of harvest, discards, and discard mortality are included below.

Amendment 16 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2009) required the use of dehooking devices, which could help reduce bycatch mortality of snapper grouper species. Dehooking devices can allow fishermen to remove hooks with greater ease and more quickly without removing the fish from the water. If a fish does need to be removed from the water, de-hookers reduce handling time thus increasing survival (Cooke et al. 2001).

Amendment 17A to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2010) required circle hooks for snapper grouper species north of 28 degrees N latitude, which has likely reduced bycatch mortality of some snapper grouper species.

The Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 2 (CE-BA 2; SAFMC 2011a) included actions that modified management of special management zones (SMZ) off South Carolina; revised sea turtle release gear requirements for the snapper grouper fishery that were established in Amendment 15B to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2008); and designated new essential

fish habitat (EFH) and EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern in the South Atlantic. CE-BA 2 also included an action that limited harvest and possession of snapper grouper and coastal migratory pelagic (CMP) species to the bag limit in SMZs off South Carolina. This action likely reduced bycatch around SMZs by restricting commercial harvest in the area, but has probably had limited effect on the magnitude of overall bycatch of snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic.

The Comprehensive ACL Amendment (SAFMC 2011b) implemented ACLs and AMs for species not undergoing overfishing in the FMPs for snapper grouper, dolphin and wahoo, golden crab, and *Sargassum*, in addition to other actions such as allocations and establishing annual catch targets for the recreational sector. ACLs and AMs have likely reduced bycatch of target species as well as incidentally caught species.

The Council's Headboat Electronic Reporting Amendment (SAFMC 2013) changed the reporting frequency by headboats from monthly to weekly, and required that reports be submitted electronically. The action is expected to provide more timely information on landings and discards. Improved information on landings would help ensure ACLs are not exceeded. Furthermore, more timely and accurate information would be expected to provide a better understanding of the composition and magnitude of catch and bycatch, enhance the quality of data provided for stock assessments, increase the quality of assessment output, and lead to better decisions regarding additional measures to reduce bycatch.

Amendment 36 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2016) established SMZs and is expected to reduce bycatch of many snapper grouper species, especially speckled hind and Warsaw grouper.

The Council developed a joint For-Hire Reporting Amendment (SAFMC 2017) with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council that requires all federally permitted charter vessels report landings information weekly to the SEFSC electronically. Additionally, the Councils will also begin development of a joint amendment to require that all federally permitted commercial fishing vessels in the southeast also report their logbook landings information electronically. These future actions will help to improve estimates on the composition and magnitude of catch and bycatch of species affected by this amendment, as well as all other federally managed species in the southeast region.

Amendment 42 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2019c) modified sea turtle release gear regulations for the commercial snapper grouper fishery and modified the snapper grouper framework so the Council may more quickly modify sea turtle and other protected resources release gear and handling requirements in the future.

Regulatory Amendment 29 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2020) required descending devices be on board all commercial, for-hire, and private recreational vessels while fishing for or possessing snapper grouper species; the use of non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing for snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear and natural baits north of 28 degrees N latitude; and all hooks be non-stainless steel when fishing for snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear and natural baits throughout South Atlantic federal waters. The Council has

also implemented an extensive outreach and public education program, which along with its citizen science initiative is promoting best fishing practices for all the species it manages.

Regulatory Amendment 31 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (included in the Comprehensive Recreational AMs Amendment) could include actions to revise recreational AMs to allow more flexibility in managing recreational fisheries.

Amendment 46 to the Snapper Grouper FMP proposes actions to focus on private recreational permit and reporting. Work on this amendment is currently on hold.

These past, current, and potential future actions will help to improve estimates on the composition and magnitude of catch and bycatch of federally managed species in the southeast region and minimize discard mortality. Additional information on fishery related actions from the past, present, and future considerations can be found in Chapter 6 (Cumulative Effects) of the amendment.

## **2. Ecological Effects Due to Changes in Bycatch**

Release mortality rates for the snapper grouper fishery are widely variable from species to species and sector to sector, and are dependent on fishing mode (Table G.2.2.1). For instance, recreational discards of red snapper in the South Atlantic are a main driver in the overfishing determination for the stock (SEDAR 41 2017). However, discard mortality estimates for snapper grouper species are variable and highly uncertain. Generally, release mortality is highly correlated with depth for snapper grouper species, with highest mortality among fish captured in deeper (Campbell et al. 2014; Pulver 2017; Rudershausen et al. 2014; Stephen and Harris 2010; Wilson and Burns 1996). Snowy grouper are typically captured in deep water so release mortality rates are nearly 100%

**Table G.2.2.1.** Release mortality rates of select recreationally and commercially important snapper-grouper species from recent stock assessments.

| Species            | Fishery                             | Release mortality | Data Source            |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Black Sea Bass     | Recreational                        | 13.7%             | SEDAR 56 (2018)        |
| Black Sea Bass     | Commercial Trap/Pot (2007- present) | 6.8%              | SEDAR 56 (2018)        |
| Black Sea Bass     | Commercial Vertical Line            | 19%               | SEDAR 56 (2018)        |
| Gag                | Recreational                        | 25%               | SEDAR 10 Update (2014) |
| Gag                | Commercial                          | 40%               | SEDAR 10 Update (2014) |
| Gray Triggerfish   | Recreational & Commercial           | 12.5%             | SEDAR 41 (2016)        |
| Greater Amberjack  | Recreational & Commercial           | 20%               | SEDAR 59 (2020)        |
| Red Porgy          | Recreational                        | 41%               | SEDAR 60 (2020)        |
| Red Porgy          | Commercial                          | 53%               | SEDAR 60 (2020)        |
| Red Snapper        | Recreational - Private              | 23%               | SEDAR 73 (2021)        |
| Red Snapper        | Recreational - Charter & Headboat   | 22%               | SEDAR 73 (2021)        |
| Red Snapper        | Commercial                          | 32%               | SEDAR 73 (2021)        |
| Vermilion snapper  | Recreational                        | 38%               | SEDAR 55 (2018)        |
| Vermilion snapper  | Commercial                          | 41%               | SEDAR 55 (2018)        |
| Yellowtail snapper | Recreational                        | 15%               | SEDAR 64 (2020)        |
| Yellowtail snapper | Commercial                          | 12.5%             | SEDAR 64 (2020)        |

It is likely that most mortality is a function of hooking and handling of the fish when the hook is being removed. Regulatory Amendment 29 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2020) required descending devices be on board all commercial, for-hire, and private recreational vessels while fishing for or possessing snapper grouper species; the use of non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing for snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear and natural baits north of 28 degrees N latitude; and all hooks be non-stainless steel when fishing for snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear and natural baits throughout South Atlantic federal waters. The Council also implemented an extensive outreach and public education program, which along with its citizen science initiative is promoting best fishing practices for all the species it manages. The goal of these regulations is to reduce discard mortality for snapper grouper species.

The actions contained in this amendment are not expected to result in substantial changes to bycatch in the snapper grouper fishery; thus, ecological effects due to changes in bycatch in this fishery are expected to be negligible. For more details on ecological effects, see Chapters 3 and 4 of this amendment.

### **3. Changes in the Bycatch of Other Fish Species and Resulting Population and Ecosystem Effects**

Amendment 51 is not expected to result in changes in bycatch of other fish species. The snapper grouper fishery is characterized by a high number of discards for all species and sectors (Table G.1.1.1 and G.1.1.3). Both sectors likely target a wide range of species, including dolphin wahoo, snapper grouper, and coastal migratory pelagic species during each trip. This results in a varied amount and type of bycatch of species. However, the actions in this amendment are not expected to alter overall fishing activity or behavior in the fishery; thus, no changes in bycatch of other species are expected.

### **4. Effects on Marine Mammals and Birds**

#### *Marine Mammals*

Under Section 118 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), the NMFS must publish, at least annually, a List of Fisheries (LOF) that places all U.S. commercial fisheries into one of three categories based on the level of incidental serious injury and mortality of marine mammals that occurs in each fishery. The longline and hook-and-line gear components of the snapper grouper fishery are determined to have remote likelihood of / no known interactions with marine mammals (Category III, LOF, 86 FR 43491; August 9, 2021).

#### *Sea Birds*

The Bermuda petrel and roseate tern occur within the action area. Bermuda petrels are occasionally seen in the waters of the Gulf Stream off the coasts of North Carolina and South Carolina during the summer. Sightings are considered rare and only occurring in low numbers (Alsop 2001). Roseate terns occur widely along the Atlantic coast during the summer but in the southeast region, they are found mainly off the Florida Keys (unpublished US Fish and Wildlife Service data). Interaction with fisheries has not been reported as a concern for either of these species. Although, the Bermuda petrel and roseate tern occur within the action area, these species are not commonly found and neither has been described as associating with vessels or having had interactions with the snapper grouper fishery. Thus, the fishery is not likely to adversely affect the Bermuda petrel and the roseate tern.

### **5. Changes in Fishing, Processing, Disposal, and Marketing Costs**

The actions proposed in Amendment 51 are not expected to substantially alter fishing practices, processing, disposal, or marketing costs in the near or short term in relation to bycatch or discards in the snapper grouper fishery. As shown in the analyses in Chapter 4 of the preferred alternatives for actions potentially affecting catch, costs are not expected to change. Similarly in the long term, it is more likely that current fishing, processing, disposal, and marketing costs would be maintained at or near their status quo levels, thus leading to no anticipated changes.

## 6. Changes in Fishing Practices and Behavior of Fishermen

As discussed above, the actions proposed in Amendment 51 are not expected to change fishing practices or fishing behavior and are likely to have little effect on the overall magnitude of discards. Also, any changes to fishing behavior and subsequent changes in the level of discards or discard mortality that may result from the actions in the amendment are expected to be small and would not jeopardize the sustainability of any target or non-target species.

## 7. Changes in Research, Administration, and Enforcement Costs and Management Effectiveness

### Research

Research and monitoring is ongoing to understand the effectiveness of implemented management measures and their effect on bycatch. The SEFSC is developing electronic logbooks, which could be used to enable fishery managers to obtain information on species composition, size distribution, geographic range, disposition, and depth of fishes that are released. Further, a joint Commercial Logbook Reporting Amendment is being developed by the Council and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, which would require electronic reporting of landings information by federally permitted commercial vessels to increase the timeliness and accuracy of landings and discard data. The For-Hire Reporting Amendment should improve timeliness and quality of data for the charter and headboat components of the recreational sector.

Cooperative research projects between science and industry are available each year in the form of grants from Marine Fisheries Initiative, Saltonstall-Kennedy program, and the Cooperative Research Prom. These programs can provide research funds for observer programs, as well as gear testing and testing of electronic devices. A condition of funding for these projects is that data are made available to the Councils and NMFS upon completion of a study.

### Administration

The proposed actions are not expected to significantly impact administrative costs.

### Enforcement

The proposed actions are not expected to significantly impact enforcement costs.

## 8. Changes in the Economic, Social, or Cultural Value of Fishing Activities and Non-Consumptive Uses of Fishery Resources

Changes in economic, social, or cultural values are discussed in Chapter 4. None of the actions and alternatives in Amendment 51 are likely to change the current level of bycatch of target or non-target species in the South Atlantic and thus are unlikely to change the social, economic, or cultural value of fishing activities and non-consumptive uses of the snapper grouper fishery.

## 9. Changes in the Distribution of Benefits and Costs

The distribution of benefits and costs expected from the proposed actions in Amendment 51 are discussed in the economic and social effects analysis in Chapter 4. These effects are discussed in relation to the baseline economic and social conditions of the fishery and fishing communities outlined in Chapter 3 of the document. Additionally, the Regulatory Impact Review (Appendix B) and Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis (Appendix C) provide additional information on changes in the distribution of benefits and costs. Overall, almost no such alterations would be caused by changes to bycatch resulting from this amendment.

## 10. Social Effects

The baseline social environment and social effects of the proposed actions are described in Chapters 3 and 4 of Amendment 51, respectively. In general, fishermen become frustrated as waste of the resource due to regulatory bycatch of target and non-target species increases. This often results in a distrust of science in that regulations are intended to protect stocks and rebuild overfished stocks by reducing such bycatch. However, none of the actions and alternatives in Amendment 51 are likely to change the current level of bycatch of target or non-target species in the South Atlantic and thus are unlikely to result in the negative social effects described.

## 11. Conclusion

This BPA evaluates the practicability of taking additional action to minimize bycatch and bycatch mortality using the ten factors provided at 50 CFR section 600.350(d)(3)(i). In summary, the proposed actions in Amendment 51 are not likely to significantly contribute or detract from the current level of bycatch in the snapper grouper fishery. The Council, NMFS, and the SEFSC have implemented and plan to implement numerous management measures and reporting requirements that have improved or are likely to improve monitoring efforts of discards and discard mortality.

**Appendix H. Fishery Impact Statement**  
**TO BE COMPLETED FOR DECEMBER 2022 MEETING**

**DRAFT**

## Appendix I. History of Management

Updated: 5/2022

The snapper grouper fishery is highly regulated; some of the species included in this amendment have been regulated since 1983. The following table summarizes actions in each of the amendments to the original Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan (FMP), as well as some events not covered in amendment actions.

\*Shaded rows indicate FMP Amendments

| Document                        | All Actions Effective By: | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule        | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.  |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| FMP (1983)                      | 08/31/83                  | PR: 48 FR 26843<br>FR: 48 FR 39463 | -12" total length (TL) limit – red snapper, yellowtail snapper, red grouper, Nassau grouper;<br>-8" limit – black sea bass;<br>-4" trawl mesh size;<br>-Gear limitations – poisons, explosives, fish traps, trawls;<br>-Designated modified habitats or artificial reefs as Special Management Zones (SMZs).            |
| Regulatory Amendment #1 (1987)  | 03/27/87                  | PR: 51 FR 43937<br>FR: 52 FR 9864  | -Prohibited fishing in SMZs except with hand-held hook-and-line and spearfishing gear;<br>-Prohibited harvest of goliath grouper in SMZs.   |
| Amendment #1 (1988a)            | 01/12/89                  | PR: 53 FR 42985<br>FR: 54 FR 1720  | -Prohibited trawl gear to harvest fish south of Cape Hatteras, NC and north of Cape Canaveral, FL;<br>-Directed fishery defined as vessel with trawl gear and<br>≥200 lbs-g on board;<br>-Established rebuttable assumption that vessel with s-g on board had harvested such fish in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). |
| Regulatory Amendment #2 (1988b) | 03/30/89                  | PR: 53 FR 32412<br>FR: 54 FR 8342  | -Established 2 artificial reefs off Ft. Pierce, FL as SMZs.   |
| Emergency Rule                  | 8/3/90                    | 55 FR 32257                        | -Added wreckfish to the fishery management unit (FMU);<br>-Fishing year beginning 4/16/90;<br>-Commercial quota of 2 million pounds;  |

|                                |                           |                                    |   |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
|                                |                           |                                    | -Commercial trip limit of 10,000 pounds per trip.   |
| Fishery Closure Notice         | 8/8/90                    | 55 FR 32635                        | - Fishery closed because the commercial quota of 2 million pounds was reached.  |
| Notice of Control Date         | 09/24/90                  | 55 FR 39039                        | -Anyone entering federal wreckfish fishery in the EEZ off S. Atlantic states after 09/24/90 was not assured of future access if limited entry program developed.  |
| Regulatory Amendment #3 (1989) | 11/02/90                  | PR: 55 FR 28066<br>FR: 55 FR 40394 | -Established artificial reef at Key Biscayne, FL as SMZ;<br>-Fish trapping, bottom longlining, spear fishing, and harvesting of Goliath grouper prohibited in SMZ.  |
| Document                       | All Actions Effective By: | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule        | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.  |
| Amendment #2 (1990a)           | 10/30/90                  | PR: 55 FR 31406<br>FR: 55 FR 46213 | -Prohibited harvest/possession of goliath grouper in or from the EEZ;<br>-Defined overfishing for goliath grouper and other species.  |
| Emergency Rule Extension       | 11/1/90                   | 55 FR 40181                        | -Extended the measures implemented via emergency rule on 8/3/90.  |
| Amendment #3 (1990b)           | 01/31/91                  | PR: 55 FR 39023<br>FR: 56 FR 2443  | -Added wreckfish to the FMU;<br>-Defined optimum yield (OY) and overfishing;<br>-Required permit to fish for, land or sell wreckfish;<br>-Required catch and effort reports from selected, permitted vessel;<br>-Established control date of 03/28/90;<br>-Established a fishing year for wreckfish starting April 16;<br>-Established a process to set annual quota, with initial quota of 2 million pounds; provisions for closure;<br>-Established 10,000 pound trip limit;<br>-Established a spawning season closure for wreckfish from January 15 to April 15;<br>-Provided for annual adjustments of wreckfish management measures. |

|                        |                           |                                    |   |
|------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Notice of Control Date | 07/30/91                  | 56 FR 36052                        | -Anyone entering federal snapper grouper fishery (other than for wreckfish) in the EEZ off S. Atlantic states after 07/30/91 was not assured of future access if limited entry program developed.   |
| Amendment #4 (1991)    | 01/01/92                  | PR: 56 FR 29922<br>FR: 56 FR 56016 | -Prohibited gear: fish traps except black sea bass traps north of Cape Canaveral, FL; entanglement nets; longline gear inside 50 fathoms; bottom longlines to harvest wreckfish; powerheads and bangsticks in designated SMZs off S. Carolina.<br>-Defined overfishing/overfished and established rebuilding timeframe: red snapper and groupers ≤ 15 years (year 1 = 1991); other snappers, greater amberjack, black sea bass, red porgy ≤ 10 years (year 1 = 1991);<br>-Required permits (commercial & for-hire) and specified data collection regulations;<br>-Established an assessment group and annual adjustment procedure (framework);<br>-Permit, gear, and vessel id requirements specified for black sea bass traps;<br>-No retention of snapper grouper spp. caught in other fisheries with gear prohibited in snapper grouper fishery if captured snapper grouper had no bag limit or harvest was prohibited. If had a bag limit, could retain only the bag limit;<br>-8” TL limit – lane snapper;<br>-10” TL limit – vermilion snapper (recreational only);<br>-12” TL limit – red porgy, vermilion snapper (commercial only), gray, yellowtail, mutton, schoolmaster, queen, blackfin, cubera, dog, mahogany, and silk snappers; |
| Document               | All Actions Effective By: | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule        | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.  |
|                        |                           |                                    | -20” TL limit – red snapper, gag, and red, black, scamp, yellowfin, and yellowmouth groupers;<br>-28” fork length (FL) limit – greater amberjack (recreational only);<br>-36” FL or 28” core length – greater amberjack (commercial only);  |

|                                 |          |                                    |   |
|---------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------|---|
|                                 |          |                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Bag limits – 10 vermilion snapper, 3 greater amberjack</li> <li>-Aggregate snapper bag limit – 10/person/day, excluding vermilion snapper and allowing no more than 2 red snappers;</li> <li>-Aggregate grouper bag limit – 5/person/day, excluding Nassau and goliath grouper, for which no retention (recreational &amp; commercial) is allowed;</li> <li>-Spawning season closure – commercial harvest greater amberjack &gt; 3 fish bag prohibited in April;</li> <li>-Spawning season closure – commercial harvest mutton snapper &gt; snapper aggregate prohibited during May and June;</li> <li>-Charter/headboats and excursion boat possession limits extended.</li> </ul> |
| Amendment #5 (1992a)            | 04/06/92 | PR: 56 FR 57302<br>FR: 57 FR 7886  | <p>For wreckfish:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Established limited entry system with individual transferable quotas (ITQs);</li> <li>-Required dealer to have permit;</li> <li>-Rescinded 10,000 lb. trip limit;</li> <li>-Required off-loading between 8 am and 5 pm;</li> <li>-Reduced occasions when 24-hour advance notice of offloading required for off-loading;</li> <li>-Established procedure for initial distribution of percentage shares of total allowable catch (TAC).</li> </ul>  |
| Emergency Rule                  | 8/31/92  | 57 FR 39365                        | <p>For Black Sea Bass (bsb):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Modified definition of bsb pot;</li> <li>-Allowed multi-gear trips for bsb;</li> <li>-Allowed retention of incidentally-caught fish on bsb trips.</li> </ul>   |
| Emergency Rule Extension        | 11/30/92 | 57 FR 56522                        | <p>For Black Sea Bass:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Modified definition of bsb pot;</li> <li>-Allowed multi-gear trips for bsb;</li> <li>-Allowed retention of incidentally-caught fish on bsb trips.</li> </ul>   |
| Regulatory Amendment #4 (1992b) | 07/06/93 | FR: 58 FR 36155                    | <p>-For Black Sea Bass:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Modified definition of bsb pot;</li> <li>-Allowed multi-gear trips for bsb;</li> <li>-Allowed retention of incidentally-caught fish on bsb trips.</li> </ul>  |
| Regulatory Amendment #5 (1992c) | 07/31/93 | PR: 58 FR 13732<br>FR: 58 FR 35895 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Established 8 SMZs off South Carolina, where only hand-held, hook-and-line gear and spearfishing</li> </ul>   |

|  |  |                                     |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
|  |  | (excluding powerheads) was allowed. |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|

| Document                        | All Actions Effective By: | Proposed Rule Final Rule           | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.   |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Amendment #6 (1993)             | 06/27/94                  | PR: 59 FR 9721<br>FR: 59 FR 27242  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Set up separate commercial TAC levels for golden tilefish and snowy grouper;</li> <li>-Established commercial trip limits for snowy grouper, golden tilefish, speckled hind, and warsaw grouper;</li> <li>-Included golden tilefish in grouper recreational aggregate bag limits;</li> <li>-Prohibited sale of warsaw grouper and speckled hind;</li> <li>-100% logbook coverage upon renewal of permit;</li> <li>-Creation of the Oculina Experimental Closed Area;</li> <li>-Data collection needs specified for evaluation of possible future individual fishing quota system.</li> </ul> |
| Amendment #7 (1994a)            | 01/23/95                  | PR: 59 FR 47833<br>FR: 59 FR 66270 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-12" FL – hogfish;</li> <li>-16" TL – mutton snapper;</li> <li>-Required dealer, charter and headboat federal permits;</li> <li>-Allowed sale under specified conditions;</li> <li>-Specified allowable gear and made allowance for experimental gear;</li> <li>-Allowed multi-gear trips in NC;</li> <li>-Added localized overfishing to list of problems and objectives;</li> <li>-Adjusted bag limit and crew specs. for charter and head boats;</li> <li>-Modified management unit for scup to apply south of Cape Hatteras, NC;</li> <li>-Modified framework procedure.</li> </ul>       |
| Regulatory Amendment #6 (1994b) | 05/22/95                  | PR: 60 FR 8620<br>FR: 60 FR 19683  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Established actions which applied only to EEZ off Atlantic coast of FL:</li> <li>Bag limits – 5 hogfish/person/day (recreational only),</li> <li>2 cubera snapper/person/day &gt; 30" TL; 12" TL – gray triggerfish.</li> </ul>  |

|                         |                           |                                   |   |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Notice of Control Date  | 04/23/97                  | 62 FR 22995                       | -Anyone entering federal black sea bass pot fishery off South Atlantic states after 04/23/97 was not assured of future access if limited entry program developed.   |
| Interim Rule Request    | 1/16/98                   |                                   | -The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) requested all Amendment 9 measures except black sea bass pot construction changes be implemented as an interim request under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.   |
| Action Suspended        | 5/14/98                   |                                   | -NMFS informed the Council that action on the interim rule request was suspended.   |
| Emergency Rule Request  | 9/24/98                   |                                   | -Council requested Amendment 9 be implemented via emergency rule.   |
| Amendment #8 (1997)     | 12/14/98                  | PR: 63 FR 1813<br>FR: 63 FR 38298 | -Established program to limit initial eligibility for snapper grouper fishery:<br>-Must have demonstrated landings of any species in the snapper grouper FMU in 1993, 1994, 1995 or 1996; and have held valid snapper grouper permit between 02/11/96 and 02/11/97;<br>-Granted transferable permit with unlimited landings if vessel landed ≥ 1,000 pounds (lbs) of snapper grouper species in any of the years;   |
| Document                | All Actions Effective By: | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule       | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.  |
|                         |                           |                                   | -Granted non-transferable permit with 225 lbs trip limit to all other vessels;<br>-Modified problems, objectives, OY, and overfishing definitions;<br>-Expanded the Council’s habitat responsibility;<br>-Allowed retention of snapper grouper species in excess of bag limit on permitted vessel with a single bait net or cast nets on board;<br>-Allowed permitted vessels to possess filleted fish harvested in the Bahamas under certain conditions. |
| Request not Implemented | 1/22/99                   |                                   | -NMFS informed the Council that the final rule for Amendment 9 would be effective 2/24/99; therefore they did not implement the emergency rule.   |

|                                 |                           |                                    |  |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Regulatory Amendment #7 (1998a) | 01/29/99                  | PR: 63 FR 43656<br>FR: 63 FR 71793 | -Established 10 SMZs at artificial reefs off South Carolina.   |
| Amendment #9 (1998b)            | 2/24/99                   | PR: 63 FR 63276<br>FR: 64 FR 3624  | -Red porgy: 14” TL (recreational and commercial); 5 fish rec. bag limit; no harvest or possession > bag limit, and no purchase or sale, in March and April;<br>-Black sea bass: 10” TL (recreational and commercial); 20 fish rec. bag limit; required escape vents and escape panels with degradable fasteners in bsb pots;<br>-Greater amberjack: 1 fish rec. bag limit; no harvest or possession > bag limit, and no purchase or sale, during April; quota = 1,169,931 lb; began fishing year May 1;<br>prohibited coring;<br>-Vermilion snapper: 11” TL (recreational), 12” TL commercial;<br>-Gag: 24” TL (recreational); no commercial harvest or possession > bag limit, and no purchase or sale, during March and April;<br>-Black grouper: 24” TL (recreational and commercial); no harvest or possession > bag limit, and no purchase or sale, during March and April;<br>-Gag and Black grouper: within 5 fish aggregate grouper bag limit, no more than 2 fish may be gag or black grouper (individually or in combination);<br>-All snapper grouper without a bag limit: aggregate recreational bag limit 20 fish/person/day, excluding tomtate and blue runner;<br>-Vessels with longline gear aboard may only possess snowy, warsaw, yellowedge, and misty grouper, and golden, blueline and sand tilefish. |
| Document                        | All Actions Effective By: | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule        | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.   |
| Emergency Action                | 9/3/99                    | 64 FR 48326                        | -Reopened the Amendment 8 permit application process.  |

|  |                            |  |   |
|--|----------------------------|--|---|
| Emergency Interim Rule   | 09/08/99, expired 08/28/00 | 64 FR 48324 and 65 FR 10040                        | -Prohibited harvest or possession of red porgy.   |
| Amendment #10<br>Comprehensive Essential Fish Habitat Amendment (1998c)    | 07/14/00                   | PR: 64 FR 37082 and 64 FR 59152<br>FR: 65 FR 37292 | -Identified essential fish habitat (EFH) and established habitat areas of particular concern (HAPC) for species in the snapper grouper FMU.   |
| Amendment #11<br>Comprehensive Sustainable Fisheries Act Amendment (1998d) | 12/02/99                   | PR: 64 FR 27952<br>FR: 64 FR 59126                 | -Maximum sustainable yield (MSY) proxy: goliath and Nassau grouper = 40% static spawning potential ratio (SPR); all other species = 30% static SPR;<br>-OY: hermaphroditic groupers = 45% static SPR; goliath and Nassau grouper = 50% static SPR; all other species = 40% static SPR<br>-Overfished/overfishing evaluations:<br>BSB: overfished (minimum stock size threshold (MSST)=3.72 mp, 1995 biomass=1.33 mp); undergoing overfishing (maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT)=0.72, F1991-1995=0.95)<br>-Vermilion snapper: overfished (static SPR = 21-27%)<br>-Red porgy: overfished (static SPR = 14-19%).<br>-Red snapper: overfished (static SPR = 24-32%)<br>-Gag: overfished (static SPR = 27%)<br>-Scamp: no longer overfished (static SPR = 35%)<br>-Speckled hind: overfished (static SPR = 8-13%)<br>-Warsaw grouper: overfished (static SPR = 6-14%)<br>-Snowy grouper: overfished (static SPR = 5-15%)<br>-White grunt: no longer overfished (static SPR = 29- 39%)<br>-Golden tilefish: overfished (couldn't estimate static SPR)<br>-Nassau grouper: overfished (couldn't estimate static SPR)<br>-Goliath grouper: overfished (couldn't estimate static SPR) |

|                                  |                           |                                    |  |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
|                                  |                           |                                    | -overfishing level: goliath and Nassau grouper = $F > F_{40\%}$ static SPR; all other species: = $F > F_{30\%}$ static SPR<br>Approved definitions for overfished and overfishing.<br>MSST = $[(1-M) \text{ or } 0.5 \text{ whichever is greater}] * BMSY$ . MFMT = FMSY.  |
| Document                         | All Actions Effective By: | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule        | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.   |
| Amendment #12 (2000a)            | 09/22/00                  | PR: 65 FR 35877<br>FR: 65 FR 51248 | For Red porgy:<br>-MSY=4.38 mp; OY=45% static SPR;<br>MFMT=0.43;<br>MSST = 7.34 mp; rebuilding timeframe=18 years (1999=year 1);<br>-no sale of red porgy during Jan-April;<br>-1 fish bag limit;<br>-50 lb. bycatch commercial trip limit May-December;<br>-Modified management options and list of possible framework actions. |
| Regulatory Amendment #8 (2000b)  | 11/15/00                  | PR: 65 FR 41041<br>FR: 65 FR 61114 | -Established 12 SMZs at artificial reefs off Georgia; revised boundaries of 7 existing SMZs off Georgia to meet CG permit specs; restricted fishing in new and revised SMZs.   |
| Amendment #9 (1998b) resubmitted | 10/13/00                  | PR: 63 FR 63276<br>FR: 65 FR 55203 | -Commercial trip limit for greater amberjack.  |
| Amendment #13A (2003)            | 04/26/04                  | PR: 68 FR 66069<br>FR: 69 FR 15731 | -Extended for an indefinite period the regulation prohibiting fishing for and possessing snapper grouper species within the Oculina Experimental Closed Area.  |
| Notice of Control Date           | 10/14/05                  | 70 FR 60058                        | -Considered management measures to further limit participation or effort in the commercial fishery for snapper grouper species (excluding wreckfish).  |

|                              |                 |  |  |
|------------------------------|-----------------|--|--|
| <p>Amendment #13C (2006)</p> | <p>10/23/06</p> | <p>PR: 71 FR 28841<br/>FR: 71 FR 55096</p> | <p>-End overfishing of snowy grouper, vermilion snapper, black sea bass, and golden tilefish.<br/>Increase allowable catch of red porgy. Year 1 = 2006;</p> <p>Snowy Grouper Commercial:<br/>-Quota = 151,000 lb gutted weight (gw) in year 1, 118,000 lb gw in year 2, and 84,000 lb gw in year 3 onwards.<br/>-Trip limit = 275 lb gw in year 1, 175 lb gw in year 2, and 100 lb gw in year 3 onwards;<br/>Recreational:<br/>-Limit possession to one snowy grouper in 5 grouper per person/day aggregate bag limit;</p> <p>Golden Tilefish<br/>Commercial: Quota of 295,000 lb gw, 4,000 lb gw trip limit until 75% of the quota is taken when the trip limit is reduced to 300 lb gw. Do not adjust the trip limit downwards unless 75% is captured on or before September 1;<br/>Recreational: Limited possession to 1 golden tilefish in 5 grouper per person/day aggregate bag limit;</p> <p>Vermilion Snapper<br/>Commercial: Quota of 1,100,000 lb gw;<br/>Recreational: 12" TL size limit.</p> <p>Black Sea Bass<br/>Commercial: Quota of 477,000 lb gw in year 1, 423,000 lb gw in year 2, and 309,000 lb gw in year 3 onwards;<br/>-Required use of at least 2" mesh for the entire back panel of black sea bass pots effective 6 months after publication of the final rule;<br/>-Required black sea bass pots be removed from the water when the quota is met;<br/>-Changed fishing year from calendar year to June 1 – May 31;<br/>Recreational: Recreational allocation of 633,000 lb gw in year 1, 560,000 lb gw in year 2, and 409,000 lb gw in year 3 onwards.<br/>Increased the minimum size limit from 10" to 11" in year 1 and to 12" in year 2;<br/>-Reduced recreational bag limit from 20 to 15 per person per day;</p> |
|------------------------------|-----------------|--|--|

|                        |                           |                                   |   |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
|                        |                           |                                   | <p>-Changed fishing year from the calendar year to June 1 through May 31.</p> <p>5. Red Porgy Commercial and recreational:<br/>                 -Retained 14” TL size limit and seasonal closure (retention limited to the bag limit);<br/>                 -Specified a commercial quota of 127,000 lb gw and prohibit sale/purchase and prohibit harvest and/or possession beyond the bag limit when quota is taken and/or during January through April;<br/>                 -Increased commercial trip limit from 50 lb ww to 120 red porgy (210 lb gw) during May through December;<br/>                 -Increased recreational bag limit from one to three red porgy per person per day.</p> |
| Notice of Control Date | 3/8/07                    | 72 FR 60794                       | -Considered measures to limit participation in the snapper grouper for-hire sector.   |
| Amendment #14 (2007)   | 2/12/09                   | PR: 73 FR 32281<br>FR: 74 FR 1621 | -Established eight deepwater Type II marine protected areas (MPAs) to protect a portion of the population and habitat of long-lived deepwater snapper grouper species.  |
| Document               | All Actions Effective By: | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule       | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.  |
| Amendment #15A (2008a) | 3/14/08                   | 73 FR 14942                       | - Established rebuilding plans and status determination criteria for snowy grouper, black sea bass, and red porgy.  |

|                        |  |                                    |  |
|------------------------|--|------------------------------------|--|
| Notice of Control Date | 12/4/08  | 74 FR 7849                         | -Established a control date for the golden tilefish portion of the snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic.  |
| Notice of Control Date | 12/4/08  | 74 FR 7849                         | -Established control date for black sea bass pot sector in the South Atlantic.   |
| Amendment #15B (2008b) | 12/16/09, except for the amendments to § 622.18(c) was effective 11/16/2009; the amendment to § 622.10(c) was effective 2/16/2010; and §§ 622.5, 622.8, and 622.18(b)(1)(i) required OMB approval. | PR: 74 FR 30569<br>FR: 74 FR 58902 | -Prohibited the sale of snapper-grouper harvested or possessed in the EEZ under the bag limits and prohibited the sale of snapper-grouper harvested or possessed under the bag limits by vessels with a Federal charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper regardless of where harvested;<br>-Reduced the effects of incidental hooking on sea turtles and smalltooth sawfish;<br>-Adjusted commercial permit renewal periods and transferability requirements;<br>-Revised the management reference points for golden tilefish;<br>-Implemented plan to monitor and assess bycatch;<br>-Required a vessel that fished in the EEZ, if selected by NMFS, to carry an observer and install electronic |
| Document               | All Actions Effective By:  | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule        | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.   |

|  |         |  |  |
|--|---------|--|--|
|  |         |  | <p>logbook and/or video monitoring equipment provided by NMFS;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Established allocations for snowy grouper (95% commercial &amp; 5% recreational);</li> <li>-Established allocations for red porgy (50% commercial &amp; 50% recreational).</li> </ul>   |
| Amendment #16 (2009a)  | 7/29/09 | <p>PR: 74 FR 6297<br/>FR: 74 FR 30964</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Specified status determination criteria for gag and vermilion snapper;</li> </ul> <p>For gag:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Specified interim allocations 51% commercial &amp; 49% recreational;</li> <li>-Recreational and commercial shallow water grouper spawning closure January through April;</li> <li>-Directed commercial quota= 352,940 lb gw;</li> <li>-Reduced 5-fish aggregate grouper bag limit, including tilefish species, to a 3-fish aggregate;</li> <li>-Captain and crew on for-hire trips cannot retain the bag limit of vermilion snapper and species within the 3-fish grouper aggregate;</li> </ul> <p>For vermilion snapper:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Specified interim allocations 68% commercial &amp; 32% recreational;</li> <li>-Directed commercial quota split Jan-June=315,523 lb gw and 302,523 lb gw July-Dec;</li> <li>-Reduced bag limit from 10 to 4 and a recreational closed season November through March;</li> <li>-Required possession of dehooking tools when catching snapper grouper species to reduce recreational and commercial bycatch mortality.</li> </ul> |
| Amendment #19 Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1 (CE-BA1) (2009b) | 7/22/10 | <p>PR: 75 FR 14548<br/>FR: 75 FR 35330</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Amended coral, coral reefs, and live/hardbottom habitat FMP to establish deepwater coral HAPCs;</li> <li>-Created a “shrimp fishery access area” (SFAA) within the Stetson-Miami Terrace CHAPC boundaries;</li> <li>-Created allowable “golden crab fishing areas” with the Stetson-Miami Terrace CHAPC and Pourtales Terrace CHAPC boundaries.</li> </ul>   |

| Document               | All Actions Effective By:                                | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule        | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here.<br>Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.   |
|------------------------|--|------------------------------------|---|
| Amendment #17A (2010a) | 12/3/10 red snapper closure;<br>circle hooks<br>3/3/2011 | PR: 75 FR 49447<br>FR: 75 FR 76874 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Required use of non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing for snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear and natural bait north of 28 deg. N latitude in the South Atlantic EEZ;</li> <li>-Specified an annual catch limit (ACL) and an accountability measure (AM) for red snapper with management measures to reduce the probability that catches will exceed the stocks' ACL;</li> <li>-Specified a rebuilding plan for red snapper;</li> <li>-Specified status determination criteria for red snapper;</li> <li>-Specified a fishery-independent monitoring program for red snapper.</li> <li>-Implemented an area closure for snapper-grouper species.</li> </ul> |
| Emergency Rule         | 12/3/10  | 75 FR 76890                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Delayed the effective date of the area closure for snapper grouper species implemented through Amendment 17A.</li> </ul>  |
| Amendment #17B (2010b) | 1/31/11  | PR: 75 FR 62488<br>FR: 75 FR 82280 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Specify ACL of 0 and prohibit fishing for speckled hind and warsaw grouper;</li> <li>-Prohibited harvest of 6 deepwater species seaward of 240 feet to curb bycatch of speckled hind and warsaw grouper (snowy grouper, blueline tilefish, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, queen snapper, silk snapper).</li> <li>-Specify allocations (97% commercial, 3% recreational), ACLs and AMs for golden tilefish;</li> <li>-Modified management measures as needed to limit harvest to the ACL or ACT;</li> <li>-Updated the framework procedure for specification of total allowable catch;</li> </ul>  |

|  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
|  |  |   | -Specified ACLs, ACTs, and AMs, where necessary, for 9 species undergoing overfishing (snowy grouper, black grouper, black sea bass, red grouper, vermilion snapper, gag, speckled hind, warsaw grouper, golden tilefish);   |
| Document   | All Actions Effective By:                  | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule                                   | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.   |
| Notice of control date   | 1/31/11                                    | 76 FR 5325  | Anyone entering federal snapper grouper fishery off S. Atlantic states after 09/17/10 was not assured of future access if limited entry program developed.   |
| Regulatory Amendment #9 (2010a)  | Bag limit: 6/22/11<br>Trip limits: 7/15/11 | PR: 76 FR 23930<br>FR: 76 FR 34892                            | -Established trip limits for vermilion snapper and gag;<br>-Increased trip limit for greater amberjack;<br>- Set black sea bass recreational bag limit at 5 fish per person per day  |
| Regulatory Amendment #10 (2010b)   | 5/31/11                                    | PR: 76 FR 9530<br>FR: 76 FR 23728                             | -Eliminated closed area for snapper grouper species approved in Amendment 17A.   |
| Regulatory Amendment #11 (2011c)   | 5/10/12                                    | PR: 76 FR 78879<br>FR: 77 FR 27374                            | -Eliminated 240 ft harvest prohibition for six deepwater species (snowy grouper, blueline tilefish, yellowedge grouper, queen snapper, silk snapper, misty grouper);   |
| Amendment # 25<br><br>Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment (2011d) | 4/16/12                                    | PR: 76 FR 74757<br>Amended PR: 76 FR 82264<br>FR: 77 FR 15916 | -Reorganize FMUs to 6 complexes (deepwater, jacks, snappers, grunts, shallow-water groupers, porgies) (see final rule for species list);<br>-Established acceptable biological catch (ABC) control rules and established ABCs, ACLs, and AMs for species not undergoing overfishing;<br>-Established jurisdictional ABC allocations between the SAFMC and GMFMC for yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, and black grouper;<br>-Removed some species from South Atlantic FMU (Tiger grouper, black margate, blue-striped grunt, French grunt, porkfish, smallmouth grunt, queen |

|   |                                  |                                    |  |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
|   |                                  |                                    | <p>triggerfish, crevalle, yellow jack, grass porgy, sheepshead, puddingwife);</p> <p>Designated species as ecosystem component species (schoolmaster, ocean triggerfish, bank triggerfish, rock triggerfish, longspine porgy);</p> <p>-Specified allocations between the commercial and, recreational sectors for species not undergoing overfishing;</p> <p>-Limited the total mortality for federally managed species in the South Atlantic to the ACLs.</p> |
| <b>Document</b>   | <b>All Actions Effective By:</b> | <b>Proposed Rule Final Rule</b>    | <p>Major Actions.</p> <p>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.</p>  |
| Amendment #24 (2011e)   | 7/11/12                          | PR: 77 FR 19169<br>FR: 77 FR 34254 | -Rebuilding plan (including MSY, ACLs, AMs, and OY, and allocations) for red grouper   |
| Amendment #23<br>Comprehensive Ecosystem-based Amendment 2 (CE-BA2) (2011f) | 1/30/12                          | PR: 76 FR 69230<br>FR: 76 FR 82183 | <p>-Designated the Deepwater MPAs as EFH-HAPCs;</p> <p>-Modify management measures for Octocoral;</p> <p>-Limit harvest of snapper grouper species in SC SMZs to the bag limit;</p> <p>-Modify sea turtle release gear;</p> <p>-Designated new EFP for pelagic Sargassum habitat.</p>  |
| Amendment #18A (2012a)  | 7/1/12                           | PR: 77 FR 16991<br>FR: 77FR3 2408  | <p>-Modified the rebuilding strategy, ABC , ACL, ACT for black sea bass;</p> <p>-Limited participation and effort in the black sea bass sector;</p> <p>-Modifications to management of the black sea bass pot sector;</p> <p>-Improved data reporting (accuracy, timing, and quantity of fisheries statistics).</p>  |

|                                   |                             |                                    |  |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Amendment #20A (2012b)            | 10/26/12                    | PR: 77 FR 19165<br>FR: 77 FR 59129 | - Individual transfer quota (ITQ) program for wreckfish;<br>-Defined and reverted inactive shares;<br>-Redistributed reverted shares;<br>-Established a share cap;<br>-Established an appeals process.   |
| Regulatory Amendment #12 (2012c)  | 10/9/12                     | PR: 77 FR 42688<br>FR: 77 FR 61295 | -Revised the ACL and OY for golden tilefish;<br>-Revised recreational AMs for golden tilefish;   |
| Document                          | All Actions Effective By:   | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule        | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.   |
| Yellowtail snapper Emergency Rule | 11/7/2012, through 5/6/2013 | 77 FR 66744                        | -Increased the commercial ACL for yellowtail snapper from 1,142,589 lb to 1,596,510 lb.  |
| Amendment #18B (2013a)            | 5/23/13                     | PR: 77 FR 75093<br>FR: 77 FR 23858 | For Golden Tilefish:<br>-Limited participation and effort in the commercial sector through establishment of a longline endorsement;<br>-Established eligibility requirements and allowed transferability of longline endorsement;<br>-Established an appeals process;<br>-Modified trip limits;<br>-Specified allocations and ACLs for gear groups (longline:7 % and hook-and-line:25%); |

|                                     |                           |                                    |  |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Amendment #28<br>(2013b)            | 8/23/13                   | PR: 78 FR 25047<br>FR: 78 FR 44461 | -Established regulations to allow harvest of red snapper in the South Atlantic (formula used to compute ACLs, AMs, fishing seasons).   |
| Regulatory Amendment #13<br>(2013c) | 7/17/13                   | PR: 78 FR 17336<br>FR: 78 FR 36113 | -Revised the ABCs, ACLs (including sector ACLs), and ACTs for 37 species implemented by the Comprehensive ACL Amendment (see final rule for list of species). The revisions may prevent a disjunction between the established ACLs and the landings used to determine if AMs are triggered.  |
| Regulatory Amendment #15<br>(2013d) | 9/12/13                   | PR: 78 FR 31511<br>FR: 78 FR 49183 | -Modified ACLs and OY for yellowtail snapper;<br>-Modified the gag commercial ACL and AM to remove the requirement that all other shallow water groupers (black grouper, red grouper, scamp, red hind, rock hind, graysby, coney, yellowmouth grouper, and yellowfin grouper) are prohibited from harvest in the South Atlantic when the gag commercial ACL is met or projected to be met. |
| Document                            | All Actions Effective By: | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule        | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.   |
| Regulatory Amendment #18<br>(2013e) | 9/5/13                    | PR: 78 FR 26740<br>FR: 78 FR 47574 | -Revised ACLs and OY for vermilion snapper;<br>-Modified commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper;<br>-Modified commercial fishing season and recreational closed season for vermilion snapper;<br>-Revised ACLs and OY for red porgy.  |

|  |                                       |                                    |   |
|--|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Regulatory Amendment #19 (2013f)   | ACL: 9/23/13<br>Pot closure: 10/23/13 | PR: 78 FR 39700<br>FR: 78 FR 58249 | -Specified ABC, and adjusted the ACL, recreational ACT and OY for black sea bass;<br>-Implemented an annual closure on the use of black sea bass pots from November 1 to April 30.  |
| Amendment #27 (2013g)  | 1/27/2014                             | PR:78 FR 78770<br>FR: 78 FR 57337  | -Established the South Atlantic Council as the responsible entity for managing Nassau grouper throughout its range including federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico;<br>-Modified the crew member limit on dual-permitted snapper grouper vessels;<br>-Modified the restriction on retention of bag limit quantities of some snapper grouper species by captain and crew of for-hire vessels;<br>-Minimized regulatory delay when adjustments to snapper grouper species' ABC, ACLs, and ACTs are needed as a result of new stock assessments;<br>-Removed blue runner from snapper grouper FMP;<br>-Addressed harvest of blue runner by commercial fishermen who do not possess a South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Permit. |
| Amendment #31 Joint South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Generic Headboat Reporting Amendment (2013h) | 1/27/2014                             | PR: 78 FR 59641<br>FR: 78 FR 78779 | -Required electronic reporting for headboat vessels at weekly intervals.  |
| Document   | All Actions Effective By:             | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule        | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.  |

|  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| BlueLine Tilefish<br>Emergency Rule    | 4/17/2014<br>through<br>10/10/2014<br>or<br>4/18/2015 | PR: 79 FR 21636<br>FR:79 FR 61262                      | -Removed the blueLine tilefish portion from the deep- water complex ACL;<br>-Established separate commercial and recreational ACLs and AMs for blueLine tilefish.  |
| Generic Dealer<br>Amendment<br>(2013i) | 8/7/2014  | PR: 79 FR 81<br>FR: 79 FR 19490                        | - Modified permitting and reporting requirements for seafood dealers who first receive fish managed by the SA and Gulf through eight FMPs.   |
| Regulatory<br>Amendment #14<br>(2014a) | 12/8/2014   | PR: 79 FR 22936<br>FR: 79 FR 66316                     | -Modified the commercial and recreational fishing year for greater amberjack;<br>-Modified the commercial and recreational sector fishing years for black sea bass;<br>-Modified the recreational AM for black sea bass;<br>-Modified the recreational AM for vermilion snapper;<br>-Modify the commercial trip limit for gag.   |
| Regulatory<br>Amendment #21<br>(2014b) | 11/6/2014   | PR: 79 FR 44735<br>FR: 79 FR 60379                     | -Modified the definition of the overfished threshold (MSST) for red snapper, blueLine tilefish, gag, black grouper, yellowtail snapper, vermilion snapper, red porgy, and greater amberjack.   |
| Amendment #29<br>(2014c)               | 7/1/2015  | NOA: 79 FR 69819<br>PR: 79 FR 72567<br>FR: 80 FR 30947 | -Updated the ABC control rule to incorporate methodology for determining the ABC of unassessed species;<br>-Adjusted the ABCs for fourteen unassessed snapper- grouper species (see final rule);<br>-Adjusted the ACLs and ACTs for three species complexes and four snapper-grouper species based on revised ABCs;<br>-Established ACLs for unassessed species;<br>-Modified gray triggerfish minimum size limits;<br>-Established a commercial split season and commercial trip limits for gray triggerfish. |
| Document                               | All Actions<br>Effective By:                          | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule                            | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.   |

|                                  |  |  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Regulatory Amendment #20 (2014d) | 8/20/2015  | PR: 80 FR 18797<br>FR: 80 FR 43033                     | -Adjusted the recreational and commercial ACLs for snowy grouper;<br>-Adjusted the rebuilding strategy;<br>-Modified the commercial trip limit;<br>-Modified recreational bag limit;<br>-Modified the recreational fishing season.   |
| Amendment #32 (2014e)            | 3/30/2015  | PR: 80 FR 3207<br>FR: 80 FR 16583                      | -End overfishing of blueline tilefish;<br>-Removed blueline tilefish from the deepwater complex;<br>-Specified AMs, ACLs, recreational ACLs, commercial trip limit, adjust recreational bag limit for blueline tilefish;<br>-Specified ACLs and revised the AMs for the recreational section of the deepwater complex (yellowedge grouper, silk snapper, misty grouper, queen snapper, sand tilefish, black snapper, and blackfin snapper) |
| Regulatory Amendment #22 (2015a) | 9/11/2015, except for the amendments to §§ 622.190(b) and 622.193(r)(1) which were effective 8/12/2015 | PR: 80 FR 31880<br>FR: 80 FR 48277                     | -Adjusted ACLs and OY for gag and wreckfish;   |
| Regulatory Amendment #16 (2016a) | 12/29/2016 (closure)<br>1/30/2017 (gear markings)  | NOI: 78 FR 72868<br>PR: 81 FR 53109<br>FR: 81 FR 95893 | -Revise the area where fishing with black sea bass pots is prohibited from Nov.1-April 30.<br>-Add additional gear marking requirements for black sea bass pot gear.   |
| Document                         | All Actions Effective By:  | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule                            | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.   |

|                                    |  |   |   |
|------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Regulatory Amendment #25 (2016b)   | 8/12/2016 except changes to blueline tilefish, effective 7/13/2016.  | PR: 81 FR 34944<br>FR: 81 FR 45245  | -Revised commercial and recreational ACL for blueline tilefish;<br>-Revised the recreational bag limit for black sea bass;<br>-Revised the commercial and recreational fishing year for yellowtail snapper.   |
| Amendment #36 (2016d)              | 7/31/17  | NOI: 82 FR 810<br>PR: 82 FR 5512<br>FR:82 FR 29772                        | -Established SMZs to enhance protection for snapper- grouper species in spawning condition including speckled hind and warsaw grouper.  |
| Amendment #37 (2016c)              | 8/24/17  | NOI: 80 FR 45641<br>NOA: 81 FR 69774<br>PR: 81 FR 91104<br>FR:82 FR 34584 | -Modified the hogfish fishery management unit;<br>-Specified fishing levels for the two South Atlantic hogfish stocks;<br>-Established a rebuilding plan for the Florida Keys/East Florida stock;<br>-Established/revised management measures for both hogfish stocks in the South Atlantic Region, such as size limits, recreational bag limits, and commercial trip limits. |
| Red Snapper Emergency Rule (2017a) | Effective 11/2/2017, through 11/31/2017. The recreational red snapper season opened on 11/3/2017, and closed on 11/6/2017; then reopened on 11/10/2017, and closed on 11/13/2017. The commercial red snapper season opened on 11/2/2017. | FR: 82 FR 50839   | -Allowed for the limited harvest and possession of red snapper in 2017 by changing the process used to set the ACL, as requested by the Council;<br>-These rules also announced the opening and closing dates of the 2017 recreational fishing season and the opening date for the 2017 commercial fishing season for red snapper   |

| Document   | All Actions Effective By:                               | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule   | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here.<br>Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.  |
|--|---|---|--|
| Golden Tilefish Interim Rule (2017b)                   | 1/2/2018 through 7/1/2018 and 7/2/2018 through 1/3/2019 | PR: 82 FR 50101<br>FR: 83 FR 65 FR<br>EXT: 83 FR 28387                | -Reduced the golden tilefish total ACL, the commercial and recreational sector ACLs, and the quotas for the hook-and-line and longline components of the commercial sector.  |
| Amendment #41 (2017c)                                  | 2/10/2018   | NOA:82 FR 44756<br>PR:82 FR 49167<br>FR:83 FR 1305                    | -Updated the MSY, ABC, ACL, OY, MSST;<br>-Designated spawning months of April through June for regulatory purposes;<br>-Revised management measures for mutton snapper including the minimum size limit (18 inches total length), recreational bag limit (five mutton snapper per person per day within the ten-snapper aggregate), and commercial trip limit (500 pounds whole weight during January through March and July through December; and during the April through June spawning season, of five mutton snapper per person per day, or five mutton snapper per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive). |
| Amendment #43 (2017d)                                  | 7/26/2018   | NOI:82 FR 1720<br>NOA: 83 FR 16282<br>PR:83 FR 22939<br>FR:83 FR35428 | -Actions addressed overfishing of red snapper by specifying recreational and commercial ACLs beginning in 2018;  |
| Abbreviated Framework Amendment 1: Red Grouper (2017e) | 8/27/2018   | PR:83 FR 14234<br>FR:83 FR35435                                       | -Adjust the ACLs for South Atlantic red grouper in response to the results of the latest stock assessment.   |

| Document   | All Actions Effective By:  | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule                           | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here.<br>Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.   |
|--|--|---|---|
| Regulatory Amendment #28 (2018a)                               | 1/4/2019   | PR: 83 FR 48788<br>FR: 83 FR 62508                    | -End overfishing of golden tilefish by reducing the ACL based on the most recent stock assessment.  |
| Abbreviated Framework Amendment 2 (2018b)                      | Effective 5/9/2019. The black sea bass recreational season notification is effective from 4/9/2019, until 12:01 a.m., local time, 4/1/2020, unless changed by subsequent notification in the Federal Register. | PR:84 FR 4758<br>FR:84 FR 14021                       | -Adjust the ACLs for South Atlantic vermilion snapper and black sea bass in response to the results of the latest stock assessments.  |
| Amendment #42 (2019a)  | 1/8/2020   | NOA:84 FR 27576<br>PR: 84 FR 48890<br>FR: 84 FR 67236 | -Modified sea turtle release gear and SG framework  |
| Regulatory Amendment #27 (Vision Blueprint Commercial - 2018c) | 2/26/2020  | PR: 84 FR 55531<br>FR 85 FR 4588                      | Modified:<br>-Commercial split seasons (snowy grouper, greater amberjack, red porgy);<br>-Commercial trip limits (blueline tilefish, vermilion snapper);<br>Implemented:<br>-Commercial trip limit for Other Jacks Complex,<br>-Minimum size limit (commercial only) for almaco jack; |

|  |                           |                                    |   |
|--|---------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
|  |                           |                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Reduced the minimum size limit for gray triggerfish off east FL;</li> <li>-Removed the minimum size (commercial) limit for deep-water snappers (silk, queen, blackfin)</li> </ul>   |
| Document   | All Actions Effective By: | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule        | <p>Major Actions.<br/>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.</p>  |
| Regulatory Amendment #30 (2018d)                                 | 3/9/2020                  | PR: 84 FR 57840<br>FR: 85 FR 6825  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Revised the rebuilding schedule for red grouper</li> <li>-Extended the seasonal prohibition on recreational and commercial harvest of red grouper in the EEZ off South Carolina and North Carolina through May;</li> <li>-Established a commercial trip limit for red grouper harvested in the South Atlantic federal waters of 200 lbs gw</li> </ul> |
| Regulatory Amendment #26 (Vision Blueprint Recreational - 2018e) | 3/30/2020                 | PR: 84 FR 57378<br>FR: 85 FR 11307 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Modified the 20-fish aggregate to limit the harvest of any one species within the aggregate bag limit to 10 fish;</li> <li>-Reduced the minimum size limit for gray triggerfish off east FL (recreational) (12 inches);</li> <li>-Removed the minimum size limit (recreational) for deep-water snappers (silk, queen, blackfin).</li> </ul>           |
| Regulatory Amendment #29 (2020a)                                 | 7/15/2020                 | PR: 85 FR 22118<br>FR: 85 FR 36166 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Modified gear requirements for South Atlantic snapper-grouper species, including requirement modifications to requirements for circle hooks and powerheads.</li> </ul>  |

|  |                           |   |   |
|--|---------------------------|---|---|
| Abbreviated Framework Amendment #3 (2019b)                   | 8/17/2020                 | PR: 85 FR 20970<br>FR: 85 FR 43145  | -Increased the total and sector ACLs and recreational ACT for South Atlantic blueline tilefish in response to the results of the latest stock assessments.  |
| Amendment #39 (Generic For-Hire Reporting Amendment) (2017f) | 9/1/2020                  | NOA:83 FR 11164<br>PR:83 FR 14400<br>FR:85 FR 10331<br>Correcting FR: 85 FR 47917 | -Weekly electronic reporting for charter vessel operators with a federal for-hire permit;<br>-Reduced the time allowed for headboat operators to complete electronic reports;<br>-Requires location reporting by charter vessels with the same detail currently required for headboat vessels.  |
| Document   | All Actions Effective By: | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule   | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.  |
| Emergency Rule Vermilion snapper and King Mackerel           | 9/17/2020                 | ER: 85 FR 57982   | -Increased the vermilion snapper commercial trip limit from 1,000 to 1,500 lbs gw;<br>-Increased the king mackerel recreational bag limit from: (1) 3-fish to 4-fish per person in federal waters from the New York/Connecticut/Rhode Island boundary to the Georgia/Florida boundary, and (2) 2- fish to 4-fish per person in federal waters from the Georgia/Florida boundary south to the Miami-Dade/Monroe County, Florida, boundary.           |
| Regulatory Amendment #33 (2020b)                             | 11/13/2020                | PR: 85 FR 28924<br>FR: 85 FR 64978  | -Removed the requirement that if NMFS projects a red snapper season (commercial or recreational) would be 3 days or less, the respective fishing season will not open for that fishing year. Therefore, red snapper harvest could be open for either commercial or recreational harvest for less than 4 days. For the recreational sector particularly, this measure could allow for a fishing season to occur that otherwise would not be allowed. |

|   |                           |                                    |   |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Regulatory Amendment #34 (2020c)            | 4/2/2021                  | PR: 85 FR 73013<br>FR: 86 FR 17318 | -Established SMZs at artificial reef sites off the coasts of North Carolina and South Carolina.   |
| Amendment #26 (Bycatch Reporting Amendment) | TBD                       | TBD                                | -Modify bycatch and discard reporting for commercial and for-hire vessels.  |
| Regulatory Amendment #32                    | Not submitted             | N/A                                | -Revise accountability measures for yellowtail snapper to reduce the possibility of in-season closures.   |
| Document                                    | All Actions Effective By: | Proposed Rule<br>Final Rule        | Major Actions.<br>Note that not all details are provided here. Please refer to Proposed and Final Rules for all impacts of listed documents.  |
| Amendment #44 Yellowtail Snapper            | TBD                       | TBD                                | -Revise ACIs, AMs, allocations, and management measures for yellowtail snapper  |
| Amendment #45 ABC Control Rule              | TBD                       | TBD                                | -Modify the ABC control rule;<br>-Specify an approach for determining the acceptable risk of overfishing and the probability of rebuilding success for overfished stocks;<br>-Allow phase-in of ABC changes; and<br>-Allow carry-over of unharvested catch. |

|  |     |     |   |
|--|-----|-----|---|
| Regulatory Amendment #31<br>- Recreational Accountability Measures | TBD | TBD | -Modify the recreational AMs for the recreational sector to bring consistency.  |
| Amendment #48<br>Wreckfish   | TBD | TBD | -Modify management of wreckfish.  |
| Amendment #49<br>Greater amberjack                                 | TBD | TBD | -Revise ACLs, AMs, allocations, and management measures for greater amberjack.  |
| Amendment #52<br>Golden tilefish and Blueline tilefish             | TBD | TBD | -Revise ACLs, AMs, allocations, and management measures for golden tilefish. Consider modification to recreational management measures and accountability measures for blueline tilefish. |
| Amendment #53<br>Gag   | TBD | TBD | -Revise ACLs, AMs, allocations, and management measures for gag and establish a rebuilding plan.  |
| Regulatory Amendment #35   | TBD | TBD | -Revise ACLs for red snapper<br>-consider management changes to reduce release mortality in the snapper grouper fishery   |

## Appendix J. Allocation Review Trigger Policy

In a letter to the NOAA Assistant Administrator dated July 16, 2019, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) responded to NOAA's Fisheries Allocation Review Policy (NMFS Policy Directive 01-119) and the associated Procedural Directive on allocation review triggers (NMFS Procedural Directive 01-119-01). The Policy established the responsibility for the Regional Fishery Management Councils to set allocation review triggers and consider three types of trigger criteria: indicator, public interest, and time. Councils were directed to establish triggers for consideration of allocation reviews by August 2019. The Council's response follows:

The Council has reviewed species allocations on numerous occasions in the past. However, these reviews may not have been formally documented in a fishery management plan amendment if a decision was made not to modify sector allocations. This new policy will ensure all species currently having sector allocations will be reviewed on a regular basis and will formalize the allocation review process so the Council's consideration of allocations will be documented.

The Council reviewed their current sector allocations and began discussions on the Policy and Procedural Directives and criteria for considering fishery allocation reviews at their December 2018 meeting. At their June 2019 meeting, the Council adopted two types of criteria for triggering consideration of an allocation review: indicator and time.

The Council chose several indicator-based criteria as triggers:

- Either sector exceeds its ACL or closes prior to the end of its fishing year three out of five consecutive years,
- Either sector under harvests its ACL or OY by at least 50% three out of five consecutive years,
- After a stock assessment is approved by the SSC and presented to the Council, and
- After the Council reviews a species Fishery Performance Report.

The Council chose a time-based trigger to ensure allocation reviews are regularly considered. Each species will have its sector allocations reviewed not less than every seven years. Table 1 shows by species when the next sector allocation review will be considered by the Council should an indicator-based criterion not be triggered. Regardless of whether consideration of an allocation review is triggered by an indicator or time criterion once it occurs the next one will automatically be scheduled for consideration seven years later. For species which are jointly managed with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, the timing for consideration of allocation reviews was coordinated with that council.

A public interest-based criterion was not selected because the Council currently receives substantial and regular comment from the public through scoping and public hearing sessions,

general public comment periods held at every Council meeting, the public comment form on the Council’s website, and through other more informal channels. Thus, the Council decided the existing Council process provides sufficient opportunity for public input on allocation.

**Table J-1.** Next year for allocation reviews (as of 2019) for SAFMC managed species.

| <b>Assessed Species</b>              | <b>Review Year</b> |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Black grouper                        | 2026               |
| Black sea bass                       | 2023               |
| Blueline Tilefish                    | 2020               |
| Gag                                  | 2022               |
| Golden tilefish                      | 2021               |
| Gray Triggerfish                     | 2023               |
| Greater amberjack                    | 2021               |
| GA-NC Hogfish                        | 2023               |
| FLK/EFL Hogfish                      | 2023               |
| Mutton Snapper                       | 2023               |
| Red grouper                          | 2023               |
| Red pogy                             | 2021               |
| Red snapper                          | 2024               |
| Snowy grouper                        | 2021               |
| Vermilion snapper                    | 2021               |
| Wreckfish                            | 2019               |
| Yellowtail Snapper                   | 2021               |
| Atlantic Group King Mackerel         | 2021               |
| Atlantic Group Spanish Mackerel      | 2022               |
| Gulf Group Cobia- FL East Coast Zone | 2021               |
| <b>Unassessed Species</b>            |                    |
| Atlantic Spadefish                   | 2022               |
| Bar Jack                             | 2022               |
| Scamp                                | 2022               |
| Speckled hind*                       | *                  |
| Warsaw grouper*                      | *                  |
| <b>Deepwater Complex</b>             |                    |
| Yellowedge Grouper                   | 2024               |
| Silk Snapper                         | 2024               |
| Misty Grouper                        | 2024               |
| Sand Tilefish                        | 2024               |

|                                       |      |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| Queen Snapper                         | 2024 |
| Blackfin Snapper                      | 2024 |
| <b>Jacks Complex</b>                  |      |
| Almaco Jack                           | 2025 |
| Banded Rudderfish                     | 2025 |
| Lesser Amberjack                      | 2025 |
| <b>Snappers Complex</b>               |      |
| Gray Snapper                          | 2025 |
| Lane Snapper                          | 2025 |
| Cubera Snapper                        | 2025 |
| <b>Grunts Complex</b>                 |      |
| White Grunt                           | 2024 |
| Sailor's Choice                       | 2024 |
| Tomtate                               | 2024 |
| Margate                               | 2024 |
| <b>Shallow-Water Groupers Complex</b> |      |
| Red Hind                              | 2026 |
| Rock Hind                             | 2026 |
| Yellowmouth Grouper                   | 2026 |
| Yellowfin Grouper                     | 2026 |
| Coney                                 | 2026 |
| Graysby                               | 2026 |
| <b>Porgy Complex</b>                  |      |
| Jolthead Porgy                        | 2027 |
| Knobbed Porgy                         | 2027 |
| Saucereye Porgy                       | 2027 |
| Scup                                  | 2027 |
| Whitebone Porgy                       | 2027 |
| <b>Dolphin/Wahoo</b>                  |      |
| Dolphin                               | 2019 |
| Wahoo                                 | 2019 |

\*ACL=0 for this species. If ACL>0 in the future, allocations will be reviewed when the ACL is increased.

## Appendix K. Stock Projections

The SSC recommends using the calculated  $P^*$  value of 27.5% along with the geometric mean of the recruitment estimates from 2011-2017 to determine the ABC and the same recruitment values at  $P^*=50\%$  for the OFL. The  $P^*$  value is implemented in 2023 and the projections extend 5 years to coincide with the recommendation of the next operational assessment.

**Table K-1.** Projection results with fishing mortality rate fixed at  $F = P^*27.5$  ( $F=75.3\%F_{MSY}$ ) starting in 2023. R = number of age-1 recruits (in 1000s), F = fishing mortality rate (per year), S = spawning stock (mt), L = removals (landings and discards) expressed in numbers (n, in 1000s) or whole weight (w, in 1000 lb). The extension base indicates expected values (deterministic) from the base run; the extension med indicates median values from the stochastic projections. The pr.rebuild indicates the number of runs above the  $L_{MSY}$  benchmark.

| year | R.base (1000) | R.med (1000) | F.base | F.med | S.base (mt) | S.med (mt) | L.base (1000) | L.med (1000) | L.base (1000 lb) | L.med (1000 lb) | pr.rebuild |
|------|---------------|--------------|--------|-------|-------------|------------|---------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|------------|
| 2019 | 80            | 86           | 0.11   | 0.11  | 673         | 707        | 24            | 25           | 210              | 216             | 0.176      |
| 2020 | 80            | 86           | 0.11   | 0.11  | 672         | 699        | 24            | 25           | 210              | 216             | 0.174      |
| 2021 | 80            | 87           | 0.11   | 0.11  | 671         | 693        | 23            | 24           | 210              | 216             | 0.172      |
| 2022 | 80            | 85           | 0.11   | 0.11  | 677         | 693        | 23            | 23           | 210              | 216             | 0.172      |
| 2023 | 80            | 86           | 0.08   | 0.08  | 694         | 704        | 15            | 16           | 146              | 148             | 0.168      |
| 2024 | 80            | 86           | 0.08   | 0.08  | 719         | 717        | 15            | 16           | 149              | 150             | 0.157      |
| 2025 | 80            | 86           | 0.08   | 0.08  | 737         | 720        | 15            | 16           | 152              | 152             | 0.147      |
| 2026 | 80            | 86           | 0.08   | 0.08  | 749         | 715        | 15            | 16           | 153              | 152             | 0.135      |

**Table K-2.** Projection results with fishing mortality rate fixed at  $F = P^*50$  ( $F=F_{MSY}$ ) starting in 2023. R = number of age-1 recruits (in 1000s), F = fishing mortality rate (per year), S = spawning stock (mt), L = removals (landings and dead discards) expressed in numbers (n, in 1000s) or whole weight (w, in 1000 lb). The extension base indicates expected values (deterministic) from the base run; the extension med indicates median values from the stochastic projections. The pr.rebuild indicates the number of runs above the  $L_{MSY}$  benchmark.

| year | R.base (1000) | R.med (1000) | F.base | F.med | S.base (mt) | S.med (mt) | L.base (1000) | L.med (1000) | L.base (1000 lb) | L.med (1000 lb) | pr.rebuild |
|------|---------------|--------------|--------|-------|-------------|------------|---------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|------------|
| 2019 | 80            | 86           | 0.11   | 0.11  | 673         | 707        | 24            | 25           | 210              | 216             | 0.176      |
| 2020 | 80            | 86           | 0.11   | 0.11  | 672         | 699        | 24            | 25           | 210              | 216             | 0.174      |
| 2021 | 80            | 87           | 0.11   | 0.11  | 671         | 693        | 23            | 24           | 210              | 216             | 0.172      |
| 2022 | 80            | 85           | 0.11   | 0.11  | 677         | 693        | 23            | 23           | 210              | 216             | 0.172      |
| 2023 | 80            | 86           | 0.10   | 0.10  | 686         | 696        | 20            | 21           | 192              | 194             | 0.160      |
| 2024 | 80            | 86           | 0.10   | 0.10  | 694         | 689        | 20            | 20           | 191              | 193             | 0.143      |
| 2025 | 80            | 86           | 0.10   | 0.10  | 696         | 672        | 20            | 20           | 191              | 192             | 0.120      |
| 2026 | 80            | 86           | 0.1    | 0.1   | 692         | 653        | 19            | 20           | 189              | 188             | 0.093      |

K-1

South Atlantic Snapper Grouper

Appendix K. Stock Projections

Amendment 51

**Table K-3.** Projection results with fishing mortality rate fixed at  $F = F_{rebuild}$  starting in 2023 and providing a 50% probability of rebuilding.  $F$  = fishing mortality rate (per year),  $pr.rebuild$  = proportion of stochastic projection replicates with  $SSB \geq SSB_{MSY}$ ,  $S$  = spawning stock (mt) at peak spawning time,  $R_m$  = total removals (landings and dead discards) expressed in numbers (1000s) or whole weight (lb). Total removals presented here would need reduction if values are used to develop quotas based only on landings; recent data suggest that ~ 95.4% of total removals are landings (the remainder being dead discards). The extension base indicates expected values (deterministic) from the base run; the extension med indicates median values from the stochastic projections.

| Year | pr.rebuild | F.base | F.med | S.base(mt) | S.med(mt) | Rm.base(1000) | Rm.med(1000) | Rm.base(1000 lbs) | Rm.med(1000 lbs) |
|------|------------|--------|-------|------------|-----------|---------------|--------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 2019 | 0.177      | 0.11   | 0.10  | 672        | 711       | 25            | 24           | 210               | 210              |
| 2020 | 0.174      | 0.10   | 0.10  | 673        | 709       | 27            | 26           | 210               | 210              |
| 2021 | 0.18       | 0.10   | 0.09  | 690        | 722       | 28            | 27           | 210               | 210              |
| 2022 | 0.192      | 0.09   | 0.09  | 728        | 762       | 28            | 28           | 210               | 210              |
| 2023 | 0.209      | 0.08   | 0.08  | 790        | 821       | 26            | 27           | 196               | 205              |
| 2024 | 0.23       | 0.08   | 0.08  | 869        | 894       | 28            | 28           | 213               | 220              |
| 2025 | 0.253      | 0.08   | 0.08  | 955        | 968       | 30            | 30           | 231               | 236              |
| 2026 | 0.275      | 0.08   | 0.08  | 1043       | 1042      | 31            | 31           | 249               | 250              |
| 2027 | 0.296      | 0.08   | 0.08  | 1130       | 1112      | 33            | 33           | 266               | 264              |
| 2028 | 0.316      | 0.08   | 0.08  | 1214       | 1179      | 34            | 34           | 282               | 277              |
| 2029 | 0.335      | 0.08   | 0.08  | 1296       | 1242      | 36            | 35           | 298               | 289              |
| 2030 | 0.356      | 0.08   | 0.08  | 1376       | 1304      | 37            | 36           | 313               | 301              |
| 2031 | 0.375      | 0.08   | 0.08  | 1453       | 1364      | 38            | 37           | 327               | 313              |
| 2032 | 0.394      | 0.08   | 0.08  | 1528       | 1421      | 39            | 38           | 341               | 325              |
| 2033 | 0.41       | 0.08   | 0.08  | 1599       | 1479      | 40            | 39           | 355               | 336              |
| 2034 | 0.427      | 0.08   | 0.08  | 1667       | 1535      | 41            | 40           | 367               | 347              |
| 2035 | 0.444      | 0.08   | 0.08  | 1732       | 1590      | 42            | 41           | 379               | 357              |
| 2036 | 0.46       | 0.08   | 0.08  | 1794       | 1640      | 43            | 42           | 390               | 367              |
| 2037 | 0.475      | 0.08   | 0.08  | 1852       | 1693      | 43            | 43           | 401               | 378              |
| 2038 | 0.488      | 0.08   | 0.08  | 1906       | 1745      | 44            | 43           | 411               | 387              |
| 2039 | 0.504      | 0.08   | 0.08  | 1957       | 1793      | 45            | 44           | 420               | 396              |