

Snapper Grouper Innovation Plan

March 2026

“The Council is where fisheries science meets reality.”

~ Eugenio Pineiro Soler, NOAA Assistant Administrator for Fisheries

The Snapper Grouper Innovation plan is a way to bring together the current priorities of the SG committee, the priorities and realities expressed by NOAA Fisheries, and consider a new path to improve how the committee operates. The intent of this plan is to reflect the Presidential Executive Orders, the changes in the type and amount of data for species within the Fishery Management Unit, and accept a greater level of uncertainty and risk by the SG committee when managing this species complex.

Overarching goal – Establish goalposts and principles for SG committee discussions. Consider ways to streamline and be more efficient during SG committee discussions.

Goal for March meeting – Review Goalposts, Principles, and Committee Streamlining suggestions. Consider any additional edits and seek to finalize this living document at this meeting. Begin incorporating concepts into committee discussions.

Goalposts

- **Recreational yield is about access and having SG species available to harvest**
 - Recreational anglers want to be able to have the opportunity to harvest SG species when their schedule allows (e.g., weather/life circumstances). Recreational anglers want optimum opportunity and year-round access to harvest SG species. Anglers throughout the Council region have different preferences on what SG species they prefer to harvest at certain times of the year. Anglers also want good quality opportunities for harvest.
- **Commercial yield is about providing access to seafood for consumers**
 - Commercial fishermen need prioritization of efficient harvest (maximum harvest with minimum effort). Commercial fishing is about access at all levels, including the harvester, dealer, market, truck drivers, restaurant, and consumers. MSA defines this as greatest benefit to the nation.
- **Optimize year-round access to SG species for commercial and recreational sectors, to the extent possible**
 - The committee intends to optimize access. This optimization could result in consistent, year-round availability and access to SG species. This concept could help restaurants that are challenged in being able to find year-round local fish to satisfy menus. The overall intent is to allow fishermen the opportunity to harvest the resource when weather, personal schedules or markets are favorable.
- **Consider regional and temporal management of fisheries to account for differences across the Council region**
 - The committee can consider split-seasons to spread access throughout the region. The committee also intends to use approaches that consider local seasons and preferences, including times of the year and holidays.

- **Consider holistic view of the SG fishery/ Consider multi-species nature of this fishery when making decisions**
 - The committee will consider the multi-species nature and regime shifts of species when making decisions.
 - The focus on single species management that has developed in response to ACL-based management isn't serving the fishery well. The committee will consider ways to manage co-occurring species together since targeting one SG species often results in the bycatch of other SG species. The committee will consider how other councils manage their fisheries to consider ways to innovate.
- **Maximize trip efficiencies or satisfactions for recreational and commercial sectors**
 - There is widespread support for being more efficient, but the committee needs to consider how to define efficiency across the sectors and then develop ways to increase efficiency.
 - Efficiency may be hard to define and the definition of efficiency or satisfaction will likely vary for recreational and commercial sectors while reflecting the different desires and needs of the sectors. In general, actions that promote each sector achieving its yield (see above) while reducing its costs and expenses could be considered to promote efficiency. The Committee could evaluate an action's impact on efficiency by considering how it affects yield (pounds, access, opportunity, flexibility) and costs (fuel, time, discarding, lost opportunity). The Committee will consider more than just simple economic efficiencies and costs in addressing this item.
 - Spreading harvest out to be more predictable can be more economically efficient (avoid flooded markets, be able to shop around for better price) in the commercial sector, and may help provide year-round access in the recreational sector. Decreasing regulatory discards could increase efficiency of both sectors, but doing so may require other regulations to prevent overharvest.
 - There is a strong likelihood that opposing objectives will make improving efficiency and satisfaction challenging. For example, higher trip catches may necessitate shorter seasons or other access limitations.
- **Take more risks in making decisions**
 - The committee intends to take more risks in making decisions. The committee recognizes that limited amount of available quota for some species may work against flexibility and risk-taking.
 - The committee intends to learn from other Councils' processes to try new management actions and find ways to move management actions/changes more rapidly.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** The Committee expects to be provided scientific recommendations from the Science Center and the SSC that define the risk of various harvest levels but do not make risk determinations on behalf of the Council. The Committee also expects to be provided analyses that are risk neutral.
- **Don't let the search for perfection stop progress**
 - Don't be paralyzed by uncertainties, challenges, or imperfect data.
 - Perfect decisions are functionally impossible in the uncertain world of fisheries.
 - Decisions taken by the Committee can be changed in the future and are subject to change as new information becomes available.

- **We will never have the perfect solution for everyone**
 - The committee seeks to balance expectations and manage tradeoffs among user groups. Such decisions are commonly described as giving outcomes where ‘Nobody’s really happy but everyone can live’.
 - This approach could result in an improvement in trust but also may result in unpopular management decisions.

Principles to get to Goalposts

In our role as Council members of this SG committee, we intend to consider the following principles to help us achieve our goalposts when conducting our committee business.

This list includes items that could be considered now and items that are aspirational for when more data could be available in the future.

Can be considered now

- Ensure local knowledge is factored into management decisions
- Take more risks and try new things to achieve goals and in making management decisions
- Be proactive
 - Get ahead of an issue; don’t wait to react to a stock assessment and don’t wait for the Cadillac (or perfect) stock assessment. Some of the tools that are available for being proactive include: SAFE Report, SERFS report, interim analyses, Fishery Performance Reports, public comments, ACL monitoring, more real-time detailed quota monitoring access.
 - The committee intends to act on the information they have not the information they hope to have.
- Minimize wasted fish
 - Turn discards into landings. This could lead to higher trip satisfaction and trip efficiency.

Economic

- Consider how SG commercial fishermen operate as portfolio fishermen
 - Conduct regular economic evaluations of the fishery.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Conduct an economic portfolio evaluation of the snapper grouper fishery. Consider the portfolio approach presented by Steve Cadrin to the SSC and the prior staff work by Kari Buck.
- Consider/Continue opportunities for new entrants for permitted fisheries and limited entry fisheries

Science and data collection

- SG committee will consider simplified science to meet management needs
- The committee supports interim assessments, more timely data on stock status for a prioritizes list of species, and stock assessments that match the available data. The committee realizes that fewer traditional stock assessments may be available in the coming years and seeks to put more confidence in simpler methods to assess stock statuses. The committee supports and promotes efforts to provide/obtain ecosystem and multi-species analyses for supporting catch recommendations and evaluating management alternatives.

- The committee seeks to use more cooperative research projects to obtain critical data
 - Cooperative research will provide more engagement with stakeholders. Cooperative research will also support the council’s citizen science initiative.
- The scientific advice provided to the Committee must move beyond single species assessments and recommendations to support the Committee’s effort to move beyond single species management solutions.
- **ACTION ITEM:** Request that Council staff, SSC and SEFSC work together to develop a plan to address the above committee expectations.
 - Provide more timely stock status evaluations using simpler approaches that can be supported given future resource expectations
 - Develop multi-species and ecosystem-informed catch recommendation approaches
 - Identify data gaps that can be addressed through cooperative research projects
 - Identify timelines and deliverables
 - Consider a workgroup or a workshop to develop this action item

Aspirational ideas

- Develop allocations based on total catch
 - Discards are applied before the total ACL is divided
 - Discard data are uncertain – need improvement in discard data to inform this discussion
 - Aspirational – want to get the data quality to be able to do this

Ideas for Process of SG committee and committee efficiency principles

In our role as Council members of this SG committee, we will consider the following items when conducting our committee business.

- **Booklet of commonly requested information provided at each Council meeting and on the website**
 - The council staff will provide binders for SG committee members that include commonly used items such as this innovation plan, SEDAR schedule, workplan, types of Amendments, etc. Each Council member will be required to bring this binder to each meeting. The Council staff will also have these items available electronically on the Council website.
 - **ACTION ITEM:** Completed by staff for the December 2025 meeting, with updates planned as needed at subsequent meetings.
- **Maximize meeting time of the SG committee**
 - The committee will maximize our allotted meeting time by using subcommittees to tackle niche issues (e.g., wreckfish subcommittee) that can save time during full SG committee discussions. The subcommittee could be comprised of a subset of members of the SG committee with expertise in the topic that will make recommendations to the SG committee.
 - The SG committee will also consider the use of a “process word/safe word” that can be used to stop or redirect the discussion and call the question quicker for motions.
- **Be more responsive and timely**
 - The SG committee seeks to be more responsive and timely to SG fishery issues. The committee seeks to make hard decisions more rapidly and will find the proper

vehicle for its actions in order to make actions move faster through the process. The committee seeks to optimize the use of expedited procedures (e.g., expedited framework actions) to move items faster. The committee seeks to have more timely responses to assessment information and use their informed judgement when presented with conflicting and incomplete information instead of being paralyzed by inaction.

- **Get out of the rut and be more innovative and efficient**
 - The committee seeks to operate in a solution-oriented way, getting away from single species management when possible, and is willing to test new and innovative ideas, and makes difficult decisions when needed that are in alignment with fishery goals.
- **More communication and collaboration between states and NOAA outside the Council meeting**
 - In order to tackle challenges between meetings and allow the committee meetings to operate more efficiently NOAA and state agency representatives should work collaboratively.

Words matter

As we conduct our business as the SG committee:

- Encourage committee members to use tact and know that words matter
- Seek to avoid broad, blaming/shaming statements, especially those directed at particular sectors, industries, or organizations

Responsibility to Stakeholders

In our role as Council members on this committee we:

- Seek to understand our audience better
- Desire stakeholder and fishermen satisfaction
- Seek to keep fishermen engaged
- Desire to improve the confidence of stakeholders in the federal fishery management process