



# SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Trish Murphey, Chair | Jessica McCawley, Vice Chair  
John Carmichael, Executive Director

## AGENDA

### Snapper Grouper Committee

North Charleston Marriott

4770 Goer Drive

North Charleston, SC

#### Tuesday, September 16, 2025, 1:30 PM – 5:30 PM

- Approval of Agenda
- Approval of Minutes (June 2025); [June 2025 Snapper Grouper Committee Report](#)
- NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office (NOAA SERO) Updates (Rulemaking for submitted amendments, Exempted Fishing Permit applications)

#### **1:40 pm – 1:55 pm**

1. Commercial Sub-Committee Report and Amendment 60 (Commercial Permit and Trip Efficiency)
  - a. Summary Report (*Attachment 1*) – Jessica McCawley, Sub-Committee Chair
  - b. **Committee Action:** Review scoping comments and Sub-Committee's direction to staff for amendment development.

#### **1:55 pm – 2:40 pm**

2. Yellowtail Snapper & Mutton Snapper Acceptable Biological Catches (ABC) and Jurisdictional Allocations (Amendment 44)
  - a. Overview (*Attachment 2*) – Allie Iberle
  - b. **Committee Action:** Review the proposed actions and provide feedback.

#### **2:40 pm – 3:15 pm**

3. Updates – Council Staff
  - a. Recreational Aggregate Bag Limit Discussion (*Attachment 3*)
  - b. Blueline Tilefish Jurisdictional ABCs
  - c. Golden Tilefish Landings Discrepancy
  - d. Vessel Limits for Headboats
  - e. **Committee Action:** Provide any necessary direction to staff to continue development of these projects. Specifically for headboats, provide any additional requests for information ahead of the next headboat discussion in March 2026.

--- Break (3:15 pm – 3:30 pm) ---

**3:30 pm – 5:30 pm**

4. Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) Amendment (*Attachments 4a and 4b*)
  - a. Presentation – Dr. Adrian Hordyk and Chip Collier
  - b. Discussion – Chip Collier
  - c. **Committee Action:** Provide feedback to be used in modeling approaches, species to include in the evaluation, and management strategies to consider through the MSE.

**Wednesday, September 17, 2025, 8:30 AM – 12:00 PM**

5. Innovative Management Approach for the Snapper Grouper Fishery (*Attachments 5a and 5b*)
  - a. Review FAQ on SAFMC's and NMFS' management and rulemaking processes
  - b. Discuss goalposts, basic principles, and actions
  - c. **Committee Action:** Discuss next steps for December meeting (prioritizing and actions)

--- Lunch ---

**Wednesday, September 17, 2025, 1:30 PM – 3:45 PM**

6. Black Sea Bass Management Measures (Regulatory Amendment 37) (*Attachments 6a & 6b*)
  - a. Overview
  - b. **Committee Action:** Review draft amendment, consider selecting preferred alternatives, and consider approval for public hearings.

**Thursday, September 18, 2025, 8:30 AM – 10:30 AM**

**8:30 am – 10:00 am**

7. Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision (Amendment 61)
  - a. Overview (*Attachment 7*) – John Hadley and Allie Iberle
  - b. **Committee Action:** Consider approval for scoping.

**10:00 am – 10:15 am**

8. Topics for Fall Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) Meeting
  - a. **Committee Action:** Review agenda topics for the October 2025 AP Meeting.

**10:15 am – 10:30 am**

9. Other Business

Adjourn

**Committee Members:**

Jessica McCawley, Chair

Kerry Marhefka, Vice Chair

Robert Beal

Carolyn Belcher  
Gary Borland  
Amy Dukes  
Judy Helmey  
Dewey Hemilright  
Jimmy Hull  
Trish Murphey  
Lt. Tom Pease  
Charlie Phillips  
Tom Roller  
Robert Spottswood, Jr.  
Andy Strelcheck

**Attachments:**

**Attachment 1:** Commercial Sub-Committee Report (*available at the meeting*)

**Attachment 2:** Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 Reef Fish Amendment 55 Decision Document

**Attachment 3:** Aggregate Bag Limit Analysis Document (*available by September 10*)

**Attachment 4a:** Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation Presentation (*available by September 10*)

**Attachment 4b:** Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Information Paper (*available by September 10*)

**Attachment 5a:** Amendment Type and Rulemaking Decision Tree Tool

**Attachment 5b:** Innovative and Comprehensive Management Approaches for Snapper Grouper Document

**Attachment 6a:** Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 37 (Black Sea Bass) Decision Document

**Attachment 6b:** Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 37 (Black Sea Bass) Draft Amendment (*available by September 10*)

**Attachment 7:** Amendment 61 (Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision) Decision Document

**Staff Lead:** Michael Schmidtke ([mike.schmidtke@safmc.net](mailto:mike.schmidtke@safmc.net))

# **OVERVIEW**

## **Snapper Grouper Committee**

The Committee will approve the minutes from the June 2025 meeting and the agenda for the September 2025 Committee meeting.

### **1. Commercial Sub-Committee Report and Amendment 60 (Commercial Permit and Trip Efficiency) (*Attachment 1*)**

**Description:** In June 2024, the Council formed the Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee) and tasked it with developing a list of commercial management topics that require further consideration. In March 2025, the Council initiated Amendment 60 to consider changes to commercial unlimited (SG 1) permit policies and management measures that would improve commercial trip efficiency. Scoping for the amendment was conducted in July-August 2025. The Sub-Committee will meet on September 15, ahead of the Snapper Grouper Committee meeting. A summary report will be developed following the meeting, and the Sub-Committee Chair will present this report and its recommendations.

**Committee Action:** Review the Sub-Committee Report and direct staff on actions and alternatives to develop in Amendment 60.

### **2. Yellowtail Snapper & Mutton Snapper (Amendment 44) (*Attachment 2*)**

**Description:** At their December 2024 meeting the South Atlantic Council discussed the logistics of starting work on this amendment again after it was paused to await updated assessments for both species. During this meeting the Council approved an approach to complete a joint SAFMC/Gulf Council amendment to establish the OFL and ABC for the single stock of mutton snapper and single stock of yellowtail snapper, and review jurisdictional allocations for both species and modify, if necessary. The Gulf Council will be the administrative lead for this amendment. The South Atlantic would then complete a follow-up amendment to the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper FMP to establish the South Atlantic total ACLs for mutton and yellowtail snapper, establish the South Atlantic sector allocations and sector ACLs for each stock, and introduce any management and accountability measures to manage the fisheries. At the June 2025 meeting the South Atlantic Council reviewed the results of SEDAR 96 (yellowtail snapper) and SEDAR 79 (mutton snapper), and the SSC's catch level recommendations and directed staff to resume work on the amendment with the changes noted. Staff will present a decision document and review the Gulf Council's discussion from their August 2025 meeting.

**Committee Action:** Review the proposed actions and provide feedback.

### **3. Updates**

**Description:**

#### **Recreational Aggregate Bag Limit Discussion (*Attachment 3*)**

In March 2025, the Council initiated an amendment to consider implementation of a recreational aggregate bag limit for the snapper grouper fishery. Council staff will present a bag limit analysis of snapper grouper species.

#### **Blueline Tilefish Jurisdictional ABCs**

In June 2025, the Council received results from the SEDAR 92 stock assessment of blueline tilefish. The Council expressed concern with how the ABC for the portion of the stock that is

north of Cape Hatteras, NC, was apportioned between the South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic jurisdictions and requested that staff communicate with the Mid-Atlantic Council to arrange a joint effort to address regional apportionments. The Council sent a letter to the Mid-Atlantic Council, proposing creation of a joint sub-committee, including members of both Councils, to collaboratively determine how the ABC should be divided.

At their August meeting, the Mid-Atlantic Council agreed to support the formation of such a joint Council subcommittee to help inform future specifications. The Mid-Atlantic Council also recommended moving forward with the 2026 specifications approved at the June meeting, noting that they were developed through a mutually agreed-upon process, supported by a joint SSC recommendation, and reflect the best scientific information available.

The new catch levels incorporate recreational catch estimates derived using the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES). Because this is the first stock assessment to incorporate FES-based estimates, the Council will need to address whether sector allocations will change.

#### Golden Tilefish Landings Discrepancy

In June 2025, staff informed the Council of a discrepancies among commercial data sources using in the [SEDAR 89](#) stock assessment of golden tilefish. Council staff has continued discussions with the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) and data providers to address these issues. Staff will update the Council on these discussions and the proposed plan to update the stock assessment.

#### Vessel Limits for Headboats

The Council has been gathering information to find a way to ease the burden of recreational possession limits on the headboat component of the recreational fisheries in the South Atlantic. Main points of previous discussions are summarized in the following bullets:

- The Council recognizes that restrictive vessel and bag limits can be overly burdensome for heaboats carrying, on average, 60 passengers.
- In March 2024, the Council requested that the Advisory Panel provide general recommendations on how recreational vessel limits should be applied to headboats.
- AP recommendations:
  - Consider vessel limit in proportion to number of anglers (e.g. anglers/6) for federally permitted headboats.
  - For gag and black grouper: set an aggregate gag and black grouper vessel limit of 2 fish for every 6 passengers on board, not to exceed a maximum number of fish per vessel per trip, ranging from 6-12 fish, not to include captain and crew limits.
- In June 2025, Council staff presented information on catch composition among headboats north and south of Cape Canaveral, FL, to better understand the characteristics of the fleet.
- Council members reiterated their intent to consider different regulations for headboats than for charter (6-pack) vessels or private recreational vessels. The Council discussed the need to revise regulations for gag, back grouper, and snowy grouper, perhaps focusing on possession limits for these three species that would apply per 6 passengers.

- Council members are also discussing the potential for an aggregate recreational limit of snapper grouper species and stated such an aggregate could address the needs of the headboat fleet.
- Council members stated they are not considering sector separation to address this issue.
- The Council is also beginning to discuss ways to innovate management of the snapper grouper fishery, including addressing the needs of the various components of the fishery.
- The Council requested that the Snapper Grouper Committee continue the discussion regarding the headboat sector and next steps. **The Council is scheduled to discuss the topic again at the March 2026 meeting.**

**Committee Action:** Provide any necessary direction to staff to continue development of these projects. Specifically for headboats, provide any additional requests for information ahead of the next headboat discussion in March 2026.

#### **4. Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation (*Attachments 4a and 4b*)**

**Description:** Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) is a method for evaluating the performance of alternative management approaches and identifying the mode of management that is most likely to meet the various management objectives of a fishery. The MSE process is designed to support evidence-based decision-making in the face of uncertainty on the status and dynamics of a fishery system.

The Council is contracting with Blue Matter Science for a second contract to apply SAFMC MSE model to several snapper grouper species, including red snapper, gag, and black sea bass. To simulate alternative management strategies, Blue Matter needs input from the Council on which approaches to use to analyze population trends, species to include in the analysis, and management strategies to analyze. Adrian Hordyk of Blue Matter Science and Council staff will summarize work accomplished on the MSE to this point, and request Council feedback for future MSE development.

**Committee Action:** Provide feedback to be used in modeling approaches, species to include in the evaluation, and management strategies to consider through the MSE.

#### **5. Innovative Management Approach for the Snapper Grouper Fishery (*Attachments 5a and 5b*)**

##### **Description**

The Council requested that staff prepare a document to help them determine which amendment type is appropriate for a particular proposed action, to help quantify the time investment of different amendment types with regards to the Council process, and to understand the timelines for NMFS rulemaking. Staff will present a decision tree that includes more information for each amendment type.

Additionally, The Committee will discuss a proposed framework (introduced in the June 2025) to reset Snapper Grouper fishery discussion and begin progress toward innovative actions that improve the overall fishery. The framework is built around establishing “goalposts” to describe overarching fishery objectives that will help guide individual decisions, agreeing to some basic principles and facts to avoid rehashing the same

discussions, and developing a series of short, medium, and long-term actions that are achievable given the current science and regulatory challenges.

Innovation requires brainstorming and the first steps need to be judgement-free. A multi-step process that is intended to allow the Council to:

- First, come up with ideas and innovative solutions that can be evaluated objectively.
- Second, apply some structure to reduce rehashing of the same unresolvable arguments and discussions of unknowns.
- Third, develop a plan for moving forward to improve the fishery under a new science reality.

**Committee Action:** Review decision tool and provide feedback. Discuss next steps for the December 2025 meeting (prioritizing and actions) to innovate management of the snapper grouper fishery

**6. Black Sea Bass (Regulatory Amendment 37) (*Attachments 6a and 6b*)**

**Description:** In June 2025, the Council initiated Regulatory Amendment 37 to enact measures that would more immediately reduce fishing mortality and increase spawning production for black sea bass while awaiting a more comprehensive review of the 2025 SEDAR 76 update stock assessment. Council staff will present a decision document summarizing the draft amendment.

**Committee Action:** Review draft amendment, consider selecting preferred alternatives, and consider approval for public hearings.

**7. Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision (Amendment 61) (*Attachment 7*)**

**Description:** The Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU) currently consists of 55 species, many of which are unassessed or have very low landings. The Council is considering changes to the species composition of the Snapper Grouper FMU through Amendment 61 to streamline ongoing management of the FMU. In doing so, the Council has selected 17 species to evaluate if there is a continued need for conservation in management. The Council has indicated that these species may be up for removal from the FMU altogether or designated as ecosystem component species.

**Committee Action:** Review the requested information from the June 2025 meeting and develop potential measures that should be further considered in Amendment 61. Consider approving the amendment for scoping.

**8. Topics for Fall Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Meeting**

**Description:** The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel is scheduled to meet in Charleston, SC, on October 27-29, 2025. Below is a list of proposed topics to develop the AP's agenda:

- Regulatory Amendment 37 (Black Sea Bass) and update on SEDAR 76 Update stock assessment review
- Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper and Mutton Snapper)
- Amendment 60 (Commercial Permit and Trip Efficiency)
- Amendment 61 (Fishery Management Unit Revision)
- Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation
- Elect Chair and Vice Chair

- Other Potential Topics: Blueline Tilefish, Golden Tilefish, Recreational Aggregate Bag Limit
- Updates: Best Fishing Practices, SEDAR, Citizen Science, Florida Red Snapper EFP Projects

**Committee Action:** Review the proposed list of AP agenda topics and modify as needed.

## **9. Other Business**