



# SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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

## **AGENDA (REVISED)** **Snapper Grouper Committee**

Villas by the Sea Resort  
1175 N. Beachview Drive  
Jekyll Island, GA 31527

### **Tuesday, March 3, 2026, 3:15 PM – 5:00 PM**

- Approve agenda
- Approve minutes (December 2025)
- Update on submitted amendments – NMFS SERO
- New exempted fishing permit (EFP) applications briefing – NMFS SERO
- Update on submitted EFP applications – NMFS SERO

### **Wednesday, March 4, 2026, 8:30 AM – 12:00 PM**

#### **8:30 am – 9:15 am**

1. Commercial Permit and Trip Efficiency (Amendment 60)
  - a. March 2026 Commercial Sub-Committee Report (*Attachment 1*)
  - b. **Committee Action:** Review the Sub-Committee Report. Provide any additional direction to staff for amendment development.

#### **9:15 am – 10:00 am**

2. Spawning Special Management Zones (SMZ) (*Attachment 2; LE AP Report*)
  - a. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel (LE AP) Recommendations (provided during Full Council 1)
  - b. Overview – Chip Collier
  - c. **Committee Action:** Provide guidance to staff for amendment development.

--- Break ---

#### **10:15 am – 11:15 am**

3. Headboat Vessel Limits (*Attachments 3a and 3b; LE AP Report*)
  - a. Overview of requested information – Myra Brouwer & Chip Collier
  - b. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel (LE AP) Recommendations (provided during Full Council 1)
  - c. **Committee Action:** Provide guidance to staff for amendment development.

#### **11:15 am – 12:00 pm**

4. Allocation Review: Vermilion Snapper (*Attachments 4a and 4b*)
  - a. Overview – John Hadley
  - b. **Committee Action:** Provide direction on whether the existing sector allocations for Vermilion Snapper are sufficient.

--- Lunch ---

**Wednesday, March 4, 2026, 1:30 PM – 3:45 PM**

**1:30 pm – 3:00 pm**

5. Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision (Amendment 61) (*Attachments 5a and 5b; LE AP Report*)
  - a. Overview – John Hadley and Allie Iberle
  - b. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel (LE AP) Recommendations (provided during Full Council 1)
  - c. **Committee Action:** Provide guidance to staff for amendment development.

--- Break ---

**3:15 pm – 3:45 pm**

6. Black Sea Bass Follow-Up (*Attachment 6*)
  - a. Amendment 56 and Effects of Revised Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey Estimate Timing
  - b. **Committee Action:** None

**Thursday, March 5, 2026, 8:30 AM – 12:00 PM**

**8:30 am – 9:45 am**

7. Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation (*Attachment 7*)
  - a. Social Science Component Presentation – Kai Lorenzen, University of Florida
  - b. **Committee Action:** Consider recommendations for management scenarios to include in the MSE analyses.

**9:45 am – 10:15 am**

8. Yellowtail Snapper & Mutton Snapper (Amendment 44) (*Attachment 8*)
  - a. Update – Allie Iberle
  - b. **Committee Action:** None

--- Break ---

**10:30 am – 11:30 am**

9. Snapper Grouper Innovation Plan (*Attachment 9*)
  - a. Overview – Jessica McCawley and Kerry Marhefka
  - b. **Committee Action:** Finalize goalposts and principles.

**11:30 am – 11:45 am**

10. Topics for Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP)
  - a. **Committee Action:** Review agenda items for the April 2026 AP Meeting.

**11:45 am – 12:00 pm**

11. 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:**

[SAFE Report](#)

**LE AP Report:** Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Meeting January 2026

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

**Attachment 2:** Spawning Special Management Zones Update

**Attachment 3a:** Headboat Vessel Limits Update Presentation

**Attachment 3b:** Headboat Vessel Limits Report

**Attachment 4a:** Allocations Review Discussion Document

**Attachment 4b:** Allocations Review Summary Presentation

**Attachment 5a:** Amendment 61 (Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision)  
Decision Document

**Attachment 5b:** Amendment 61 (Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision)  
Decision Document Summary Presentation

**Attachment 6:** Amendment 56 (Black Sea Bass) Presentation

**Attachment 7:** Recreational Angler Attitudes and Preferences in the South Atlantic Snapper  
Grouper Fishery (*available on 2/25*)

**Attachment 8:** Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper & Mutton Snapper) Update (*available on  
2/25*)

**Attachment 9:** Innovation Plan – Draft Goalposts and Principles (*available on 2/25*)

**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 December 2025 meeting and the agenda for the March 2026 Committee meeting.

### [December 2025 Snapper Grouper Committee Report](#)

#### 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. The Sub-Committee will meet on December 8, 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. **Spawning Special Management Zones (SSMZ) (*Attachment 2; LE AP Report*)**

**Description:** The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council established five Spawning Special Management Zones (SSMZs) in 2017 where fishing for, harvest of, and/or possession of snapper-grouper species is prohibited. Three of these SSMZs are natural sites with a sunset on regulations after 10 years, while two artificial-reef SSMZs did not have the sunset provision. The Council intended to use the 10-year period to gather additional information to determine whether the natural sites are functioning as effective spawning areas for the focal species listed in the System Management Plan for the SSMZs.

To support the evaluation of the SSMZs and other protected areas, the Council established the System Management Plan (SMP) Workgroup. The workgroup is in the process of finalizing an evaluation and conducting the review. Their report can be provided to the Council as an amendment is ongoing to consider extending regulations for the SSMZs with regulations sunseting.

**Committee Action:** Consider starting an amendment for Spawning Special Management Zones

#### 3. **Headboat Vessel Limits (*Attachment 3a and 3b; LE AP Report*)**

**Description:** The Council is exploring per-angler based catch limits for federally inspected and permitted headboats (those carrying more than six passengers) as an alternative to vessel based bag limits for certain snapper grouper species. The Committee will receive a recap of the discussions and recommendations to date, including from the January 2026 meeting of the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel. The Committee will also review information requested at the September 2025 meeting for gag, black grouper, scamp, and snowy grouper.

**Committee Action:** Provide guidance on whether to initiate an amendment to consider headboat-specific regulations.

**4. Allocation Review: Vermilion Snapper (*Attachments 4a and 4b*)**

**Description:** At the December 2023 meeting, the Council approved their [Allocation Review Guidelines](#) and updated their [Allocation Review Trigger Policy](#). The guidelines specify how the Council's sector allocations will be reviewed and documented while the policy specifies when allocations reviews will occur. One of the criterion that the Council chose to trigger an allocation review is time-based, noting that each species will have its sector allocations reviewed at least once every seven years.

For this meeting, the Council will review the current sector allocations for Vermilion Snapper. In accordance with the guidelines, a summary allocations report will be developed based on the Council's discussion and presented to the Council for approval at the June 2025 meeting.

**Committee Action:** Provide direction on whether the existing sector allocations for Vermilion Snapper are sufficient.

**5. Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision (Amendment 61) (*Attachments 5a and 5b*)**

**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 and management. The Council has indicated that these species may be up for removal from the FMU altogether or designated as ecosystem component (EC) species.

At the December meeting, the Council reviewed scoping comments, draft ecosystem management objectives, and requested additional information EC species designation, including how the Mid-Atlantic and other Councils have addressed EC species. At this meeting, the Committee will review feedback from the Law Enforcement (LE) Advisory Panel (AP), the requested information on EC species designation, an updated decision document.

**Committee Action:** Review LE AP feedback, information requested at the December 2025 Council meeting, and provide direction on development of the amendment.

**6. Black Sea Bass Follow-Up (*Attachment 6*)**

**Description:** In June 2025, the Council paused work on Amendment 56 until updates to the SEDAR 76 stock assessment, including incorporation of updated recreational catch estimates, have been made. At that meeting, the Council also received an acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendation from the SSC, with the first year of new management occurring in 2027. Since then, the Council has approved Regulatory Amendment 37, which will implement short-term management changes until longer-term changes can be developed through Amendment 56, based on the updated stock assessment. Staff will review the past timeline and considered actions for Amendment 56, as well as provide an update on potential availability of updated recreational catch data.

**Committee Action:** None.

**7. Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation (*Attachment 7*)**

**Description:** As part of the ongoing South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE), research has recently been conducted assessing angler preferences to better understand attitudes and fishing behavior in the recreational fishery. This research is intended to be used to enhance the Snapper Grouper MSE and aid the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council in future decision making.

**Committee Action:** Consider recommendations for management scenarios to include in the MSE analyses.

**8. Yellowtail Snapper & Mutton Snapper (Amendment 44) (*Attachment 8*)**

**Description:** The Southeastern stocks of mutton and yellowtail snapper were recently assessed through SEDAR 79 and SEDAR 96 respectively. The stocks for both species are considered a single unit in the Gulf and South Atlantic and therefore catch levels will be modified via a joint amendment with the Gulf, with the Gulf as administrative lead. This amendment will establish the stock OFL and ABC, update jurisdictional apportionment of each stock's ABC between each Council, update regional ACLs, and update the South Atlantic sector allocations for both species. At their September meeting, the South Atlantic Council reviewed the initial decision document, including feedback from the Gulf Council's August discussion. At this meeting, the South Atlantic Council will receive a brief update on the amendment's progress and updated timeline.

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

**9. Innovative Management Approach for the Snapper Grouper Fishery (*Attachment 9*)**

**Description:** The Committee is developing a framework, first introduced during the June 2025 Council meeting, to reset Snapper Grouper fishery discussions 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. At the December 2025 meeting, the Committee refined goalposts and principles that were developed based on discussions at previous meetings. The Committee Chair and Council staff will present the goalposts and principles for final Committee approval.

**Committee Action:** Approve the management goalposts and principles.

**10. Topics for Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP)**

**Description:** The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel is scheduled to meet in Charleston, SC, on April 21-23, 2026. Below is a list of proposed topics to develop the AP's agenda:

- 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
- Southeast Reef Fish Survey Presentation
- Recreational Golden Tilefish Season
- Discussion about SG 2 (225-pound) Snapper Grouper Permits
- Other Potential Topics: Blueline Tilefish, Golden Tilefish, Recreational Aggregate Bag Limit

- Updates: Best Fishing Practices, SEDAR, Citizen Science, State Red Snapper EFP Projects

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

## **11. Other Business**

### Blueline Tilefish

In February 2026, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council sent a letter to the Council (available in ‘Additional Materials’) requesting population of the joint Council subcommittee to determine allocation of the blueline tilefish ABC north of Cape Hatteras, NC. The proposed composition of the subcommittee is 3 Council members and 1 SSC member from each of the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Councils. The Mid-Atlantic Council has proposed that the first meeting be scheduled for late March or early April, 2026. Council members that would like to volunteer for this subcommittee can inform staff.