

**FINAL**  
**SUMMARY REPORT**  
**SNAPPER GROUPEL COMMITTEE**  
**SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**  
**March 5-6, 2025**

The Committee approved the minutes from the December 2024 meeting and the agenda for the March 2025 meeting.

The Committee received updates about amendments that have been approved by the Council and were recently submitted or are under development to be submitted for secretarial review. Amendment 55 (scamp and yellowmouth grouper) is under a statutory deadline. NMFS is working on proposed rules for this amendment as well as the Commercial Electronic Logbook (which covers species under the Snapper Grouper FMP as well as Coastal Migratory Pelagics and Dolphin Wahoo).

**Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision**

In December 2024, the Council directed staff to compile information to evaluate the species included in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU). Staff presented how any revisions to the FMU could affect other Council projects, including Amendment 46 (Private Recreational Permit and Education Requirement), identification of key stocks, and the For-Hire Reporting Amendment. The Committee reviewed assessment and annual catch limit (ACL) information for all species in the FMU. Based on this information, the Committee selected species in the FMU that are clearly in need of conservation and management under a federal FMP and do not need to be evaluated at this time. The Committee directed staff to compile information to evaluate the need for conservation and management of the following species at future meetings: Atlantic spadefish, bar jack, sand tilefish, misty grouper, blackfin snapper, queen snapper, cubera snapper, banded rudderfish, jolthead porgy, knobbed porgy, saucereye porgy, scup, whitebone porgy, white grunt, sailor's choice, tomtate, and margate.

**Golden Tilefish Assessment Response**

The SEDAR 89 stock assessment of South Atlantic golden tilefish was completed in 2024 and indicated that the stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing. The Committee reviewed potential actions and decided to develop actions to address: 1) updating catch levels to be consistent with the Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) most recent recommendations, and 2) consider changing the recreational season start date. Council staff also reviewed potential timelines and amendment formats for developing these actions. The Committee requested staff to develop a timing and format recommendation and provide that at Full Council.

Council staff recommends addressing the catch level changes through an abbreviated framework that would tentatively be scheduled for public hearing and final Council approval in June or September 2025. To allow the more expedient timeline for these catch levels and avoid a separate rulemaking process for the recreational season start date change, staff recommends adding this action to Amendment 56 (Black Sea Bass; expected Council approval in March 2026).

**DIRECTION TO STAFF:** PREPARE AN ABBREVIATED FRAMEWORK TO ADJUST CATCH LEVELS OF GOLDEN TILEFISH AND ADDRESS MODIFICATION OF THE RECREATIONAL SEASON START DATE IN AMENDMENT 56 (BLACK SEA BASS).

### **Commercial Sub-Committee Report**

The Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee) met on March 3, 2025. A [summary report](#) for this meeting is included in the March 2025 Council meeting briefing book. The Sub-Committee’s next meeting will occur in-person, ahead of the June 2025 Council Meeting. Based on the Sub-Committee’s recommendations, the Committee passed the following motion and provided the following direction to staff:

**MOTION 1:** INITIATE AN AMENDMENT THAT WILL ADDRESS COMMERCIAL PERMIT AND TRIP EFFICIENCY ISSUES.

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- Commercial permit issues may include:
  - Revision of the 2 for 1 commercial SG 1 (unlimited) permit policy
  - Consideration of limiting the number of permits that can be owned per entity
  - Consideration of establishing income requirements or “use it or lose it” provisions
    - **Direction to staff:** Gather information on the use of income requirements for fisheries in other regions.
- Ways to increase trip efficiency may include:
  - Trip limit increases if landings are below a threshold by a specified date in the season (“step-ups”)
  - Establishment of a non-target or out-of-season allowance for species that are not overfished.

**DIRECTION TO STAFF:** DO NOT INCLUDE CONSIDERATION OF AGGREGATE TRIP LIMITS AT THIS TIME IN THE INTEREST OF EFFICIENCY. THE COUNCIL HAS NOT HAD ENOUGH TIME TO DISCUSS THIS TOPIC IN DEPTH.

### **Presentation on Status Determination Criteria Proxies**

The NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) staff presented information on MSY proxies and their use in management. The Council had the following discussion and gave the following direction to staff:

- The Committee agreed with the SEFSC’s recommended approach of species-specific evaluation of MSY and  $F_{MSY}$  proxies.
- The Committee discussed the possibility of requesting a range of SPR proxies, which the Council could use to consider different management goals through different associated selectivities.
- The Committee also discussed the possibility of incrementally shifting target SPR levels over time. This could allow a smoother transition from current targets to long-term targets.

- Request the following items for review and discussion at a future meeting:
  - A non-technical presentation from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute’s stock assessment group discussing their perspectives on developing spawning potential ratio (SPR)-based MSY proxies for state and federally-managed species.
  - A compilation and comparison of SPR proxies for Southeastern stocks that have MSY estimates based on stock-recruitment relationships.
  - A discussion of management situations that would require a higher or lower SPR.

**Update on Secretarial Amendment to end overfishing of red snapper in the South Atlantic**

The NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office presented information on Amendment 59 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan, which is a secretarial amendment that ends overfishing of South Atlantic red snapper and reduces discards. The Committee asked clarifying questions and discussed recommendations, which will be submitted to NOAA Fisheries on behalf of the Council via a letter by March 17, 2025. Staff will present a list of drafted bullet points in Full Council, which will be used to develop the Council’s comment letter.

**Black Sea Bass (Amendment 56)**

SEDAR 76 included data through 2021 and indicated that the black sea bass stock in the South Atlantic is at very low levels in recent years. In January – February 2025, Council staff conducted scoping for this amendment. The Committee reviewed scoping comments and discussed the ranges of actions and alternatives that should be drafted in the amendment. The Committee directed staff to develop the amendment with the following actions:

- Reduce catch levels (ABC, annual catch limit [ACL], and optimum yield [OY])
- Consider revising status determination criteria (SDC)
  - Develop several alternatives, including the current proxy (30% SPR), recommended proxy (40% SPR), and a flexible proxy based on the best scientific information (BSIA).
  - Additional alternatives may be developed following the Council’s MSY proxy discussions in June 2025.
- Change fishing year start date
  - Include an alternative to revise the fishing year for both sectors to begin on January 1.
- Re-open nearshore areas to on-demand black sea bass pots.
- Prohibit multi-hook rigs for the RECREATIONAL snapper grouper fishery
- Revise the recreational bag limit
  - Explore an alternative for a larger bag limit (currently 7 fish per person per day)
  - Analysts will provide a range of alternatives for review in June
- Reduce the recreational size limit (currently 13 inches)
  - Range from 11 inches to 13 inches.
- Recreational seasonal retention closure (seasonal closure for black sea bass only)
  - Include an alternative to close from January-April (include different alternatives for the length of closures)
  - Include information on whether discards were reduced during historical closures in the evaluation.
- Regional management actions

- Staff will draft actions to potentially vary management of black sea bass for different areas of the region.
- Include action to address recreational season start date for golden tilefish.

The Committee additionally directed staff to continue communicating with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and state agencies to discuss consistent or additional management in state waters, allowing for more effective management in federal waters.

The Committee directed staff not to include an action considering changes to sector allocations. This is consistent with the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel’s recommendation, which also noted that the poor stock condition limits any advantage to reallocating at this time.

### **Private Recreational Permit & Education Requirements (Amendment 46)**

#### Purpose and Need

The Committee made the following edit to the purpose statement:

The **purpose** of the amendment is to develop a federal recreational permitting system that will identify the universe of private anglers or vessels targeting South Atlantic snapper grouper species and will enhance the ability to collect recreational effort and catch data through potential ~~increases~~ MODIFICATIONS in survey frame and precision of effort estimation. Also work to promote best recreational fishing practices through education.

#### Action 1

A Committee member requested information on tradeoff in costs and burden to the agency based on permit type. The agency is currently not able to provide such information as funding and staff capacity are uncertain.

#### Action 2

The Committee discussed Draft Alternative 5, which was added for consideration in December 2024. The alternative would have considered covering “key stocks” under the federal recreational permit. However, the Council has not yet defined key stocks beyond them being a sub-set of the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit. Therefore, the Committee opted to remove the alternative from consideration as it would not be possible to analyze until key stocks are selected. Thus, the Committee made no changes to Action 2 other than removing the draft alternative from further consideration. The Committee wants the public to understand that the permit may cover the entirety of the management unit or a subset of it. However, the Committee acknowledged the potential for a “loophole” if a permit were required only for certain species.

The Committee made no changes to Action 3 or Action 4.

#### Action 5

There was concern among Committee members about the way the action and alternatives are written in that there is not enough flexibility for states. The action should not be prescriptive and dictate what a state can and cannot do.

It was clarified that the structure of the action and alternatives is based on recommendations from the technical advisory panel.

The Committee would like to continue to consider a way to “grandfather in” or exempt a state that already has an existing program, such as Florida. The Florida state representative indicated that changing the structure of the Florida State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS) and the species it covers to match the requirements of a federal permit would be difficult and take time because it is tied to statutory language.

The Committee had the following comments and questions:

- Could a state be exempt from the permit requirement based on how prevalent a species or group of species is for that state?
- The Florida program is certified by MRIP. Could flexibility be built-in for states if certified by MRIP?
- Could the number of species be based initially on those covered by the FL SRFS, work up coast to see what species would be most relevant, and narrow down the list of core species from there?
- Could a time component be built in? For example, a state could be exempt for a certain amount of time while species are being changed?
- Could another broader sub-alternative be considered along the lines of “species proposed by the state contingent upon review and approval by the Council”?
- NMFS proposed having a conversation with state directors on what would be acceptable for the species covered under a federal permit.
- The Committee briefly discussed modeling this action on how the National Saltwater Angler Registry was implemented.

DIRECTION TO STAFF:

- DEVELOP A SUB-ALTERNATIVE THAT WOULD EXEMPT A STATE BASED ON ACCEPTING A PROPOSAL FROM THAT STATE (SIMILAR TO HOW THE NATIONAL SALTWATER ANGLER REGISTRY WORKS OR THE ASMFC CONSERVATION EQUIVALENCY).
- STATE DIRECTORS TO DISCUSS WITH NMFS THE SPECIFICS OF HOW STATES COULD BE EXEMPT.
- SUBMIT ADDITIONAL REQUEST TO SERO AND THE OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY TO INCLUDE IN THE PRESENTATION FOR JUNE AN UPDATE OF HOW THE NATIONAL SALTWATER ANGLER REGISTRY HAS BEEN WORKING. IN THIS PRESENTATION, COULD OST SPEAK TO WHETHER IT IS POSSIBLE TO ADD A STATE ISSUED FEDERAL FISHERIES ENDORSEMENT TO AN EXISTING ANGLER IN THE NSAR DATA DISSEMINATION PROCESS. ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE WILL BE SOUGHT BETWEEN SERO AND STATES TO CLARIFY THE ADDED REQUEST FOR THE JUNE PRESENTATION.

- BRING THE AMENDMENT BACK TO COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER FOR APPROVAL FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS IN JUNE 2025.

### **Topics for Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Meeting**

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel is scheduled to meet in Charleston, SC, on April 2-3, 2025. The Committee approved the following list of agenda items:

- Gag FPR Update (Including stock risk rating)
- Black Sea Bass Stock Risk Rating
- Amendment 56 (Black Sea Bass)
- For-Hire Reporting Amendment
- Golden Tilefish Assessment Response (Catch levels only?)
- Lines of Communication: Conversations with the Council Meeting Run-Through
- Review the Council’s Research Plan
- Spawning SMZ research presentation
- Amendment Update: Amendment 46 (Recreational Permitting and Education Requirements), Commercial Amendment, Amendment 59
- Other Updates: Best Fishing Practices, SEDAR, Citizen Science, Florida Red Snapper EFP Projects, For-hire limited entry

### **Other Business**

The Committee approved the following motion:

**MOTION 2:** INITIATE AN AMENDMENT TO CONSIDER OPTIONS FOR SNAPPER GROUPEER AGGREGATE RECREATIONAL BAG LIMITS AND OTHER MANAGEMENT ACTIONS TO REDUCE RECREATIONAL DEAD DISCARDS. (THIS COULD BE INCLUDED IN ANOTHER AMENDMENT ALREADY ON THE WORKPLAN).

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### **Timing and Tasks:**

**MOTION 3:** DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Update the Shiny tool to evaluate the need for conservation and management of snapper grouper species.
- Prepare golden tilefish amendment as an abbreviated framework to adjust golden tilefish catch levels only that would be approved at the June or September Council meeting.
- Request additional information on MSY proxies from Florida FWRI and the SEFSC.
- Draft and submit the Council’s comment letter on Amendment 59 (secretarial amendment) and submit by the March 17 deadline.
- Develop draft actions and alternatives for Amendment 56, including the action to consider aligning the start date of the golden tilefish recreational season with that of other deep water species.
- Conduct the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel meeting.

- Plan and conduct the Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee's June 2025 meeting.
- Continue work on Amendment 46. Prepare the amendment for approval for public hearings in June 2025.
- Staff to begin development of the commercial amendment as soon as the abbreviated golden tilefish amendment is complete.

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**