FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPER COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
September 15-17, 2026

The Committee approved the minutes from the June 2026 Snapper Grouper Committee and the April 2026 Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee meetings and the agenda for the September 2026 meeting.

The Committee received an update from SERO on the following amendments that have been submitted to NOAA Fisheries: Abbreviated Framework Amendment 5 (Blueline Tilefish), Regulatory Amendment 36 (Gag and Black Grouper vessel limits and Black Sea Bass on-demand gear), Regulatory Amendment 37 (Black Sea Bass Short-Term Management Measures), Amendment 48 (Wreckfish), Amendment 54 (Commercial E-Logbook), and Amendment 55 (Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper). The agency updated that the proposed rule for Abbreviated Framework 5 published on July 13, 2026, and comments were due no later than August 12, 2026.

The Committee received an update from SERO on exempted fishing permit (EFP) applications. The EFP application from Cultimar Technologies, Inc., that was reviewed by the Council at a previous meeting has been approved, with the condition that harvest under this EFP would not coincide with an open red snapper season, as recommended by the Council. In July 2026, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina submitted EFP applications for recreational harvest of red snapper to test state management and data collection strategies. The comment period for these EFPs ended on August 25, 2026, and comments for those applications are currently being reviewed by NOAA Fisheries.

Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision (Amendment 61)
The Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU) currently consists of 55 species, many of which are unassessed or have low landings. The Council is considering changes to the species composition of the Snapper Grouper FMU through Amendment 61 to streamline management of the fishery. In doing so, the Council has selected 14 species to evaluate whether they continue to need management under a federal plan. The Council has indicated that these species could be removed from the FMU altogether or could be designated as ecosystem component (EC) species. Additionally, Amendment 61 considers establishing a permit and reporting requirement to fish for or harvest EC species commercially or onboard for-hire vessels and an aggregate recreational bag limit for EC species.

The Committee reviewed the purpose and need statements and actions in the amendment. In doing so, the Committee provided the following motion and direction to staff:

MOTION 1: APPROVE DRAFT ALTERNATIVE 6 FOR INCLUSION IN ACTION 2.
Action 2. Designate additional ecosystem component species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan and adjust annual catch limits

DRAFT Alternative 6. Designate **bar jack** as ecosystem component species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

DIRECTION TO STAFF:

- In the tables covering recreational landings, include associated error estimates.
- At the next meeting, include additional information on landings in state versus federal waters.
- Move Action 3 to be the first action in the amendment, since subsequent decisions by Committee members are dependent upon the preferred alternative selected in that action.
- In Action 3, revise the wording of Alternative 3 to clarify that the intent is for the permit requirement to only apply on board federal for-hire vessels. Make mention of for-hire vessels earlier in the alternative wording rather than at the very end.
- Request that NMFS provide information on policy guidelines for establishing permit requirements for EC species. Specifically, other examples of where this has occurred and whether other Councils have implemented such a permit or whether this Council may require limited entry commercial permits as the sole commercial permit option to harvest EC species.
- Change the sub-alternatives of Action 4 to include 10, 15, or 20 fish.
- Prepare the amendment for approval for public hearing approval at the March 2027 meeting.

Yellowtail Snapper & Mutton Snapper (Amendment 44)

Joint Snapper Grouper Amendment 44/Reef Fish Amendment 55 is in response to SEDAR 79 for mutton snapper and SEDAR 96 for yellowtail snapper, where both assessments indicated that the stocks are not overfished or experiencing overfishing. The amendment will establish the stock OFL and ABC and jurisdictional apportionment between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, establish regional ACLs, and modify South Atlantic sector allocations for each species. Staff reviewed an updated decision document, draft amendment, and August 2026 Gulf Council Action. The Council made the following motions/recommendations:

MOTION 2: APPROVE SNAPPER GROUPER AMENDMENT 44 REEF FISH AMENDMENT 55 FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Evaluate Sunsetting of Spawning Special Management Zones (SSMZ) (Regulatory Amendment 39)

Regulatory Amendment 39 addresses the sunset provision for the South Cape Lookout, Georgetown/Devil's Hole, and Warsaw Holes spawning special management zones. Staff reviewed a decision document and draft amendment, including feedback from the SSC and System Management Plan Workgroup. The Committee made the following recommendations:

Direction To Staff: Modify the Purpose and Need statement

MOTION 3: APPROVE THE PURPOSE AND NEED FOR REGULATORY AMENDMENT 39.
The *purpose* of this framework amendment is to examine the current spawning protections provided by the established South Cape Lookout, Georgetown Hole/Devil's Holes, and Warsaw Hole spawning special management zones and modify the sunset provisions to allow for continued protection, research, and monitoring to occur within the areas.

The *need* for this framework amendment is to continue to protect spawning fish and spawning habitat in the established spawning special management zones and allow for continued research and monitoring within these areas which would contribute to achieving optimum yield and providing positive social and economic effects for snapper grouper fishermen and fishing communities.
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 4: SELECT OPTION 3 AS THE PREFERRED FOR ACTION 1.
Action 1. Modify the sunset provision for the South Cape Lookout spawning special management Zone.

Preferred Option 3. Extend the sunset provision for the South Cape Lookout spawning special management zone by **10 years**, starting August 3, 2027, and ending August 2, 2037.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 5: SELECT OPTION 3 AS THE PREFERRED FOR ACTION 2.
Action 2. Modify the sunset provision for the Georgetown Hole spawning special management Zone.

Preferred Option 3. Extend the sunset provision for the Georgetown Hole spawning special management zone by **10 years**, starting August 3, 2027, and ending August 2, 2037.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 6: SELECT OPTION 3 AS THE PREFERRED FOR ACTION 3.
Action 3. Modify the sunset provision for the Warsaw Hole spawning special management Zone.

Preferred Option 3. Extend the sunset provision for the Warsaw Hole spawning special management zone by **10 years**, starting August 3, 2027, and ending August 2, 2037.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 7: APPROVE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 39 FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Direction to Staff: The Council highlighted issues that spot lock technologies built into trolling motors may pose with the SSMZ regulations:

- Currently a person on board a fishing vessel may not anchor, use an anchor and chain, or use a grapple and chain while in the spawning SMZs (50 CFR 622.183(a)(2)(i)).
- Currently for a fishing vessel to possess snapper-grouper species on board while in a spawning SMZ, the vessel must be in transit, and fishing gear must be appropriately stowed (50 CFR 622.183(a)(2)(i)).
- Spot lock technology may allow a vessel to stay in the areas without a traditional anchor.
- Staff were directed to investigate and consider modifying language that would stipulate that having spot lock gear turned off would be included in the definition of gear stowed (Appendix I). THE COUNCIL DISCUSSED INCLUDING THIS INFORMATION IN THE AMENDMENT BUT NO ACTION NEEDS TO BE TAKEN.

Commercial Management Measures (Amendment 60)

The Committee reviewed comments provided through public hearings and the public comment process conducted from July 27, 2026, through September 1, 2026. Additional comments are still being received through September 18, 2026. NOAA Fisheries staff from the Office of Law Enforcement and Limited Access Permit Program presented information on vessel monitoring systems and how information on gear changes could potentially be communicated to law enforcement. The Committee reviewed the amendment's actions and alternatives, had the following discussion, and passed the following motions:

- The Committee had no suggested changes for the Purpose and Need statements, but did direct staff to incorporate specific discussion about the economic benefits of the included actions, specifically with respect to current high fuel prices.
- The Committee discussed concerns about potential timing delays that could occur due to the establishment of new systems resulting from Action 2 (bottom longline stowage and species restriction). The Committee requested that NOAA Fisheries consider delayed implementation of Action 2 relative to other actions in Amendment 60 that could be implemented more quickly.

MOTION 8: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 4 (REQUIRE VMS TO SWITCH TO/FROM BOTTOM LONGLINE GEAR) AS PREFERRED UNDER ACTION 2.

Action 2. Revise bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species that may be harvested while gear is on board and stowed

Alternative 4. Modify the regulations restricting possession of snapper grouper species to allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Appropriately stowed means longline hooks are not baited or are not on the deck of the vessel. Vessel operators who intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear on a single trip are required to carry an active and approved vessel monitoring system on board and send a notification via the vessel monitoring system to the National Marine Fisheries Service before each gear change on that trip.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE (1 ABSTENTION)
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

- The Committee discussed that the requirements for vessel monitoring systems would be that the systems must have satellite connectivity, be turned on for any trips during which the vessel intends to switch to or from bottom longline gear within the trip, and must submit positioning information (i.e. ping rate) hourly.
- The Committee discussed potential conflicts with Highly Migratory Species (HMS) specifications and directed staff to develop alternatives and discussions to reduce conflicts with HMS as much as possible.
    - Staff informed the Committee that one potential conflict resulting from several snapper grouper species being demersal indicator species for HMS longline vessels is under consideration for removal and anticipated to be removed prior to implementation of this action.
- The Committee continues to emphasize that the preferred VMS requirement is only for commercial vessels that intend to switch to or from bottom longline gear within a trip; VMS would not be required for most commercial vessels, based on current gears and methods of operation.
- The Committee discussed red porgy trip limits, noting the stock's long-time overfished status no notable progress toward rebuilding, as well as a relatively large amount of harvest occurring outside the South Atlantic region.

MOTION 9: MOVE ACTION 5 (RED PORGY TRIP LIMITS) TO CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED.

Action 5. Revise commercial trip limit for red porgy
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

- The Committee discussed hogfish (GA-NC) trip limits, noting the stock's unknown stock status, ease of harvest and high desirability among spearfishermen, and economic benefits of a higher trip limit.

MOTION 10: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2 (INCREASE TRIP LIMIT TO 750 LBS WW) AS PREFERRED UNDER ACTION 6 (HOGFISH).

Action 6. Revise commercial trip limit for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina)

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina to 750 lbs ww.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE (1 OBJECTION)
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

- The Committee discussed red grouper trip limits. Some concern was expressed about the principle of increasing a trip limit for an overfished stock, with some specific concerns for the stock's health off North Carolina.
- Some members stated that the annual catch limit provides a sustainable level of harvest and prevents negative biological effects. Members also noted that fishery-independent information may indicate some amount of recovery in recent years.

MOTION 11: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2 (300 LB GW TRIP LIMIT) AS PREFERRED FOR ACTION 7 (RED GROUPER).

Action 7. Revise commercial trip limit for red grouper

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for red grouper to 300 lbs gw; 354 lbs ww.
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE (6-4-1ABS)
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

- The Committee discussed gray triggerfish trip limits. Some concern was expressed about the stock's unknown status and recent declines in fishery-independent indices. The Committee intends to receive input from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel to further inform the consideration of a trip limit change.

MOTION 12: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION) AS PREFERRED FOR ACTION 8 (GRAY TRIGGERFISH).

Action 8. Revise commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not increase the commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish. The current trip limit for gray triggerfish is 1,000 lbs ww.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

- The Committee discussed the action to require sale of all snapper grouper caught on commercial trips. Through this discussion, the Committee decided that this action could be more appropriately addressed through another amendment currently under development to address other commercial sale considerations.

MOTION 13: MOVE ACTION 10 (COMMERCIAL SALE REQUIREMENT) TO THE 'SUNDAY SALE' AMENDMENT.

Action 10. Require sale of all snapper grouper caught on commercial trips
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 14: APPROVE ALL ACTIONS FOR AMENDMENT 60**.**
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Headboat Vessel Limits (Regulatory Amendment 38)

Regulatory Amendment 38 proposes a headboat-specific, per six passenger vessel limit for gag and black grouper. This vessel limit would allow headboats that meet specified criteria to increase the amount of gag and black grouper they may retain as they carry more passengers. Staff reviewed an updated decision document including the updated criteria for a headboat to retain a "per-6 passenger" limit and preliminary analysis. Discussion focused on the criteria a vessel must meet to retain this vessel limit. The recommended criteria were that a vessel must have the federal charter for-hire permit and participate in the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS). The Committee expressed concerns about "true" headboats operating outside of this survey and how possible changes to the survey would affect the ability to retain the vessel limit. The Committee also discussed certificate of inspection (COI) criteria and how this should be required since it is needed to take more than 6 passengers on a vessel. The Committee made the following recommendations:

Direction to Staff: With regards to the criteria a vessel must meet to retain the proposed headboat vessel limit:

- Remove the requirement of participation in the SRHS.
- Add the requirement of a valid COI.

Action 1. Revise the for-hire vessel limits for gag and black grouper.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Within the 3-fish combined grouper and tilefish aggregate bag limit, the daily bag limit is one gag or black grouper, combined. The for-hire vessel limit for gag and black grouper is 2 fish per trip in any combination; the more restrictive limit applies. Captain and crew may not retain gag or black grouper.

Alternative 2. Modify the for-hire vessel limit to be **2 gag or black grouper, in any combination per 6 passengers** for vessels with the South Atlantic Charter/Headboat for Snapper-Grouper For-Hire Fishing Permit (Open Access), and have a valid certificate of inspection (COI). Any vessel that has a valid South Atlantic Charter/Headboat for Snapper-Grouper For-Hire Fishing Permit (Open Access) and does not have a valid certificate of inspection (COI) would have a vessel limit of 2 gag or black grouper combined per vessel per day. Captain and crew may not retain gag or black grouper.

Sub-Alternative 2a. The maximum number of gag or black grouper, combined, is 8 fish per vessel.

Sub-Alternative 2b. The maximum number of gag or black grouper, combined, is 10 fish per vessel.

Sub-Alternative 2c. The maximum number of gag or black grouper, combined, is 12 fish per vessel.

MOTION 15: APPROVE THE PURPOSE AND NEED FOR REGULATORY AMENDMENT 38.

Purpose: The **purpose** of this framework amendment is to revise the for-hire vessel limit for gag and black grouper, to allow vessels that have a valid South Atlantic Snapper-Grouper Charter/Headboat (Open Access) Permit and a valid certificate of inspection (COI) to retain a per-six-passenger limit of gag and black grouper.

***Need*:** The **need** for this framework amendment is to allow for greater efficiency and increased profitability for federally permitted headboats that meet the criteria for the headboat vessel limit, while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

APPROVED BY THE COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

NOTE: THE COUNCIL ADDED AN ACTION TO THIS AMENDMENT TO ADJUST CATCH LEVELS FOR GOLDEN TILEFISH SO THE PURPOSE AND NEED WILL BE REVISED.

MOTION 16: INITIATE A FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT TO ESTABLISH A RECREATIONAL FISHING SEASON FOR GOLDEN TILEFISH WITH THE GOAL OF IT ALIGNING WITH THAT FOR OTHER DW SPECIES (BLUELINE, SNOWY).
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) Updates

Staff provided the Committee updates on the Southeastern Black Grouper, South Atlantic, and Wreckfish Management Strategy Evaluations (MSE). The Black Grouper MSE was initiated in response to data limitations identified during SEDAR 48. The current phase of the MSE focused on developing an indicator to monitor stock status and inform future management decisions. Development of the MSE is nearing completion, and the results are scheduled for review by a joint SSC sub-group composed of members from the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees in October 2026.

Project leads working on the South Atlantic MSE project have been working on analyzing the aggregate bag limit and better incorporating stock assessments into the MSE. Blue Matter staff have been updating the MSE software to allow results from multiple stock assessments to be incorporated into a single MSE framework. Due to delays in the availability of recreational data needed for the Red Snapper and Black Sea Bass stock assessments, completion of the MSE will be delayed until next year.

The Wreckfish Adaptive Implemented Management (AIM) project continues to engage stakeholders to gather input for the project. Project leads conducted one-on-one meetings with several stakeholders to better understand the fishery, stakeholder perspectives, and management priorities.

Wreckfish Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) Program Review

At their March 2026 meeting, the Council directed staff to begin work on the next review of the Wreckfish ITQ program. The draft Wreckfish ITQ was not ready for review at this meeting. To ensure the review stays on schedule, the Council was comfortable with the Wreckfish Advisory Panel reviewing the document first at their November 2026 meeting and providing their perspective on possible conclusions and recommendations. The Council will review their input during the December 2026 meeting and finalize the ITQ review.

Blueline Tilefish Joint Sub-Committee Report

Council staff reported on a meeting of the Joint SAFMC and MAFMC Sub-Committee on Blueline Tilefish (Sub-Committee) that occurred on July 20 and 22, 2026. The Sub-Committee reviewed recent data, provided initial guidance for staff to develop a rubric for apportioning the acceptable biological catch between regions ahead of the next stock assessment, and recommended maintaining the current apportionment percentages until that rubric is developed. The Committee agreed with the Sub-Committee's recommendations to continue to meet and develop the apportionment rubric.

Topics for Fall Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Meeting

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) is scheduled to meet in Charleston, SC, on October 6-8, 2026. Below is a list of proposed topics to develop the AP's agenda:

- Red Grouper Fishery Performance Report
- Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper and Mutton Snapper)
- Amendment 38 (Headboat Vessel Limits)
    - With the addition of golden tilefish catch levels
- Framework Amendment X - establishing a golden tilefish recreational season that begins aligns with other DW species recreational seasons (May 1).

- Regulatory Amendment 40 (Black Sea Bass Closed Areas)
- Amendment 60 (Commercial Permit and Trip Efficiency)
    - Request a presentation on VMS from OLE/LAPP
- Amendment 39 (SSMZ Sunset Provision)
- Amendment Updates: Amendment 61 (Fishery Management Unit Revision)
- Other Updates: Best Fishing Practices, SEDAR, Citizen Science, State Red Snapper EFP Applications
- TBD 'Sunday Sale' Amendment
    - Discussion about what professionalization of the commercial fishery looks like
    - How to ensure that people with commercial permits are actually fishing commercially
- Discussion on improving commercial discard data collection
    - Request a presentation from Mote

The Committee also noted that discussions about recreational discard data collection and shark depredation should be scheduled for the April AP meeting.

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION 17: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- CONVENE MEETINGS OF THE SNAPPER GROUPER AND WRECKFISH ADVISORY PANELS IN FALL 2026.
- CONTINUE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WRECKFISH ITQ REVIEW FOR DISCUSSION AT THE NOVEMBER 2026 WRECKFISH AP MEETING AND THE DECEMBER 2026 COUNCIL MEETING.
- CONTINUE DEVELOPMENT OF AMENDMENT 60 FOR CONSIDERATION OF FINAL COUNCIL APPROVAL AT THE DECEMBER 2026 COUNCIL MEETING.
- CONTINUE DEVELOPMENT OF AMENDMENT 61 FOR CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC HEARING APPROVAL AT THE MARCH 2027 MEETING.
- DEVELOP REGULATORY AMENDMENT 40 (BLACK SEA BASS CLOSED AREAS) FOR CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC HEARING APPROVAL IN DECEMBER 2026.
- CONDUCT WEBINAR PUBLIC HEARINGS FOR AMENDMENT 44 (YELLOWTAIL & MUTTON SNAPPER) IN CONJUCTION WITH THE GULF COUNCIL.
- CONDUCT A WEBINAR PUBLIC HEARING FOR REGULATORY AMENDMENT 39 (SUNSET PROVISION FOR SSMZs).
- CONTINUE DEVELOPMENT OF REGULATORY AMENDMENT 38 (HEADBOAT) AND ADD GOLDEN TILE CATCH LIMIT ADJUSTMENT
- INITIATE A FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT TO ADDRESS A GOLDEN TILEFISH RECREATIONAL FISHING SEASON.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Appendix I.

Below is information from the Code of Federal Register pertaining to anchoring, transiting, and stowing gear within the spawning special management zones

Anchoring

50 FR 622.183(a)(2) Spawning SMZs.

> (i) "…For a fishing vessel to possess snapper-grouper species on board while in a spawning SMZ, the vessel must be in transit and fishing gear must be appropriately stowed, as specified in paragraph (a)(2)…A person on board a fishing vessel may **not anchor**, use **an anchor and chain**, or use **a grapple and chain** while in the spawning SMZs…"

Transiting and Stowing Gear

50 CFR 622.183(a)(2) Spawning SMZs.

> (vii) For the purpose of paragraph (a)(2)(i) this section, **transit means direct, non-stop progression through the spawning SMZ**. Fishing gear appropriately stowed means-
>
> (A) A longline may be left on the drum if all gangions and hooks are disconnected and stowed below deck. Hooks cannot be baited. All buoys must be disconnected from the gear; however, buoys may remain on deck.
> (B) Trawl doors and nets must be out of the water, but the doors are not required to be on deck or secured on or below deck.
> (C) A gillnet, stab net, or trammel net must be left on the drum. Any additional such nets not attached to the drum must be stowed below deck.
> (D) **Terminal gear** (*i.e.,* hook, leader, sinker, flasher, or bait) used with an automatic reel, bandit gear, buoy gear, handline, or rod and reel **must be disconnected** and **stowed separately from such fishing gear**. **Sinkers must be disconnected from the down rigger and stowed separately**.
> (E) A crustacean trap, golden crab trap, or sea bass pot cannot be baited. All buoys must be disconnected from the gear; however, buoys may remain on deck.

Some things to think about: If a vessel is in possession of snapper grouper species and was using spot lock to remain in one place (not moving) in the SSMZ and/or if gear is not stowed, it can be assumed they would be in violation, however since there is a motor running and the vessel could still be moving slightly, would this qualify as non-stop progression? The goal of the anchoring provision was to protect habitat so using a spot lock would not affect the habitat.