



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

# Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Report

June 2026

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# TOPICS NOT ON JUNE 2026 COUNCIL AGENDA



PC: NC Sea Grant



# GOLDEN TILEFISH

Should the Council consider changing the start date for the recreational golden tilefish fishing year?

**AP RECOMMENDATION:** Consider changing the golden tilefish recreational fishing year to begin on May 1.

- This would align with season start dates for blueline tilefish and snowy grouper, with the following benefits:
  - Fewer discards for areas where species are found together
  - Greater trip efficiency for deep water fisheries (including outside the SG fishery, e.g. swordfish)
  - Avoidance of harvesting golden tilefish early in the year, when fishermen have observed spawning fish
- Lower priority issue, but another example of a high priority need for sub-regional management

# 2025/26 BLACK SEA BASS SEASON



Members were asked for observations from the 2025/26 season

- NC – BSB fishing was significantly better
  - More and larger fish
  - Bag limits caught more frequently
  - More keeper-sized fish closer to shore
  - More recreational vessels on the water, even during winter
- Northern SC – BSB fishing was consistent with recent years
- Southern SC – Big decline in BSB, even after pots were removed; continued concern about effects from red snapper
- FL – Better BSB fishing than seen in a long time; cold water intrusion affected several fisheries, including bringing BSB back to the area and closer to shore



# SNAPPER GROUPER MSE

- AP received a presentation on the Angler Attitudes survey conducted by U of Florida
- Members raised concern about the sample potentially over-representing anglers without a strong interest in the fishery.
- Members expressed concern with how this survey might be used to support future management.
- Members also recommended specific, separate surveys in the future to capture perspectives of the for-hire component



# COMMERCIAL SG 2 PERMIT

- Members stated the SG 2 permit has become an essential part of the commercial fishery
  - Fewer large boats; loss of working waterfront has led to a shift toward smaller 'dayboats', which comprise a large portion of SG 2 permit holders
  - Boutique fishery with less expectation for large amounts of fish
- Some members supported making SG 2 permits transferable
  - Some members expressed concern with greater access leading to wealthy recreational fishermen acquiring permits to have higher trip limits
- Generally, changes to the SG 2 permit should wait until after there is some time to see effects of Am 60
- A permit pool to maintain the current number of SG 2 permits may be useful

# TOPICS ON JUNE 2026 COUNCIL AGENDA





# REG AM 40 (BLACK SEA BASS)

Should black sea bass pot trip limit reductions be considered in Reg Am 40?

AP RECOMMENDATION: The black sea bass pot trip limit should not be reduced. If it is decreased any lower, that component of the fishery will no longer be profitable.

- In NC, the market for South Atlantic fish is affected by the Mid-Atlantic trawl fishery, which lowers the price.
  - The larger Mid-Atlantic trawl fishery catches more fish at a time and floods the market.
  - Mid-Atlantic BSB catch levels were recently increased.
  - Uneven regulations between the Mid and South Atlantic create a situation where the South Atlantic fishery cannot compete in markets.



# REG AM 40 (BLACK SEA BASS)

Should the Council consider removing the nearshore seasonal BSB pot closures for on-demand gear?

AP RECOMMENDATION: AP supports the opening of nearshore seasonal closures to on-demand gear.

- Pot fishery has little bycatch and few discards; increased access not likely to significantly increase discards
- Not likely for the BSB pot fishery to become a derby fishery due to the low number of active endorsements and even lower number of fishermen currently with on-demand gear.
  - On-demand gear has a significant expense; fishermen will need to balance whether the fishing access benefits are worth the financial cost.
- Some concern from the for-hire industry about balancing access to nearshore areas that currently have seasonal closures to pots; consider adjusting the fishing years to balance access.

# AMENDMENT 60 (COMMERCIAL MANAGEMENT)



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## Action 1. Remove 2-for-1 policy for SG 1 permits

- Mixed opinions; no consensus recommendation at this time
- Some support for if the 2-for-1 policy is removed, only allow active permits to be exchanged 1-for-1
  - Still require a 2-for-1 exchange to transfer latent permits
  - This could mitigate immediate increases in effort
- Leasing – Some ability to lease permitted vessels is necessary as an avenue for newer entrants to participate without the full investment of ownership
  - While the AP acknowledged that some leasing practices are problematic, it is difficult to develop a workable solution that wouldn't have loopholes

# AMENDMENT 60 (COMMERCIAL MANAGEMENT)



## Action 2. Bottom LL stowage requirements and species restriction

- VMS – Commercial members don't want a VMS requirement, but may be willing to accept if it allows additional access or higher trip limits (e.g. multiple trip limits for multi-day trips)
  - Members noted communication benefits and financial expenses needed to acquire, maintain, or transfer VMS units.
- Bottom LL stowage requirements may need to be more flexible.
  - Smaller vessels may not have space to stow gear below deck.
  - Longer LL configurations (e.g. golden tilefish LLs) take several hours to bait and need to be able to be stowed on board with bait on hooks to maximize efficiency.
  - Clarify differences between bottom LL gear and buoy gear.

# AMENDMENT 60 (COMMERCIAL MANAGEMENT)



## Action 3. Greater Amberjack Trip Limit

- Some members supported higher trip limits of 1,500 or 1,750 lbs
- Others supported maintaining the current trip limits, stating concerns for localized depletion in some areas (e.g. Morehead City, NC)
- All members stated 2,000 lbs was too much of an increase



# AMENDMENT 60 (COMMERCIAL MANAGEMENT)



## Action 4. Vermilion Snapper Trip Limit

- AP generally supported increasing the vermilion snapper trip limit; one member specifically supported 1,500 lbs
- Longer trips would particularly benefit
- Increase may help rebuild trust with commercial stakeholders



# AMENDMENT 60 (COMMERCIAL MANAGEMENT)



## Action 5. Red Porgy Trip Limit

- AP generally supported increasing the red porgy trip limit
  - Some members supported 30 fish
  - Other members supported 45 fish, noting the small size of the species

## Action 6. Hogfish (GA-NC) Trip Limit

- AP generally supported increasing the GA-NC hogfish trip limit
  - Some members specifically supported 750 lbs

# AMENDMENT 60 (COMMERCIAL MANAGEMENT)



## Action 7. Red Grouper Trip Limit

- AP generally supported increasing the red grouper trip limit
- Low harvest relative to the ACL may not be due to the trip limits; red grouper and some other SG ACLs may need to be revisited

## Action 8. Gray Triggerfish Trip Limit

- AP expressed concern about increasing the trip limit for gray triggerfish
- Triggerfish can be a go-to recreational target with red snapper being closed, so they have been fished pretty hard in recent years

# AMENDMENT 60 (COMMERCIAL MANAGEMENT)



## Action 9. Golden Tilefish H&L Trip Limit

- AP generally supported increasing the golden tilefish trip limit
- Some support for a 750 lb or 1,000 lb limit; increasing trip costs and the offshore location of golden tilefish have reduced trip profitability at the current trip limit
- Especially off NC, weather is a big factor affecting when harvest can occur

# AMENDMENT 61 (FMU REVISION)



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- AP members updated recommendations for species being considered in this amendment (see table on next slide)
- Misty grouper should remain status quo
  - Long-lived species and the Amendment 14 MPAs were set up to protect long-lived deep water species, specifically including misty grouper
- The starting point for potential bag/trip limits seems fairly high, but looking forward to seeing additional analyses in the future
- Some specific discussions about spadefish and grunts are detailed in the AP Report

# AMENDMENT 61 (FMU REVISION)



Species	1) Status quo (maintain federal management)	2) Remove from FMP all together	3a) EC w/ no other measures	3b) EC + permit and reporting	No AP consensus at this time
Jolthead Porgy	X				
Knobbed Porgy	X				
Saucereye Porgy	X				
Scup	X				
Whitebone Porgy	X				
Misty Grouper	X				
Blackfin Snapper	X				
Bar Jack		X		X	
Atlantic Spadefish				X	
Sand Tilefish				X	
White Grunt				X	
Tomtate				X	
Sailor's Choice				X	
Margate				X	

# REG AM 39 (SPAWNING SMZS)





# REG AM 39 (SPAWNING SMZS)

- General support for keeping the SSMZs in place; benefits include:
  - Evidence of spawning fish in the zones
  - Protection of spawning habitat
  - Value of long-term, stable management areas for research and monitoring
  - Even small protected areas can have local biological benefits
- Concerns expressed about the SSMZs included:
  - Limited enforcement
  - Small area relative to the broader spawning range
  - Uncertainty about effectiveness of area vs time-based closures
  - Some confusion about how much fishing actually occurs in the zones