



Update on Snapper Grouper Amendments

April 2019

Vision Blueprint Recreational Regulatory Amendment 26

The Council reviewed the analyses in December 2018 and selected No Action on the first three actions pertaining to a deep-water aggregate. The Council approved the amendment for formal review in December 2018. The amendment is currently undergoing review by the Council Chair. Proposed actions in this amendment are below:

1. Deep-water Species Aggregate: After reviewing analyses and considering public input, the South Atlantic Council is proposing **no changes at this time**.
2. Recreational season for the deep-water species aggregate: **no changes at this time**.
3. Aggregate bag limit for the deep-water species aggregate: **no action at this time**.
4. Minimum size limits for deep-water snappers: Remove the 12-inch total length recreational minimum size limit for queen snapper, silk snapper, and blackfin snapper in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.
5. Gray Triggerfish: Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in the exclusive economic zone off east Florida to 12 inches fork length.
6. 20-fish Aggregate: 20 fish per person per day including whitebone porgy, jolthead porgy, knobbed porgy, saucereye porgy, scup, gray triggerfish, bar jack, almaco jack, banded rudderfish, lesser amberjack, white grunt, margate, sailor's choice, and Atlantic spadefish. **Specify no more than 10 fish can be of any one species within the 20-fish aggregate.**

Vision Blueprint Commercial Regulatory Amendment 27

The Council approved the amendment for formal review at their October 2018 meeting and the amendment was submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on 1/24/19. Proposed actions in this amendment are below:

1. Blueline Tilefish: Retain the January 1 through December 31 commercial fishing year for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone: 100 pounds gutted weight from January 1 through April 30 and 300 pounds gutted weight from May 1 through December 31.
2. Snowy Grouper: Specify two commercial fishing seasons. Allocate the snowy grouper commercial annual catch limit into two quotas: 70% to the period January 1 through June 30 (Season 1) and 30% to the period July 1 through December 31 (Season 2). Any remaining quota

from Season 1 would transfer to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 would not be carried forward.

3. Greater Amberjack: Specify two commercial fishing seasons for greater amberjack. Allocate the commercial annual catch limit for greater amberjack into two quotas: 60% to the period March 1 through August 31 (Season 1) and 40% to the period September 1 through the end of February (Season 2). Any remaining quota from Season 1 would transfer to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 would not be carried forward. During April each year, no person may sell or purchase a greater amberjack harvested from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone and the harvest and possession limit is one per person per day or one per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive. Season 1 trip limit equals 1,200 pounds whole weight, Season 2 trip limit equals 1,000 pounds whole weight.
4. Red Porgy: Specify two commercial fishing seasons for red porgy. Allocate the commercial red porgy annual catch limit into two quotas: 30% to the period January 1 through April 30 (Season 1) and 70% to the period May 1 through December 31 (Season 2). Any remaining quota from Season 1 would transfer to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 would not be carried forward. Remove the sale and purchase prohibition and the possession limit of three per person per day or three per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive, during January 1 to April 30 each year. Retain the commercial trip limit of 120 fish from May 1 through December 31 and specify a commercial trip limit from January 1 through April 30 of 60 fish.
5. Vermilion Snapper: Retain the commercial fishing year for vermilion snapper in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone from January 1 to December 31; and the 50% split quotas of the commercial ACL between the two seasons. Modify the commercial trip limit for both seasons and remove trip limit reductions. Any remaining quota from Season 1 transfers to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward. Trip limit = 1,000 pounds gutted weight
6. Almaco Jack: Establish a minimum size limit for almaco jack for the commercial sector of 20 inches fork length.
7. Other Jacks Complex: Establish a commercial trip limit for the Other Jacks Complex of 500 pounds gutted weight.
8. Deep-water Snappers: Remove the 12-inch total length commercial minimum size limit for queen snapper, silk snapper, and blackfin snapper in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.
9. Gray Triggerfish: Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in the exclusive economic zone off the east coast of Florida to 12 inches fork length.

Abbreviated Framework 2 (Vermilion Snapper and Black Sea Bass)

During the December 2017 meeting, the Council discussed options for addressing the stock status for vermilion snapper and black sea bass based on the latest stock assessments for those two species (SEDAR 55 and SEDAR 56, respectively). The Council received public comment and approved the amendment for formal review at their October 2018 meeting. The amendment was submitted to NMFS on November 19, 2018. The proposed rule was published on 2/19/2019 and comments were due by 3/6/2019. The amendment proposes the following:

New annual catch limits for vermilion snapper (in pounds whole weight) are as follows:

Year	Total ACL	Commercial ACL*	Recreational ACL
Current	1,269,000	862,920	406,080
2019	1,579,000	1,073,720	505,280
2020	1,478,000	1,005,040	472,960
2021	1,408,000	957,440	450,560
2022	1,362,000	926,160	435,840
2023 until modified	1,336,000	908,480	427,520

*For the commercial sector, the annual catch limit is further divided into two 6-month seasons and the annual catch limit is equally divided between the seasons.

New annual catch limits for black sea bass (in pounds whole weight) are as follows:

Year	Total ACL	Commercial ACL*	Recreational ACL **
Current	1,756,450	755,274	1,001,176
2019	760,000	326,800	433,200
2020	669,000	287,670	381,330
2021 until modified	643,000	276,490	366,510

*The fishing year for the black sea bass commercial sector is from January 1 through December 31.

**The fishing year for the black sea bass recreational sector is from April 1 through March 31.

Amendment 38 (blueline tilefish)

SEDAR 50 was conducted in 2017 as a joint assessment between the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SEDAR Lead) with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council addressing the stock assessment(s) for Atlantic blueline tilefish. The SSC reviewed results of SEDAR 50 at their October 2017 meeting and provided catch level recommendations for blueline tilefish for the area south of Cape Hatteras, NC. As acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations that match the jurisdictional boundaries of the Mid- and South Atlantic Councils (boundary at the NC/VA state line) were needed to develop fishing levels and management measures, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) formed a workgroup whose task was to determine a suitable approach to obtaining an ABC that would be useable under the existing management structure. In June 2018, the Council reviewed SSC recommendations on setting an ABC for blueline tilefish and development of this amendment was delayed by other priorities. The SAFMC SSC will convene in April 2019 to discuss species assessment revisions using the calibrated MRIP landings data and determine if they can be used to generate new ABC recommendations. If the SSC reviews new projections and provides guidance, work on this amendment work will resume in June 2019. Otherwise development would start after a new ABC is developed.

Amendment 42 (Sea Turtle Release Gear and Revisions to Snapper Grouper Framework)

The NMFS Release Protocols for protected species were originally published in 2004. Revised editions were released in 2008 and 2010, and a new update is ready for publication. In the pending update, the

Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) approved three additional turtle release gear types for use in handling and releasing incidentally caught sea turtles when fishing for reef fish. The new gear requires less space on vessels while still providing the necessary functionality; however, fishermen who participate in the snapper grouper fishery cannot use the approved gear until it is listed as acceptable gear in a fishery management plan and made a requirement in the regulations. Amendment 42 would include the new gear in the regulations for the snapper grouper fishery and consider modifications to the snapper grouper framework so the Council may more quickly modify sea turtle and other protected resources release gear and handling requirements in the future. Public hearings occurred as part of the March 2019 meeting and the Council voted to approve Amendment 42 for formal Secretarial review.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 46 (recreational permit and reporting)

In March 2018, the Council directed staff to retain actions on recreational permitting and reporting in Amendment 46 and develop the remainder of the actions (best fishing practices and powerhead regulations) in a framework amendment (Regulatory Amendment 29). The Council approved the amendment for scoping but did not include it as an agenda item for the September 2018 Meeting. Work on this amendment may resume in 2019.

Regulatory Amendment 30 (Red Grouper Rebuilding)

The most recent red grouper assessment (SEDAR 53) indicated that the stock is undergoing overfishing and is not making adequate progress towards rebuilding, which is supposed to take place by 2020 under the current rebuilding plan. The Council has moved to end overfishing through the revised ABC and ACL for red grouper that was implemented via Abbreviated Framework Amendment 1 but has not yet revised the red grouper rebuilding plan. At their March 2018 meeting, the Council directed staff to begin work on a framework amendment to revise the red grouper rebuilding schedule. Subsequently, the Council added actions to modify the seasonal closure of red grouper in federal waters off the Carolinas (moved from Visioning Amendments). In addition, the Council added an action to consider a trip limit for red grouper. Due to delays in the availability of 2017 commercial landings data, analyses were not completed in time for the December 2018 meeting. Further, the SSC is scheduled to provide additional guidance on red grouper fishing levels based on the updated assessment that incorporates revised recreational landings estimates (MRIP revisions) in April 2019. The Council is expected to approve this amendment for formal review at their June 2019 meeting.

Regulatory Amendment 32 (Yellowtail Snapper AMs)

The amendment proposed changing accountability measures to remove in-season closures for either sector until the total annual catch limit was met or was projected to be met. The Council reviewed analyses in December 2018 and considered public input. Since the proposed changes were unlikely to prevent an in-season closure of the commercial sector the Council voted to stop work on the amendment and reconsider changes in yellowtail snapper management once the stock assessment is completed in late 2019.

Regulatory Amendment 33 (Red Snapper Seasons)

During the March 2019 Council meeting, SERO staff briefed the Council on the projected 2019 red snapper season. As implemented through Amendment 43, the commercial season begins each year on the second Monday in July and the recreational season begins on the second Friday in July. NMFS has predicted that the recreational red snapper season in 2019, based on the catch rate in 2018 and the ACL established through Amendment 43, can be open for 5 days. Consequently, red snapper harvest in 2019 will be allowed on July 12, 13, and 14 (Friday, Saturday, Sunday) and on July 19 and 20, (Friday and Saturday). Commercial harvest of red snapper will open on July 8, 2019, and will close at 12:01 a.m.,

local time, on January 1, 2020, unless the commercial annual catch limit is met or projected to be met before this date. The Council discussed possibly modifying the definition of “weekends” for the recreational sector to allow more flexibility in 2020 and future red snapper seasons in the South Atlantic. The Council approved the following motion:

MOTION #1: INITIATE A FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT TO MODIFY THE RED SNAPPER SEASON FOR 2020 AND ONWARD TO ALLOW MORE FLEXIBILITY IN HOW THE SEASON IS SPECIFIED

- REMOVE THE SPECIFICATION THAT IF PROJECTIONS INDICATE THE SEASON WOULD BE THREE DAYS OR LESS, THEN THERE WOULD BE NO SEASON FOR THAT FISHING YEAR
- MODIFY START DATES (SPRING, SUMMER, FALL) FOR BOTH RECREATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL SECTORS

Regulatory Amendment 34 (SMZs off NC & SC)

North Carolina and South Carolina have submitted requests to the Council to designate artificial reef areas in federal waters off their coasts as Special Management Zones (SMZs). The procedure for requesting SMZ designation was established in the original fishery management plan in 1983 and was recently amended to include designation of Spawning Special Management Zones (Amendment 36). During 2019, the Council will review the states’ requests and develop regulation recommendations for NMFS to approve and implement. North Carolina has requested SMZ designation for 30 artificial reefs. South Carolina’s request applies to four additional sites to the existing 28. Within the NC SMZs, only handline gear (handline, rod and reel, and spear) would be allowed to fish for snapper grouper species and only the recreational bag limit could be retained for species harvested with spear. In the SC SMZs, harvest of snapper grouper species would be limited to the recreational bag limit and the only allowable gear would be handheld gear (handline, rod and reel, and spear without powerheads).

For-hire Electronic Reporting Amendment

This amendment proposes mandatory electronic reporting for charter vessel operators with a federal for-hire permit in the snapper grouper, dolphin wahoo, or coastal migratory pelagic fisheries with alternatives for weekly or daily reporting; reducing the time allowed for headboat operators to complete their electronic reports; and requiring location reporting by charter vessels with the same detail now required for headboat vessels. The proposed rule published on April 4, 2018, with a comment period through May 4, 2018. The Council was notified on June 12, 2018, that the amendment was approved by NMFS.

At their January 2017 meeting, the Gulf Council approved a generic amendment to modify charter vessel and headboat reporting requirements for vessels with a Gulf charter/headboat reef fish or a federal Gulf charter/headboat coast migratory pelagics permit. The amendment proposes daily electronic reporting for both Gulf charter and Gulf headboat vessels, a hail-in and hail-out requirement, as well as requirements to report on NMFS approved hardware/software, and a system to report archived GPS coordinates.

Publication of the final rules for both the South Atlantic and Gulf amendments is pending.