



## Update on Snapper Grouper Amendments

October 2019

### ***Vision Blueprint Recreational Regulatory Amendment 26***

The Council submitted this amendment for formal review in April 2019. Proposed actions in this amendment are below:

1. Deep-water Species Aggregate: **no change.**
2. Recreational season for the deep-water species aggregate: **no change.**
3. Aggregate bag limit for the deep-water species aggregate: **no changes.**
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 for formal review in January 2019. 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 3 (Blueline Tilefish)***

The stock assessment for blueline tilefish (SEDAR 50) was conducted in 2017 as a joint assessment between the South Atlantic Council (SEDAR Lead) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (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 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. However, development of this amendment was delayed by other priorities.

At the June 2019 meeting, the Council directed staff to begin developing Abbreviated Framework Amendment 3 to establish a new South Atlantic blueline tilefish ABC and ACL. The Council reviewed actions to include in the amendment during September 2019 with the intent to review analyses at their December 2019 meeting and approve the amendment at that time. Tables 1 and 2 below show the proposed revisions to the ABC, ACLs, and recreational Annual Catch Target (ACT):

**Table 1.** Proposed blueline tilefish OFLs and ABCs (lbs ww) in the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction for the areas south and north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, and the combined total ABC for the South Atlantic, based on recommendations from the South Atlantic Council's SSC based on SEDAR 50 (2017).

Year	South of Cape Hatteras, NC		North of Cape Hatteras, NC		Total South Atlantic	
	OFL	ABC	OFL	ABC	OFL	ABC
2020-2022	225,000	178,000	103,985	55,968	328,985	233,968

**Table 2.** Current and proposed total ACLs (lbs ww) for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic. The total ACL equals ABC, and sector allocations are 50.07% commercial and 49.93% recreational.

	Total South Atlantic ACL	Commercial ACL	Recreational ACL	Recreational ACT
Current (2019)	174,798	87,521	87,277	54,653
Proposed (2020-2022)	233,968	117,148	116,820	70,886

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

This amendment would add three new devices to the Federal regulations as options for fishermen with Federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permits for South Atlantic snapper grouper to meet existing requirements for sea turtle release gear, and would update the regulations to simplify and clarify the requirements for other sea turtle release. The amendment would also modify the Fishery Management Plan framework procedure to allow for future changes to release gear and handling requirements for sea turtles and other protected resources. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is requesting public comment on the proposed changes through October 17, 2019.

***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).

At their September 2019 meeting, the Council decided not to prioritize this amendment for development in 2019 or 2020.

***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. The Council took action to end overfishing through the revised ABC and ACL for red grouper that was implemented via Abbreviated Framework Amendment 1. Regulatory Amendment 30 initially contained one action 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) and to implement a commercial trip limit in the South Atlantic. The Council approved this amendment for formal review at

their June 2019 meeting and the amendment was submitted to NMFS on September 10, 2019. The amendment would:

1. Revise the rebuilding schedule to equal the maximum time period allowed to rebuild (10 years) with rebuilding ending in 2028. 2019 would be Year 1.
2. Extend the annual closure of commercial and recreational harvest and possession of red grouper off the Carolinas through May.
3. Implement a 200-pound commercial trip limit

### ***Regulatory Amendment 31 (Recreational Accountability Measures)***

Over the past few years, the Council has requested information on possible approaches to improve recreational landings estimates, particularly for species that are infrequently intercepted in the recreational survey. However, the accuracy of such estimates has not improved enough to allow efficient tracking of recreational ACLs and has led to mounting frustration among fishery managers, stock assessment analysts, and recreational anglers. A possible avenue to lessen the impact of uncertain recreational data on stakeholders is revision of accountability measures. At their March 2018 meeting, the Council directed staff to begin development of an amendment that would revise recreational accountability measures to allow more flexibility in managing recreational fisheries. The Council has reviewed some preliminary actions/alternatives and decided that this amendment would apply only to the snapper grouper and dolphin wahoo fishery management plans. The Council will resume development of this amendment in December 2019.

### ***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; 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 NMFS notified the Council on June 12, 2018, that the amendment was approved.

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.

### ***Regulatory Amendment 29 (Best Fishing Practices and Powerheads)***

This amendment would:

- require a descending device\* be *on board* vessels fishing for or possessing snapper grouper species,
- Require the use of *non-offset*, non-stainless-steel circle hooks to fish for species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit with hook-and-line gear and natural baits north of 28 degrees north latitude (approximately 25 miles south of Cape Canaveral, Florida),
- require the use of *non-stainless-steel hooks* to fish for snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear and natural baits in the South Atlantic, and

- allow the use of powerheads to harvest snapper grouper species in federal waters off South Carolina.

In June 2019, the Council modified the definition of descending device based on AP comment and directed staff to bring a finalized document to the September 2019 meeting, including discussion of different types of commercially available and homemade descending devices. The Council further revised the definition of a descending device and approved this amendment for formal review at the September 2019 meeting. In addition, The Council also discussed an outreach plan for best fishing practices and prioritized the following:

- A brochure on best fishing practices and the requirements contained in Regulatory Amendment 29.
- Working with influencers to promote best fishing practices.
- Beginning discussions on incentivizing fishermen to use best fishing practices.

### ***Wreckfish ITQ Review***

The Council reviewed the final version of the 2019 Wreckfish ITQ Review. They received a presentation that outlined work done since the June 2019 meeting and outlined the Conclusions and Recommendations from the review. The Council approved the review as written and directed staff to begin to develop a plan amendment to modernize the Wreckfish ITQ Program and include actions that address all the conclusions and recommendations from the Wreckfish ITQ Review that can be addressed through a plan amendment.

### ***Visioning***

The 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery was approved in December 2015 and includes prioritized short-term objectives around broad goals addressing science, management, communication, and governance. The AP approved a motion at the April 2019 meeting to recommend that the Council adopt the goals and objectives in the Vision Blueprint for the snapper grouper fishery management plan. The Council discussed this topic at their September 2019 meeting and decided to include the new objectives in the upcoming amendment that would address management of the wreckfish ITQ program. Additionally, a comprehensive review of the Vision Blueprint was scheduled to take place from January to June 2020 with adoption of a revised 2021-2026 Vision Blueprint in December 2020. At their September 2019 meeting, however, the Council opted to continue to address the items in the current Blueprint.