

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPEL COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
June 10-12, 2025

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

The Committee received a presentation and information on exempted fishing permit (EFP) applications from Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission to continue research investigating management impacts of aggregate bag limits and limited allowance of red snapper retention. The Committee expressed support for continuing this research.

The Committee also received updates about amendments that have been approved by the Council and were recently submitted for secretarial review and implementation. Amendment 55 (Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper) is under a statutory deadline. NMFS is working on proposed rules for this amendment as well as the Regulatory Amendment 36 (Gag and Black Grouper Recreational Vessel Limits and On-Demand Black Sea Bass Pot Stowage), Amendment 48 (Wreckfish), and the Joint Commercial Electronic Logbook Amendment (which covers species under the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan as well as Coastal Migratory Pelagics and Dolphin Wahoo).

NMFS updated the Council on the Final Rule for Amendment 59 (Secretarial Amendment for Red Snapper), which has been submitted to the Federal Register. The Final Rule implements 3 actions from the proposed rule. The 2025 red snapper commercial season will begin on July 14, 2025, and will close at 12:01 a.m., local time, on January 1, 2026, unless the commercial catch limit is met or is projected to be met before this date. The recreational sector will open for two days on July 11 and 12, 2025.

Innovation Plan (Other Business)

Council staff and Council members introduced an [Innovation Plan](#) to the Committee that provides a potential framework for future discussions. The goal of this approach is to adapt to changes in NMFS and maximize commercial and recreational goals through innovative and comprehensive management in the Snapper Grouper fishery. The Council intends to engage in further discussion on this topic at upcoming meetings.

Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) Proxies

Dr. Luiz Barbieri (Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission) presented information on MSY proxies, their estimation, and how they are used in management. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) updated the Council about ongoing efforts to provide guidance for developing Spawning Potential Ratio (SPR)-based MSY proxies specific to stocks in the South Atlantic. Council staff presented a summary of MSY and SPR-based benchmarks from stock assessments used for Council-managed species, the relationship between steepness and associated SPR proxy values, guidance from the NS1 tech memo, and recommendations following the SCS8 meeting and SSC review. The Committee had some discussion throughout these presentations about the applicability of MSY proxies specifically for South Atlantic

snapper grouper species. The Committee continues to support species-specific evaluations of MSY proxies for snapper grouper species over application of general scientific principles primarily based on other species from other areas.

MOTION 1: FORM A WORKING GROUP COMPRISED OF MEMBERS OF THE GULF AND SOUTH ATLANTIC SSC'S, COUNCIL STAFF, AND A COUNCIL MEMBER FROM EACH COUNCIL TO COLLECTIVELY ADDRESS THE BEST PRACTICES FOR ESTIMATING STEEPNESS (AND THUS ESTIMATE MSY) FOR MANAGEMENT ADVICE, AS WELL AS A DISCUSSION OF SPR PROXY VALUES GIVEN A RANGE OF LIFE HISTORY VALUES AMONG FISH SPECIES.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

DIRECTION TO STAFF:

- Have Staff and Council SSC Liaison develop a process between science (SSC) and management (Council) for development of appropriate SPR proxies on either a stock-by-stock basis or among stocks with similar life history characteristics. Potential topics would include:
 - o Thresholds for re-examining benchmark values and associated SPRs.
 - o How to consider transitioning fixed steepness stocks to associated SPRs.
- Consider a similar joint workgroup approach for stocks shared between the South and Mid Atlantic Council jurisdictions after completion of joint Gulf/South Atlantic workgroup report and Council review.

Terms of Reference for Gag Assessment

Staff presented the changes to the terms of reference for the gag stock assessment requested by the Council during Full Council I following the discussion of MSY proxies. The Council approved the terms of reference after minor additions and clarifications.

Black Sea Bass (Amendment 56)

Council staff presented the stock risk rating matrix from the ABC Control Rule for Black Sea Bass and the preliminary scores and comments made by the Advisory Panel and SSC. The Council determined the stock risk rating of black sea bass to be “high.”

The SEFSC presented results of the SEDAR 76 Update stock assessment of black sea bass. This assessment indicated that the black sea bass stock in the South Atlantic is overfished and is experiencing overfishing. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed SEDAR 76U at their April and May 2025 meetings. The SSC Chair presented the SSC’s comments on the assessment and recommendations for the overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC). The SSC’s comments noted several uncertainties in the stock assessment information used to develop catch level recommendations. The Committee agreed with these uncertainties but also recognized the decline in abundance of black sea bass, necessitating more immediate management action. Therefore, the Committee passed the following motion:

MOTION 2: Through Snapper Grouper Amendment 56, establish commercial and recreational annual catch targets (ACTs) that are equal to 50% of average landings from 2019-2023 for each sector. The recreational ACT would be calculated using landings in CHTS units. The Council will reconsider ACTs and associated management measures two years after implementation.

Direct the IPT to draft actions that would be expected to lead to landings that are below the respective sector ACTs. The actions could include:

- Making recreational and commercial size limits the same length.
- Reducing the recreational bag limit.
- Reducing commercial trip limits.
- Implementing a spawning season closure where harvest of black sea bass would be prohibited for both sectors including January through April each year. At a minimum the closure would cover the months of March and April.
 - o Consider spawning season alternatives in 2-month waves.

Request that the SSC:

- Re-evaluate the MSY estimate and reconsider the F40%SPR proxy recommended previously in light of the uncertainties identified with the MSY estimates and the SSC recommendation to investigate “the use of an SPR-based MSY proxy in a future assessment because of the uncertainties in the stock recruitment relationship and the potential for non-stationarity.”
- Reconsider use of the high terminal F estimate (2023) in the estimation of the assumed fishing mortality rate for the interim years in the projection analysis.
- Reconsider ABC advice for 2027 and beyond.

Direct Council Staff to work with SSC leadership and the SEFSC to conduct additional peer review of the SEDAR 76 assessment update.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

THE COUNCIL CLARIFIED THE FOLLOWING:

- SSC MEETING NEEDS TO OCCUR IN PERSON AND ENSURE THE SSC HAS AMPLE TIME TO DISCUSS

The Committee later clarified that the proposed actions from the above motion could be considered through a framework amendment, and directed staff to develop this amendment as a framework rather than a plan amendment. The framework amendment will include actions to address:

- Annual catch targets for both sectors.
- Recreational size limit – Consider alternatives ranging from 11-13 inches by 1-inch increments
- Recreational bag limit – Consider alternatives (other than No Action) ranging from 1 fish to 4 fish.
- The Council directed to *not* consider an action to modify commercial trip limits. It was clarified that pot fishermen fully expect to have a closure under the reduced catch level and support management modifications under consideration. A trip limit under 1,000 pounds will not work for pot fishermen.
- Spawning closure *for both sectors* – Consider alternatives from January-April in 2-month increments.

- Include an alternative that closes the *both sectors* from February-March.
- Include separate alternatives considering each sector. Staff may develop 8 total alternatives, one for each sector and month combination. Then, the Council can select multiple alternatives to develop the spawning closure for each sector.

Commercial Sub-Committee Report and Amendment 60

The Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee) met on June 9, 2025. A [summary report](#) for this meeting is included in the June 2025 Council meeting briefing book. Based on the Sub-Committee’s recommendations, the Committee passed the following motion:

MOTION 3: APPROVE AMENDMENT 60 FOR SCOPING.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

In addition to direction provided in the Sub-Committee Summary Report, the Committee directed staff to include consideration of replacing gear onboard restrictions with stowage requirements. The Committee also directed staff to include consideration of multi-day trip limits, potentially for a subset of snapper grouper species. Finally, the Committee directed staff to ask the public, through scoping, when fishermen begin to reduce directed effort on a trip to avoid exceeding trip limits.

DIRECTION TO STAFF:

- Request information from NOAA regarding status of 1-stop reporting for the commercial sector at a future Sub-Committee meeting
- Ask in scoping: for annual catch limits that are not being harvested, is it because the trip limits are too low?
- Update “reaching trip limit” analysis to include a threshold lower than 90% of the limit. Analyze through a frequency distribution to estimate the threshold level.

Golden Tilefish Assessment Update

During preparation of Abbreviated Framework 4 (golden tilefish catch levels) for analysis and further discussion, Council staff identified some discrepancies between the stock assessment and the commercial landings as monitored in-season relative to the ACL. Council staff will continue to work with the SEFSC, SERO, and data cooperators to identify the source of discrepancies and report back to the Committee in September 2025.

Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision

In March 2025, the Council directed staff to compile information on 17 species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU) to evaluate whether they continue to require conservation and federal management. The Committee completed an online survey that included federal guidelines to facilitate a discussion of whether these species are in need of conservation and management. Council staff reviewed the results of the survey. The Committee concluded that all 17 species should be considered for either designation as ecosystem component species or removal from the FMU through an amendment. Several Committee members noted that they do not want most of this group of species to be completely unregulated but also recognized that the need for conservation and management of these species may not rise to the same level as others in the FMU. Committee members also noted that some state-level regulations for these

species, particularly in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, are currently dependent on federal regulations. The Committee also directed staff to investigate whether a federal permit could be required to commercially harvest ecosystem component or unmanaged species from federal waters. The Committee passed the following motion:

MOTION 4: INITIATE AN AMENDMENT TO CONSIDER REMOVAL FROM THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT UNIT OR DESIGNATION AS ECOSYSTEM COMPONENT SPECIES/THIRD CATEGORY FOR MISTY GROUPER, MARGATE, SAILOR’S CHOICE, TOMTATE, WHITE GRUNT, BAR JACK, JOLTHEAD PORGY, KNOBBED PORGY, SAUCEREYE PORGY, SCUP, WHITEBONE PORGY, BANDED RUDDERFISH, BLACKFIN SNAPPER, CUBERA SNAPPER, QUEEN SNAPPER, ATLANTIC SPADEFISH, AND SAND TILEFISH.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Yellowtail Snapper & Mutton Snapper (Amendment 44)

The Council reviewed the results of the SEDAR 79 for mutton snapper and SEDAR 96 for yellowtail snapper. The SSC chair then provided feedback from the joint Gulf and South Atlantic SSC meeting. Staff reviewed the proposed amendment process for both species which would start with a joint Gulf and South Atlantic amendment, where the Gulf is the administrative lead, that would establish ABCs and the jurisdictional allocation for both species. Following this amendment, the South Atlantic would initiate an amendment to update the ACL and sector allocations for both species.

MOTION 5: DIRECT STAFF TO RESUME WORK ON JOINT SNAPPER GROUPER AMENDMENT 44, REEF FISH AMENDMENT 55 FOR YELLOWTAIL SNAPPER WITH THE ADDITION OF ABCS AND JURISDICTIONAL ALLOCATION FOR MUTTON SNAPPER.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Private Recreational Permit & Education Requirement (Amendment 46)

The Council paused work on this amendment in favor of focusing on actions that are de-regulatory in accordance with recent Executive Orders. The amendment remains on the Council’s workplan but its timeline of development is uncertain.

Atlantic Blueline Tilefish

In April and May 2025, the SSC reviewed the blueline tilefish stock assessment and did not recommend the surplus production model for use in management. Instead, the SSC supported a data-limited approach based on average catch to establish the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for areas north and south of Cape Hatteras. For the region north of Cape Hatteras, the SSC also recommended incorporating updated data from the South Atlantic Deepwater Longline Survey to inform the allocation of the ABC. This resulted in 70% of the northern ABC being allocated to the Mid-Atlantic and 30% to the South Atlantic.

For the South Atlantic, this allocation equated to 193,800 pounds, which was added to the ABC recommendation of 133,000 pounds for the area south of Cape Hatteras. The total combined

ABC recommended for the South Atlantic was 326,800 pounds (whole weight). Council staff also presented a Fishery Overview, which included blueline tilefish landings and related data. Notably, landings in some years significantly exceeded the recommended ABC, with recreational catches surpassing 800,000 pounds in certain instances. The Committee expressed concern about how the average catch models were resulting in potential reductions in catch for the South Atlantic region. The Committee decided that since a management response was not immediately required by the stock status or ABC recommendation, timing and the substance of the management response would be considered later, after the Council has considered prioritization and timing of other, more immediate actions.

DIRECTION TO STAFF: COMMUNICATE WITH THE MAFMC THROUGH A LETTER REQUESTING A MEETING TO JOINTLY ADDRESS REGIONAL APPORTIONMENTS OF BLUELINE TILEFISH. DEVELOP AND SUBMIT THE LETTER BY THE END OF JUNE.

- This is an opportunity to set up a process for addressing other species as they move northward into the Mid-Atlantic.
- Consider whether commercial trip limits are adequate in the context of the updated annual catch levels.

AP Report for topics not covered on the agenda

The Snapper Grouper AP met on April 2-3, 2025, and the topics for this meeting were largely addressed in this meeting or planned to be addressed in the next Council meeting. The Committee had an opportunity to ask any clarifying questions of the Acting AP Chair, but no further discussion was had.

Management Strategy Evaluation Update

Blue Matter Science was selected to continue its work on the Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE). As part of this effort, they will develop scenarios to evaluate aggregate bag limits, Amendment 59, and additional management scenarios informed by the ongoing Angler Attitudes and Perceptions research led by the University of Florida. The final MSE products are expected to be presented to the Council in September 2026, coinciding with the conclusion of Blue Matter's contract.

Other Business

Aggregate Bag Limit

The Committee also discussed an aggregate recreational bag limit for the snapper grouper fishery.

MOTION 6: DECOUPLE THE ACTION TO IMPLEMENT A RECREATIONAL AGGREGATE BAG LIMIT FROM THE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY EVALUATION AMENDMENT. DIRECT STAFF TO REPORT TO THE COUNCIL IN SEPTEMBER 2025 ON WAYS TO DEVELOP THIS AMENDMENT.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Note: At the March 2025 meeting, the Council approved a motion to include consideration of recreational aggregate bag limits in the amendment that would result from the Snapper Grouper MSE, which has a longer timeline.

State Management

The Committee discussed recent proposals to implement state agency management of snapper grouper species, specifically red snapper, in federal waters. In September 2025, NMFS will present information about potential paths towards this type of management format, working with ASMFC to use some of the principles used in their management as a basis. A staff from the Gulf Council will also be asked to present as part of this discussion.

DIRECTION TO STAFF:

- NMFS, GULF COUNCIL, FWC, AND OTHERS TO COORDINATE ON PRESENTATIONS RELATIVE TO STATE MANAGEMENT.
- ENSURE THAT THOSE THAT HAVE GONE THROUGH THE PROCESS (E.G., CONGRESSIONAL STAFFERS, GULF COUNCIL STAFF, OTHER AGENCIES) OF SWITCHING TO STATE MANAGEMENT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE DISCUSSION.
- ADD THIS TO THE SEPTEMBER 2025 MEETING AGENDA (**THIS IS A PRIORITY ITEM**). REQUEST THAT STATES BEGIN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THIS TOPIC AMONG THEMSELVES AND WITH NMFS.

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION 7: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Form the MSY Estimation Best Practices Work Group.
- Use work for Amendment 56 to develop a framework amendment for Council consideration for public hearing approval at the September 2025 meeting.
- Conduct scoping for Amendment 60. Convene the Commercial SG Sub-committee at the beginning of the September Council meeting if time allows.
- Continue working with SEFSC, SERO, and data cooperators to investigate differences between commercial landings included in SEDAR 89 and ACL monitoring for golden tilefish.
- Request that state agency Council members compile information about how removal of federal snapper grouper regulations for the 17 species evaluated for ecosystem component designation would affect the states' abilities to manage these species. Provide to staff ahead of the September 2025 meeting for inclusion on the meeting agenda.
- Begin development of the FMU Revision Amendment.
- Resume work on Joint Snapper Grouper Amendment 44, Reef Fish Amendment 55 and add mutton snapper to this amendment.
- Work with Blue Matter Science to begin the second phase of the Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation.
- Report to the Council in September 2025 on ways to consider an action implementing an aggregate bag limit for the snapper grouper fishery.
- Prepare material for continued discussion of an innovative approach to manage the Snapper Grouper fishery and bring to the September 2025 Council meeting.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPEL COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
September 16-18, 2025

The Committee approved the minutes from the June 2025 meeting and the agenda for the September 2025 meeting. The Council also received updates from SERO on several amendments (Regulatory Amendment 36, Amendment 48, and Amendment 55) that have been submitted to NOAA Fisheries.

Commercial Sub-Committee Report and Amendment 60 (Commercial Permit and Trip Efficiency)

The Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee) met on September 15, 2025. A [summary report](#) for this meeting is included in the September 2025 Council meeting briefing book. In addition to the actions, ranges of alternatives, and directions to staff described in the Sub-Committee Report, the Committee gave the following directions to staff for Amendment 60:

- Revise Action 4 to only address allowance of snapper grouper harvest while stowed longline gear is on board.
 - Develop stowage requirements to be applicable to different types of longline gear.

The Committee also discussed the Sub-Committee's recommendation to revise the application of trip limits to the sale of fish. The Committee expressed intent for this revision to be addressed as quickly as possible, and passed the following motion:

MOTION 1: INITIATE AN ACTION TO REVISE HOW TRIP LIMITS ARE APPLIED TO THE SALE OF FISH, WITH THE VEHICLE TO BE DETERMINED LATER.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Language regarding sale of fish relative to the end of a commercial fishing trip is in the regulations for the Snapper Grouper (SG), Dolphin Wahoo, and Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plans (FMP).

DIRECTION TO STAFF: Send a letter to NMFS to state the issue for all three of these FMPs. Focus on how the Council perceives the regulation should be interpreted for enforcement purposes. NOAA General Counsel advised to send the letter; however, there is no discussion on the record for FMPs other than SG. A change to the regulations will be needed in the long-term to clarify the trip limit language.

The Council requests that draft codified text be provided earlier in the process to ensure it accurately reflects the Council's intent for a rule.

The Committee also discussed the Sub-Committee's recommendation concerning Starlink as a potential approved telecommunication device for the Coast Guard and gave the following direction to staff:

DIRECTION TO STAFF:

- Send a letter to the Coast Guard, of similar form to a letter sent by the Gulf Council, requesting approval of Starlink as an approved telecommunication device.
- Include this topic on the agenda for the winter 2026 LEAP.

The Committee passed the following motion:

MOTION 2: SEND A LETTER TO THE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE EXPRESSING CONCERN ABOUT THE DELAY OF FISHERIES' SERVICE ACTIONS RELATED TO QUOTA-MANAGED FISHERIES (E.G., ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES).

APPROVED BY COUNCIL (1 ABSTENTION)

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 Council reviewed a decision document with an action that would establish the stock OFL and ABC and jurisdictional allocation between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils for each species. The Council had previously planned on updating the ACL and sector allocations in a separate amendment, but this is not feasible because of the gap in time between amendments. Therefore the ACL for each species needs to be updated within the current amendment. The Committee discussed the best way to move forward updating the catch levels and settled on one amendment document to be prepared jointly with the Gulf Council and with the Gulf Council as the administrative lead.

The Committee made the following motions and gave the following direction to staff:

MOTION 3: IN ACTION 1, MOVE ALTERNATIVE 4 TO CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED.

Action 1. Modify the stock overfishing limit, stock acceptable biological catch, and jurisdictional allocation of the stock acceptable biological catch between the South Atlantic and Gulf of America Fishery Management Councils for mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not establish the updated stock OFL and ABC for mutton and yellowtail snapper and retain the current jurisdictional allocations percentages for each species.

Alternative 2a-b. Establish the stock OFL and ABC, apply the current jurisdictional allocation percentages for each species to the updated stock ABC.

Alternative 3a. Establish the stock OFL and ABC, allocate 9% of the mutton snapper stock to the Gulf Council and 91% to the South Atlantic Council.

Alternative 3b. Establish the stock OFL and ABC, allocate 8% of the mutton snapper stock to the Gulf Council and 92% to the South Atlantic Council.

Alternative 3c. Establish the stock OFL and ABC, allocate 16% of the yellowtail snapper stock to the Gulf Council and 84% to the South Atlantic Council.

Alternative 3d. Establish the stock OFL and ABC, allocate 15% of the

yellowtail snapper stock to the Gulf Council and 85% to the South Atlantic Council.

Alternative 4a. Establish the stock OFL and ABC, allocate 9% of the mutton snapper stock to the Gulf Council and 91% to the South Atlantic Council.

Alternative 4b. Establish the stock OFL and ABC, allocate 9% of the mutton snapper stock to the Gulf Council and 91% to the South Atlantic Council.

Alternative 4c. Establish the stock OFL and ABC, allocate 7% of the mutton snapper stock to the Gulf Council and 93% to the South Atlantic Council.

Alternative 4d. Establish the stock OFL and ABC, allocate 17% of the yellowtail snapper stock to the Gulf Council and 83% to the South Atlantic Council.

Alternative 4e. Establish the stock OFL and ABC, allocate 15% of the yellowtail snapper stock to the Gulf Council and 85% to the South Atlantic Council

Alternative 4f. Establish the stock OFL and ABC, allocate 14% of the yellowtail snapper stock to the Gulf Council and 86% to the South Atlantic Council

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

DIRECTION TO STAFF:

- Discussion at the Gulf Council noted that Action 1 should be split into two actions, one for each species. The Committee agreed and directed staff to split this action into two actions.
- Include language that would update the total ACLs for each species within Actions 1 and 2.
- Include two additional actions that would update the South Atlantic sector allocations for mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper and develop a suite of alternatives based on previous allocation methods and the Allocation Decision Tool, which will be presented at the December 2025 meeting.

Updates

Recreational Aggregate Bag Limit Discussion

Council staff presented an analysis of bag limits for snapper-grouper species. The results showed that most landings and catches occurred on trips where anglers harvested fewer than 10 fish in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit per person. For some species, discarding did not appear to be driven by regulations (e.g., Gray Snapper), whereas for others, discards seemed more directly tied to regulatory measures (e.g., Black Sea Bass and Red Snapper).

The Committee expressed interest in whether similar patterns were observed in the Florida State Reef Fish Survey or under the Florida Exempted Fishing Permit. Members also noted that any recreational aggregate bag limits would need to be based on full retention with no size limits. In addition, it was recognized that anglers may choose to fish in an area if at least one target species is open for harvest. Members also expressed interest in exploring the data by region to find overlapping or differing species.

Blueline Tilefish Jurisdictional ABCs

Council staff informed the Council of communication with the Mid-Atlantic Council concerning jurisdictional allocations between the regions and the formation of a joint subcommittee, including members of both Councils, to collaboratively determine how the ABC should be divided.

More immediately, the Committee discussed the need to implement the increased ABC that has been recommended by the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), based on SEDAR 92. The Committee recognized the time constraint with any potential amendment in order to get the new catch limits in place for the 2026 fishing season. As such, the Committee passed the following motion:

**MOTION 4: INITIATE AN ABBREVIATED FRAMEWORK FOR BLUELINE TILEFISH FOR 2026 TO IMPLEMENT THE SSC RECOMMENDED ABC AND ESTABLISH AN ACL.
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

To address this change through an abbreviated framework amendment, sector allocation percentages would need to be maintained, even though the recreational catch estimation method changed to incorporate the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES) in the SEDAR 92 stock assessment. This method would be used to track recreational catch moving forward. Staff presented an analysis of recreational and commercial landings, with recreational landings calibrated to estimation methods using the Coastal Household Telephone Survey as well as the Fishing Effort Survey. The analysis indicated a relatively small difference between recreational and commercial landings relative to current sector allocation percentages. The Committee also discussed that the overall benefit to the fishery of quickly implementing the increased ABC is greater than potential benefits of waiting for a more prolonged process that would include re-evaluating sector or jurisdictional allocation percentages.

DIRECTION TO STAFF: Include discussion about the upcoming revision to MRIP FES (2026) in the rationale for maintaining current sector allocations in the abbreviated framework amendment. The Council intends to work with the MAFMC to explore jurisdictional allocations later, through a separate process. The Council can also consider long-term changes to South Atlantic sector allocations at that time.

The Committee directed staff to draft the abbreviated framework amendment for consideration of final Council approval in December 2025. The public hearing for the abbreviated framework amendment would be conducted within the public comment session at the December 2025 Council meeting.

Golden Tilefish Landings Discrepancy

In June 2025, staff informed the Council of discrepancies among commercial data sources using in the [SEDAR 89](#) stock assessment of golden tilefish. Staff updated the Committee on continued discussions with the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) and data providers, noting that a revised stock assessment is expected to be completed and presented at the December 2025 Council Meeting.

Vessel Limits for Headboats

Council staff reviewed previous discussion points related to vessel limits for headboats and updated the Committee on the upcoming discussion about headboat vessel limits scheduled for March 2026. The Committee requested the following additional information be provided for this discussion: investigate vessel limits and current catch rates per every six passengers for black

grouper, gag, and scamp, and snowy grouper; also, define and explain the requirements to be considered a headboat. For other species, vessel limits would be considered during amendment development for that species.

Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation

Council staff provided an update on the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery and requested the Committee provide guidance on management scenarios, performance objectives, and species to analyze. The Committee recommended including an aggregate bag limit, mandatory stopping, seasonal closure, and spatial closures as potential management scenarios. The Committee recommended not considering large area closures in the EEZ. Recommended performance objectives included rebuilding overfished stocks, short-term and long-term yield, fraction discarded, and angler access. The Committee wanted additional information to make a recommendation for species to include in the evaluation.

MOTION 5: CONSIDER AGGREGATE BAG LIMITS, MANDATORY STOPPING (REEF FISH), SEASONAL MANAGEMENT, AND SPATIAL MANAGEMENT (CLOSED OR OPEN AREAS) IN THE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY EVALUATION.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

DIRECTION TO STAFF: Do not include large area closures.

MOTION 6: USE PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES: SUCCESSFUL REBUILD, SHORT-TERM LANDINGS, LONG-TERM LANDINGS, DISCARD FRACTION, AND ANGLER ACCESS IN THE SNAPPER GROUPE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY EVALUATION.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

The Council discussed species to include in the MSE, noting the following points:

- There are 6 regions in the MSE that differ in species' abundance
- What applies to the north FL region would also apply to GA. It's ok if there is overlap to avoid confidentiality issues.
- Consider the MSE is a simulation.
- Challenging to superimpose the distribution of species on the BAM.
- State directors and SG committee chair to work directly with Chip to give their input (goal: ~5 species).

Innovative Management Approach for the Snapper Grouper Fishery

Council staff led the Committee through a brainstorming exercise to develop goalposts and principles that can guide and inform future discussions. Discussions from this exercise are described in Appendix 1.

Black Sea Bass (Regulatory Amendment 37)

Council staff informed the Committee of the Council's request for additional modifications and review of the SEDAR 76 Update stock assessment. Information about this request will be

included in Regulatory Amendment 37 to note the long-term actions that are developing outside of that amendment process.

Council staff presented Regulatory Amendment 37 through a decision document. The Committee passed the following motions and gave the following direction to staff:

MOTION 7: FOR ACTION 1, SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER SUB-ACTION 1A; ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER SUB-ACTION 1B; AND ALTERNATIVE 2 UNDER SUB-ACTION 1C AS PREFERRED.

Action 1. Establish annual catch targets and revise the accountability measures for South Atlantic black sea bass

- **Sub-Action 1a. Establish annual catch targets for black sea bass**

Alternative 2. Establish a commercial annual catch target of 48,557 pounds whole weight and a recreational annual catch target of 63,143 pounds whole weight for South Atlantic black sea bass. The annual catch limits for each sector would remain unchanged.

- **Sub-Action 1b. Revise the in-season accountability measure for the commercial sector**

Alternative 2. If the National Marine Fisheries Service estimates that commercial landings of South Atlantic black sea bass will reach or are projected to reach the commercial quota, set at the commercial **annual catch target** in Sub-Action 1a, Alternative 2, the National Marine Fisheries Service will close the commercial harvest of black sea bass for the remainder of the fishing year.

- **Sub-Action 1c. Revise accountability measure for the recreational sector**

Alternative 2. The National Marine Fisheries Service will project the length of the South Atlantic black sea bass recreational fishing season based on when the recreational **annual catch target** in Sub-Action 1a, Alternative 2, is projected to be met and announce the recreational fishing season end date in the Federal Register prior to the start of the recreational fishing year on April 1.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 8: SELECT SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2B (FEBRUARY; COMMERCIAL), SUB-ALTERNATIVE 2C (MARCH; COMMERCIAL), SUB-ALTERNATIVE 3B (FEBRUARY; RECREATIONAL), SUB-ALTERNATIVE 3C (MARCH; RECREATIONAL) UNDER ACTION 4 (SPAWNING CLOSURE) AS PREFERRED.

DIRECTION TO STAFF: Add “spawning” under Action 4 seasonal closure alternatives

Action 4. Establish a spawning season closure for South Atlantic black sea bass

Alternative 2. Establish a commercial seasonal closure in which commercial sale, purchase, harvest, or possession of black sea bass in or from South Atlantic federal waters south of Cape Hatteras, NC, is prohibited and the commercial trip limit is zero.

The commercial spawning seasonal closure occurs from:

Sub-Alternative 2b. February 1 through the end of February.

Sub-Alternative 2c. March 1 through March 31.

Alternative 3. Establish a recreational seasonal closure in which recreational harvest or possession of black sea bass in or from South Atlantic federal waters south of Cape Hatteras, NC, is prohibited and the bag limit is zero.

The recreational spawning seasonal closure occurs from:

Sub-Alternative 3b. February 1 through the end of February.

Sub-Alternative 3c. March 1 through March 31.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 9: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3 (2 FISH) UNDER ACTION 2 (BAG LIMIT) AND ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION; 13 INCH) UNDER ACTION 3 (SIZE LIMIT) AS PREFERRED.

Action 2. Reduce the recreational bag limit for South Atlantic black sea bass

Alternative 3. Reduce the recreational bag limit for South Atlantic black sea bass to 2 fish per person per day.

Action 3. Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for South Atlantic black sea bass

Alternative 1 (No Action). The recreational minimum size limit for South Atlantic black sea bass is 13 inches total length.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

DIRECTION TO STAFF:

- Include up-front explanation of outcomes of the various size limit alternatives in the public hearing materials.
- Include season length and closure date projections in the draft amendment released for public comment.
- Conduct public hearings via webinar ahead of the december 2025 meeting.

**MOTION 10: APPROVE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 37 FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision (Amendment 61)

Through the development of Amendment 61, the Council has identified 17 species to examine more in-depth to determine whether the species should be removed from the fishery management unit (FMU) or designated as ecosystem component (EC) species. These species are misty grouper, margate, sailor's choice, tomtate, white grunt, bar jack, jolthead porgy, knobbed porgy, saucereye porgy, scup, whitebone porgy, banded rudderfish, blackfin snapper, cubera snapper, queen snapper, Atlantic spadefish, and sand tilefish.

The Committee reviewed previous Council actions that removed species from the FMU or designated EC species, the ability of states to manage species removed from federal conservation and management, parameters for designating EC species, EC species actions from several federal fishery management councils, and permit requirements for EC species. The Committee reviewed potential measures to include in the amendment, providing the following guidance and motions:

Include the following list of measures to include for scoping:

- Retain species within the FMP under current federal management (no action).
- Remove species from the FMP.
- Designate species as ecosystem components.
 - Retain a permit requirement.
 - Retain a reporting requirement.
 - Implement a possession limit.

DIRECTION TO STAFF:

- During scoping, emphasize that the Council has the ability to choose different actions for different species. The same action does not need to apply to all 17 species.
- For the December 2025 meeting, provide additional information on:
 - Prepare a discussion on developing ecosystem management objectives.
 - The extent of measures that can be implemented for EC species in regard to commercial and recreational retention limits. How restrictive can these measures be without being considered “conservation and management?”
 - Revisit the list of species to continue to include in Amendment 61.
- Regarding the report of landings for unmanaged and EC species, include landings from both state and federal waters. Also include landings by state when possible.

**MOTION 11: REQUEST TO RECEIVE AN ANNUAL REPORT OF COMMERCIAL LANDINGS OF UNMANAGED AND ECOSYSTEM COMPONENT SPECIES (SEE MID-ATLANTIC REPORT FOR REFERENCE).
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

DIRECTION TO STAFF: Council staff and NMFS staff cooperate to develop and plan to prepare for the Council's September or December meeting.

**MOTION 12: APPROVE SNAPPER GROUPEL AMENDMENT 61 FOR SCOPING.
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

Topics for Fall Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Meeting

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel is scheduled to meet in Charleston, SC, on October 27-29, 2025. The Committee directed staff to develop the AP's agenda with inclusion of the following topics:

- Regulatory Amendment 37 (Black Sea Bass) and update on SEDAR 76 Update stock assessment review
- Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper and Mutton Snapper)
- Amendment 61 (Fishery Management Unit Revision)
- Blueline Tilefish Abbreviated Framework Amendment
- Commercial Trip Limitations on Sale/Conclusion of a Trip
- Blueline Tilefish Potential Trip Limit Increase from 300 to 400 pounds
- Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation
- Elect Chair and Vice Chair
- Updates on Developing Council Actions: Golden Tilefish Assessment, Recreational Aggregate Bag Limit, Headboat Vessel Limit, Amendment 60 (Commercial Permit and Trip Efficiency), Amendment for Joint State-Federal Management of Red Snapper
- Updates: Best Fishing Practices, SEDAR, Citizen Science, Florida Red Snapper EFP Projects

Other Business

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION 13: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Continue development of Amendment 60 (Commercial Permit and Trip Efficiency) for Council approval for public hearings in March 2026. Update the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel on progress of this amendment at their meeting in October 2025, but give the a detailed update at their April meeting, and present information on the amendment to the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel for discussion at their next meeting (January/February 2026).
- Send letters: 1) to the Secretary of Commerce concerning the delay in NMFS' actions on quota-managed species, and 2) to the Coast Guard requesting designation of Starlink as an approved telecommunication device.
- Develop a draft abbreviated framework amendment that would change the blueline tilefish acceptable biological catch and annual catch limits for consideration of final Council approval in December 2025.
- Gather and analyze information on the aggregate bag limit and headboat vessel limit ahead of future discussions.
- Continue development of the Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation using direction provided earlier in this report.
- Conduct public hearings for Regulatory Amendment 37 (Black Sea Bass) prior to the December Council meeting.

- Prepare Regulatory Amendment 37 (Black Sea Bass) for final Council approval in December 2025.
- Conduct scoping for Amendment 61 (Fishery Management Unit Revision) and continue developing the amendment for review at the December 2025 meeting.
- Develop a report of landings for unmanaged and ecosystem component species in the region with the intent that this report be updated and provided to the Council annually (in the second half of the year by Council and NMFS staff).
- Convene the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel to address topics as described earlier in this report.
- Continue development of Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper and Mutton Snapper), including adding actions that update the ACL and include South Atlantic sector allocations for both species. This Amendment will go to the Gulf Council at their next meeting and then SAFMC will review again in December.
- Prepare the Allocation Decision Tool to review possible allocation changes for mutton and yellowtail snapper.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

APPENDIX 1
DRAFT
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPE INNOVATIVE MANAGEMENT EXERCISE
SNAPPER GROUPE COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
Charleston, South Carolina
September 17, 2025

The Committee discussed a proposed framework, first introduced during the June 2025 Council meeting, to reset Snapper Grouper fishery discussions and begin progress toward innovative actions that improve the overall fishery. The framework is built around establishing “goalposts” to describe overarching fishery objectives that will help guide individual decisions, agreeing to some basic “principles” and facts to avoid rehashing the same discussions, and developing a series of short, medium, and long-term actions that are achievable given the current science and regulatory challenges.

The Innovation Plan requires brainstorming, and the first steps need to be judgement-free. To that end, the Committee agreed upon a multi-step process that is intended to allow the Committee to:

- Come up with ideas and innovative solutions that can be evaluated objectively (goalposts).
- Apply some structure to reduce rehashing of the same unresolvable arguments and discussions of unknowns (principles).
- Develop a plan for moving forward to improve the fishery under a new science reality.

During this meeting, Committee members brainstormed ideas for goalposts and principles, followed by discussions and grouping of different ideas. Once goalposts and principles were grouped, Committee members were asked to place dots on the items they felt should be prioritized. At the December 2025 meeting, the Committee will continue to develop the Innovation Plan by reviewing and discussing identified priorities.

Below is a summary of the goalposts and principles that were identified by the Council:

Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan Goalposts

Process Goalposts

- Figure out how to keep folks engaged (5 Dots, Stack of 3)
 - o Promote our fisheries as the best managed in the world (outreach).
 - o Improve trust and confidence of our stakeholders in the Council process.
- Creating a snapper grouper sub-committee was a good idea, use more sub-committees (4 Dots, Stack of 2)
 - o Be innovative to streamline the process so that it is more efficient.
- Ensure local knowledge is factored into management decisions (3 Dots, Stack of 2)
 - o Have fishermen knowledge on species at any SSC meeting.

- More communication and collaboration between states and NOAA outside of the Council process (1 Dot).
- Safe word to stop discussions.

Management Goalposts

- Council take more risk to try new things to achieve goals and fix problems (9 Dots).
- Develop allocations based on total catch (7 Dots).
- Evaluate portfolio fishing (commercial) (6 Dots, Stack of 2)
 - o Reexamine S. Cadrin fishery portfolio approach for commercial fishery.
- Be proactive (5 Dots).
- Eliminate discards and quit wasting the resource (4 Dots, Stack of 3).
 - o No wasted fish.
 - o Eliminate discards in the recreational sector.
- Recreational optimum yield about access, not poundage of fish harvested (3 Dots).
- Regional management of fisheries to account for differences across the Council region (2 Dots, Stack of 4).
 - o Sub-regional management.
 - o Regional management.
 - o Spatial management with year round fishing in some areas (areas may not be static).
- More holistic review of the fishery (multi-species, regime shift) (2 Dots).
- Everyone is happy (2 Dots)
- Less dependence on stock assessments. It is one tool in the tool box, not the hammer (1 Dot, Stack of 3).
 - o Timely management; do not wait for “data” when we agree there is a problem.
 - o Not just reacting to stock assessments.
- Act on information we have, not what we are hoping to get (1 Dot).
- A balanced sustainable stock(s) (1 Dot).
- No bottom closures.
- More simple regulations that are still effective.
- Regulatory flexibility to meet local needs.

Science Goalposts

- Simplify the science to meet management needs (simpler assessments) (9 Dots, Stack of 6).
 - o Stock assessment methods that match available data.
 - o Support more interim analyses.
 - o Simplify and more timely stock status. Use indices and surveys.
 - o Percent change of ABC doesn’t require action.
 - o Evaluate stock assessment uncertainties to determine if a regulation change is necessary for the ABC (Action/No Action).

- Create real time data collection (Innovative, ex. EFPs, Citizen Science) (9 Dots).
- Expand fishery independent surveys (3 Dots, Stack of 2)
 - Fishery independent data throughout the Council's jurisdiction.
- More cooperative research = more engagement with the industry (2 Dots, Stack of 2).
 - Create more surveys using cooperative sampling.
- Look at where species are caught geographically and both recreational and commercial (1 Dot).
- More timely, less complex science for management (1 Dot).
- Make response to data/assessment more timely.

Economic Goalpost

- Explore portfolio fishing for commercial (8 Dots, Stack of 5)
 - A stable commercial fishery this is so well managed that it can command good prices year-round, age of fishermen, and number of fishermen.
 - Ensure commercial trips are profitable because enough fisheries are available for harvest.
 - Enhanced commercial trip efficiency and viability.
 - Commercial trip profitability.
- Maximize recreational trip efficiencies.

Access Goalposts

- Optimize access (6 Dots).
- I don't want to put headboats out of business or any fisheries (4 Dots).
 - Don't let headboats go out of business.
- Optimize year-round access to all snapper grouper for commercial and recreational fisheries (3 Dots).
 - Ensure year-round access for recreational and commercial fisheries.
 - Reasonable access for commercial and recreational fisheries.
 - Access to commercial fisheries year round if possible.
 - Robust rebuilt snapper grouper stocks to provide year round access.
 - Year round access for the recreational sector.
 - Some year round access to fish.
- Ensure path for new entrants for commercial and for-hire (Stack of 4)
 - Maintain size of commercial fleet and access.
 - Need pathway for new entrants into commercial fisheries.
 - New entrants are able to place retired fishermen.
- Seafood consumers have a right to the resource.

Responsibility to Stakeholders Goalposts

- Understanding our audience better.
- Stakeholder and fishermen satisfaction.

- Fishermen don't want to share their feelings they want to show them.

Input Added to the "Marina"

- Broader leadership of Council/Committees beyond state directors.
- Balance access with quality fishing experience and reduce waste/discards/



Figure 1. Sticky wall used by the Snapper Grouper Committee to brainstorm "goalposts" for the Snapper Grouper Innovation Plan in September 2025.

Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan Principles

Big Picture Process Principles

- Be solution oriented (11 Dots, Stack of 3)
 - o Arguing about regional differences without tools to address
 - o Fewer roadblocks, more off-ramps
- Be willing to test new and innovative ideas (8 Dots)
- Make difficult, unpopular decisions when needed in alignment with fishery goals (6 Dots, Stack of two)
 - o Think about the mess or positive situation we will leave a future SAFMC in (don't kick the can...)
- Grow 'pie' by exploring other available target species (4 Dots)

- Recognize population growth, technology, and effort continue to increase and will place increased downward pressure on resources (3 Dots)
- Don't let perfection stop progress (3 Dots)
- Take more risk when making decisions (2 Dots, Stack of 2)
 - o STOP Sugar Coating It!
- We will never have the perfect solution/approach for everyone (1 Dot, Stack of 3)
 - o We will always have data gaps, move on!
 - o Avoid falling in the same ditches
- Stick to our big picture goals (2 Dots)
- Don't continue to bring up ideas that Council decided not to move forward with – unless there is new rationale and you know the history (Stack of 2)
 - o Focus on single species management not serving fishery well
- Use science and data to make decisions

Committee Efficiency Principles

- Push for shorter time lines for actions (9 Dots, Stack of 3)
 - o Make hard decisions faster
 - o More sub-committees to solve problems / challenging issues
- Be creative and innovative while following MSA (6 Dots)
- Maximize time together focusing on decisions and strategic planning – minimize informational discussions (1 Dot)
- Not all assessments require action
- Give us each a booklet with important info we reach for every meeting including: SEDAR schedule, workplan, the principles, types of amendments / FW
- Better define your words – so all understand
- Safe Word – to stop discussions

'No Go' Statements

- There are too many fishermen (commercial or recreational) is a 'no go' statement (2 Dots, Stack of 5)
 - o Get hooks out of the water is a 'no go' statement
 - o Only commercial fishermen are accountable is a 'no go' statement
 - o Recreational fishermen are unaccountable is a 'no go' statement
- That's too much work (2 Dots)
- Do not say we want changes to sector allocations (2 Dots, Stack of 6)
 - o We all agree that both sectors 'deserve' access as much as biologically possible
 - o Fair and balanced management between sectors
 - o Sector "accountability"
- No sector or NOAA shaming (3 stack)

- o Maintain our reputation as the ‘civil’ Council. Remember at the end of the day we all want the same thing
- o Try to understand where other sectors come from
- Focus on fish abundance

Input Added to the Marina

- Provide clear requests to congress on actual funding needed
- Be more clear about funding priorities

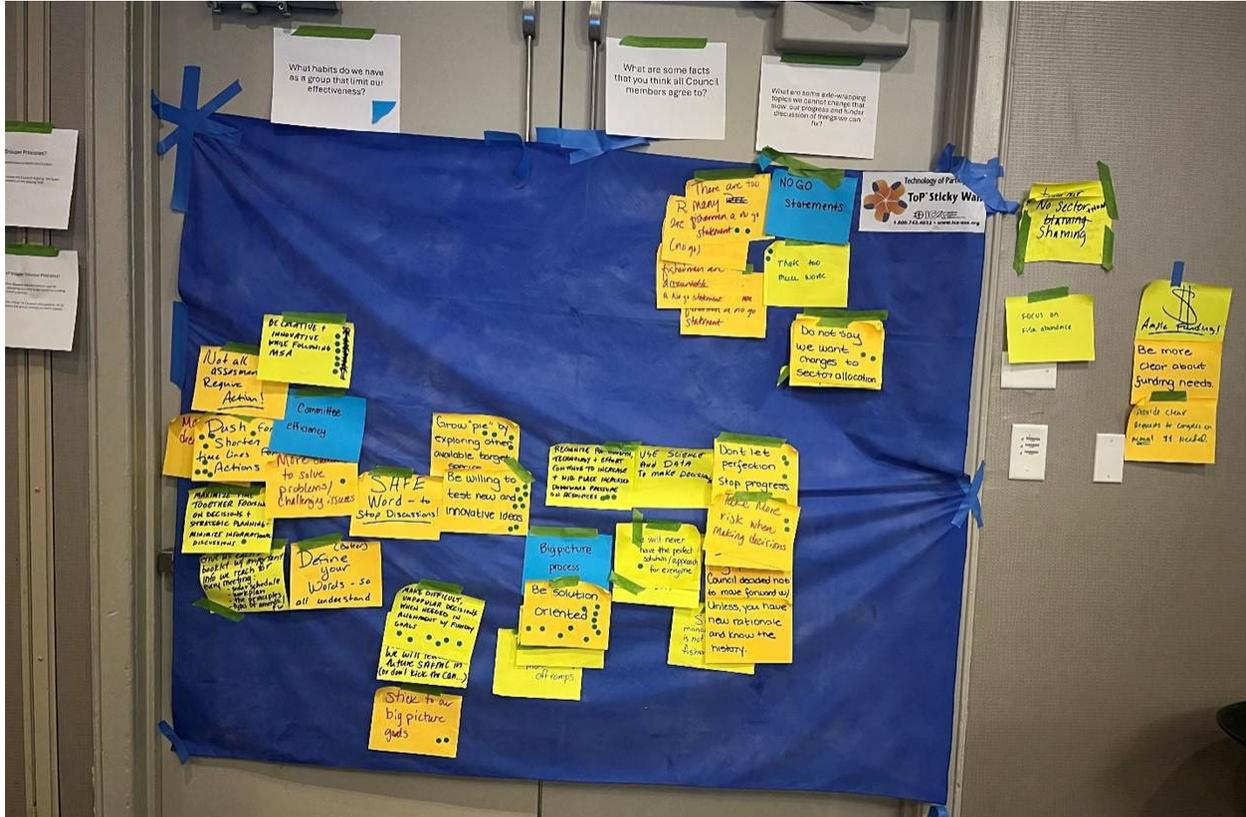


Figure 2. Sticky wall used by the Snapper Grouper Committee to brainstorm “principles” for the Snapper Grouper Innovation Plan in September 2025.