THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 37

Annual Catch Targets, Accountability Measures, and Management Measure Modifications for Black Sea Bass

AP Discussion Document, October 2025

Background

South Atlantic black sea bass were assessed through Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) 76. Due to various concerns from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Council over catch level projection assumptions, several iterations of projections for this assessment were developed between 2023 and 2025, with the SEDAR 76 Update stock assessment, which added data through 2023 and included some additional modeling changes from the original assessment, being completed in March 2025. All iterations of the assessment indicated strong declines in black sea bass spawning stock biomass and abundance since 2012.

In preparation for catch level recommendations from the SEDAR 76 Update, the Council began development of an amendment (Amendment 56 to the Snapper Grouper FMP). In April – May 2025, the SSC reviewed the SEDAR 76 Update, and recommended acceptable biological catch (ABC) levels, beginning in 2027, to the Council, based on this stock assessment. In June 2025, the SEDAR 76 Update was presented to the Council. The Council expressed concerns with modeling decisions and assumptions used to develop reference points, estimate stock status, and project future sustainable catch levels. The Council also noted expected changes to recreational catch estimates based on the Marine Recreational Information Program's (MRIP) review of its Fishing Effort Survey (FES), and determined that a potential long-term rebuilding plan for black sea bass would be best informed by incorporating these catch estimates. Therefore, the Council requested additional review and potential modification of the SEDAR 76 Update to address any modeling changes and incorporate updated recreational catch information before using it to develop long-term management. The Council postponed work on Amendment 56 until after this review and any additional modifications to the black sea bass stock assessment are completed. Updates to the stock assessment and revised MRIP catch estimates are now expected in 2026, at which time the Council will receive new ABC advice from their SSC. New scientific advice

and revised ABCs from the SSC will inform Amendment 56 to address long-term changes to South Atlantic black sea bass management based on the most recent version of the stock assessment.

While additional review and modifications of the stock assessment are being developed, the Council recognizes the persistent, strong declines in biomass, abundance, fishery-independent indices, and landings, as reflected in the SEDAR 76 Update. To limit these population declines and increase stock biomass and recruitment in the short-term, the Council is considering actions intended to: 1) reduce fishing mortality from harvest and dead discards, and 2) increase spawning output and recruitment through spawning season closures.

Throughout this amendment, 'South Atlantic black sea bass' refers to the stock of black sea bass that is managed by the South Atlantic Council, located in federal waters along the US Atlantic coast south of Cape Hatteras, NC.

Purpose and Need

Purpose: The purpose of this framework amendment is to establish annual catch targets and modify management and accountability measures for South Atlantic black sea bass to immediately address declining landings and abundance while updates to the black sea bass stock assessment are completed in 2026 and longer-term actions are developed through a separate process.

Need: The need for this framework amendment is to limit further declines in South Atlantic black sea bass abundance by reducing fishing mortality from harvest and dead discards.

Tentative Amendment Timing

June 2025	Amendment initiated
September 2025	Review the draft amendment, select preferred alternatives (as necessary), and approve for public hearings
October 2025	**Snapper Grouper AP Meeting**
Fall 2025	Conduct public hearings
December 2025	Review public comment, approve all actions, and approve for formal review
Mid-Late 2026	Regulations effective

Objectives for this Meeting (October 2025)

- Review the amendment development process thus far, including the Council's initial selections for preferred alternatives.
- Recommend preferred alternatives, providing rationale for recommended alternatives.

Actions and Alternatives

Decision tools have been developed for the commercial and recreational sectors to evaluate predicted effects from the actions considered in this amendment. The decision tools and their instructions are posted under 'Additional Materials' in the September 2025 Council Meeting Briefing Book. Select combinations of alternatives are included in the Discussion sections below.

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 1 (No Action). No annual catch targets are currently in place for South Atlantic black sea bass.

Preferred 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.

Discussion

- Current annual catch limits (ACL) were based on SEDAR 56 (2018).
- Although ACLs have not been exceeded since SEDAR 56, the Southeast Reef Fish Chevron Trap Survey index (Finch et al. 2025) has continued to trend down.
- The current ACLs (commercial: 276,490 lbs ww; recreational: 366,510 lbs ww) would remain in effect. Sub-Actions 1b and 1c address revisions to accountability measures (AMs) to connect them to the annual catch targets (ACT).
    - Current recreational ACL is based on the MRIP Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS).
    - **Sub-Action 1a – Alternative 2** would continue monitoring of recreational landings using CHTS-based estimates.
    - Current allocation percentages of the total ACL (43% commercial and 57% recreational) are not changed.
- **Sub-Action 1a – Alternative 2** would establish ACTs for each sector at 50% of the average annual landings for the 5 most recent years of catch information available at the time of amendment development (Table 1). This alternative was developed by the Council in June 2025.
- **Alternative 2** would establish a commercial ACT of 48,557 lbs ww and a recreational ACT of 63,143 lbs ww.
    - The commercial ACT is 43.5% and the recreational ACT is 56.5% of the sum of the ACTs.

Table 1. Commercial (2019-2023) and recreational (2019/2020-2023/2024) landings of South Atlantic black sea bass for the five most recent years of data at the time of amendment development. Annual catch targets (ACT) proposed through Sub-Action 1a – **Alternative 2** are 50% of the 5-year average.

	Commercial Landings (lbs ww)		**Recreational landings (lbs ww)**
2019	199,058	2019/2020	170,190
2020	80,690	2020/2021	104,202
2021	57,250	2021/2022	117,789
2022	78,566	2022/2023	110,660
2023	70,005	2023/2024	128,587
Average	97,114	**Average**	126,285
50% of Average/ACT	48,557	**50% of Average/ACT**	63,143

Source: NOAA Annual Catch Limit monitoring website

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

Alternative 1 (No Action). 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, currently set at the commercial **annual catch limit**, the National Marine Fisheries Service will close the commercial harvest of black sea bass for the remainder of the fishing year.

Preferred 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.

Discussion

- **Sub-Action 1b – Alternative 2** would close the commercial season if landings reach or are projected to reach the lower **commercial ACT** from Sub-Action 1a. This would reduce commercial landings relative to recent levels.
- The commercial sector also has a post-season AM that states: if commercial landings exceed the quota, currently set at the ACL, then the ACL in the following fishing year will be reduced by the amount of the overage in the prior fishing year, unless NMFS Fisheries determines that no reduction is necessary based on the best scientific information available. *This post-season AM is not being considered for revision, and will continue to be based on the commercial ACL (currently, 276,490 lbs ww).*

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

Alternative 1 (No Action). 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 limit** 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.

Preferred 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** 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.

Discussion

- **Sub-Action 1c – Alternative 2** would maintain the process of NMFS announcing the season end date, but the season projection would be based on the lower recreational ACT from **Sub-Action 1a – Alternative 2**, rather than the recreational ACL.
- On and after the effective date of the recreational closure notification, the bag and possession limit for black sea bass in or from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone (EEZ) for all recreational components would be zero.
    - This bag and possession limit would also apply in the South Atlantic on board a vessel for which a valid Federal charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper grouper has been issued, without regard to where such species were harvested, *i.e.* in state or Federal waters.
    - State water regulations are incompatible with federal regulations; therefore, a federal bag limit of zero during a closure would not apply to private recreational vessels or charter vessels/headboats that do not hold a federal snapper grouper permit and do not enter the South Atlantic EEZ.

Effects Summary

- **Biological –** Under each Sub-Action, **Preferred Alternative 2** is expected to result in biological benefits to the stock, as fewer fishing removals would occur.
    - Season length projections are affected by later actions. Therefore, projection results are discussed later in this document. However, generally, implementation of the sector ACTs is expected to result in a commercial in-season closure and a recreational season that does not last for the entire fishing year, if current fishing practices continue.
    - NOTE: The recreational season end date for black sea bass is projected based on the previous year's harvest rates and announced annually. In recent years, the season has lasted the entire fishing year (April-March). Under a lower annual catch target, the length of the recreational season may be shorter.
- **Economic –** Under each Sub-Action, **Preferred Alternative 2** is expected to result in negative economic effects for each sector, as less annual harvest would occur.
- **Social –** Short-term effects are strongly impacted by the season length and whether unexpected closures occur, so this aspect is explored further under other actions. If this action contributes, as intended, to increasing the black sea bass stock and eventually

resulting in a higher level of sustainable harvest, then long-term social benefits would be expected.

Developing Council Rationale

- Declines in black sea bass abundance have persisted, even under all-time low levels of removals for the last 6 years of the SEDAR 76 Update assessment (2018-2023).
    - Declines are indicated in both fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data.
- Significantly lowering the number of removals from levels of recent years is necessary to change the trajectory of the black sea bass stock from its decline to all-time low abundances.

AP Action

Review the action, information, preferred alternatives, and rationale. Recommend whether the AP supports the current preferred alternative or would recommend another alternative to be preferred for implementation. State any supporting rationale for recommendations.

Action 2. Establish a spawning season closure for South Atlantic black sea bass

Alternative 1 (No Action). There is no spawning seasonal closure for black sea bass in or from South Atlantic federal waters south of Cape Hatteras, NC.

Preferred Alternative 2. Establish a commercial seasonal spawning closure during 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 seasonal spawning closure occurs from:

Sub-Alternative 2a. January 1 through January 31.

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

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

Sub-Alternative 2d. April 1 through April 30.

Preferred Alternative 3. Establish a recreational seasonal spawning closure during 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 seasonal spawning closure occurs from:

Sub-Alternative 3a. January 1 through January 31.

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

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

Sub-Alternative 3d. April 1 through April 30.

Discussion

- Sub-alternatives under **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** consider closures in 1-month increments, from January through April.
    - **The Council may select multiple sub-alternatives as preferred to establish a closure that lasts for more than one month.**
- Spawning season closures are intended to protect and increase the stock biomass by allowing fish to spawn for some time in their spawning season without any fishing mortality from harvest (though there may still be some fishing mortality from fish that are caught and released).
- Peak spawning season for black sea bass: February – May (Farmer et al. 2017)
- Other species in the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery management unit that are closed to harvest from January through April include: black grouper, blueline tilefish (recreational only), gag, greater amberjack (closed only in April), East Florida/Florida

Keys hogfish (recreational only), red grouper, red porgy (recreational only), scamp, snowy grouper (recreational only), wreckfish (recreational closed January-April; commercial closed January 15 - April 15), red hind, rock hind, yellowmouth grouper, yellowfin grouper, graysby, and coney.

- For all three species that have been assessed since 2010 and are included in the January-April shallow water grouper closure (gag, scamp, and red grouper), removals (landings plus dead discards in number of fish) declined in 2010, the first year of implementation, and remained lower than typical levels observed prior to 2010 (SEDAR 71, SEDAR 68, SEDAR 53).
- Spawning closures considered in Action 4 do not change seasonal area closures for commercial fishing with black sea bass pots. The seasonal area closures for black sea bass pots remain in effect.

Effects Summary

- **Biological –** In general, biological benefits to the stock increase with a longer spawning closure occurs that overlaps with the spawning season. Therefore, maximum protection for spawning fish would occur with a spawning closure from February through May.
    - The current preferred spawning closure of both sectors closing to harvest during February and March (**Preferred Sub-Alternatives 2b, 2c, 3b,** and **3c**) is expected to result in biological benefits to the stock, relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, as fewer fishing removals would occur during the spawning season. This would allow more fish to spawn more times before being harvested, potentially increasing overall spawning production and recruitment.
    - A spawning closure is expected to affect the season length for the commercial sector (Table 2). Commercial landings are greatest in January and February (recent average harvests during each of these months are over two times greater than any other month), therefore a closure during these months would have the strongest impact on extending the rest of the open season.

Table 2. Predictions for when the black sea bass commercial annual catch target (48,557 lbs ww) would be met under Action 2 spawning closure sub-alternatives 2a through 2d **for the commercial sector**. The fishing year begins on January 1; predictions are based on monthly landings for 2021-2023.

Action 2 Alternatives	**Average Landings**	
	Closure Date	*Fishing Days*
Alternative 1: No Action (No Spawning Closure)	30-May	149
Sub-Alternative 2a: Closure Jan 1 - Jan 31	23-Dec	325
Preferred Sub-Alternative 2b: Closure Feb 1 - end of Feb	1-Dec	306
Preferred Sub-Alternative 2c: Closure Mar 1 - Mar 31	29-Jul	178
Preferred Sub-Alternatives 2b and 2c: Closure Feb 1 – Mar 31	No In-Season Closure	306
Sub-Alternative 2d: Closure Apr 1 - Apr 30	2-Aug	183

    - Season length for the recreational sector is likely to be affected by additional actions that will be discussed later in this document. Recent (2021-2023) average recreational landings are greatest in May and June and are generally higher between January and June.
        - If the recreational season ends prior to the beginning of the spawning closure, the closure is not expected to have any additional impacts on removals by the recreational sector.

- **Economic –** Negative economic effects are only expected if the spawning closure, combined with other management measures, is expected to result in landings not reaching the sector ACTs.
- **Social –** Overall social benefits of a spawning closure depend on the balance of a tradeoff between the benefits of a healthier stock and negative effects of lost fishing opportunities during the closure. Generally, longer open seasons are expected to have more positive social effects.

Developing Council Rationale

- The Council believes that a spawning closure of both sectors during February and March would best balance the needs of the fishery sectors and the stock.
- The Council intends this closure to be a spawning closure to provide protection of black sea bass during their spawning season, rather than a closure to control overall harvest. Therefore, any closure should apply to both sectors.
- The commercial sector's most critical harvest month is January, and this month is not within the peak spawning season for black sea bass. Therefore, biological benefits of closing this month would not outweigh the negative effects of lost fishing opportunities, particularly for the commercial sector.
- The recreational sector has above average harvests during the first half of the calendar year, with harvests peaking in May and June, when the Shallow Water Grouper spawning closure ends.
- A spawning closure during February and March would 1) overlap with peak spawning for black bass, 2) provide significant biological benefits by closing during above average harvest months for both sectors, and 3) maintain fishing opportunities during critical times for the commercial (January) and recreational (late spring/early summer) sectors.

AP Action

Review the action, information, preferred alternatives, and rationale. Recommend whether the AP supports the current preferred alternative or would recommend another alternative to be preferred for implementation. State any supporting rationale for recommendations.

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

Alternative 1 (No Action). The recreational bag limit for South Atlantic black sea bass is 7 fish per person per day.

Alternative 2. Reduce the recreational bag limit for South Atlantic black sea bass to 1 fish per person per day.

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

Alternative 4. Reduce the recreational bag limit for South Atlantic black sea bass to 3 fish per person per day.

Alternative 5. Reduce the recreational bag limit for South Atlantic black sea bass to 4 fish per person per day.

Discussion

- State water bag limits for black sea bass:
  - NC: 7 fish/day
  - SC: 7 fish/day
  - GA: 15 fish/day
  - FL: 7 fish/day
- Differences between state and federal regulations can affect the efficiency of managing the South Atlantic black sea bass stock.
- Although the current bag limit is seven fish per person per day, over 60% of recreational angler trips that harvested black sea bass harvested one or (less than one) black sea bass per person.

Effects Summary

- **Biological –** In general, biological benefits of a bag limit are neutral in terms of overall harvest if the stock is constrained by an annual catch limit. However, a slowed fishing rate throughout the year can have varying effects.
  - A positive biological effect of a lower bag limit can be a prolonged time for fish to survive, grow, and reproduce before being harvested.
  - A negative biological effect of a lower bag limit can be an increase in dead releases due to fish being caught after the bag limit has been met.
  - For black sea bass, anglers average less than one landed fish per person per trip under the current bag limit, with most of the releases occurring due to fish being under the minimum size limit.
  - **Preferred Alternative 3** would reduce the bag limit to 2 black sea bass per person per day. Effects of different Action 3 alternatives are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Predictions for when the black sea bass recreational annual catch target (63,143 lb ww) would be met under each of the Action 3 alternatives for the recreational sector, and assuming

the currently preferred spawning closure from Action 2 (February-March) and minimum size limit from Action 4 (13 inches total length). The fishing year begins on April 1; predictions are based on monthly landings for the 2021/22-2023/24 fishing years.

Action 3 Alternatives	Closure Date	Fishing Days
Alternative 1 (No Action): 7 fish per person per day	16-Sep	168
Alternative 2: 1 fish per person per day	-	306
Preferred Alternative 3: 2 fish per person per day	9-Jan	283
Alternative 4: 3 fish per person per day	24-Nov	237
Alternative 5: 4 fish per person per day	31-Oct	213

NOTE: This table shows an average scenario based on a recent set of years. Information used to project the recreational season will be conducted according to the FMP and using the most recent years of information available.

- **Economic –** Overall economic effects of a lower bag limit depend on the balance of a tradeoff between potentially lower angler satisfaction with the smaller number of fish that can be kept and the potential economic benefits of a longer open recreational season.
- **Social –** Social effects depend on a similar tradeoff as economic effects. Additionally, a higher bag limit can lead to higher variability in landings projections. Higher variability can cause difficulty in constraining catch to the ACL, leading to negative long-term effects if the ACL is regularly exceeded.

Developing Council Rationale

- The Council believes that a 2 fish per person bag limit provides the greatest benefit to the fishery.
- Given the size of black sea bass, there may be a much lower angler satisfaction with a 1 fish bag limit rather than 2 fish.
- Most anglers currently average less than 1 black sea bass landed per person on trips in which they are landed. Therefore, a 2 fish bag limit is likely to maintain the current rate of landings for most trips.
- The largest difference in number of fishing days between any 1-fish increment considered is between 2 fish and 3 fish (46 days). Therefore, a 3 fish or greater bag limit, may result in too large of a negative effect on the fishery from a shortened season that would outweigh the benefit of a higher bag limit.

AP Action

Review the action, information, preferred alternatives, and rationale. Recommend whether the AP supports the current preferred alternative or would recommend another alternative to be preferred for implementation. State any supporting rationale for recommendations.

Action 4. Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for South Atlantic black sea bass

Alternatives

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

Alternative 2. Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for South Atlantic black sea bass to 12 inches total length.

Alternative 3. Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for South Atlantic black sea bass to 11 inches total length.

Discussion

- The intent is for this action, along with a reduction in the bag limit, is to contribute to reduced fishing mortality by reducing discards of black sea bass, which is the primary source of black sea bass removals in numbers of fish.
- With a lower bag limit (Action 2) and anglers being more likely to retain fish that are caught, it is more likely that they will hit their bag limit earlier in the trip, potentially motivating them to switch to a different fishing method (e.g., trolling) or move to a different area where they would be less likely to encounter black sea bass.
- **Alternative 3** would reduce regulatory differences between sectors without changing the commercial minimum size limit.
- The primary commercial gear, pots, has mesh and opening regulations based on a 10-inch minimum size limit. Amendment 18A (2011) increased the minimum size limit from 10 to 11 inches but did not change the gear requirements. Further deviation away from this level may result in additional commercial discards.

Effects Summary

- **Biological –** In general, biological benefits of a lower minimum size limit are neutral in terms of overall harvest if the stock is constrained by an annual catch limit. However, a minimum size limit can have varying effects on a stock.
    - A positive biological effect of a lower minimum size limit can be a reduced number of size-related releases and associated release mortality.
    - A negative biological effect of a lower minimum size limit can be an increased rate of harvest. More fish would meet the size limit and be kept.
    - Although a higher minimum size limit can lead to more size-related releases and associated mortality, released black sea bass are more likely to survive this process than not (~86% recreational release survival rate; SEDAR 76 Update 2025).
    - Reducing the recreational minimum size limit is expected to have substantial effects on the recreational season length (Table 4). **Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action)** would maximize the length of the open season.

Table 4. Predictions for when the black sea bass recreational annual catch target (63,143 lb ww) would be met under each of the Action 4 alternatives for the recreational sector, and assuming the currently preferred spawning closure from Action 2 (February-March) and bag limit from Action 3 (2 fish). The fishing year begins on April 1; predictions are based on monthly landings for the recreational sector and size information from state at-sea headboat observers for the 2021/22-2023/24 fishing years.

Action 4 Alternatives	Closure Date	Fishing Days
Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action): 13 in TL	9-Jan	283
Alternative 2: 12 in TL	28-Jun	88
Alternative 3: 11 in TL	26-May	55

NOTE: This table shows an average scenario based on a recent set of years. Information used to project the recreational season will be conducted according to the FMP and using the most recent years of information available.

- **Economic –** A lower minimum size limit can have short-term economic benefits if the lower minimum size limit enhances anglers ability to harvest all of the ACL. However, given annual harvest would still be constrained, if the ACL can be harvested at a larger minimum size limit, then economic effects are neutral.
- **Social –** A lower minimum size limit can have short-term social benefits if the lower minimum size limit enhances anglers ability to harvest all of the ACL. However, given annual harvest would still be constrained, if the ACL can be harvested at a larger minimum size limit, then social effects are neutral, in terms of overall harvest. Social effects can additionally vary according to angler preferences for a longer fishing season at a larger minimum size limit or a shorter season with a smaller minimum size limit.

Developing Council Rationale

- Given the large seasonal reduction that is expected from decreasing the minimum size limit from 13 inches to 12 inches, the Council believes that **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would be in the best interest of the recreational sector to maximize access to the fishery.

AP Action

Review the action, information, preferred alternatives, and rationale. Recommend whether the AP supports the current preferred alternative or would recommend another alternative to be preferred for implementation. State any supporting rationale for recommendations.

Appendix A. Summary of Regulations

Species	Black Sea Bass
OFL	703,000 lbs ww (2021+)
ABC	643,000 lbs ww (2021+) (AF 2)
Total ACL	643,000 lbs ww (2021+) (AF 2)
Commercial ACL	276,490 lbs ww (2021+) (AF 2)
Recreational ACL	366,510 lbs ww (2021-2022+) (AF 2)
Commercial Allocation	43.00%
Recreational Allocation	57.00%
Commercial AM (Amendment Language)	If commercial landings, as estimated by the SRD, reach or are projected to reach the quota specified in §622.190(a)(5), the AA will file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register to close the commercial sector for the remainder of the fishing year.
Recreational AM (Amendment Language)	NMFS will project the length of the recreational fishing season based on when NMFS projects the recreational ACL is expected 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. On and after the effective date of the recreational closure notification, the bag and possession limit for black sea bass in or from the South Atlantic EEZ is zero. This bag and possession limit applies in the South Atlantic on board a vessel for which a valid Federal charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper has been issued, without regard to where such species were harvested, i.e. in state or Federal waters.
Commercial In-season Closure?	Yes
Commercial Payback?	Yes
Rec In-season Closure?	No- NMFS will announce rec season each year (Reg 14). Rec season for 2024 is Apr 1- Mar 31 (all year)
Rec Payback?	No (removed in Reg 14)
Fishing year	Jan 1-Dec 31 comm Apr 1- Mar 31 rec (Reg 14)
Commercial Management Measures	Trip limit 1,000 lbs gw (1,180 lbs ww); 11" TL. (Am18A) H&L trip limit 300 lbs gw Jan -Apr (Reg 14 effective 12/8/14) Pot closure Nov 1- Apr 30 (Reg 16)
Recreational Management Measures	13" TL (Am 18A); 7-fish bag limit (Reg Am 25) Sale of recreationally caught fish prohibited.

Seasonal closures	Pot closure Nov 1- Apr 30 (Reg 16)
Spawning season	Peak spawning March-May offshore with minor spawning Sept-Nov
Size at first spawning	Black sea bass change sex from female to male. The minimum size of maturity for females 3.6 in SL. All females are mature by 7.1 in SL.

Appendix B. State Regulations

Based on current information, the effects of changes to recreational management should all be considered with the expectation that state regulations (summarized below) remain unchanged. A large portion of the recreational catch occurs in state waters (Table 2).

Federal: 7 fish per person per day bag limit; 13-inch minimum size limit

North Carolina (S of Cape Hatteras): 7 fish per person per day bag limit; 13-inch minimum size limit

South Carolina: 7 fish per person per day bag limit; 13-inch minimum size limit

Georgia: 15 fish per person per day bag limit; 12-inch minimum size limit

Florida: 7 fish per person per day bag limit; 13-inch minimum size limit

Table 2. South Atlantic (shore, charter, and private trips) landings, releases, and catch of black sea bass in numbers of fish from 2019-2023 for state waters (inland, ocean<=3 miles) and federal ocean (>3 miles) waters.

Year	Inland	Ocean <= 3 miles	Ocean> 3 miles
	Landings (number)		
2019	2,270	14,650	162,962
2020	5,346	3,478	72,689
2021	9,483	1,572	93,341
2022	9,657	1,836	83,621
2023	12,152	4,446	79,506
	Releases (number)		
2019	742,222	304,775	1,930,162
2020	559,806	205,393	1,005,273
2021	494,573	200,780	940,233
2022	566,395	243,523	966,563
2023	584,311	178,476	538,325
	Catch (number)		
2019	744,492	319,425	2,093,124
2020	565,152	208,871	1,077,962
2021	504,056	202,351	1,033,573
2022	576,052	245,358	1,050,184
2023	596,462	182,922	617,831

Source: SEFSC Recreational (CHTS) ACL Monitoring file from May 25, 2025. Units include MRIP (CHTS)

Note: All headboat landings are aggregated into the Ocean>=3 miles column since the headboat data cannot be split into state and federal waters.