



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Snapper Grouper Abbreviated Framework 5

Revising Stock Catch Levels For Blueline Tilefish

Discussion Document
Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel
September 2025

Amendment Background

Blueline tilefish is a single genetic stock that ranges from the Mid-Atlantic coast to the northeastern Gulf of America. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) manages the population from the North Carolina/Virginia border southward to the jurisdictional line in the Florida Keys pursuant to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP). Due to increased fishing activity in the Mid-Atlantic, the final rule for Amendment 6 to the Mid Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Mid-Atlantic Council) Tilefish FMP (MAFMC 2017) added blueline tilefish north of the North Carolina/Virginia border as a managed species in the Tilefish FMP and established blueline tilefish management measures, including annual catch limits, sector allocations, possession limits, fishing season, permitting, and reporting requirements.

SEDAR 92: Atlantic Blueline Tilefish

An operational assessment for blueline tilefish (SEDAR 92) was completed in March 2025 with a data terminal year of 2023. Similar to the previous assessment (SEDAR 50; 2017), blueline tilefish north of Cape Hatteras, NC, were modeled separately from those south of Cape Hatteras due to differences in data availability between these areas. In April and May 2025, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the blueline tilefish stock assessment and did not recommend the surplus production model for use in management of the south of Cape Hatteras portion of the stock. Instead, the SSC supported data-limited approaches based on average catch to establish the acceptable biological catch (ABC) for each of the areas, north and south

of Cape Hatteras. Data-limited approaches do not produce overfishing level (OFL) estimates, so the OFL for blueline tilefish is unknown. For the region north of Cape Hatteras, the SSC also recommended incorporating updated data from the South Atlantic Deepwater Longline Survey (SADLS) to inform the apportionment of the ABC to each of the Council management jurisdictions. This resulted in 70% of the north of Cape Hatteras ABC being allocated to the Mid-Atlantic and 30% to the South Atlantic.

For the South Atlantic (between Cape Hatteras and the NC/VA border), this allocation equated to an ABC of 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). These ABC recommendations were presented to the Council at their June 2025 meeting. The Council requested that staff send a letter to the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Mid-Atlantic Council) requesting a meeting to jointly address regional apportionments of blueline tilefish. The Mid-Atlantic Council supported the formation of a joint sub-committee to inform future catch level specifications, especially given that blueline tilefish is a single stock along the Atlantic coast. The Mid-Atlantic Council also recommended moving forward with the specifications presented by the SSC at the June 2025 Council meeting as they were developed through a mutually agreed-upon process, supported by a joint SSC recommendation, and reflect the best scientific information available.

Implementing New Catch Levels

At their September 2025 meeting, the Council discussed the need to implement the increased ABC that was recommended by the SSC (Table 1) and discussed the timeline necessary to get the new catch level recommendations in place for the 2026 fishing season. As such, the Council initiated Abbreviated Framework 5 to the Snapper Grouper FMP. To address catch level recommendations through an abbreviated framework amendment, sector allocation percentages would need to be maintained (50.07% commercial and 49.93 recreational) (Table 2), 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.

Table 1. Scientific and Statistical Committee’s Atlantic Blueline Tilefish (Northern and Southern Model) Acceptable Biological Catch Recommendations.

Year	North of Cape Hatteras to the NC-VA Border ABC	South of Cape Hatteras, NC to the FL Keys ABC	Total South Atlantic ABC
2026	193,800 lbs ww	133,000 lbs ww	326,800 lbs ww

Table 2. Proposed Total Sector and Annual Catch Limits for Blueline Tilefish in the South Atlantic.

Year	Total South Atlantic ACL	Commercial Sector ACL	Recreational Sector ACL
2026	326,800 lbs ww	163,650 lbs ww	163,150 lbs ww

A [fishery overview for blueline tilefish](#) is available online and provides information on the status of the stock, management of the fishery, recent landings trends, and life history. 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 indicate that there is a relatively small difference between recreational and commercial landings relative to current sector

allocation percentages. Based on this analysis the Council determined 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 regional apportionment percentages. The Council still intends to work with the Mid-Atlantic Council 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.

Blueline Tilefish Management Measures

The following tables review the current management measures in the Snapper Grouper FMP for recreational and commercial blueline tilefish (Table 3 and Table 4, respectively).

Table 3. Recreational Management Measures for Blueline Tilefish

Open Season	May 1 through August 31
Bag Limit	Part of the three-fish grouper tilefish aggregate, no more than two may be blueline tilefish. Captain and crew of a vessel operating as a charter vessel or headboat may not retain blueline tilefish.
Minimum Size Limit	None
In-Season Accountability Measures	NMFS will project the length of the recreational fishing season based on catch rates from the previous fishing year and when the recreational ACL is expected to be met and annually announce the recreational fishing season end date.
Post-Season Accountability Measures	None

Table 4. Commercial Management Measures for Blueline Tilefish

Open Season	January 1 through December 31
Trip Limits	January 1 to April 30 (100 lbs gw, 106 lb rw) May 1 to December 31 (300 lbs gw, 318 lbs rw)
Minimum Size Limit	None
In-Season Accountability Measures	If commercial landings for blueline tilefish reach or are projected to reach the commercial ACL harvest will close for commercial sector the remainder of the fishing year.
Post-Season Accountability Measures	If commercial landings exceed the commercial ACL, and the combined commercial and recreational ACL is exceeded, and blueline tilefish is overfished the commercial ACL will be reduced the following year by the amount of the commercial ACL overage in the prior fishing year.



Would the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel recommend the Council consider increasing the commercial trip limit for blueline tilefish from 300 lbs gw to 400 lbs gw?

Note: a change to the commercial trip limit could not be considered in this abbreviated framework but could be considered in a future blueline tilefish amendment.

Tentative Amendment Timing

	Process Step	Date
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Scientific and Statistical Committee provides catch-level recommendations for the areas north and south of Cape Hatteras.	May 2025
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Council writes a letter to the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council requesting a meeting to jointly address regional apportionments for blueline tilefish.	June 2025
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Council initiates Snapper Grouper Abbreviated Framework Amendment 5 for blueline tilefish to implement the Scientific and Statistical Committee’s recommended acceptable biological catch.	September 2025
<input type="checkbox"/>	Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel discusses Snapper Grouper Abbreviated Framework Amendment 5	October 2025
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public hearings held for Snapper Grouper Abbreviated Framework Amendment 5 (at the December 2025 Council Meeting)	December 2025
<input type="checkbox"/>	Council reviews Snapper Grouper Abbreviated Framework Amendment 5 modifies the document as needed and consider approval for formal review.	December 2025
<input type="checkbox"/>	Snapper Grouper Abbreviated Framework Amendment 5 transmitted for Secretarial Review.	Winter 2026

Opportunities to provide public comment in-person for this amendment include the South Atlantic Council’s December 2025 meeting. There will also be opportunities to submit written comments via the online comment form throughout the process.