

Amendment 46 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

Discussion Document
Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel
April 2023

Note: Words that are [underlined and in blue font](#) provide a link to other documents.

Background

Amendment 46 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan was previously developed in the first half of 2018 and was approved for scoping at the June 2018 South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting. Due to time constraints over the Council's workplan and the need to obtain more information on potential approaches for private recreational data gathering, the amendment was never scoped. From 2018 through 2020 staff focused instead on piloting the MyFishCount mobile app and portal. Other related efforts have also been underway, notably the convening of the Joint Council Workgroup on Section 102 of the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2018 (Modern Fish Act), the Private Recreational Reporting Workgroup (workgroup), and subsequently the Snapper Grouper Recreational Permitting and Reporting Technical Advisory Panel (AP). The summary reports and recommendations from these groups can be found on the Council's website under the following links:

- Joint Council Workgroup on Section 102 of the Modern Fish Act (click [HERE](#))
- Private Recreational Reporting Working Group recommendations (click [HERE](#))
- Snapper Grouper Recreational Permitting and Reporting AP ([Meeting 1](#) and [Meeting 2](#))

The Council's 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery, previous amendments, and existing requirements

The 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery (Vision Blueprint) was approved in December 2015 and was intended to inform management of the Snapper Grouper fishery through 2020. The Vision Blueprint was also intended to serve as a “living document” to help guide future management, building on stakeholder input. The Vision Blueprint is organized into four strategic goal areas: (1) Science, (2) Management, (3) Communication, and (4) Governance. Each goal area has a set of objectives, strategies, and actions. The potential actions in Amendment 46 correspond to different objectives and strategies in the Vision Blueprint.

Since the Council began development of the Vision Blueprint, fishermen have expressed concern with the estimates of recreational catch resulting from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Stakeholders have been requesting that the Council explore a recreational stamp or permit for snapper grouper fishing. This recommendation has also been put forth by the Council’s Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel numerous times. Permits have been implemented for the federal for-hire component of the recreational sector and the commercial sector for the Snapper Grouper, Dolphin Wahoo, and Coastal Migratory Pelagic fisheries in part to improve estimates of effort or catch in the South Atlantic region. However, these requirements do not cover the private recreational component.

Currently, a coastal recreational fishing license, issued through the states, is required for private recreational anglers as part of the 2007 Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Reauthorization to improve estimates of catch and effort. There have been other federal and state efforts to further refine information gathered on the private recreational component of the recreational sector, such as the [Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Angling Permit](#) and [Large Pelagics Survey](#) that covers highly migratory species in the Atlantic and the [Private Recreational Tilefish Permit](#) in the Mid-Atlantic and New England regions. The state of Florida has also developed the [State Reef Fish Survey](#) where anglers intending to fish for 13 species of snappers, groupers, jacks, triggerfish, or hogfish from a private vessel must obtain an State Reef Fish Angler designation.

Recent Council actions in 2022 and 2023

At their March 2022 meeting, the Council reviewed background information, recommendations from the workgroup, and directed staff to assemble candidates for an ad hoc AP to be selected in June 2022. The Council then reviewed recommendations from the first meeting of the AP at its September 2022 meeting. At this meeting, the Council approved the following vision statement and identified the subsequent list of additional questions for the AP to consider.

Vision Statement: A permit for the private recreational sector of the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper fishery will facilitate the collection, validation, and analysis of harvest and discard data to improve the catch and effort estimates used for fisheries science and management decision-making.

At the December 2022 meeting, the Council narrowed the scope of the amendment to focus on development of a permit for the private component of the recreational sector and creation of an education component. Additionally, the Council approved the amendment for scoping which was held in January and February 2023. The Council further refined options within the amendment at their March 2023 meeting.

Private recreational reporting was removed from further consideration in Amendment 46 at the December 2022 meeting. While reporting may be considered at a later date, the Council expressed interest in timely implementation of the amendment as well as the notable benefits of implementing a permit which may include better identifying the universe of private anglers or vessels targeting snapper grouper species and enhancing the ability to collect recreational effort and catch data within existing programs such as the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP).

Potential actions in this amendment

- Private Recreational Permit
 - Establish a private recreational permit and determine the permit type (vessel-based or angler-based)
 - Specify the species that will be covered by a private recreational permit
 - Specify which fishing locations will require a private recreational permit (EEZ or also include state waters)
- Education Component
 - Establish an education component for private recreational anglers
 - Specify whether an education component would be mandatory or voluntary
 - Specify timing of implementation for an education component

Objectives for this meeting

- Gather initial feedback on draft actions and alternatives being considered in the amendment.
 - Detailed feedback will be requested at the Snapper Grouper AP’s fall 2023 meeting once the amendment has been further developed and approved for public hearings.

Tentative amendment timing

December 2022	Reviewed options paper and approved amendment for scoping.
Winter 2023	Conducted scoping.
March 2023	Review scoping comments and provide guidance on the amendment.
April/May 2023	Gather initial feedback from the Snapper Grouper AP and Permit and Reporting AP.
June 2023	Review amendment, AP comments, and preliminary analyses.
September 2023	Review modifications to the amendment, select preferred alternatives, and approve for public hearings.
Fall 2023	Conduct public hearings. Gather detailed feedback from the Snapper Grouper AP.
December 2023	Review amendment, public hearing comments, and AP comments.
March 2024	Review final draft of amendment and consider approval for formal review.
2024/2025 (TBD)	Regulation changes effective.

DRAFT Purpose and Need

The *purpose* is to develop a recreational permitting system that would better identify the universe of private anglers or vessels targeting South Atlantic snapper grouper species and would enhance the ability to collect recreational effort and catch data. Also work to promote best recreational fishing practices through education.

The *need* for the amendment is to improve education on best fishing practices and the quality of effort and catch data for the private component of the recreational sector that targets South Atlantic snapper grouper species, while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

Potential actions in the amendment

Permit-related actions (DRAFT Actions 1-3)

DRAFT Action 1. Establish a private recreational snapper grouper permit to fish for, harvest, or possess Snapper Grouper species in the South Atlantic Region

Purpose of the Action: This action is necessary to establish a private recreational permit requirement in the snapper grouper fishery and determine whether the permit will be issued to an individual angler or a vessel.

Alternative	A federal private recreational permit would be required for:
Alternative 1 (No Action)	A federal permit is not required for a private angler or vessel when fishing for snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.
Alternative 2	<u>Any vessel</u> participating in the private angler component of the snapper grouper fishery.
Alternative 3	<u>Any private angler on board a vessel</u> participating in the private angler component of the snapper grouper fishery.
Alternative 4	<u>At least one angler on board a vessel</u> participating in the private angler component of the snapper grouper fishery.
Alternative 5	<u>Any private angler</u> participating in the snapper grouper fishery, regardless of where fishing occurs.

Permitting and Reporting AP Comments and Recommendations:

The following feedback and recommendations have been provided by the Snapper Grouper Recreational Permitting and Reporting AP:

Vessel vs Individual Permit: Discuss the pros and cons of a vessel permit versus an individual permit.

- **Potential cons of a vessel-based permit:**

- Vessel registration number needs to be tied to permit to incorporate into existing FL State Reef Fish Survey framework.
 - U.S. Coast Guard documented vessels could be challenging to integrate with state registration framework. Would need additional work to make sure permitted vessels could be identified correctly in the field.
- The Gulf of Mexico Region (GOM) has been focused on individual state-based permits:
 - Whether future GOM regional permits will be vessel or angler based is still undecided, but if individual it could be challenging to apply information across regions if the South Atlantic is a vessel-based permit.
- The shore-based component may not be negligible for some Snapper Grouper species (gray snapper effort, gag grouper discards, etc.) and permit related improvements would be left out of a vessel-based permit.
- Is the number of vessels going to be high enough to offset cost of implementing permit?
 - It was noted that any potential fees collected would not go directly towards the program.
- **Potential pros of a vessel-based permit:**
 - Less error prone to identify a vessel and whether there is a permit in place than an individual permit (i.e., a lower potential for non-sampling errors).
 - A vessel-based permit can be used to determine angler trips.
 - Vessel-based permits could lead to lower administrative burden due to the lower number of permits that would need to be issued (vs. individual).
 - See additional notes from the August 2022 meeting.

The following guidance was provided at the AP's August 2022 meeting:

- **Permit Type:** *Recommend a vessel rather than individual permit since it helps reduce “the universe” of how many permits will need to be issued.*
 - Helps with survey design and validation.
 - Easier to write down vessel ID that is easily visible rather than require asking for individual permit number or paperwork.
 - Consistent with existing permits issued by SERO for commercial and for-hire vessels.
 - A vessel permit doesn't create an impediment to integrate with other programs (such as MRIP).
 - Accuracy is improved by a vessel permit and may streamline questionnaire during interview if intercepted (ability to interview one representative for vessel or all anglers at once).

Snapper Grouper AP Discussion:

- 1) Does the Snapper Grouper AP have comments on the Council's initial range of alternatives for establishing a vessel-based or angler-based private recreational permit?
- 2) Are there other alternatives that should be considered?

DRAFT Action 2. Specify the species that would be covered by a private recreational snapper grouper permit

Purpose of the Action: This action would specify the species that would be covered by a private recreational permit requirement in the snapper grouper fishery.

Alternative	A federal private recreational permit would be required to fish for, harvest, or possess the following species:
Alternative 1 (No Action)	A federal permit is not required for a private angler or vessel when fishing for snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.
Alternative 2	<u>Any species</u> in the snapper grouper fishery management unit.
Alternative 3	<u>Any assessed species</u> in the snapper grouper fishery management unit for which recreational harvest is allowed.
Alternative 4	Any species that is also <u>covered by the Florida State Reef Fish Survey</u> .
Alternative 5	Any species in the <u>deepwater complex</u> .
Alternative 6	Any species in the <u>shallow water grouper complex</u> .

Discussion:

- The Council is gathering information on developing a potential exemption for states that implement their own private recreational permit requirement that is equivalent to federal requirements. As such, the list of species will likely play an important role in determining equivalency of such an exemption.
- The full list of species within the snapper grouper fishery management unit is provided in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Species found within the snapper grouper fishery management unit*.

Species	Assessed	FL SRFS	DW	SWG	Species	Assessed	FL SRFS	DW	SWG
Black grouper	X	X		X	Misty Grouper			X	
Black sea bass	X				Sand Tilefish			X	
Blueline Tilefish	X				Queen Snapper			X	
Gag	X	X		X	Blackfin Snapper			X	
Golden tilefish	X				Gray Snapper				
Greater amberjack	X	X			Lane Snapper				
Hogfish	X	X			Cubera Snapper				
Mutton Snapper	X	X			White Grunt				
Red grouper	X	X		X	Sailor's Choice				
Red porgy	X				Tomtate				
Red snapper	X	X			Margate				
Snowy grouper	X				Atlantic Spadefish				

Vermilion snapper	X	X			Bar Jack				
Wreckfish	X				Speckled hind				
Yellowtail Snapper	X	X			Warsaw grouper				
Gray Triggerfish		X			Goliath Grouper				
Almaco Jack		X			Nassau Grouper				
Banded Rudderfish		X			Cottonwick				
Lesser Amberjack		X			Ocean Triggerfish				
Scamp				X	Jolthead Porgy				
Red Hind				X	Knobbed Porgy				
Rock Hind				X	Saucereye Porgy				
Yellowmouth Grouper				X	Scup				
Yellowfin Grouper				X	Whitebone Porgy				
Coney				X	Longspine Porgy				
Graysby				X	Rock Sea Bass				
Yellowedge Grouper			X		Bank Sea Bass				
Silk Snapper			X						

*Assessed = species is assessed and recreational harvest is currently allowed for at least part of the year.
 FLSRFS = species is covered by the Florida State Reef Fish Survey.
 DW = species is part of the deepwater complex.
 SWG = species is part of the shallow water grouper complex.

Snapper Grouper AP Discussion:

- 1) Does the Snapper Grouper AP have comments on the Council’s initial range of alternatives for the species that would be covered by a private recreational permit?
- 2) Are there other species or species groups that should be considered?

DRAFT Action 3. Specify the area where a private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required to fish for, harvest, or possess Snapper Grouper species in the South Atlantic Region

Purpose of the Action: This action would specify the area where a private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species.

Alternative	A federal private recreational snapper grouper permit would be required to:
Alternative 1 (No Action)	A federal permit is not required for a private angler or vessel when fishing for snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.
Alternative 2	Fish for, harvest, or possess applicable snapper grouper species from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.
Alternative 3	Fish for, harvest, or possess applicable snapper grouper species from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone or state waters.

Snapper Grouper AP Discussion:

- 1) Does the Snapper Grouper AP have comments on the Council's initial range of alternatives for the areas that would be covered by a private recreational permit?

Education component-related actions (DRAFT Actions 4-6)

DRAFT Action 4. Establish an education component in the private recreational portion of the snapper grouper fishery.

Purpose of the Action: This action is necessary to establish an education component for private recreational anglers fishing for or targeting snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.

Alternative	Education component
Alternative 1 (No Action)	There is not an education component for private recreational anglers who fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.
Alternative 2	Establish an education component for private recreational anglers who fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.

Permitting and Reporting AP Comments and Recommendations:

The following feedback and recommendations have been provided by the Snapper Grouper Recreational Permitting and Reporting AP:

Education Requirement: Weigh in on efficacy of an education certification as a proxy for a permit. Discuss mandatory versus voluntary measures.

- *An education requirement or certification may not be necessary or required on an annual basis, thus such a requirement would not be an adequate substitute for a permit.*
 - There would still need some readily available way to identify anglers in the field that took the education training. For both compliance and validation as well as sampling purposes.
- There are many other opportunities to learn best fishing practices.
 - People signing up for permit may already have best fishing practices in place or are knowledgeable of such practices.
- *An education requirement would pair well with a permit, potentially in the initial issuance or renewal process.*
 - Such a requirement would provide an opportunity to educate anglers on best fishing practices, what species are within SG complex, species ID, descending devices, etc.
 - Education could include information on why the permit exists and importance of data collection.
 - An education requirement could help deter oversubscription.
 - If a permit is vessel based, the details need to be specified regarding who must obtain the education certificate.

- Vessel owner? Vessel operator? At least one person onboard a permitted vessel?

DRAFT Action 5. Specify whether an education component in the private recreational portion of the snapper grouper fishery would be mandatory or voluntary.

Purpose of the Action: This action would specify whether an education component would be mandatory or voluntary for private recreational anglers fishing for or targeting snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.

Alternative	An education component would be:
Alternative 1 (No Action)	There is not an education component for private recreational anglers to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.
Alternative 2	<u>Mandatory</u> for all private recreational anglers to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.
Alternative 3	<u>Voluntary</u> for all private recreational anglers to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.

DRAFT Action 6. Specify the timing of implementation for an education component in the private recreational portion of the snapper grouper fishery.

Purpose of the Action: This action would specify the timing of when an education component would become effective for private recreational anglers fishing for or targeting snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.

Alternative	An education component would be:
Alternative 1 (No Action)	There is not an education component for private recreational anglers to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.
Alternative 2	<u>Implemented immediately</u> when a private recreational permit is established.
Alternative 3	<u>Delayed until a later date</u> after a private recreational permit has been established. (Note: Council would need to specify length of delay).

Snapper Grouper AP Discussion:

- 1) Does the Snapper Grouper AP have comments on the Council’s initial range of alternatives for establishing an education component, mandatory or voluntary measures, or timing of implementation?