

Recreational Seasons for Deep Water Snapper Grouper Species

Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Discussion Document

March 2024

Recreational seasons for deep water species vary within the South Atlantic. Most species that do not regularly approach their (or their complex's) annual catch limit (ACL) begin January 1 and persist until landings reach or are projected to reach the ACL to maximize retention of these species in the uncommon occasions that they are caught. Species that more often reach their ACL or may be overfished have shifted to later season start dates to (in some cases) end overfishing and lessen impacts of rare event Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) dockside intercepts. When intercepts occur during times of year when few of a certain species are typically caught, this can result in highly uncertain catch estimates.

In March 2024, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) requested that the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel review the recreational season start dates for deep water snapper grouper species to determine whether they are optimized for meeting the fishery's needs. End dates of the seasons may vary depending on harvest rates and accountability measures for each species, so the Council is asking whether start dates should be better aligned. Recreational ACLs, seasons, and trip limits are listed in Table 1.

The Council previously discussed the timing of the recreational season for species that were (at the time) part of the deep-water species aggregate (snowy grouper, misty grouper, yellowedge grouper, blueline tilefish, golden tilefish, and wreckfish) during development of [Snapper Grouper Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26](#) (2019), under Action 2. In that amendment, the Council decided to maintain snowy grouper and blueline tilefish seasons starting on May 1, wreckfish starting on July 1, and year-round fishing for the other species considered in that action.

Table 1. Seasons and retention limits (trip, bag, or vessel) for deep water South Atlantic snapper grouper species.

Species	2024 Recreational ACL	Recreational Season	Recreational Retention Limit
Misty Grouper	23,411 lbs ww ^{1,2}	Jan 1 - Dec 31	aggregate: 3/p/d bag: 3/p/d

Species	2024 Recreational ACL	Recreational Season	Recreational Retention Limit
Snowy Grouper	1,691 fish	May 1 - Jun 30	1/v/d
Wreckfish	19,455 lbs ww ²	Jul 1 - Aug 31	1/v/d
Yellowedge Grouper	23,411 lbs ww ^{1,2}	Jan 1 - Dec 31	aggregate: 3/p/d bag: 3/p/d
Blackfin Snapper	23,411 lbs ww ^{1,2}	Jan 1 - Dec 31	aggregate: 10/p/d bag: 10/p/d
Queen Snapper	23,411 lbs ww ^{1,2}	Jan 1 - Dec 31	aggregate: 10/p/d bag: 10/p/d
Silk Snapper	23,411 lbs ww ^{1,2}	Jan 1 - Dec 31	aggregate: 10/p/d bag: 10/p/d
Blueline Tilefish	116,820 lbs ww ²	May 1 - Aug 31	aggregate: 3/p/d bag: 2/p/d, no retention by captain and crew (for-hire)
Golden Tilefish	2,635 fish	Jan 1 - Dec 31	aggregate: 3/p/d bag: 1/p/d
Sand Tilefish	23,411 lbs ww ^{1,2}	Jan 1 - Dec 31	aggregate: 3/p/d bag: 3/p/d

¹Deepwater Complex ACL

²This ACL is still measured as calibrated to the Coastal Household Telephone Survey

AP Action:

Comment on recreational season start dates for deep water snapper grouper species. Comment on risks and benefits for current or alternative start dates. Could alignment of seasonal start dates for any of the considered species be expected to increase trip efficiency or reduce out-of-season discards?