

**FINAL**  
**SUMMARY REPORT**  
**SNAPPER GROUPEL COMMITTEE**  
**SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**  
**March 6-8, 2023**

The Committee approved the minutes from the December 2022 meeting and the agenda for the March 2023 meeting.

**Status of Amendments under formal review**

NMFS SERO provided an update on progress of Snapper Grouper Amendment 50 (Red Porgy Catch Levels and Rebuilding), Snapper Grouper Amendment 49 (Greater Amberjack), Snapper Grouper Amendment 51 (Snowy Grouper), and Snapper Grouper 52 (Golden and Blueline Tilefish). The final rule for Amendment 50 published on December 20, 2022. Amendment 51 was formally submitted to NMFS SERO on March 2, 2023. Development of the proposed rule for Amendment 51 is in progress. Amendment 49 and Amendment 52 are pending submission by the Council.

**Management Strategy Evaluation for the Snapper Grouper Fishery**

The Council is conducting a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) to explore long-term management strategies for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. The Committee received a presentation on MSEs from Blue Matter Science. Blue Matter Science described preliminary information being included in the MSE, and discussions at the most recent Snapper Grouper AP and SSC meetings. The Committee recommended reviewing the Visioning Project and a report by Kari Buck on alternative recreational management approaches presented to the Council in March 2019 as potential sources of management approaches. The Committee provided guidance on conceptual management options and key uncertainties.

**Red Snapper 2023 Recreational Season**

NMFS SERO discussed information surrounding the 2023 recreational season for red snapper. Due to inclement weather during the 2022 season, catch estimates were notably lower. Discussions of whether and how these catch estimates should be used in determining the length of the 2023 recreational season are ongoing, and the season will be announced at a later date. Due to the expected timing of Regulatory Amendment 35 implementation, the 2023 season is being developed based on current red snapper catch levels rather than those considered in Regulatory Amendment 35.

**Release Mortality Reduction & Red Snapper (SG Reg Amendment 35)**

Regulatory Amendment 35 considers revisions to South Atlantic red snapper catch levels following the most recent stock assessment (SEDAR 73) and gear changes intended to reduce dead discards throughout the snapper grouper fishery. Seven public hearings were held in January 2023 (6 in-person and 1 via webinar).

Staff presented the draft amendment, including a summary of public comment and draft rationale for each action. NMFS SERO discussed potential recreational opportunities for exempted fishing permits for red snapper. NMFS is developing a request for EFP proposals that will be

focused on reducing discards of red snapper and testing of potential management strategies. A separate path for experimental commercial fishing opportunities is being developed through internal funding.

The Committee made the following motions and gave the following guidance:

**MOTION 1: APPROVE THE REVISED LANGUAGE FOR PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE 2.**

**Action 1. Reduce the acceptable biological catch, total annual catch limit, and sector annual catch limits, and establish an annual optimum yield for South Atlantic red snapper**

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Reduce the red snapper acceptable biological catch and set it equal to the most recent recommendation from the Scientific and Statistical Committee. Reduce the total annual catch limit and establish an annual optimum yield for red snapper and set them equal to the recommended acceptable biological catch. Reduce the sector annual catch limits according to the revised total annual catch limit, current allocation method, and average weight estimates from the most recent stock assessment. Red snapper may only be harvested or possessed in or from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone during the commercial and recreational fishing seasons. The 2027 total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

Fishing Year	ABC (numbers of fish)	Annual OY=Total ACL (numbers of fish)	Commercial ACL (lbs ww)	Recreational ACL (numbers of fish)
2023	28,000	28,000	77,016	19,119
2024	31,000	31,000	85,268	21,167
2025	33,000	33,000	90,769	22,533
2026	35,000	35,000	96,270	23,899
2027+	36,000	36,000	99,021	24,581

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION 2: SELECT ALTERNATIVE 2 AS PREFERRED UNDER ACTION 2.**

**Action 2. Prohibit the use of more than one hook per line for the snapper grouper recreational sector**

**Alternative 2.** The recreational sector is required to use one non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hook per line when fishing for South Atlantic snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear and natural baits north of 28° N latitude, and no more than one hook per line may be used. The recreational sector is required to use one non-stainless steel hook per line when fishing for South Atlantic snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear and natural baits south of 28° N latitude, and no more than one hook per line may be used.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION 3:** DIRECT NOAA FISHERIES TO PRESENT DATA ON THE SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL DISTRIBUTION OF SG CATCH, BY SECTOR, IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION 4:** APPROVE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 35 TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE SNAPPER GROUPER FISHERY OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION FOR FORMAL SECRETARIAL REVIEW AND DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT AS NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE. GIVE STAFF EDITORIAL LICENSE TO MAKE ANY NECESSARY EDITORIAL CHANGES TO THE DOCUMENT/CODIFIED TEXT AND GIVE THE COUNCIL CHAIR AUTHORITY TO APPROVE THE REVISIONS AND RE-DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Staff updated the Council on the Best Fishing Practice outreach expansion, notably the hire of Ashley Oliver as the Best Fishing Practices Outreach Specialist. Staff also updated the Council on progression of the South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program. Additional funding from Public Law 117-328 has been made available for the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to better understand discard rates and mortality in the snapper grouper fishery. The Council will develop guidance for this spending during Full Council.

**Private Recreational Permitting (SG Amendment 46)**

Amendment 46 considers establishing a private recreational permit and education component for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. In recent meetings, the Committee has received input and technical guidance from the Private Recreational Reporting Working Group, Joint Council Workgroup on Section 102 of the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act, and the Recreational Permitting and Reporting Technical Advisory Panel (AP). After reviewing this input, the Committee initiated development of the amendment and approved it for scoping at the December 2022 meeting. Scoping took place in January and February 2023, with webinars on January 30th and February 6th accompanied by a scoping comment period that ended February 10th. Council staff reviewed scoping comments that were received and a decision document for the amendment. The Committee held a discussion on potential permitting, education, and future reporting requirements and provided the following guidance:

- Continue development of actions that would establish a private recreational permit and education component.

The Committee also edited the purpose and need to read:

- 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.

### **DIRECTION TO STAFF:**

- Restructure permit-related actions to separately cover permit type, species, and fishing location.
  - Additional options for other species, including SRFS + assessed species and deepwater species options.
- Restructure education component-related actions to separately cover establishing an education component, mandatory vs. voluntary measures, and the timing of implementation.
- Request that the Recreational Permitting and Reporting Technical AP Chair or other appropriate AP member be available during Committee discussion of the amendment at future meetings.
- Examine whether the National Saltwater Angler Registry exemption for states or a similar framework could apply to a federal permit requirement.
  - Would this process need to be specified in the amendment?
  - State education and permitting requirements would need to be equivalent to federal requirements.
- Provide feedback and estimate of administrative cost for developing a private recreational permitting program. Including the options to secure funding to support the program.
- Recreational Permitting and Reporting Technical AP topics:
  - Review and provide feedback and recommendations on actions and alternatives in the amendment.
    - Provide recommendations on species that should be covered by a permit.
  - Other?

### **Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper Assessment Results (SEDAR 68)**

SEFSC staff presented the results of the SEDAR 68 stock assessment for scamp and yellowmouth grouper. Staff provided an overview of management changes that are needed to incorporate the results from SEDAR 68 into management. This was followed by a [Fishery Overview](#) that includes information on the management history, fishery performance report developed by the Snapper Grouper AP, and descriptive graphs of the fishery.

**MOTION 5: INITIATE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AMENDMENT IN RESPONSE TO SEDAR 68 TO MODIFY MANAGEMENT OF SCAMP AND YELLOWMOUTH GROUPE**  
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

### **Gag and Black Grouper (SG Amendment 53)**

Amendment 53 considers establishing a rebuilding plan and changing catch levels for gag in response to the most recent stock assessment (SEDAR 71) and proposes management measure modifications for gag and black grouper. Public hearings were held January 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. The Committee reviewed public hearing comments and a decision document. The Committee made the following motions and gave the following guidance:

**MOTION 6: APPROVE THE PURPOSE AND NEED, AS MODIFIED.**

The *purpose* of this fishery management plan amendment is to establish a rebuilding plan, and revise the acceptable biological catch, annual catch limits and sector allocations for South Atlantic gag based on the results of the most recent stock assessment. This plan amendment

would also make modifications to management measures for South Atlantic gag and black grouper and recreational accountability measures for South Atlantic gag.

The *need* for this fishery management plan amendment is to end overfishing of South Atlantic gag, rebuild the stock, and achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

The Regional Administrator stated that NMFS’ review of the amendment suggested that the probability of rebuilding under the Council’s preferred alternative for Action 1 (rebuilding timeframe) might be below 70% and suggested the Council consider including a buffer between the ABC and ACL under Action 2 to account for discards.

**Rounding Clarification**

A rounding error was found within Action 3. Sector ACLs were corrected for the highlighted years. Changes were limited to a single pound to ensure the sector ACLs combined equaled the total ACL. The codified text will be updated accordingly.

**Action 3.** Revise the gag sector allocations and sector annual catch limits

**Preferred Alternative 4.** Commercial and recreational allocation percentages would change each year from 2023 to 2032 (where they would remain in place until modified) based on:

**Preferred Sub-Alternative 4b.** Total average commercial and recreational landings from 2015-2019 (5-year average).

Year	Total ACL (lbs gw)	Commercial ACL (lbs gw)	Commercial Allocation %	Recreational ACL (lbs gw)	Recreational Allocation %
2023	175,632	85,326	49%	90,306	51%
2024	261,171	128,096	49%	133,075	51%
2025	348,352	171,687	49%	176,666/176,665	51%
2026	435,081	215,051	49%	220,030	51%
2027	524,625	259,823	50%	264,802	50%
2028	617,778	306,400	50%	311,379/311,378	50%
2029	711,419	353,220	50%	358,199	50%
2030	800,088	397,555	50%	402,534/402,533	50%
2031	879,758	437,390	50%	442,369/442,368	50%
2032	948,911	471,966	50%	476,945	50%

\*Numbers highlighted were shifted a single pound to make sure rounding = total ACL. Exact changes will be made to the codified text.

**MOTION 7:** APPROVE ALL ACTIONS AS MODIFIED IN SNAPPER GROUPER AMENDMENT 53

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION 8:** APPROVE AMENDMENT 53 TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE SNAPPER GROUPER FISHERY OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION FOR FORMAL SECRETARIAL REVIEW AND DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT AS NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE. GIVE STAFF EDITORIAL LICENSE TO MAKE ANY NECESSARY EDITORIAL CHANGES TO THE DOCUMENT/CODIFIED TEXT AND GIVE THE COUNCIL CHAIR AUTHORITY TO APPROVE THE REVISIONS AND RE-DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT.  
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**Wreckfish (SG Amendment 48)**

A review of the Wreckfish ITQ Program was completed in 2019 and included recommendations for improvement, particularly with respect to confidentiality issues and related constraints; moving away from a paper coupon-based program to an electronic program; cost recovery; wreckfish permit requirement; allocation issues; offloading sites and times; and economic data collection. At their September 2022 meeting the Council selected preferred alternatives and approved the amendment for public hearings during the March 2023 meeting. Staff presented a decision document and a draft amendment for the Committee to discuss, and NMFS staff provided a presentation on cost recovery in ITQ fisheries.

The Committee made the following motions and gave the following guidance:

**MOTION 9:** CHANGE THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE UNDER SUB-ACTION 7-2 TO ALTERNATIVE 4

**Sub-Action 7-2. Collection of wreckfish individual transferable quota program cost recovery fees.**

**Alternative 4.** Fees will be collected in the last quarter of the calendar year in which the fish is harvested.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**DIRECTION TO STAFF:** HAVE THE AGENCY PRESENT INFORMATION IN SEPTEMBER 2023 ABOUT ENFORCEMENT OF COST RECOVERY FEE NON-PAYMENT.

**MOTION 10:** CHANGE THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE UNDER SUB-ACTION 7-3 TO ALTERNATIVE 2.

**Sub-Action 7-3. Frequency of wreckfish individual transferable quota program cost recovery fee submission.**

**Alternative 2.** Cost recovery fee will be submitted once per year.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**DIRECTION TO STAFF:** BRING MORE INFORMATION ON ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN OF ACTUAL VS. STANDARD EX-VESSEL PRICE ON THE AGENCY AND MORE INFORMATION ADDRESSING STAKEHOLDER CONCERNS ABOUT ACTUAL

EX-VESSEL VALUE AS REPORTED BY THE FISHERMEN, INCLUDING EXAMPLES FROM OTHER ITQ PROGRAMS.

**MOTION 11:** REMOVE ACTION 5 AND SEND TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED APPENDIX.

**Action 5. Require all commercial vessels with a South Atlantic Unlimited Snapper-Grouper Permit participating in the wreckfish portion of the snapper grouper fishery to be equipped with vessel monitoring systems.**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Commercial vessels with a South Atlantic Unlimited Snapper-Grouper Permit are not required to be equipped with vessel monitoring systems when participating in the wreckfish portion of the snapper grouper fishery.

**Alternative 2.** Require all commercial vessels with a South Atlantic Unlimited Snapper-Grouper Permit participating in the wreckfish portion of the snapper grouper fishery to be equipped with vessel monitoring systems.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION 12:** DIRECT STAFF TO INCLUDE A HAIL-IN/HAIL-OUT PROVISION AND BRING THAT BACK TO THE JUNE 2023 COUNCIL MEETING.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**DIRECTION TO STAFF:** BRING THE OFFLOADING SITE AND TIME REQUIREMENT ACTION(S) TO THE JUNE 2023 MEETING FOR DISCUSSION. INCLUDE INFORMATION ON WHY THESE OFFLOADING SITE AND TIME REQUIREMENTS WERE ORIGINALLY INCLUDED IN THE FISHERY. HAVE THERE BEEN ANY ISSUES/PROBLEMS THAT NEED TO BE SOLVED?

### **Approve Topics for Snapper Grouper AP Meeting**

The Snapper Grouper AP is scheduled to convene on April 25-27, 2023. Below is a list of proposed topics to develop the AP's agenda:

- Red Grouper Fishery Performance Report Update
- Management Strategy Evaluation Update and Discussion
  - A scoping session will be conducted in the evening on one of the AP meeting dates.
- Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper Fishery Overview
- Amendment 46 (Recreational Permitting)
- Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper)
- Amendment 48 (Wreckfish)
- Review Research Recommendations
- Effects of Space Launches on Fishing Activities
- Amendment Updates: Regulatory Amendment 35 (Red Snapper and Release Mortality Reduction), Amendment 51 (Snowy Grouper), Amendment 52 (Golden Tilefish and Blueline Tilefish), Amendment 53 (Gag Grouper)
- Other Updates: Citizen Science, SEDAR, Climate Change Scenario Planning, Reef Fish Fellowship, SERFS

## **Other Business**

1. The Committee also discussed timing of Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper).
2. The Committee requested future presentations and discussions by the Council and SSC about regime shift evaluation and development and interpretation of catch projections.
3. The Committee discussed the challenges with the gag grouper stock and requested a potential future presentation on Gulf gag grouper life history research from FWRI and NMFS.

## **Timing and Tasks:**

### **MOTION 13: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:**

- Develop a guidance document or road map for the development of the Management Strategy Evaluation.
- Finalize and submit Regulatory Amendment 35 (Release Mortality Reduction and Red Snapper) and Amendment 53 (Gag and Black Grouper) for formal secretarial review.
- Continue developing Amendment 46 (Private Recreational Permitting) for review at the June 2023 meeting.
  - Convene Recreational Permitting and Reporting Technical AP to review and provide recommendations on actions and alternatives in the amendment (either before the June or September 2023 Council meetings).
- Begin development of a plan amendment to adjust catch levels for scamp and yellowmouth grouper based on SEDAR 68.
- Continue developing Amendment 48 (Wreckfish) for final action at the September 2023 meeting but review actions pertaining to offloading site and times requirements at the June 2023 meeting.
- Per request from the Gulf Council, try and move Yellowtail Snapper Amendment as fast as possible before the data are too old again.
- Request the SSC initiate discussion (or form a workgroup) of how regime shifts might affect the snapper grouper fishery and discuss with the Council.
  - Have Council staff brief the Council on how regime shifts could affect fisheries management.
  - Investigate what is allowed and not allowed in the MSA.
- Schedule presentation from SERO on gag management in the Gulf and Sue Barbieri research on gag life history. – schedule for *after* Gulf’s SSC presentation in summer 2023.
- Request a presentation from the SEFSC on the handling of discards and landings in assessment projections be provided to the SSC.
  - Review how projections have been prepared in the past and address the recommendation that estimated discards will be tied to management action in future projections.
  - Address how this could impact the development of management actions, sector allocations, and ACLs in future amendments.



- Include discussion of how to communicate better between Science Center, SSC, and Council to coordinate planned management actions with projection assumptions.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL