

**FINAL**  
**SUMMARY REPORT**  
**SNAPPER GROUPEr COMMITTEE**  
**SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**  
**September 18, 2024**

The Committee approved the minutes from the June 2024 meeting and the agenda for the September 2024 meeting with slight modification to allow for a litigation briefing.

The Committee received updates about amendments currently under review, red snapper litigation and the upcoming Secretarial amendment (see additional details below), and the red snapper research projects being conducted in Florida under exempted fishing permits. Website about the projects: <https://myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/atlantic-red-snapper-efp/>.

Three red snapper cases are currently under litigation. One lawsuit alleges that NMFS violated the MSA and APA because it failed to address overfishing of red snapper. The settlement agreement was approved on August 22 and includes NMFS agreeing to complete and submit a secretarial amendment. The Final Rule needs to be submitted to the Federal Register by June 6, 2025. The Council can prepare regulations to end overfishing but would need to submit these to NMFS in time for NMFS to approve and submit the final rule to the Federal Register by June 6, 2025. The Council will be able to comment on the secretarial amendment, and there will be opportunities for public comment prior to implementation. The Notice of Intent is expected to be published next month.

**Gag and Black Grouper Recreational Vessel Limits and On-Demand Gear for Black Sea Bass (Regulatory Amendment 36)**

Regulatory Amendment 36 considers revising the gag and black grouper recreational vessel limits and revising transit stowage requirements for commercial black sea bass pots equipped with on-demand gear. Council staff presented the draft amendment using a decision document that outlines actions, alternatives, public comments, and draft rationale for each action. The committee provided the following direction to staff:

**DIRECTION TO STAFF:** REVISE DRAFT CODIFIED TEXT FOR GAG AND BLACK GROUPEr BAG LIMITS TO BE SIMILAR TO PREVIOUS LANGUAGE AND TO BE CONSISTENT WITH OTHER BAG LIMIT TEXT (E.G., AMENDMENT 55 PERTAINING TO SCAMP AND YELLOWMOUTH GROUPEr).

ADD THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION TO THE BACKGROUND DISCUSSION IN THE AMENDMENT:

- Describe misidentification issues between gag and black grouper, similar to information in Amendment 53. Clarify that misidentification issues pertain to the recreational sector in some areas of the Council's jurisdiction.
- Note the Council's intent to revisit black grouper management after completion of the ongoing black grouper management strategy evaluation being conducted by Florida FWC.

**MOTION 1: APPROVE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 36 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**

**Black Sea Bass (SG Amendment 56)**

Amendment 56 responds to the SEDAR 76 stock assessment of black sea bass, which indicates the stock is depleted. In June 2024, the Council requested additional catch projections that incorporated management changes beyond changes to the annual catch limit to be developed by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center and reviewed by the SSC at their August 2024 meeting. The SSC met via webinar in August and discussed the additional projections with the analysts, clarifying the assumptions for the requested projections. The SSC is expected to review results of the projections at their October 2024 meeting. An SSC representative presented the SSC's comments from the August 2024 meeting. The committee discussed the current list of potential management actions and expected changes to fishing behavior in response to management actions being incorporated in the requested catch projections. The committee discussed addressing black sea bass changes incrementally. First, the committee would address new catch limits, once provided) and new reference points. Secondly, once the new stock reference points have been adopted, the Council will address the rebuilding plan. The committee also provided the following direction to staff:

**DIRECTION TO STAFF:**

- Explore federal snapper grouper recreational trip data to determine whether past closures of black sea bass (2010-2013) or other snapper grouper species provide insight as to whether changes in recreational catch (landings and releases) or trips could be expected if a January-April recreational black sea bass retention closure were to be implemented.
  - If notable changes can be expected, coordinate with the SEFSC to discuss how expected effort changes can be incorporated into the applicable catch projections.
- Work further with the SSC and Science Center to develop a method to allocate projected removals and subtract discards of black sea bass for presentation at the December 2024 Council meeting.
- Conduct scoping after the December 2024 Council meeting.

**Scamp/Yellowmouth Grouper (SG Amendment 55)**

Snapper Grouper Amendment 55 is being developed to reorganize the Other Shallow Water Grouper Complex, establish the new Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper Complex and establish a rebuilding plan, catch levels, allocations, and accountability measures (AM) for this new complex. The Committee provided feedback on the codified text to ensure the text is written similarly to other bag limits. The committee passed the following motions, and provided the following direction to staff:

**MOTION 2:** SELECT ALTERNATIVE 4 AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR SUB-ACTION 2D.

**Action 2d. Establish the optimum yield for the Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper complex.**

**Preferred Alternative 4.** Establish an optimum yield of 95% of maximum sustainable yield for the Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper complex.

## **APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**MOTION 3:** MOVE ACTIONS 6 AND 7B TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED APPENDIX.

**Action 6.** Reduce the recreational fishing season for scamp and yellowmouth grouper  
**Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action).** The recreational fishing season for scamp and yellowmouth grouper in the exclusive economic zone is open May 1 – December 31. A spawning season closure is in place annually from January 1 through April 30.

**Alternative 2.** Reduce the recreational fishing season for scamp and yellowmouth grouper in the exclusive economic zone to be open May 1 through August 31. The season will be closed January 1 through April 30 (spawning season closure) and September 1 through December 31.

**Alternative 3.** Reduce the recreational fishing season for scamp and yellowmouth grouper in the exclusive economic zone to be open May 1 through September 30. The season will be closed January 1 through April 30 (spawning season closure) and October 1 through December 31.

**Sub-Action 7b.** Establish a recreational vessel limit

**Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action).** There is no vessel limit for scamp and yellowmouth grouper.

**Alternative 2.** Establish a private recreational aggregate vessel limit for scamp and yellowmouth grouper of:

**Sub-alternative 2a.** 2 fish (either scamp or yellowmouth grouper combined) per vessel per **day**, not to exceed the daily bag limit, whichever is more restrictive.

**Sub-alternative 2b.** 4 fish (either scamp or yellowmouth grouper combined) per vessel per **day**, not to exceed the daily bag limit, whichever is more restrictive.

**Alternative 3.** Establish a for-hire (charter vessel/headboat) recreational aggregate vessel limit for scamp and yellowmouth grouper of:

**Sub-alternative 3a.** 2 fish (either scamp or yellowmouth grouper combined) per vessel per **trip**, not to exceed the daily bag limit, whichever is more restrictive.

**Sub-alternative 3b.** 4 fish (either scamp or yellowmouth grouper combined) per vessel per **trip**, not to exceed the daily bag limit, whichever is more restrictive.

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**MOTION 4:** APPROVE SNAPPER GROUPE AMENDMENT 55 (SCAMP AND YELLOWMOUTH GROUPE) 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**

**Topics for Fall 2024 AP Meeting**

The Snapper Grouper AP is scheduled to convene on October 15-17, 2024. The Committee directed staff to include the following topics in the AP’s agenda:

- Red Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper Fishery Performance Reports
- ABC Control Rule Risk Scoring for Golden Tilefish, Blueline Tilefish, Mutton Snapper, Red Snapper, and Yellowtail Snapper
- Management Strategy Evaluation Update and Discussion
- SERFS Presentation
- Stakeholder Engagement Meetings Discussion
- Amendment 56 (Black Sea Bass Assessment Response) – Ask about expected fishing behavior response to the considered management actions
- Amendment Updates: Amendment 46 (Recreational Permitting), SEFHIER Update & recruitment for For-Hire AP
- Other Updates: Best Fishing Practices, Citizen Science, SEDAR, Red Snapper EFP Projects

The Committee also requested an FPR to be completed for the Jacks Complex at a future AP meeting.

**Other Business**

Black Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation

At their August 2024 meeting, the SSC reviewed a presentation from Nature Analytics on a proposed foundation for designing management procedure options for black grouper fisheries in the U.S. Southeast Region. The SSC representative provided the SSC’s comments on the MSE.

**Timing and Tasks:**

**MOTION 5:** DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Prepare Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 36 (Gag and Black Grouper Recreational Vessel Limits and Black Sea Bass On-Demand Pots) and Amendment 55

(Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper Complex) for transmittal to the Secretary of Commerce.

- Review and revise codified text as needed
- Develop outreach materials/media for stakeholders about Regulatory Amendment 36 and Amendment 55 regulations.
- Investigate black sea bass effort data and work with the Science Center to update assumptions for catch projections.
- Convene the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel in October 2024
- Conduct scoping webinars for Amendment 56 (Black Sea Bass Assessment Response) AFTER the December Meeting.
- Convene the Commercial Snapper Grouper Management Subcommittee between the September and December 2024 Council meetings.

#### **APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

Commercial SG Management Subcommittee: Dukes, Marhefka, Murphey, Phillips, Hull, McCawley, Griner, Strelchek(?)