

DRAFT
SUMMARY REPORT
SNAPPER GROUPEr COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
December 4-5, 2024

The Committee approved the minutes from the September 2024 meeting and the agenda for the December 2024 meeting.

The Committee received updates about amendments that have been approved by the Council and are under development to be submitted for secretarial review. The Southeast Regional Office (SERO) updated the Council on potential actions and timing for the Secretarial amendment being developed to end overfishing of red snapper. Potential actions and other details are outlined in the [Fishery Bulletin](#) released on December 5, 2024. An updated stock assessment of red snapper with data through 2023 is being developed by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to provide scientific advice for the Secretarial amendment. This stock assessment report will be available within the timing of amendment development. A more detailed update on the Secretarial amendment will be presented at the March 2025 Council meeting, and in-person public hearings are being scheduled by NOAA Fisheries around February 2025. Specific times and locations of the public hearings will be announced at a later date.

AP Report for Topics Not on the Agenda

The Snapper Grouper AP met on October 15-17, 2024, and discussed topics pertaining to the snapper grouper fishery that were not scheduled for Council discussion at this meeting. The AP Chair presented these discussions.

One of these items was notification from an AP member who holds a golden tilefish longline endorsement that this user group is considering proposal of a catch share program for that component of the fishery. The Council directed staff to gather information about the process for establishing an individual transferable quota (ITQ) fishery under the current Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (reauthorized in 2007).

Black Sea Bass (SG Amendment 56)

The AP and SSC Chairs presented discussions about black sea bass from their respective October 2024 meetings. The AP discussed potential fishery behavior responses to recreational management actions under consideration through Amendment 56. The SSC reviewed additional assessment projections of black sea bass catch levels. The SSC recommended against management use of the currently available set of catch projections, and instead recommended the development of an “enhanced projection” approach that updates several assessment inputs through 2023 and re-runs the assessment model to provide catch projections for 2026 and future years. Staff presented an overview of the current amendment timeline and decision points necessary for developing the assessment response. The Committee provided the following direction to staff:

- Request projections from the Science Center consistent with the SSC’s recommendation to be available for the SSC to review in April 2025 and the Council to review in June 2025.

- The SSC would apply the new ABC Control Rule; the stock risk rating for black sea bass will need to be evaluated IN SPRING 2025
- Conduct scoping meetings (staff will decide webinar or in-person) including the following actions:
 1. Reduce catch levels (ABC, annual catch limit [ACL], and optimum yield [OY])
 2. Revise status determination criteria (SDC)
 3. Discuss sector allocation percentages
 4. Accountability measures
 5. Change fishing year start date
 6. Re-opening nearshore areas to on-demand black sea bass pots.
 7. Recreational management measures
 - a. Discard reducing measures (e.g., single hook rigs)
 - b. Close nearshore areas for black sea bass retention that coincide with spawning season (potentially in alignment in time and space with roped pot closure)
 - c. Recreational bag limit reduction
 - d. Recreational size limit reduction
 - e. Recreational seasonal retention closure.
- With the currently considered actions, implementation would be tentatively expected for late 2026.
- In the absence of catch levels available for review during scoping meetings, note recent landings, discard removals, and other data that are indicating the strong decline in the black sea bass stock.
- Request a presentation from the SEFSC to the Council (at the March or June meeting, depending on number of items in the agenda) describing various levels of spawning potential ratio (SPR)-based proxies for maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and rationale for different levels.

Management Strategy Evaluation for the Snapper Grouper Fishery

The Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) explores long-term management strategies for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. The AP and SSC Chairs presented comments and recommendations for management strategies that should be considered in future simulations. Staff from Blue Matter Science presented several potential management strategies for black sea bass, gag, and red snapper and requested input from the Council to refine the current suite of broad management strategies into implementable actions that should be further explored. The Committee provided the following guidance for development of future model iterations:

- Identify implementable management strategies (specific management decisions)
 - Effort reduction and sector caps
 - Recalculation of reference points (dynamic reference points)
- Specific management options like aggregate bag limit
 - Recreational fleet response to management actions (inshore/offshore shifts and season length changes (Sean Powers paper)
- Seasonal closures (weekend only fishing)
- Additional species, species interactions, and life history variation
- Key Uncertainties

- Fleet dynamics (responses to regulation)
- Spatial management options (north to south and depth) state water vs federal water management varying
- Future recruitment patterns – regime shift
- Compliance rates and angler satisfaction
- Start year of assessment
- Management objective
 - Maximize days at sea
 - Ensure for-hire fishery remains economically viable

Assessment Review and Response Planning Discussion for Ongoing Assessments

Three upcoming stock assessments straddle the jurisdictional boundary between the South Atlantic and another region – Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper have shared jurisdiction with the Gulf of Mexico, and Blueline Tilefish with the Mid-Atlantic – with each of the three species analytically treated as a single stock. As such, the review of stock assessments for these species needs to be conducted jointly among the Council’s respective SSCs to provide catch-level recommendations for the entire stock. A sub-group approach consisting of representatives from each Council’s SSC was proposed for the stock assessment review of these three species, and Council staff provided details on this sub-group approach, logistics, and timing of these assessment reviews. The Council agreed with and approved the proposed approach and the list of participants for the assessment review. The Council was also presented with a proposal for the joint management approach with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council for Yellowtail Snapper and Mutton Snapper following the joint review of the assessments. The proposed approach was to complete a joint SAFMC/GMFMC amendment to establish the OFL and ABC for the single stock of Mutton Snapper and single stock of Yellowtail Snapper, and review jurisdictional allocation for both species and modify, if necessary. The Gulf Council would be the administrative lead for this amendment. The South Atlantic would then complete a follow-up amendment to the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper FMP to establish the South Atlantic ABC and ACL for mutton and yellowtail snapper, establish the SA sector allocations and sector ACLs for each stock, and introduce any management and accountability measures to manage the fisheries. The Committee supported moving forward with the SSC review and management plans as outlined by staff.

Stock Risk Ratings for Golden Tilefish, Blueline Tilefish, Red Snapper, Mutton Snapper, and Yellowtail Snapper

Under the ABC Control Rule, the Council incorporates an evaluation of how much risk of overfishing it would be willing to accept based on biological, fishery (human interaction), and environmental factors affecting each stock. The Committee reviewed recommended scores from the AP and SSC and related information for golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, red snapper, mutton snapper, and yellowtail snapper. The Committee developed stock risk ratings for use in application of the ABC Control Rule to each of these species and rated each of these stocks as High Risk.

Private Recreational Permit & Education Requirements (Amendment 46)

Amendment 46 considers establishing a private recreational permit and education requirement for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. The amendment was recently reviewed by the Snapper Grouper Private Angler AP at their November 2024 meeting. The Committee was

provided with summary AP feedback and then provided the following comments and direction to staff:

- For the Purpose and Need Statements, direct staff to:
 - Adapt the statements to include planning for potential reporting and expansion to other FMPs in the future.
 - Further emphasize the intent to survey permit holders to enhance data collection.
- Action 2 (Species Covered By A Permit): Add an alternative that would cover “key stocks” (see SEDAR Committee Report). **NOTE THE NUMBER FO SPECIES MAY BE BROADER (KEY STOCKS AND FRIENDS)**
 - “Key stocks” will be discussed and identified by the Council at a future date.
 - During discussion of this action, the Committee provided direction to Council staff to review the Snapper Grouper complex to determine what species are in need OF federal conservation and management and change the Fishery Management Unit.
- Actions 3 and 4 (Education Requirement): Accept the IPT suggested edits to the alternatives.
Action 3. Establish an education component in conjunction with a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit
Alternative 2. Establish and require an education component in conjunction with a private recreational snapper grouper permit to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone. The education component would be **required before FOR initial issuance** of a federal private recreational permit.

Action 4. Specify the timing of the education component requirement for the private recreational snapper grouper permit
Alternative 4. Completion of the education component would be required **ONLY upon initial issuance** of a federal private recreational snapper grouper permit.
- Action 5 (Exemption To The Federal Permit and Education Requirement), direct staff to:
 - Add an allowance that would accommodate the existing Florida state reef fish survey.
 - Either exempt Florida or “grandfather” the existing program in to allow an exemption from a federal permit and education requirement.
 - Make sure that future state programs can be exempted from federal permit and education requirements.
 - Carry through “equivalent” or “comparable” in the wording of sub-alternatives rather than “same.”
 - Gather feedback on whether Florida, which has an angler-based permit, could be provided an exemption from the federal requirement if the federal permit is vessel-based.
- Accept the IPT suggested edits to the alternatives in Action 5.
Action 5. Establish an exemption to the federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and education requirements based on permitting and education by the states
Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not establish an exemption to the federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and education requirements to fish for, harvest, or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic region.
Alternative 2. Establish an exemption to the federal private recreational snapper grouper permit and education requirements. The National Marine Fisheries Service would certify a state permit and education component as equivalent to a federal private recreational snapper

grouper permit and education component...

Golden Tilefish Stock Assessment

SEDAR 89 included data through 2022 and indicated that the golden tilefish stock in the South Atlantic is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. SEFSC staff presented the assessment results to the Committee. The SSC Chair presented the SSC's comments on the assessment and recommendations for the overfishing limit and acceptable biological catch. Council staff presented the Fishery Overview, showing recent golden tilefish landings and other pertinent data. The Committee passed the following motion and gave the following direction:

MOTION 1: INITIATE AN AMENDMENT TO INCORPORATE SEDAR 89 CATCH LEVELS FOR GOLDEN TILEFISH.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

- In the amendment, include considerations of the following actions:
 - Allocation discussion (not necessarily an action but discussion to generate report with Council's rationale for not changing allocations)
 - Consult the SSC if golden tilefish would be a candidate for carry-over or phase-in under the ABC Control Rule
 - Staff reviewed the requirements of the ABC Control Rule for carry-over and phase-in provisions.
 - Golden tilefish are not eligible for phase-in because the recommended ABC is not less than 80% of the current ABC.
 - Neither golden tilefish sector is currently eligible for carry-over because the accountability measures (AM) do not include post-season reductions to the ACL if an overage occurs. If the AMs were changed to include such reductions in response to overages, the stock would meet eligibility requirements defined in the ABC Control Rule.
 - Modify the recreational season start date (currently January 1)
 - Consider revision of accountability measures

Commercial Sub-Committee Report

In November 2024, the Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee met via webinar. Staff summarized the meeting for the Committee. The Sub-Committee reviewed commercial information from the 2015 Snapper Grouper Vision Blueprint. The Sub-Committee concluded that additional and updated information is necessary to prioritize commercial management issues that need to be addressed. The Sub-Committee directed staff to compile this information, as available, for the Sub-Committee's next meeting, which is to be held in-person prior to or during the March 2025 Council meeting. Staff will follow up with Sub-Committee members to schedule a specific meeting time and location.

Other Business

Return 'Em Right Expansion

Following the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the Open Ocean Trustee Council created the Gulf Spill Restoration project portal to accept restoration project ideas from the public. The

submitted project ideas have been narrowed down to ten projects that are being recommended for implementation. One of the recommended projects would expand the “Return ’Em Right” Program, which works to advance the use of best fishing practices, into the south Atlantic and Caribbean regions as well as to other species including highly migratory species, coastal migratory pelagic species, and other species such as flounders, drums, and sea trout. The Committee supported drafting a comment letter expressing support for the expansion of the program to the South Atlantic region. Additionally, the Committee requested the letter strongly emphasize the importance of collaborating with and supporting already established programs in the region, specifically the Council’s Best Fishing Practices Initiative and Citizen Science Program, and relevant state and regional agencies.

MOTION 2: SUBMIT COMMENTS ON THE RETURN ‘EM RIGHT: SPECIES AND AREA EXPANSION PROJECT PROPOSED IN THE OPEN OCEAN TRUSTEE IMPLEMENTATION GROUP DRAFT RESTORATION PLAN 4.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION 3: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Conduct scoping meetings for Amendment 56 prior to the March 2025 Council meeting.
- Request black sea bass projections from the Science Center consistent with the SSC’s recommendations.
 - Include runs based on 30%SPR and 40%SPR as MSY proxies.
- Request a presentation on the MAFMC’s Recreational Reform process.
- Request a presentation to the Council (at the March or June 2025 meeting) describing various levels of spawning potential ratio (SPR)-based proxies for maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and rationale for different levels.
- Coordinate with the MAFMC for blueline tilefish and the GMFMC for yellowtail snapper and mutton snapper to conduct SSC reviews of the assessments and develop management responses.
- Request further development of the Snapper Grouper MSE, per the guidance listed above.
- Continue work on Amendment 46 for review at the March 2025 meeting. Consider the amendment for approval for public hearings at the March 2025 meeting.
 - Request that NMFS consult with OST to provide clarity on the survey methodology at a future meeting.
- Compile information to review the snapper grouper fishery management unit to evaluate which species are in need of federal conservation and management.
- Prepare a document for the golden tilefish amendment to be considered for scoping at the March 2025 Council meeting.
- Convene the Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee in-person, prior to the March 2025 Council meeting.
- Submit comments on the proposed Return Em’ Right: Species and Area Expansion project.

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