



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Snapper Grouper Amendment 60

Commercial Sub-Committee

Discussion Document, December 2025

PG: AVH

Background

In March 2024, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) established the Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee (Sub-Committee) and tasked them with identifying and developing potential management responses to issues in the commercial sector of the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. Through its discussions, the Sub-Committee has identified two major objectives to be addressed through an amendment: 1) commercial SG 1 permit issues, and 2) increasing commercial trip efficiency.

Scoping was conducted from July 25 through August 8, 2025. Comments received during scoping were summarized in the [September 2025 Discussion Document](#).

Last Meeting (September 2025)

In September 2025 ([Sub-Committee Report](#); [Snapper Grouper Committee Report](#)), the Sub-Committee reviewed scoping comments and provided initial directions to staff on the actions and alternatives that will be considered in Amendment 60.

Objectives for this Meeting (December 2025)

- Direct staff on actions and ranges of alternatives to initially develop in the amendment.
- Identify necessary information for any known outstanding Council discussions.
- Review the amendment timeline and revise as necessary.

Actions and Alternatives

*Draft Actions may change as the Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT) discusses how to best accomplish the Council's directions given at this meeting. The IPT was unable to meet between the September and December meetings due to the federal government shutdown.

Action 1. Remove the 2-for-1 policy for the snapper grouper commercial unlimited permit

Alternative 1 (No Action). To acquire a limited access, transferable permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper, a person must obtain and exchange two such permits for one new permit.

Alternative 2. To acquire a limited access, transferable permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper, a person must obtain and exchange one such permit for one new permit.

Previous Notes for Future Reference

- This action does not consider any change to the use of limited access for the snapper grouper commercial sector.
- After one SG1 permit has been acquired, the new owner has one year after the expiration date of that permit to acquire a second SG1 permit to exchange the two permits for a new SG1 permit.

Outstanding Council discussion related to this action: What are the Council's goals for the commercial sector in the absence of the 2-for-1 policy?

- How will the number of permits that will remain in the fishery be determined?
 - Do we need to announce with a control date?

Outstanding Information Needs:

- The number of latent SG1 permits due to not having acquired a second permit. This is needed to understand potential effort that will return to the fishery.
- Up to date number of SG1 permits. Also, corporate versus individual SG 1 permits and differences by state.

Sub-Committee Action

Review initial set of alternatives, and provide direction to staff on how alternatives should be developed. Direct staff on any additional information that is needed to have outstanding discussions during a future meeting.

Action 2. Establish a framework for dynamic trip limits that vary throughout the season, based on the tracked catch and the time remaining in the season

Alternative 1 (No Action). No general policy applies for commercial trip limits that would reduce trip limits at a percentage of the commercial annual catch limit.

Alternative 2. If commercial landings of a stock reach ___% of the commercial annual catch limit before (corresponding amount of time) of the fishing year has passed, the commercial trip limit will be reduced by ___% for the remainder of the fishing year.

*** (Other alternatives can be developed following this general structure, if directed)

Table 1. Species-specific commercial trip limits and recent (2022-2024) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL).

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)		
		2024 (Preliminary)	2023	2022
Black Sea Bass	1,000 lbs gw H&L (Jan-Apr): 300 lbs gw	20.1%	25.9%	30.4%
Blueline Tilefish	Jan-Apr: 100 lbs gw May-Dec: 300 lbs gw	98.7% (8/8/2024)	95.0% (8/2/2023; Re-opened 9/11-9/16/2023)	102.8% (9/3/2022)
Gag	300 lbs gw	99.4% (6/30/2024)	176.4%* (10/23/2023)	46.5%
Golden Tilefish (H&L)	500 lbs gw	94.2%	84.5%* (10/31/2023; Re-opened 12/7/2023)	107.7% (7/6/2022)
Golden Tilefish (Longline)	4,000 lbs gw	100.7% (6/8/2024; Re-opened 7/24 - 7/31/2024)	85.6%* (2/26/2023; Re-opened 4/4-4/6/2023; Re-opened 12/7/2023)	102.2% (3/16/2022; Re-opened 4/11-4/16/2022)
Gray Triggerfish	1,000 lbs ww	Jan-Jun: 34.2% Jul-Dec: 47.7%	Jan-Jun: 54.1% Jul-Dec: 73.1%	Jan-Jun: 58.9% Jul-Dec: 92.2%
Greater Amberjack	1,200 lbs ww or gw	Mar-Aug: 45.4% Sept-Feb: 33.1%	Mar-Aug: 66.5% Sept-Feb: 59.0%*	Mar-Aug: 69.0% Sept-Feb: 61.9%
Hogfish (GA-NC)	500 lbs ww	72.6%	74.1%	74.7%
Hogfish (EFL/FLK)	25 lbs ww	20.5%	24.8%	37.1%

Mutton Snapper	Jan-Mar & Jul-Dec: 500 lbs ww Apr-Jun: 5 fish/person/day or trip	47.4%	59.3%	55.3%
Red Grouper	200 lbs gw	52.6%	27.1%	25.4%
Red Porgy	15 fish	Jan-Apr: 47.3% May-Dec: 44.8%	Jan-Apr: 54.1%* May-Dec: 57.0%	Jan-Apr: 35.2% May-Dec: 38.8%
Red Snapper	75 lbs gw	112.7% (8/6/2024)	100.1% (8/18/2023; Re-opened 10/6- 10/9/2023)	99.0% (8/31/2022)
Scamp/Yellowmouth Grouper (ACL %s for scamp only)	None; Am 55 establishes a 300 lbs gw trip limit for an aggregate of both species	22.0%	19.5%	20.1%
Snowy Grouper	200 lbs gw	Jan-Jun: 89.6% (6/4/2024) Jul-Dec: 95.9% (9/29/2024)	Jan-Jun: 60.4% Jul-Dec: 74.5%	Jan-Jun: 70.6% Jul-Dec: 90.4%
Vermilion Snapper	1,000 lbs gw	Jan-Jun: 65.3% Jul-Dec: 56.4%	Jan-Jun: 61.9% Jul-Dec: 92.6%	Jan-Jun: 61.7% Jul-Dec: 88.2%

Source: [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region Annual Catch Limit \(ACL\) Monitoring Website](#)

*Management change became effective during this year/season

Carry-Over

- Black sea bass is the only species that is eligible for carry-over of unharvested ACL under current regulations.
- Species that do not have post-season accountability measures (i.e. payback) are not eligible for carry-over.
 - Species with payback: black sea bass
 - Species without payback: red snapper, vermilion snapper
 - Species with payback only if overfished (these are only eligible for carry-over if they are overfished): blueline tilefish, gag, golden tilefish, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, hogfish (both stocks), mutton snapper, red grouper, red porgy, snowy grouper
- Changes to postseason accountability measures would be necessary to allow more species to be eligible for carry-over.

Questions for Discussion:

- Should this action be structured such that all species in Table 1 have the same step-down process? If not, should species be addressed individually or in groups?

- Should only one step-down be used for each species (as opposed to multiple step-downs/thresholds)?
- What is the minimum ACL percentage that should be considered to initiate a step-down?
- Are current trip limits being considered for change, other than incorporating a step-down?
 - Step-downs would be intended to extend the season.
 - Annual commercial landings for several species are not approaching the commercial ACL.
 - Is the Council considering an increase to trip limits, along with the incorporation of step-downs, to better enable harvest to achieve optimum yield (set for many species at the ACL)?

Previous Notes for Future Reference

- Include flexibility to allow the RA adjust the trip limit up or down, if the situation calls for it.
- Factor in how split seasons affect dynamic trip limits.
- Harvest at or below the ACL is sustainable, even if within a rebuilding plan.

Sub-Committee Action

Review initial structure of alternatives. Address discussion questions and provide direction to staff on how alternatives should be developed. Direct staff on any additional information that is needed to have outstanding discussions during a future meeting.

Action 3. Establish an incidental out-of-season trip limit for harvest of deep water species

Alternative 1 (No Action). No out-of-season harvest of deep water species is allowed.

Alternative 2. Allow landing of no more than ___ pounds (whole weight or gutted weight) or one fish, whichever is of greater weight, of blueline tilefish, golden tilefish, snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, silk snapper, misty grouper, sand tilefish, queen snapper, blackfin snapper, or wreckfish per commercial trip, when the commercial seasons for these species are closed. This total weight or number of fish is cumulative of all applicable species.

Commercial trips may only land the allowed out-of-season limit if they are also landing at least ___ pounds (whole weight or gutted weight) of species for which the commercial seasons are open, on the same trip.

*** (Other alternatives can be developed following this general structure, if directed)

Questions for Discussion

- Should alternatives be developed using the current structure, or based solely on number of fish or poundage that can be retained?
- The following species were identified as “deep water” based depth at which they commonly occur or a high discard mortality rate, as applied by previous stock assessments: Blueline Tilefish, Golden Tilefish, Snowy Grouper, Deepwater Complex (Yellowedge Grouper, Silk Snapper, Misty Grouper, Sand Tilefish, Queen Snapper, Blackfin Snapper), Wreckfish
 - Should all of these species be considered for inclusion in this out-of-season limit? Should any species not list be added for consideration?
- Are there suggested changes to the structure of **Alternative 2**? Provide any additional direction on poundage amounts that should apply to the out-of-season maximum and in-season minimum.

Previous Notes for Future Reference

- Out-of-season catches would need to be estimated when monitoring in-season landings or establishing annual seasons (i.e., seasons may be shortened to allow out-of-season harvest to occur and not exceed the annual catch limit). In any circumstance, catch must be limited to the ACL.
 - Timing of receiving reports can affect projecting landings against the ACL.

Sub-Committee Action

Review initial structure of alternatives. Address discussion questions and provide direction to staff on how alternatives should be developed. Direct staff on any additional information that is needed to have outstanding discussions during a future meeting.

Action 4. Revise authorized gear and stowage requirements

Additional time and information is needed for the IPT to develop specific alternatives for this action.

Species Group	Authorized Commercial Gear Types (Primary)
Snapper-Grouper	Bottom Longline, Bandit Gear, Buoy Gear, Handline, Rod and Reel, Sea Bass Pot, Spearfishing Gear
Dolphin & Wahoo	Automatic Reel, Bandit Gear, Handline, Pelagic Longline, Rod and Reel, Spearfishing Gear, trap (spiny lobster only)
Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP) (King/Spanish Mackerel, Cobia)	KM North of Cape Lookout: All gear except drift and long gillnet. South of Cape Lookout: automatic reel, bandit gear, handline, and rod and reel. SM: automatic reel, bandit gear, handline, rod and reel, cast net, run-around gillnet, and stab net. Cobia: All gear except drift and long gillnet.
Highly Migratory Species (HMS) (Sharks, Swordfish, Tunas)	Longline (Logline/Green Stick Gear), Gillnet (Sharks, no swordfish), Rod and Reel, Bandit Gear, Handline, Harpoon, Buoy Gear (Swordfish Handgear LAP), Trap, Speargun (BAYS).

Questions for Discussion

- The Sub-Committee previously directed staff to develop alternatives to specifically address stowage and harvest of species with longline gear on board.
 - Should alternatives be developed to change the allowable species when a vessel has longline gear on board?
 - Currently, a vessel that fishes in the EEZ on a trip with longline on board may possess only: snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish.
 - The only form of longline that is an authorized gear in the South Atlantic region is bottom longline.
 - Should alternatives be developed to allow the harvest of snapper grouper species for vessels with pelagic longline gear (a non-authorized gear for the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan [FMP]) on board?

Previous Notes for Future Reference

- Consider including a notification requirement that would inform law enforcement when switching/stowing fishing gear.
- Reference other FMPs to ensure alternatives to change the Snapper Grouper FMP complement requirements of other FMPs.
- Not an expansion of allowable gear; but enabling fishermen to more easily stow one gear and switch to another form of fishing during the same trip.
- **Outstanding Council discussion related to this action:** How can law enforcement verify which fish were caught using which gear?

Sub-Committee Action

Address discussion questions and provide direction to staff on how alternatives should be developed. Direct staff on any additional information that is needed to have outstanding discussions during a future meeting.

Potential Amendment Timeline

March 2025	Amendment 60 initiated
June 2025	Review initial actions and consider approval for scoping
July 5-August 8, 2025	Scoping
September 2025	Review scoping comments; provide direction for actions and alternatives
December 2025	Review available analyses and draft action and alternative language
March 2026	Consider approval for public hearings
Spring 2026	Public hearings
June 2026	Review public comment and approve all actions
September 2026	Final Council approval
Summer/Fall 2027	Regulations effective

Sub-Committee Action

Review the amendment timeline and edit as necessary.