

Commercial Snapper Grouper Landings Analyses

September 2025

Introduction

In November 2024, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee requested several pieces of commercial landings-related information to use in prioritization of commercial management issues to be addressed. Council staff prepared this report in response to this request and has been updated based on Council requests. Updates for September will be highlighted in yellow.

Methods and Data Sources

Landings data from 2019 to 2023 are based on the commercial Annual Catch Limit (ACL) tracking files. The file was filtered to only landings from the South Atlantic region (except for Hogfish, for which the management boundary between the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils is at Cape Sable, Florida). Gutted weight (gw) for Greater Amberjack (1.04), Golden Tilefish (1.12), Gag (1.18), Snowy Grouper (1.18), and Red Porgy (1.04) were converted to whole weight (ww) using gutted to whole weight conversions. This allows comparison of landings in whole weight for all species. Triggerfish were separated into a general triggerfish category and Gray Triggerfish. The same was done for White Grunt and Grunts (family), Spadefish and Atlantic Spadefish. Family level landings were reported for Grouper, Porgies, and Snapper but these catches were minor with less than 2,000 lbs in most years.

Southeast Coastal Logbooks were used to compare the number of trips landing the trip limit to compare all trips reporting landings for that species from 2019 to 2023. Trips were filtered to trips reported in the South Atlantic region. Trips were compared to the most recent trip limit for seasons, gear, permit type, or area, if applicable. Trips were considered to reach the trip limit if they landed 90% or more of the limit. This allows for inclusion of trips that may have approached the trip limit, but crew stopped fishing or targeting a species to prevent exceeding the limit. Red Porgy were not included in the analysis due to all reporting being in pounds, whereas the trip limit is in numbers of fish.

Council members asked for permit type to be included in the analysis. Currently, there are issues with the permit database. To assign each vessel a permit type, official vessel number was compared with three different permit time periods (2019, 2023, and 2025). Datasets were split between 2019 to 2021 and 2022 to 2024. Assignments were first done by determining if a vessel had an SG1 or SG2 in 2023 or 2025. Vessels with changes in vessel number were assumed to continue to have a permit (assuming permit holder would only continue to report if they continued to have permit). A similar process was used to assign permit type for the 2019 to 2021 dataset using both the 2019 permit database and the 2022 to 2024 database. Vessels that had a permit in 2019 but not in the 2022 to 2024 database were assigned the 2019 permit type for 2020 and 2021 based on the 2019 assignment. Vessels that had permits in 2022 to 2024 permit database but not in 2019 were analyzed for time of first logbook and catch levels reported by date. Logbooks starting after August 2019 were assigned permit type in 2022 to 2024 permit if the catches commonly exceeded 225 lbs. This resulted in 73% of the vessels being assigned SG1 or SG2 permits in the 2019 to 2021 and 76% of the vessels assigned in 2022 to 2024.

Top Ten Species in the Snapper Grouper Complex By Weight

Ten species in the Snapper Grouper Complex accounted for 83% to 86% of commercial landings for all Snapper Grouper Complex species from 2019 through 2023 (excluding Wreckfish).

Yellowtail Snapper averaged 1.3 million lbs ww per year; almost double the landings of Vermilion Snapper, which ranked second with 775,151 lbs ww per year (**Table 1**). Greater Amberjack, Golden Tilefish, and Triggerfish (descending order) completed the top five species.

Several species had dramatic decreases over the past five years (**Figure 1**). Yellowtail Snapper landings in 2023 were 50% of the landings in 2019 (note that the fishery operates on a non-calendar fishing year, so this calendar-based yearly comparison could differ from ACL-tracking results). Vermilion Snapper and Triggerfish landings in 2021, 2022, and 2023 were all less than 75% of the landings from 2019 and most years were less than 66% of the 2019 landings. Gag landings dropped over the same timeframe (2021 to 2023) from 75% down to 62% of the 2019 landings (lowered catch limits for Gag from Snapper Grouper Amendment 53 went into place in October 2023). Similarly, Snowy Grouper dropped from 91% down to 65% of the 2019 landings between 2021 and 2023 (lowered Snowy Grouper catch limits from Amendment 51 were not effective until January 2024).

Two species not in the top 10 that had dramatic changes were Black Sea Bass and Red Grouper. Black Sea Bass landings from 2021 to 2023 were 29% to 39% of the 2019 landings. Red Grouper landings during 2021 through 2023 were 50%-66% of the 2019 landings.

Commercial Landings Relative to Annual Catch Limits

Commercial landings exceeded the annual catch limits in 15 out of 50 potential instances for the top 10 species (**Table 2**). Most of the time when the ACL was exceeded, the landings were less than 10% over the catch limit. One exception occurred in 2023, when the Gag landings exceeded the ACL by 85%. This was due to the lowering of the ACL from 347,301 lbs to 85,326 lbs through Amendment 53. Other species with changes are bolded below.

In 2019, eight of the top ten stocks had landings that were 90% or more of the ACL. The number dropped in 2020, which could have been due to the global pandemic. Since 2021, four or five of the top ten stocks had landings that were 90% or more of their ACLs in each year.

Vermilion Snapper, notably, had a decrease in the percentage of the ACL harvested while the ACL decreased annually. Red Snapper and Golden Tilefish landings were near the ACL (within 10%) in most years. Gray Triggerfish, Greater Amberjack, and Snowy Grouper had a decreasing percentage of ACL harvested from 2019 through 2023. No species had an increasing percentage of ACL harvested.

Percent of Trips Landings Trip Limits

For many species, the percentage of trips landing 90% of the trip limit was less than 30% (**Table 3, Figure 2**). Red Snapper had the highest percentage of trips landing 90% of the trip limit, ranging from 68% to 78% of the trips from 2019 to 2023. Greater Amberjack, Black Sea Bass, Red Grouper, Jacks, Gray Triggerfish, and Hogfish (GA to NC stock) landings were 90% of the trip limit on less than 5% of the trips on most trips. Annual trends varied with some species, such as Red Snapper and Golden Tilefish longline, having increasing percentages of trips reaching 90% of the trip limit. Snowy Grouper had decreasing percentages of trips reaching 90% of the trip limit.

Percent of SG1 landing trips limits mirrored the percentage of all trips. There were slight differences among species but usually the percent of trips reaching trip limits increased due to SG2 permit trips only hit trips limits for a few species. SG2 permit holders approached trips limits for Hogfish East Coast and Florida Keys, Red Snapper, and Snowy Grouper.

SG1 Permit Trips by State

Most of the vessels that submitted logbooks were SG1 permitted vessels ranging from 70% to 100% of the vessels by state and year (**Table 4**). Most of the SG1 vessels were in Florida, followed by North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Most of the single days SG1 trips landed in Florida. Multi-day trips were also most commonly landed in Florida followed by North Carolina and South Carolina (**Figure 3**).

Update Percent of Trips Landings Trip Limits

Due to potential bias in selecting 90% as the threshold for determining when fishermen stop targeting a species due to a trip limit, the analysis was expanded to include trips reaching as low as 50% of the trip limit. These figures provide insight not only into whether trip limits may be influencing targeting behavior, but also into how strongly that influence is expressed.

When trip limits appear to affect targeting of a species, a clear decline is expected in the percentage of trips reaching higher portions of the trip limit (**Figure 4**). In the example where trip limits influenced targeting (red line), about 80% of trips landed at least 50% of the limit. This percentage gradually declined by ~15% between the 50% and 90% of the trip limit. Then the percentage of trips landing 95% and 100% of the trip limit dropped sharply (nearly 10% for each). In contrast, when trip limits did not appear to influence targeting (blue line), only about 30% of trips landed 50% or more of the trip limit. While the percentage of trips varied by about 25% across the full range of trip limits, there was no point where a sharp decline was observed.

It is important to note that this analysis does not account for fishermen ceasing to target a species due to a trip limit being so low that they have switched species. The results are based solely on the observed percentage of trips relative to the percentage of trip limit landed on a trip.

Figures 5 and 6 show the 12 species managed with trip limits (note change in scale between figures). For several species, results are further separated by gear type (Black Sea Bass hook and pot, Tilefish hook and longline) or geographic region (Hogfish GA–NC and Hogfish EFL–FLK).

For Black Sea Bass hook and line, Gray Triggerfish, Greater Amberjack, Hogfish GA–NC, Jacks, and Red Grouper, relatively few trips landed at least 50% of the trip limit, and in most cases fewer than 5% of trips reached the trip limit (**Figure 5**). This pattern suggests that trip limits are unlikely to be constraining landings for these species, as fishermen rarely approach the cap. In these cases, harvest levels are more likely driven by availability or demand rather than regulatory limits.

Black Sea Bass pot, Blueline Tilefish, and Hogfish EFL–FLK had higher percentages of trips landing 50% or more of the trip limit, but these species generally showed a steady, consistent decline in the proportion of trips reaching higher fractions of the trip limit. This indicates that while trip limits may influence landings to some degree, they do not appear to create sharp thresholds where fishermen switch to targeting other species before reaching the trip limit.

In contrast, Red Snapper, Snowy Grouper, and Tilefish (hook) exhibited sharper declines near the upper thresholds, with noticeable drops around 90% and 95% of the trip limit (Figure 6). These patterns are consistent with trip limits actively constraining landings, as fishermen switch to other species or stop fishing prior to reaching trip limits. Gag also showed a clear shift in 2024, when the trip limit was reduced from 1,000 pounds gutted weight to 300 pounds (effective September 22, 2023), suggesting that the regulation change directly impacted trip outcomes. Vermilion Snapper showed declines at 95% of the trip limit in some years, while Tilefish (longline) displayed a distinct drop in 2021 once landings exceeded 80% of the trip limit. Both examples suggest situations where trip limits had an observable effect on fisher behavior and harvest levels.

Table 1. Top ten species in the Snapper Grouper Complex based on average commercial landings (in pounds whole weight) in the South Atlantic region from 2019 to 2023. Average is average landings of whole weight from 2019 to 2023 (conversions from gutted weight to whole weight are provided above). NOTE: Yellowtail Snapper and Greater Amberjack do not have complete data for 2023.

Species	Average	Rank
Yellowtail Snapper	1,314,485	1
Vermilion Snapper	775,151	2
Greater Amberjack	448,178	3
Golden Tilefish	355,206	4
Triggerfish	255,306	5
Gag Grouper	204,995	6
Almaco Jack	135,815	7
Snowy Grouper	132,559	8
Red Snapper	129,218	9
Blueline Tilefish	112,848	10

Table 2. Percentage of annual catch limits (ACL) landed by commercial fishermen in the South Atlantic region from 2019 to 2023 (or 2018/2019 to 2022/2023 season for Yellowtail Snapper and Greater Amberjack) for the top 10 species landed in the Snapper Grouper Complex. Bold italics indicates changes in the ACL.

Species	Season	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Vermilion Snapper	Jan 1 – Dec 31	95%	82%	69%	74%	75%
Golden Tilefish	Jan 1 – Dec 31	111%	104%	98%	103%	94%
Triggerfish	Jan 1 – Dec 31	105%	101%	65%	75%	63%
Gag Grouper	Jan 1 – Dec 31	73%	74%	55%	47%	185%
Jacks Complex*	Jan 1 – Dec 31	102%	80%	74%	86%	86%
Snowy Grouper	Jan 1 – Dec 31	100%	100%	90%	78%	64%
Red Snapper	Jan 1 – Dec 31	101%	108%	103%	100%	107%
Blueline Tilefish	Jan 1 – Dec 31	110%	99%	102%	102%	96%

Species	Season	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Yellowtail Snapper	Aug 1 – Jul 31	104%	90%	75%	94%	90%
Greater Amberjack	Mar 1 – end of Feb	86%	54%	60%	67%	65%

*Most Jacks Complex landings are attributed to Almaco Jack.

Table 3. Percentage of trips (A) and SG1 (B) trips landing 90% of the trip limit (Limit) in the South Atlantic region based on Coastal Logbook data, 2019 to 2023 (only includes trips with greater than 1 pound). Black Sea Bass and Blueline Tilefish have seasonal trip limit restrictions. Golden Tilefish were separated into longline landings (L) and other gear (O) due to the different trip limits. Hogfish were split into Florida (EFL/FLK) and Georgia through North Carolina (GA-NC) due to the different stocks and trip limits in the areas. Units are GW for gutted, AR for as reported, and WW for whole weight. All weights are in pounds.

A. Species/Stock	Trip Limit (lb)	Weight Type	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Black Sea Bass	300/1000	GW	4%	2%	2%	3%	4%
Blueline Tilefish	100/300	GW	28%	33%	42%	34%	41%
Gag Grouper*	300	GW	14%	18%	15%	13%	14%
Gray Triggerfish	1000	WW	3%	3%	1%	1%	0%
Greater Amberjack	1200	WW	5%	4%	5%	4%	4%
Jacks	500	AR	6%	3%	3%	4%	3%
Red Grouper	200	GW	4%	1%	2%	3%	3%
Red Snapper	75	GW	68%	71%	69%	75%	78%
Snowy Grouper	200	GW	34%	28%	28%	30%	25%
Vermilion Snapper	1000	GW	15%	13%	11%	14%	12%
Tilefish Longline	4000	GW	13%	10%	14%	17%	24%
Tilefish Other	500	GW	16%	14%	17%	20%	10%
Hogfish EFL/FLK	25	WW	22%	29%	29%	26%	23%
Hogfish GA-NC	500	WW	1%	2%	6%	3%	2%

B. Species/Stock	Trip Limit (lb)	Weight Type	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Black Sea Bass	300/1000	GW	4%	2%	3%	3%	4%
Blueline Tilefish	100/300	GW	28%	34%	41%	33%	40%
Gag Grouper*	300	GW	15%	20%	16%	13%	15%
Gray Triggerfish	1000	WW	3%	3%	1%	1%	0%
Greater Amberjack	1200	WW	5%	4%	5%	4%	4%
Jacks	500	AR	6%	3%	3%	4%	3%
Red Grouper	200	GW	4%	1%	2%	3%	2%
Red Snapper	75	GW	69%	71%	69%	75%	78%
Snowy Grouper	200	GW	35%	31%	29%	31%	26%
Vermilion Snapper	1000	GW	16%	14%	12%	14%	13%
Tilefish Longline	4000	GW	12%	11%	15%	18%	24%
Tilefish Other	500	GW	18%	15%	20%	21%	12%
Hogfish EFL/FLK	25	WW	15%	19%	24%	18%	17%
Hogfish GA-NC	500	WW	1%	2%	6%	3%	3%

* Gag Grouper trip limit was enacted in 2023 and the comparison indicates the number of trips that would have exceeded 90% of the new trip limit.

Table 4. Number of SG1 vessels and all vessels submitting logbooks by state, 2019 to 2023. Georgia was removed due to confidentiality.

Year	SG1 Vessels Submitting			All Vessels Submitting		
	FL	NC	SC	FL	NC	SC
2019	257	95	43	349	119	49
2020	240	86	45	338	119	48
2021	226	72	35	315	100	36
2022	239	74	42	313	90	42
2023	235	69	40	303	93	41
2024	203	60	38	283	89	39

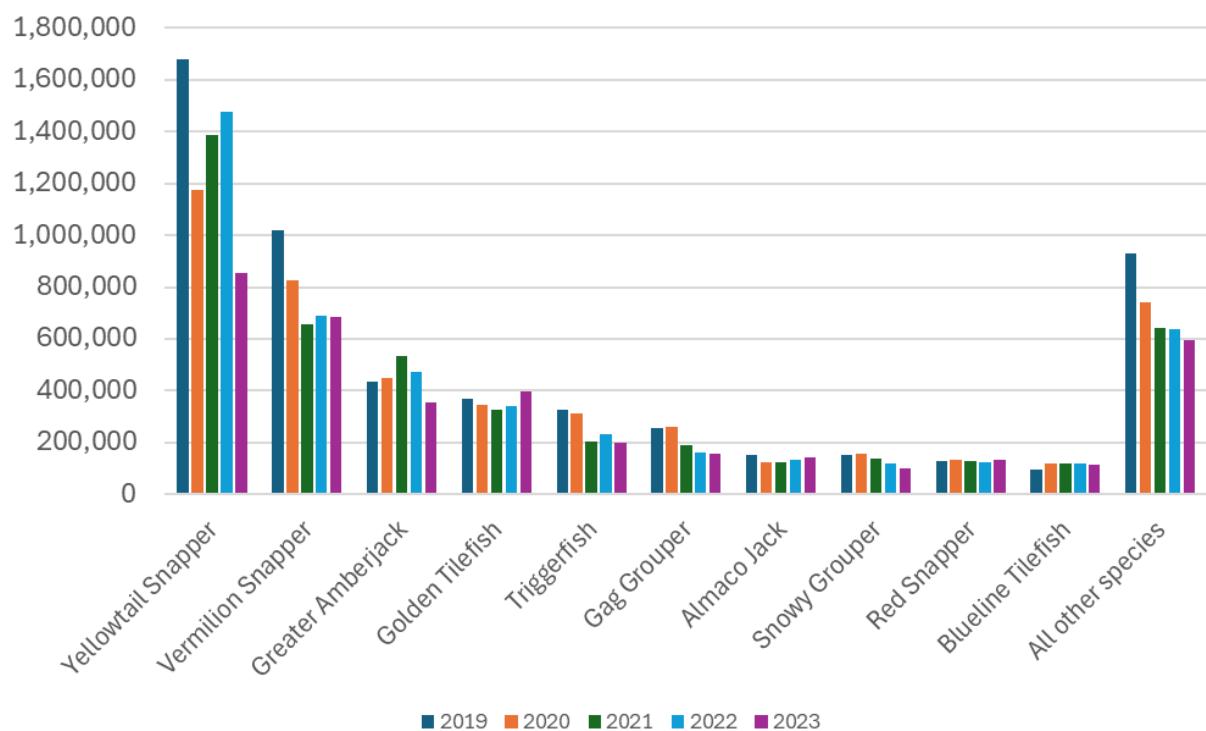
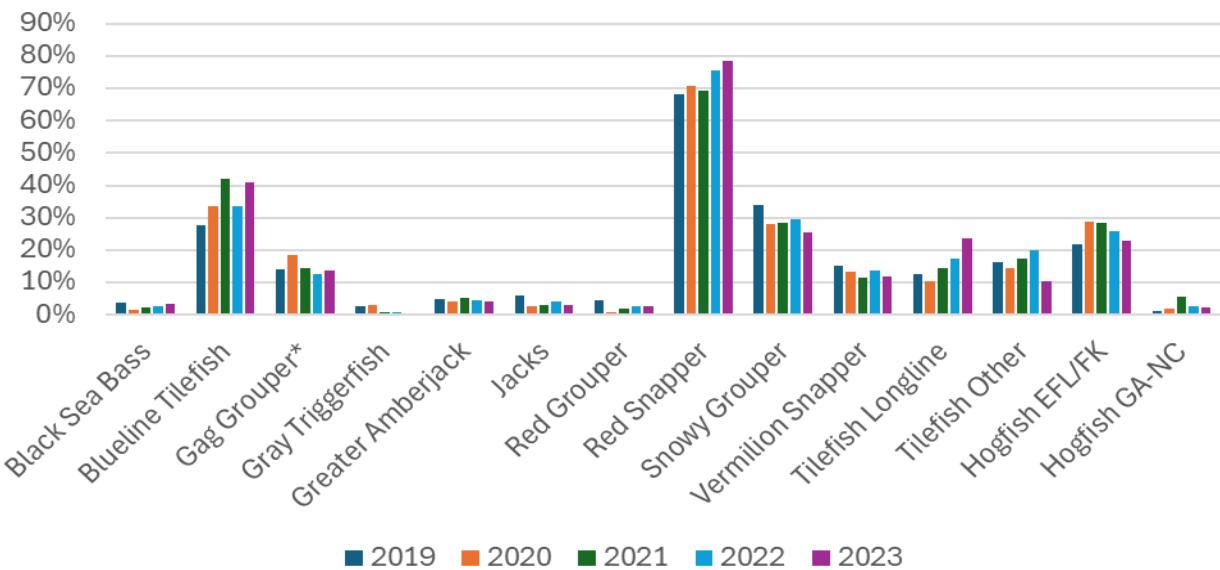


Figure 1. Commercial landings (whole weight, pounds) of the top 10 Snapper Grouper Complex species and all other species (remaining species in Snapper Grouper Complex) by year, 2019 to 2023. NOTE: Yellowtail Snapper and Greater Amberjack do not have complete data for 2023.

A.



B.

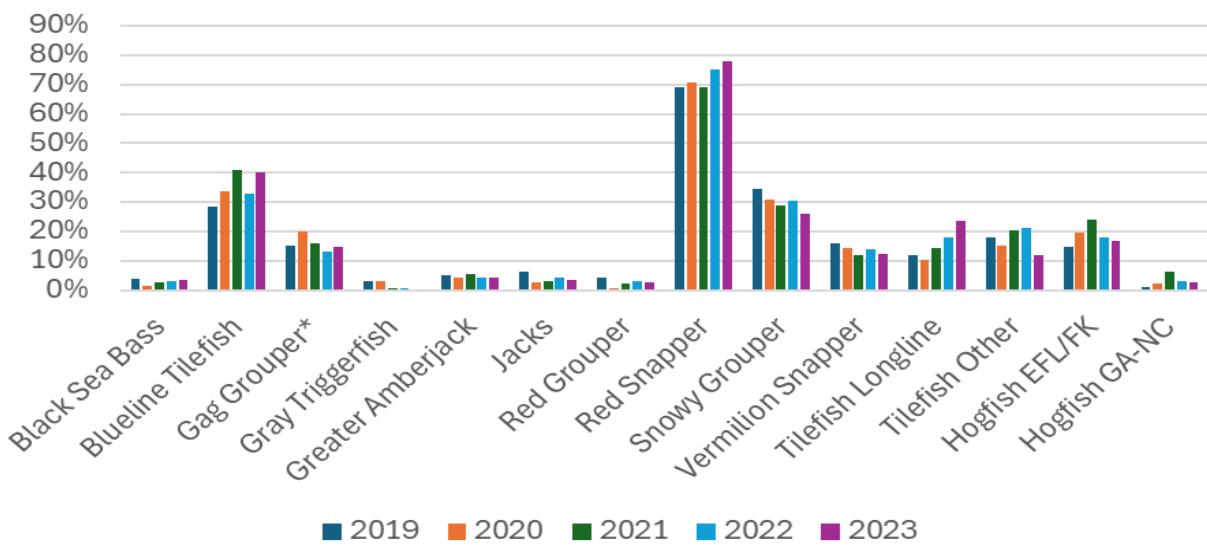


Figure 2. Percentage of trips (A) and SG1 trips (B) landing 90% of the trip limit or more in the South Atlantic Region based on Coastal Logbook data, 2019 to 2023. Black Sea Bass and Blueline have season variation in trips limits that were accounted for in the calculation. Golden Tilefish was split into the longline fishery (L) and all other gear due to different trip limits. Hogfish were split into landings off Florida (EFL/FL Keys) and Georgia through North Carolina (GA-NC) based on the different ACLs and trip limits in the areas. Gag Grouper did not have a 300 lb trip limit in place (see note under Table 3) during the years of data examined. This is a comparison of trips that would have exceeded 90% of the trip limit.

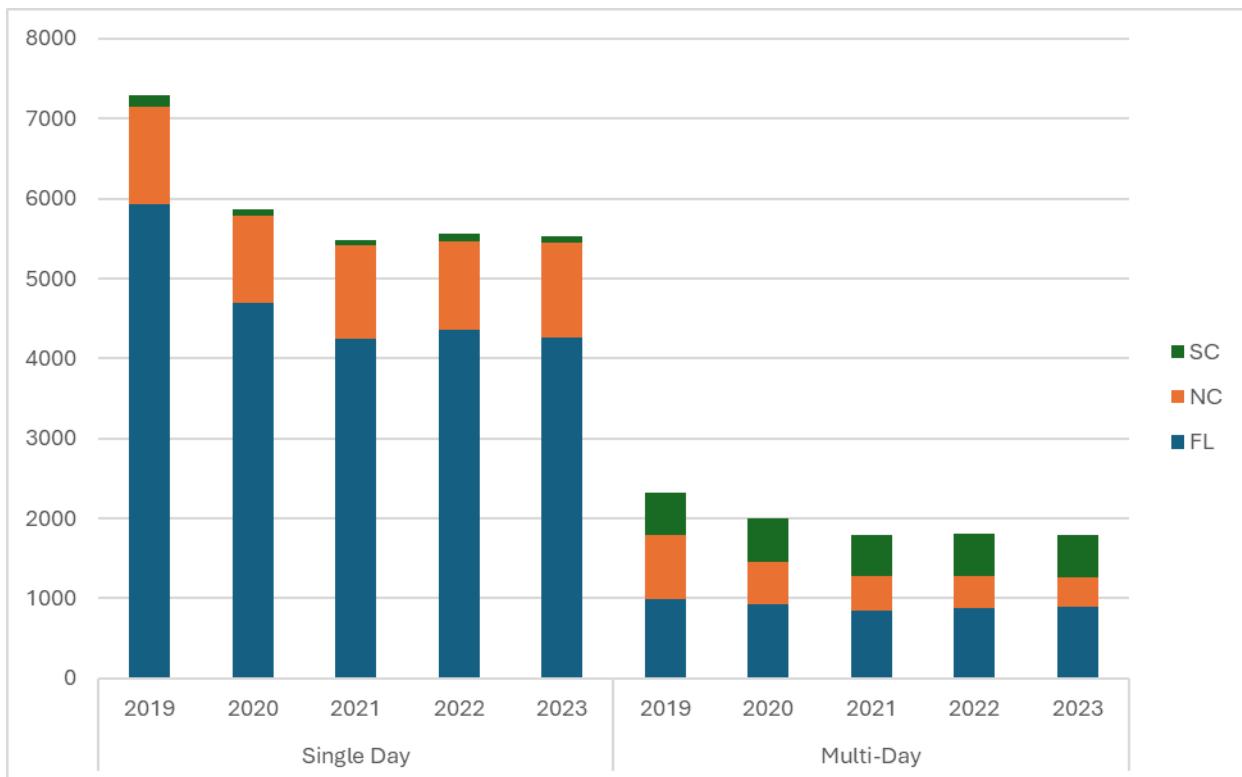


Figure 3. Number of SG1 trips reporting single day or multi-day trips by landing state, 2019-2023. Georgia is removed due to confidentiality.

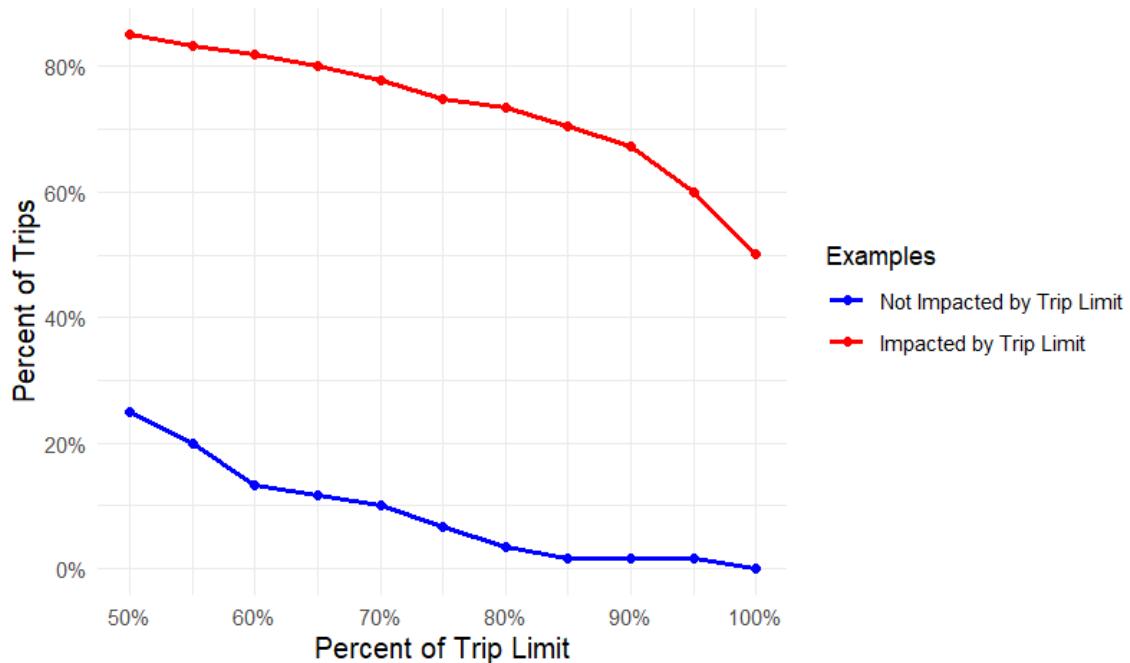


Figure 4. Examples of trip limit impacting the targeting for a species. The percentage of all trips landing a range of percentage of trip limit (50% to 100%).

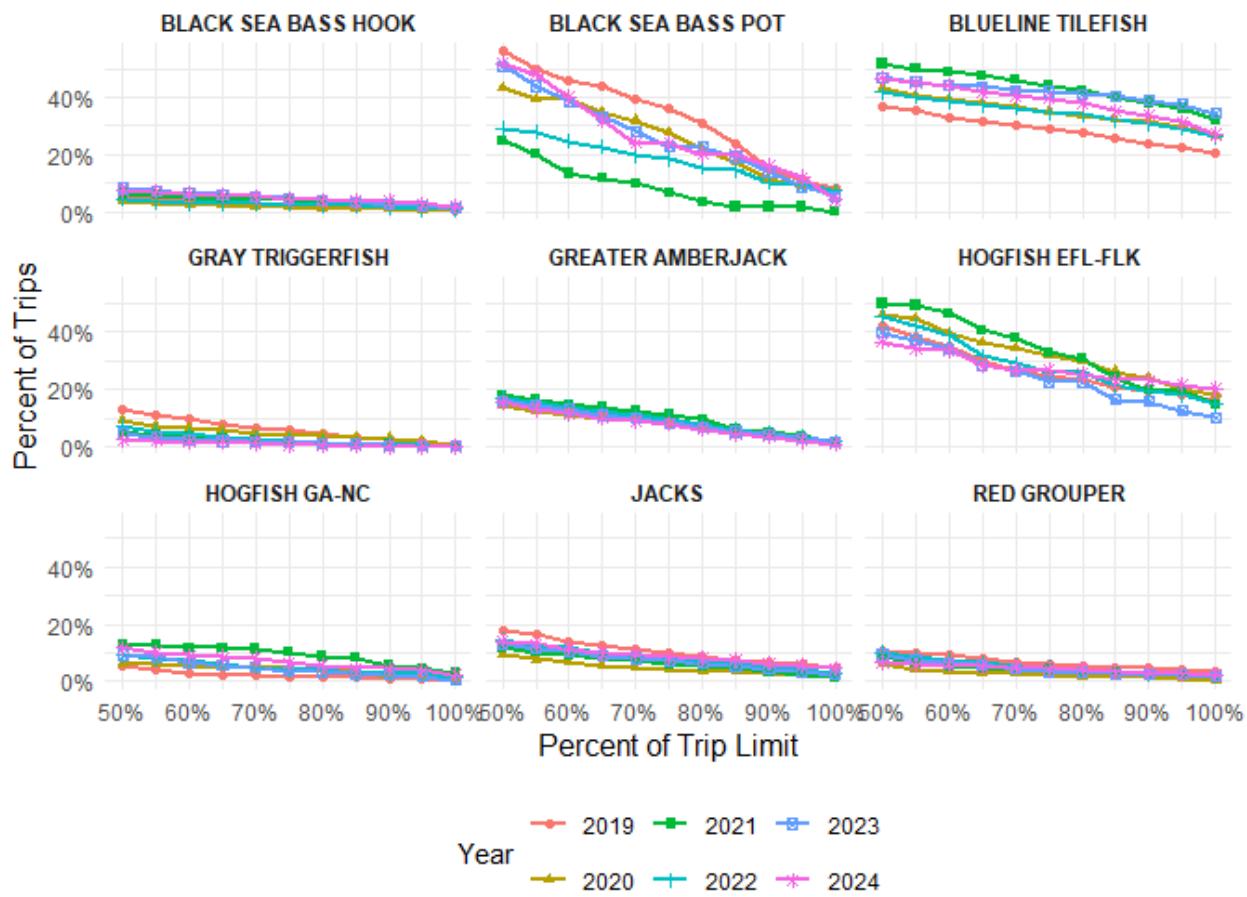


Figure 5. Percent of trips landings 50% to 100% of the trip limit for Black Sea Bass (hook and pot gears separate), Blueline Tilefish, Gray Triggerfish, Greater Amberjack, Hogfish (EFL-FLK and GA-NC Stocks), Jacks Complex (Almaco Jack, Banded Rudderfish, and Lesser Amberjack), and Red Grouper from 2019 to 2024 based on fishermen logbook data.

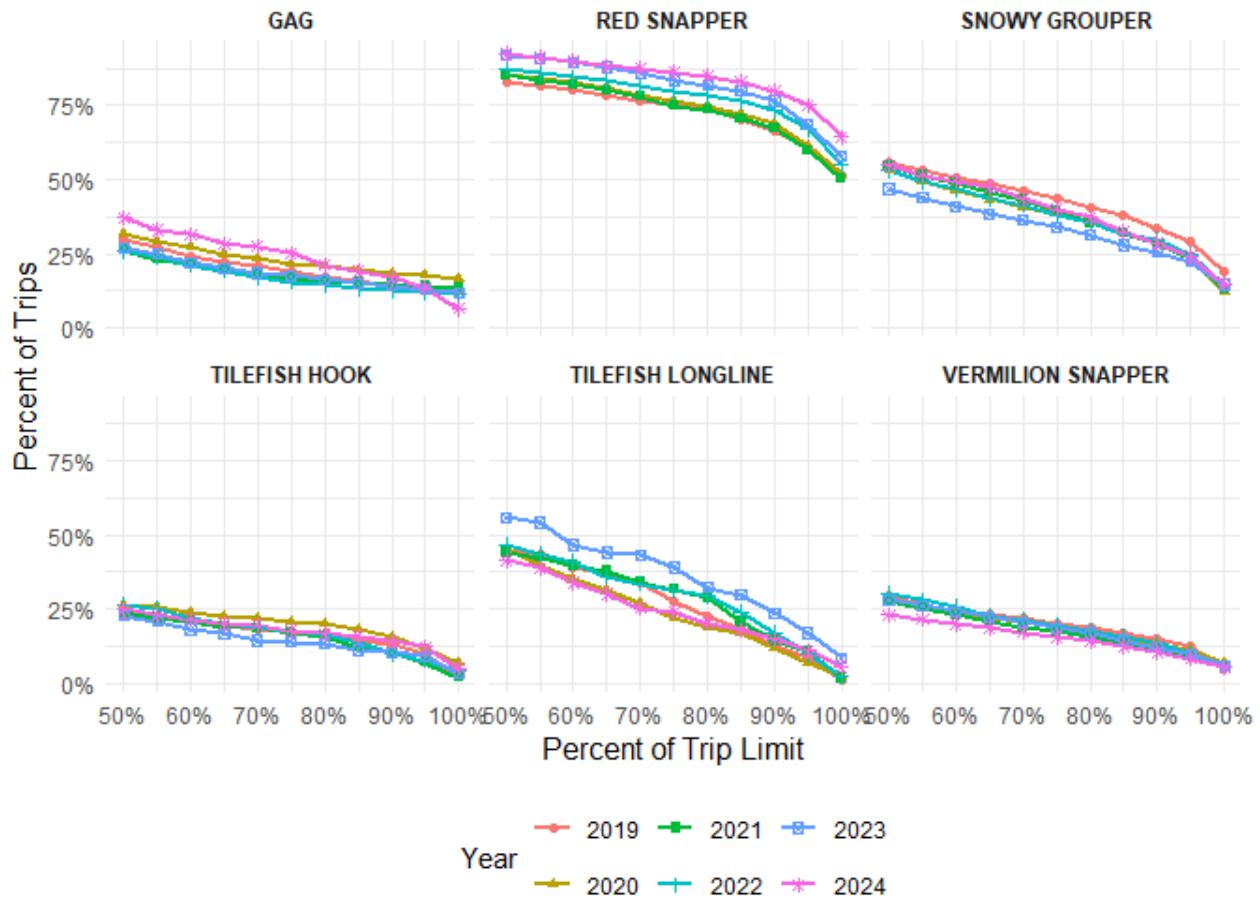


Figure 6. Percent of trips landings 50% to 100% of the trip limit for Gag, Red Snapper, Snowy Grouper, Tilefish (hook and longline), and Vermilion Snapper from 2019 to 2024 based on fishermen logbook data.