



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Snapper Grouper Amendment 60

Commercial Sub-Committee

Discussion Document, March 2026

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 (December 2025)

In December 2025 ([Sub-Committee Report](#); [Snapper Grouper Committee Report](#)), the Sub-Committee provided staff with direction on actions and a range of potential alternatives, removed a draft action for an incidental catch allowance from consideration, and revised the amendment timeline.

Objectives for this Meeting (March 2026)

- Review preliminary analyses and information about considered actions.
- Review draft Purpose and Need statements, as well as revised actions and alternatives.
- Provide direction to staff on edits or additions to actions and alternatives that should be made prior to review for public comment in June 2026.
- Identify additional information necessary for further discussions.
- Review the amendment timeline and revise as necessary.

Purpose and Need

Purpose: The purpose of this amendment is to increase flexibility and adaptability in the commercial snapper grouper sector by revising permit accessibility, trip limits, and bottom longline gear species limitations and stowage requirements.

Need: The need for this amendment is to facilitate acquisition of limited-access commercial permits by replacement fishermen and for the commercial sector to more consistently achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

Sub-Committee Action

Review Purpose and Need statements and provide any necessary edits.

Actions and Alternatives

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

Purpose of Action: Facilitate new entry into the snapper grouper commercial sector by removing the 2-for-1 regulation for obtaining a snapper grouper commercial unlimited (SG 1) permit.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not change the current permit requirements. 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.

Discussion

- This action does not consider any change to the use of limited access for the snapper grouper commercial sector.
- Currently, after one SG 1 permit has been acquired, the new owner has one year after the expiration date of that permit to acquire a second SG 1 permit to exchange the two permits for a new SG 1 permit. Ownership of each permit is not transferred in the federal system until both permits are exchanged.
- The Council has stated that the current number of permits is appropriate and may include guidance in this amendment for adjusting the number of permits in the future.
 - NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff will present information on limited access permit pools, which may be a tool to address future attrition.
- A letter was mailed to SG 1 permit holders in January 2026, informing them that the Council is considering a change from the 2-for-1 policy.

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 drafted alternatives and information and provide any necessary direction on edits to language or additional analyses for future discussions.

Action 2. Revise commercial trip limits for snapper grouper species

Purpose of Action: Revise commercial trip limits to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest optimum yield of snapper grouper species.

This action addresses the “base” trip limit, which would be the initial trip limit at the beginning of the open season, before (or without) any step-up or step-down. Alternatives have initially been developed for vermilion snapper. These alternatives also are a template for additional species to be included in this action through their own alternatives and sub-alternatives.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not revise trip limits. The current trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 1 (January through June) and Season 2 (July through December) is 1,000 lbs gw.

Alternative 2. Increase the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 1 to:

Sub-Alternative 2a. 1,250 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2b. 1,500 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 2d. 3,000 lbs gw.

Alternative 3. Increase the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper during Season 2 to:

Sub-Alternative 3a. 1,250 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3b. 1,500 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3c. 2,000 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3d. 3,000 lbs gw.

Sub-Alternative 3e. 4,000 lbs gw.

- Additional alternatives could be added, as directed by the Council, for any other species for which the Council wants to consider a change to the trip limit.

Discussion

- Trip limits are not a requirement of the Magnuson-Stevens Act.
- Trip limits are a tool typically used to spread landings throughout the year to allow fair access, controlled availability of fish for markets, economic stability, etc.
- Not all snapper grouper species have commercial trip limits (e.g. yellowtail snapper, black grouper, mangrove snapper).
- Trip limits carry a law enforcement burden, as they require officers to check compliance during stops.
- Harvest at or below the ACL is sustainable, regardless of the trip limit and even if within a rebuilding plan.

Table 1. Species-specific commercial trip limits and recent (2023-2025) commercial landings relative to the commercial annual catch limit (ACL).

Species	Trip Limit	Commercial ACL % (In-Season Closure Date, if applicable)		
		2025 (Preliminary)	2024 (Preliminary)	2023
Black Sea Bass	1,000 lbs gw H&L (Jan-Apr): 300 lbs gw	24.4%	20.1%	25.9%
Blueline Tilefish	Jan-Apr: 100 lbs gw May-Dec: 300 lbs gw	95.8% (7/23/2025; Re- opened 9/21- 9/26/2025)	98.7% (8/8/2024)	95.0% (8/2/2023; Re- opened 9/11- 9/16/2023)
Gag	300 lbs gw	104.6% (12/1/2025)	99.4% (6/30/2024)	176.4%* (10/23/2023)
Golden Tilefish (H&L)	500 lbs gw	63.0%	94.2%	84.5%* (10/31/2023; Re- opened 12/7/2023)
Golden Tilefish (Longline)	4,000 lbs gw	97.6% (10/17/2025)	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)
Gray Triggerfish**	1,000 lbs ww	Jan-Jun: 17.0% Jul-Dec: 24.9%	Jan-Jun: 34.2% Jul-Dec: 47.7%	Jan-Jun: 54.1% Jul-Dec: 73.1%
Greater Amberjack**	1,200 lbs ww or gw	Mar 2024-Aug 2024: 51.6% Sept 2024-Feb 2025: 46.4%	Mar 2023-Aug 2023: 45.4% Sept 2023-Feb 2024: 33.1%	Mar 2022-Aug 2022: 66.5% Sept 2022-Feb 2023: 59.0%*
Hogfish (GA- NC)	500 lbs ww	72.1%	72.6%	74.1%
Hogfish (EFL/FLK)	25 lbs ww	25.0%	20.5%	24.8%
Mutton Snapper	Jan-Mar & Jul- Dec: 500 lbs ww Apr-Jun: 5 fish/person/day or trip	44.3%	47.4%	59.3%
Red Grouper	200 lbs gw	44.9%	52.6%	27.1%
Red Porgy**	15 fish	Jan-Apr: 30.9% May-Dec: 46.0%	Jan-Apr: 47.3% May-Dec: 44.8%	Jan-Apr: 54.1%* May-Dec: 57.0%
Red Snapper	75 lbs gw	141.4% (9/24/2025)	112.7% (8/6/2024)	100.1% (8/18/2023; Re- opened 10/6- 10/9/2023)
Scamp/ Yellowmouth Grouper (ACL %s for scamp only)	None; Am 55 establishes a 300 lbs gw trip limit for an aggregate of both species	28.3%	22.0%	19.5%
Snowy Grouper**	200 lbs gw	Jan-Jun: 90.2% Jul-Dec: 101.4%	Jan-Jun: 89.6%* (6/4/2024) Jul-Dec: 95.9% (9/29/2024)	Jan-Jun: 60.4% Jul-Dec: 74.5%
Vermilion Snapper**	1,000 lbs gw	Jan-Jun: 32.3% Jul-Dec: 50.3%	Jan-Jun: 65.3% Jul-Dec: 56.4%	Jan-Jun: 61.9% Jul-Dec: 92.6%

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

*Management change became effective during this year/season

Species that have exceeded 80% of the commercial ACL in more than half of years/seasons of current management

**Season 2 ACL percentages do not include any part of the ACL that was carried over from Season 1

Table 2. Summary of factors and affected species that could impact considerations of trip limit changes or incorporation of step-ups or step-downs into management.

Factor	Affected Species	Potential Effects
>80% of the ACL in more than half of years/seasons of current management from 2023-2025	Blueline Tilefish, Gag, Golden Tilefish (H&L), Golden Tilefish (Longline), Red Snapper, Snowy Grouper	Trip limits may be appropriate for the recent ACL, landings, and effort. Step-down could be useful to extend the open season, if desired.
50%-80% of the ACL in more than half of years/seasons of current management from 2023-2025	Hogfish (GA-NC), Vermilion Snapper	Trip limits could potentially be increased or step-up could be considered.
<50% of the ACL in more than half of years/seasons of current management from 2023-2025	Black Sea Bass, Gray Triggerfish, Greater Amberjack, Hogfish (EFL/FLK), Mutton Snapper, Red Grouper, Red Porgy, Scamp/Yellowmouth Grouper	Trip limits could potentially be increased or step-up could be considered. Trip limits may not be necessary given the recent ACLs, landings, and effort.
Pending/Expected Management Changes from Other Amendments	Black Sea Bass, Blueline Tilefish, Golden Tilefish, Mutton Snapper, Scamp/Yellowmouth Grouper	Changes in other management measures (e.g. ACL) may increase uncertainty about potential effects of a trip limit change through this amendment.
Stock Assessments Expected within 2026	Black Sea Bass, Hogfish (EFL/FLK)	Additional management response to upcoming assessments may increase uncertainty about potential effects of a trip limit change through this amendment.
Trip Limit <500 lbs	Black Sea Bass (H&L; Jan-Apr), Blueline Tilefish, Gag, Hogfish (EFL/FLK), Red Grouper, Red Porgy, Red Snapper, Scamp/Yellowmouth Grouper, Snowy Grouper	Small trip limits may not be viable species for step-downs, as reduced trip limits may not justify associated trip expenses.

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 post-season accountability measures would be necessary to allow more species to be eligible for carry-over.

Sub-Committee Action

Review trip limit analyses for vermilion snapper, presented by SERO. Review drafted action and alternative language. Direct staff on whether trip limit changes should be considered for vermilion snapper or any other snapper grouper species. Discuss and direct staff on whether any other trip limit alternatives should be included.

Action 3. Establish temporary trip limit increases for snapper grouper species (step-ups)

Purpose of Action: Establish a framework for temporary trip limit increases to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest optimum yield of snapper grouper species.

The Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT) developed 2 options to consider step-ups. Option 1 is an in-season step-up, and Option 2 is a post-season step-up (temporarily increasing the trip limit in the following year). For clarity in developing alternatives for additional species, the IPT recommends that the Council choose Option 1 or Option 2 as the step-up method for further consideration, then provide direction on any additional species that should be included in this action.

Separating step-ups by season for split-season fisheries maintains any temporal or spatial considerations that supported the establishment of split-seasons. Alternatives were developed for landings to be evaluated against the specified seasonal ACLs, without consideration of carry-over, when considering whether a step-up should be implemented.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not establish temporary trip limit increases.

Alternative 2. Option 1. (Step-Up) If commercial landings of vermilion snapper are below 40% of the Season 1 commercial annual catch limit before March 31, the commercial trip limit will be increased for the remainder of Season 1 by:

Sub-Alternative 2a. 500 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

Sub-Alternative 2b. 1,000 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

Sub-Alternative 2c. 1,500 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

Sub-Alternative 2d. 2,000 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

The Regional Administrator will review the landings and announce whether a trip limit increase will occur by May 1, each year.

Alternative 2. Option 2. (Step-Up) If commercial landings of vermilion snapper are below 75% of the Season 1 commercial annual catch limit, the seasonal commercial trip limit will be increased in the following fishing year. If landings during a year with the increased trip limit are less than the commercial annual catch limit, then the increased trip limit will remain in place for another Season 1. If landings during a year with the increased trip limit meet or exceed the seasonal commercial annual catch limit, resulting in an in-season closure, then the baseline trip limit will go into effect for the following Season 1.

Sub-Alternative 2a. 500 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

Sub-Alternative 2b. 1,000 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

Sub-Alternative 2c. 1,500 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

Sub-Alternative 2d. 2,000 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

The Regional Administrator will review the landings and announce whether a trip limit increase will occur by January 1, each year.

Alternative 3. Option 1. (Step-Up) If commercial landings of vermilion snapper are below 40% of the Season 2 commercial annual catch limit before September 30, the commercial trip limit will be increased for the remainder of Season 2 by:

Sub-Alternative 3a. 500 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

Sub-Alternative 3b. 1,000 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

Sub-Alternative 3c. 1,500 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

Sub-Alternative 3d. 2,000 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

The Regional Administrator will review the landings and announce whether a trip limit increase will occur by November 1, each year.

Alternative 3. Option 2. (Step-Up) If commercial landings of vermilion snapper are below 75% of the Season 2 commercial annual catch limit, the seasonal commercial trip limit will be increased in the following fishing year. If landings during a year with the increased trip limit are less than the commercial annual catch limit, then the increased trip limit will remain in place for another Season 2. If landings during a year with the increased trip limit meet or exceed the seasonal commercial annual catch limit, resulting in an in-season closure, then the baseline trip limit will go into effect for the following Season 2.

Sub-Alternative 3a. 500 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

Sub-Alternative 3b. 1,000 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

Sub-Alternative 3c. 1,500 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

Sub-Alternative 3d. 2,000 lbs gw more than the baseline trip limit

The Regional Administrator will review the landings and announce whether a trip limit increase will occur by July 1, each year.

- Additional alternatives could be added, as directed by the Council, for any other species for which the Council wants to consider incorporation of a step-up into management.

Discussion

- Step-ups have been discussed as a tool to potentially help fishermen harvest a higher percentage of the ACL.
 - This tool would be used on species for which the ACL is not typically harvested or approached, but can have some fluctuation in landings that would cause uncertainty about the effects of increasing or removing the trip limit.

Option 1 – In-Season Step-Up

- Analyses assume a 1-month lag to account for the time necessary to receive commercial landings data, determine whether a step-up would go into effect, and announcement of when the stepped-up trip limit would be effective.
- If landings are below 40% of the ACL at the halfway point of the season or fishing year, a step-up would be implemented for the remainder of the season or fishing year.
- Seasonal trends in landings should be considered (e.g., is it normal for most of the landings to occur earlier/later in the fishing year?)
- Administratively burdensome due to more in-season announcements of management changes.
- Landings monitoring can be uncertain with shorter reporting timeframes or administrative turnaround times due to delayed reporting and increased reliance on projections.
- Potentially short time period for the stepped-up trip limit, especially for species with split seasons. Additionally, the stepped-up trip limit is likely to be later in the fishing

year/season, which may not align with weather and market conditions for fishermen to benefit from the stepped-up limit.

- Law Enforcement AP indicated that an initial lag in enforcement would be likely while officers and fishermen become aware of trip limit changes.

Option 2 – Post-Season Step-Up

- If landings are below 75% of the ACL for a season or fishing year, a step-up would be implemented for the following fishing year or corresponding season (e.g., an underharvest during Season 1 would result in a stepped-up trip limit during Season 1 of the following year).
- Additional administrative burden relative to current responsibilities, but potentially more time for data to be reported and evaluated.
 - Fewer in-season administrative changes relative to Option 1.
- Includes fewer in-season regulatory changes and a likely longer time period for stepped-up trip limits to be in place, allowing these limits to coincide with beneficial times of year for the fishery.
 - Commercial fishing businesses could also benefit from the ability to plan ahead for a stepped-up trip limit that is in place for a full fishing year/season rather than a portion of the year/season.
- Potential enforcement benefits relative to Option 1 due to fewer in-season regulatory changes.

Sub-Committee Action

Review trip limit analyses for vermilion snapper, presented by SERO. Review drafted action and alternative language. Direct staff on if step-ups should be considered for vermilion snapper or any other snapper grouper species. Discuss and direct staff on whether any other time and ACL percentage thresholds for stepped-up trip limit alternatives should be included.

Action 4. Establish temporary trip limit decreases for snapper grouper species (step-downs)

Purpose of Action: Establish a framework for temporary trip limit decreases to extend seasons for snapper grouper species that have been closed early due to the ACL being harvested.

Golden tilefish hook-and-line was used to initially develop this action it has regularly met its ACL in recent years. Effects of a step-down would not be evident in analyses for species that have not typically met the threshold level (75% of the ACL per Alternative 2).

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not establish temporary trip limit decreases.

Alternative 2. (Step-Down) If commercial landings of golden tilefish via hook-and-line gear are above 75% of the commercial annual catch limit before August 31, the commercial trip limit will be decreased for the remainder of the fishing year by 50% (lower trip limit would be 250 lbs gw).

- Additional alternatives will be added, as directed by the Council, for any other species for which the Council wants to consider incorporation of a step-down into management.

Discussion

- Step-downs have been discussed as a tool to potentially extend fishing seasons to avoid closures from harvesting the ACL early in the fishing year or season.
- Similar to Option 1 under Action 3, a 1-month lag is assumed in analyses to account for the time necessary to receive commercial landings data, determine whether a step-down would go into effect, and announcement of when the stepped-down trip limit would be effective.
- Seasonal trends in landings should be considered (e.g., is it normal for most of the landings to occur earlier/later in the fishing year?)
- Administratively burdensome due to more in-season announcements of management changes.
- Landings monitoring can be uncertain with shorter reporting timeframes or administrative turnaround times due to delayed reporting and increased reliance on projections.
- Law Enforcement AP indicated that an initial lag in enforcement would likely be necessary to ensure officers and fishermen are aware of trip limit changes.

Sub-Committee Action

Review trip limit analyses for golden tilefish hook-and-line, presented by SERO. Review drafted action and alternative language. Direct staff on if step-downs should be considered for golden tilefish hook-and-line or any other snapper grouper species. Discuss and direct staff on whether any other time and ACL percentage thresholds or stepped-down trip limit alternatives should be included.

Action 5. Revise bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species that may be harvested while gear is on board and stowed

Purpose of Action: Increase commercial trip efficiency by allowing commercial vessels with bottom longline gear on board the ability to harvest the full array of snapper grouper species using other allowable gear types, as long as the bottom longline gear is stowed while fishing for species that are not already allowed to be possessed with such gear on board. This action is not intended to expand the gear that may be used to fish for snapper grouper species, but to allow fishermen to more easily stow one gear type and switch to another fishing gear during the same trip.

Alternative 1 (No Action). A vessel that has on board a valid Federal commercial permit for South Atlantic snapper grouper, excluding wreckfish, that fishes in the EEZ on a trip with bottom longline gear on board may possess only the following South Atlantic snapper grouper species: snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish.

Alternative 2. Modify the bottom longline species limitation to allow possession of any snapper grouper species on commercial trips with bottom longline gear on board. Species other than snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, golden tilefish, blueline tilefish, and sand tilefish may only be harvested if bottom longline gear is appropriately stowed. Appropriately stowed means hooks are not baited and no hooks attached to longline gear are on the deck of the vessel.

Discussion

- Relevant CFR reference: [50 CFR 622.188\(g\)](#)
- The Council discussed potential ways that longline gear could be stowed to be obviously unusable.
 - No bait on hooks
 - Remove hooks
 - Remove spool
 - Stow hooks and/or spool below deck
- The LE AP has commented that there still may be enforcement difficulties due to illegal gear potentially being cut (and needing to be retrieved by law enforcement for prosecution) and identifying fish that were harvested by each gear on multi-gear trips (reference the January 2026 LE AP Report for a more complete summary of the discussion).
- The Council has also discussed the possibility of a call-in/notification system that would inform law enforcement that a trip will use multiple gears or is switching between longline gear and another gear. Further discussion is needed to define how this system could work and how much time is necessary for it to be implemented.
 - Due to the regulatory burden and potential issues with timing of IT security clearances and contractor shortages, if a call-in system is required, it may delay implementation of this action.

- SERO staff will provide additional information on potential challenges associated with establishing this type of system.

Sub-Committee Action

Review drafted action and alternative language. Review information from SERO about potential challenges associated with a call-in system and direct staff on whether this should be included in the action.

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	Review available analyses and draft action and alternative language. Approve suite of actions and range of alternatives for analysis.
June 2026	Consider approval for public hearings
Summer 2026	Public hearings
September 2026	Review public comment and approve all actions
December 2026	Final Council approval

Sub-Committee Action

Review the amendment timeline and edit as necessary.