



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

# Snapper Grouper Amendment 60

Commercial Sub-Committee

Discussion Document, April 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 (March 2026)

In March 2026 ([March 2026 Snapper Grouper Committee Report and Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee Report](#)), the Sub-Committee made edits to the Purpose and Need statements, reviewed drafted action and alternative language, gave directions on the species and alternative trip limits that should be included for consideration, gave direction for developing the process for temporarily adjusting trip limits, added an alternative that considers a requirement for notification prior to departure for vessels intending to switch to or from bottom longline gear within a trip, and added an action to consider revising trip limit applications to sale of fish and clarification of trip completion.

## Objectives for this Meeting (April 2026)

- Review preliminary analyses and information about considered actions.
- Review revised Purpose and Need statements and 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 hearings 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 long-term stability of commercial participants and to increase flexibility, adaptability, access, and economic profitability in the snapper grouper commercial sector.

**Need:** The need for this amendment is to provide increased access by modifying limited-access commercial permit requirements, modifying trip limits, allowing flexibility for changing gears at sea, and clarifying commercial trip limit possession requirements to more consistently achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, commercial closures and other adverse social and economic effects, consistent with Executive Order 14276 – Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.

## **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 South Atlantic snapper grouper unlimited permit, a person must obtain and exchange two such permits for one new permit.

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

### Discussion

- This action maintains the snapper grouper unlimited (SG 1) permit as a limited access permit.
- Currently, after one unlimited (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 received information on limited access permit pools, and has decided not to consider a permit pool at this time.
- 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.

### Sub-Committee Action

- Review alternatives and information and provide direction for any necessary edits to language or additional information for future discussions.

## Action 2. Revise bottom longline gear stowage requirements and species that may be harvested while gear is on board and stowed

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** A vessel that has on board a valid Federal commercial permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper 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 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 are not on the deck of the vessel.

**Alternative 3.** Modify 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 are not on the deck of the vessel. **Vessels that intend to fish multiple gear types on a single trip must submit a notification prior to departure.**

### Discussion

- Relevant CFR reference: [50 CFR 622.188\(g\)](#)
- 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 (see [January 2026 LE AP Report](#) for a more complete summary of the discussion).
- The IPT removed language concerning wreckfish from all alternatives. Wreckfish may not be harvested or be possessed onboard a vessel with bottom longline gear.
- 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 how this type of system could work.

### Sub-Committee Action

- Review alternatives and information and provide direction for any necessary edits to language or additional information for future discussions.

## Temporarily Adjusted Trip Limit Draft Alternatives Under Actions 3-10

Under Actions 3-10 (listed below), alternatives will be included to establish a procedure for evaluating and temporarily adjusting commercial trip limits based on annual harvest relative to the annual catch limits (ACL) (including seasonal ACLs, where applicable). The alternatives have the same general structure, outlined here:

**Draft Alternative A.** Provide NMFS the authority to increase or decrease commercial trip limits\* for [species] for the following corresponding season. For any given season, if less than [75%, converted to pounds] of the ACL is harvested or projected to be harvested, or if the ACL is met or projected to be met, NMFS will specify the trip limit for the corresponding season in the following fishing year to achieve but not to exceed the ACL for that season.

**Draft Alternative B.** If less than [75%, converted to pounds] of the ACL is harvested or projected to be harvested for any given season, NMFS may increase the trip limit for the corresponding season in the following fishing year to no greater than [150%, converted to pounds or fish] of the codified trip limit. Conversely, if the ACL is met or projected to be met in any given season, NMFS may decrease the trip limit for the corresponding season in the following fishing year to no less than [50%, converted to pounds or fish] of the codified trip limit\*.

**Draft Alternative C.** If less than [75%, converted to pounds] of the ACL is harvested or projected to be harvested for any given season, NMFS may increase the trip limit for the corresponding season in the following fishing year to no greater than [125%, converted to pounds or fish] of the codified trip limit. Conversely, if the ACL is met or projected to be met in any given season, NMFS may decrease the trip limit for the corresponding season in the following fishing year to no less than [75%, converted to pounds or fish] of the codified trip limit\*.

\*Codified trip limit may change based on other alternatives.

Language that is highlighted and bracketed will be adjusted for each species, based on the applicable quota and season(s).

### Discussion

Before the start of each fishing year or season, NMFS will review the proportion of quota harvested during the prior fishing year or projected to be harvested. The Regional Administrator will consult with the Council at a Council meeting about adjusting the trip limit for the following year. The Council will provide the RA with a recommended trip limit in writing. NMFS will specify any temporary modification to the trip limit in the Federal Register.

If this process is implemented for all species considered in Amendment 60 Actions 3-10, a schedule of necessary annual actions is shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Schedule of Council and NMFS actions to evaluate and implement adjusted trip limits.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Data Needs</b>	<b>Species</b>
1-Jan	Adjusted Trip Limit Implemented		Vermilion Snapper (S1), Red Porgy (S1), GA-NC Hogfish, Gray Triggerfish (S1), Golden Tilefish (H&L)
1-Jan	NMFS Submits Temp Rule Package		Greater Amberjack (S1)
15-Feb	Science Center projection memo	Projected Landings	Vermilion Snapper (S2), Gray Triggerfish (S2)
15-Feb	Council sends recommendation letter to NMFS	Council recommendation for trip limit	Red Porgy (S2), Red Grouper, Gag
1-Mar	Adjusted Trip Limit Implemented		Greater Amberjack (S1)
1-Mar	NMFS Submits Temp Rule Package		Red Porgy (S2), Red Grouper, Gag
March Council Meeting	Council evaluates landings and develops trip limit recommendation	Projected Landings	Vermilion Snapper (S2), Gray Triggerfish (S2)
15-Apr	Council sends recommendation letter to NMFS	Council recommendation for trip limit	Vermilion Snapper (S2), Gray Triggerfish (S2)
1-May	NMFS Submits Temp Rule Package		Vermilion Snapper (S2), Gray Triggerfish (S2)
1-May	Adjusted Trip Limit Implemented		Red Porgy (S2), Red Grouper, Gag
15-May	Science Center projection memo	Projected Landings	Greater Amberjack (S2)
June Council Meeting	Council evaluates landings and develops trip limit recommendation	Projected Landings	Greater Amberjack (S2)
15-Jun	Council sends recommendation letter to NMFS	Council recommendation for trip limit	Greater Amberjack (S2)
1-Jul	Adjusted Trip Limit Implemented		Vermilion Snapper (S2), Gray Triggerfish (S2)
1-Jul	NMFS Submits Temp Rule Package		Greater Amberjack (S2)
15-Aug	Science Center projection memo	Projected Landings	Vermilion Snapper (S1), Red Porgy (S1), GA-NC Hogfish, Gray Triggerfish (S1), Golden Tilefish (H&L)
1-Sep	Adjusted Trip Limit Implemented		Greater Amberjack (S2)
September Council Meeting	Council evaluates landings and develops trip limit recommendation	Projected Landings	Vermilion Snapper (S1), Red Porgy (S1), GA-NC Hogfish, Gray Triggerfish (S1), Golden Tilefish (H&L)

Date	Action	Data Needs	Species
15-Oct	Council sends recommendation letter to NMFS	Council recommendation for trip limit	Vermilion Snapper (S1), Red Porgy (S1), GA-NC Hogfish, Gray Triggerfish (S1), Golden Tilefish (H&L)
1-Nov	NMFS Submits Temp Rule Package		Vermilion Snapper (S1), Red Porgy (S1), GA-NC Hogfish, Gray Triggerfish (S1), Golden Tilefish (H&L)
15-Nov	Science Center projection memo	Projected Landings	Greater Amberjack (S1), Red Porgy (S2), Red Grouper, Gag
December Council Meeting	Council evaluates landings and develops trip limit recommendation	Projected Landings	Greater Amberjack (S1), Red Porgy (S2), Red Grouper, Gag
15-Dec	Council sends recommendation letter to NMFS	Council recommendation for trip limit	Greater Amberjack (S1)

### Sub-Committee Action:

- Are the threshold levels for considering changes to the trip limit (<75% of the quota and meeting the quota) appropriate? Do any other threshold levels need to be considered?
- Should all of the draft alternatives (A-C) be included for further consideration under Actions 3-10?
- Does the language and outlined process meet the Council's needs for adaptability (consistent with the Purpose and Need), while allowing adequate opportunity for Council involvement?
  - Does the language allow temporary trip limit adjustments to occur without needing additional public comment for federal rulemaking?
- Provide any necessary edits that would generally be applied to these alternatives in Actions 3-10.

## Discussion for Actions 3-10

**Table 2.** 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
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)
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 2023-Aug 2023: 45.4% Sept 2023-Feb 2024: 33.1%	Mar 2022-Aug 2022: 66.5% Sept 2022-Feb 2023: 59.0%*	Mar 2021-Aug 2021: 69.0% Sept 2021-Feb 2022: 61.9%
Hogfish (GA- NC)	500 lbs ww	72.6%	74.1%	74.7%
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%
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

### Sub-Committee Action for Actions 3-10:

- Review trip limit alternatives and provide edits, if necessary.

### Action 3. Revise commercial trip limits for greater amberjack

**Purpose of Action:** Revise commercial trip limits for greater amberjack to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest optimum yield.

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Do not revise trip limits. The current trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 1 (March 1 through August 31) and Season 2 (September through February) is 1,200 lbs ww or gw, except for April, when no harvest is allowed. No process for temporarily adjusting the commercial trip limit is in place.

**Alternative 2.** Increase the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 1 to:

**Sub-Alternative 2a.** 1,500 lbs ww or gw.

**Sub-Alternative 2b.** 2,000 lbs ww or gw.

**Alternative 3.** Increase the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack during Season 2 to:

**Sub-Alternative 3a.** 1,500 lbs ww or gw.

**Sub-Alternative 3b.** 2,000 lbs ww or gw.

**Alternative 4.** See temporarily adjusted trip limit language (Alternatives A-C).

## **Action 4. Revise commercial trip limits for vermilion snapper**

**Purpose of Action:** Revise commercial trip limits for vermilion snapper to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest optimum yield.

**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. No process for temporarily adjusting the commercial trip limit is in place.

**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.

**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.

**Alternative 4.** See temporarily adjusted trip limit language (Alternatives A-C).

## **Action 5. Revise commercial trip limits for red porgy**

**Purpose of Action:** Revise commercial trip limits for red porgy to better enable commercial fishermen to harvest optimum yield.

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Do not revise trip limits. The current trip limit for red porgy during Season 1 (January through April) and Season 2 (May through December) is 15 fish. No process for temporarily adjusting the commercial trip limit is in place.

**Alternative 2.** Increase the commercial trip limit for red porgy during Season 1 to:

**Sub-Alternative 2a.** 30 fish.

**Sub-Alternative 2b.** 45 fish

**Alternative 3.** Increase the commercial trip limit for red porgy during Season 2 to:

**Sub-Alternative 3a.** 30 fish

**Sub-Alternative 3b.** 45 fish

**Alternative 4.** See temporarily adjusted trip limit language (Alternatives A-C).

## **Action 6. Revise commercial trip limit for hogfish (Georgia-North Carolina)**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Do not revise trip limit. The current trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina is 500 lbs ww. No process for temporarily adjusting the commercial trip limit is in place.

**Alternative 2.** Increase the commercial trip limit for hogfish from Georgia-North Carolina to 1,000 lbs gw.

**Alternative 3.** See temporarily adjusted trip limit language (Alternatives A-C).

## **Action 7. Revise commercial trip limit for red grouper**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Do not revise trip limit. The current trip limit for red grouper is 200 lbs gw. No process for temporarily adjusting the commercial trip limit is in place.

**Alternative 2.** Increase the commercial trip limit for red grouper to 300 lbs gutted weight.

**Alternative 3.** See temporarily adjusted trip limit language (Alternatives A-C).

## **Action 8. Revise commercial trip limits for gray triggerfish**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Do not revise trip limits. The current trip limit for gray triggerfish is 1000 lbs gw. No process for temporarily adjusting the commercial trip limit is in place.

**Alternative 2.** See temporarily adjusted trip limit language (Alternatives A-C).

## **Action 9. Revise commercial trip limit for golden tilefish (hook and line only)**

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Do not revise trip limit. The current trip limit for the golden tilefish hook and line component is 500 lbs gw. No process for temporarily adjusting the commercial trip limit is in place.

**Alternative 2.** See temporarily adjusted trip limit language (Alternatives A-C).

## Action 10. Revise commercial trip limit for gag

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Do not revise trip limit. The current trip limit for gag is 300 lbs gw. No process for temporarily adjusting the commercial trip limit is in place.

**Alternative 2.** See temporarily adjusted trip limit language (Alternatives A-C).

## Action 11. Modify Commercial Trip Limit and Possession Requirements

**Purpose:** To allow commercial fishermen the flexibility to land a trip limit and resume fishing operations on days when licensed federally permitted dealers are unavailable to receive and record the catch (e.g., Sundays or holidays).

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Maintain existing regulations.

*50 CFR 622.191*

*Commercial trip limits are limits on the amount of the applicable species that may be **possessed on board or landed, purchased, or sold from a vessel per day**. A person who fishes in the EEZ may not combine a trip limit specified in this section with any trip or possession limit applicable to state waters. A species subject to a trip limit specified in this section taken in the EEZ may not be transferred at sea, regardless of where such transfer takes place, and such species may not be transferred in the EEZ.*

**Alternative 2.** Remove “purchased or sold” from the commercial trip limit provision. In lieu of (fully) transferring harvested fish to a dealer upon landing, such fish may be placed in a secured, shore-based storage location **owned by the dealer. The fisherman’s portion of the commercial trip ticket would be completed and left with the fish.** Reporting requirements for the trip would not be affected.

**Alternative 3.** Remove “purchased or sold” from the commercial trip limit provision. In lieu of (fully) transferring harvested fish to a dealer upon landing, such fish may be placed in **any secured, shore-based location. The fisherman’s portion of the commercial trip ticket would be completed and left with the fish.** Reporting requirements for the trip would not be affected.

### Discussion

- Commercial trip limits are limits on the amount of the applicable species that may be possessed on board or landed, purchased, or sold from a vessel per day. Thus, if a dealer is closed on a day that a vessel lands the maximum trip limit for a species, and those landings are sold to that dealer the next day, that vessel effectively may not harvest that species that next day (because the trip limit would already be met by virtue of the sale).
- Relevant CFR References:

- Commercial trip limit definition ([50 CFR 622.191](#))
- General Magnuson-Stevens Act Definitions ([50 CFR 600.10](#))
  - See definitions for terms including: *catch limit, dealer, land, sale or sell, trip*

**Sub-Committee Action:**

- Review alternative language and provide edits as necessary.
- Consider whether any drafted alternatives should be removed from further consideration.

## Potential Amendment Timeline

<b>March 2025</b>	Amendment 60 initiated
<b>June 2025</b>	Review initial actions and consider approval for scoping
<b>July 5-August 8, 2025</b>	Scoping
<b>September 2025</b>	Review scoping comments; provide direction for actions and alternatives
<b>December 2025</b>	Review available analyses and draft action and alternative language
<b>March 2026</b>	Review available analyses and draft action and alternative language. Approve suite of actions and range of alternatives for analysis.
<b>April 2026</b>	<b>Review additional analyses and further develop actions and alternatives</b>
<b>June 2026</b>	Consider approval for public hearings
<b>Summer 2026</b>	Public hearings
<b>September 2026</b>	Review public comment and approve all actions
<b>December 2026</b>	Final Council approval

**Sub-Committee Action**

Review the amendment timeline and edit as necessary.