

Commercial Snapper Grouper Landings Analyses

March 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.

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 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, 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 stopped fishing 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.

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. 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. 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 and Black Sea Bass had decreasing percentages of trips reaching 90% of the trip limit.

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).

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 landing 90% of the trip limit (Limit) in the South Atlantic region based on Coastal Logbook data, 2019 to 2023. 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/FL Keys) and Georgia through North Carolina (GA-NC) due to the different stocks and trip limits in the areas. Units are G for gutted, R for as reported, and W for whole weight. All weights are in pounds.

Species/Stock	Limit	Unit	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Greater Amberjack	1200	W	5%	4%	5%	4%	4%
Black Sea Bass	300/1000	G	3%	1%	1%	2%	2%
Gag Grouper*	300	G	14%	18%	15%	13%	14%
Red Grouper	200	G	4%	1%	2%	3%	3%
Snowy Grouper	200	G	34%	28%	28%	30%	25%
Jacks	500	R	6%	2%	3%	4%	3%
Red Snapper	75	G	68%	71%	69%	75%	78%
Vermilion Snapper	1000	G	15%	13%	11%	14%	12%
Blueline Tilefish	100/300	G	24%	31%	38%	30%	39%
Triggerfish	1000	W	3%	3%	1%	1%	1%
Golden Tilefish L	4000	G	13%	10%	14%	17%	24%
Golden Tilefish O	500	G	16%	14%	17%	20%	10%
Hogfish EFL/FL Keys	25	W	22%	29%	29%	26%	23%
Hogfish GA-NC	500	W	1%	2%	6%	3%	2%

* 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.

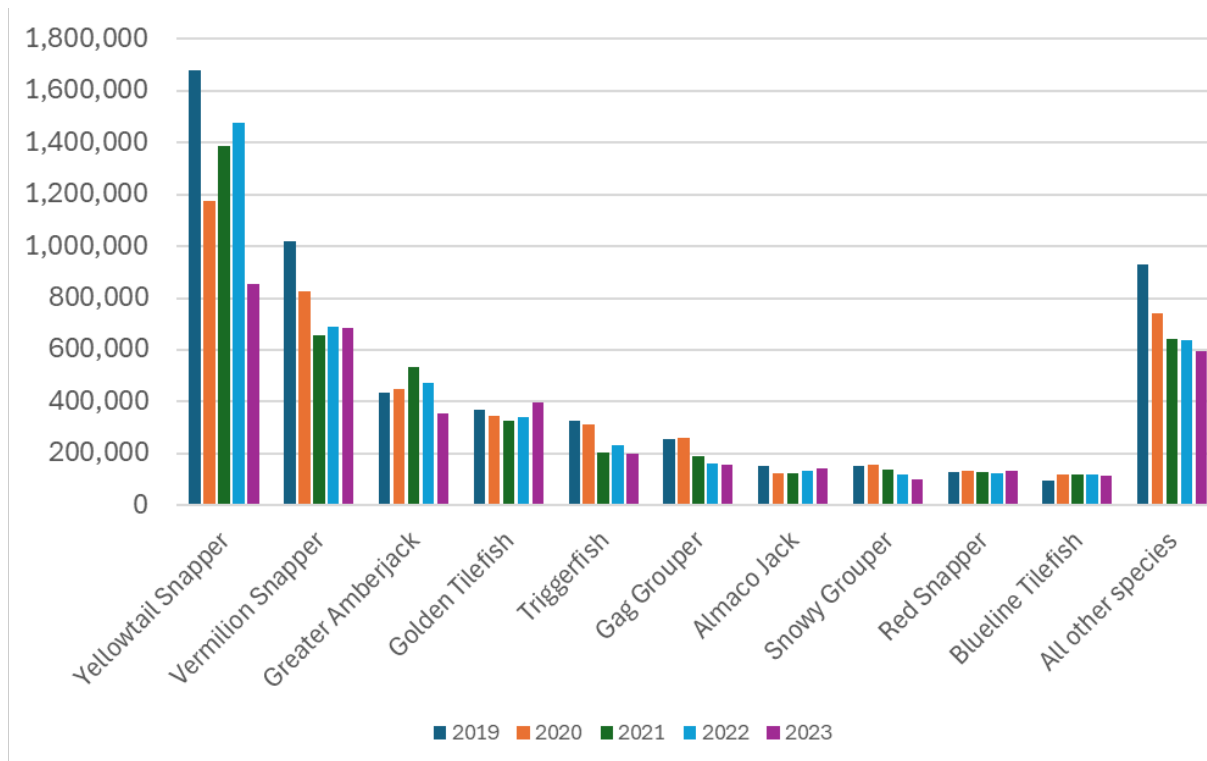


Figure 1. Commercial landings (whole weight, pounds) of the top 10 Snapper Grouper Complex species and all other species (remaining species in Snapper Grouper Complex) by year, 2019 to 2023.

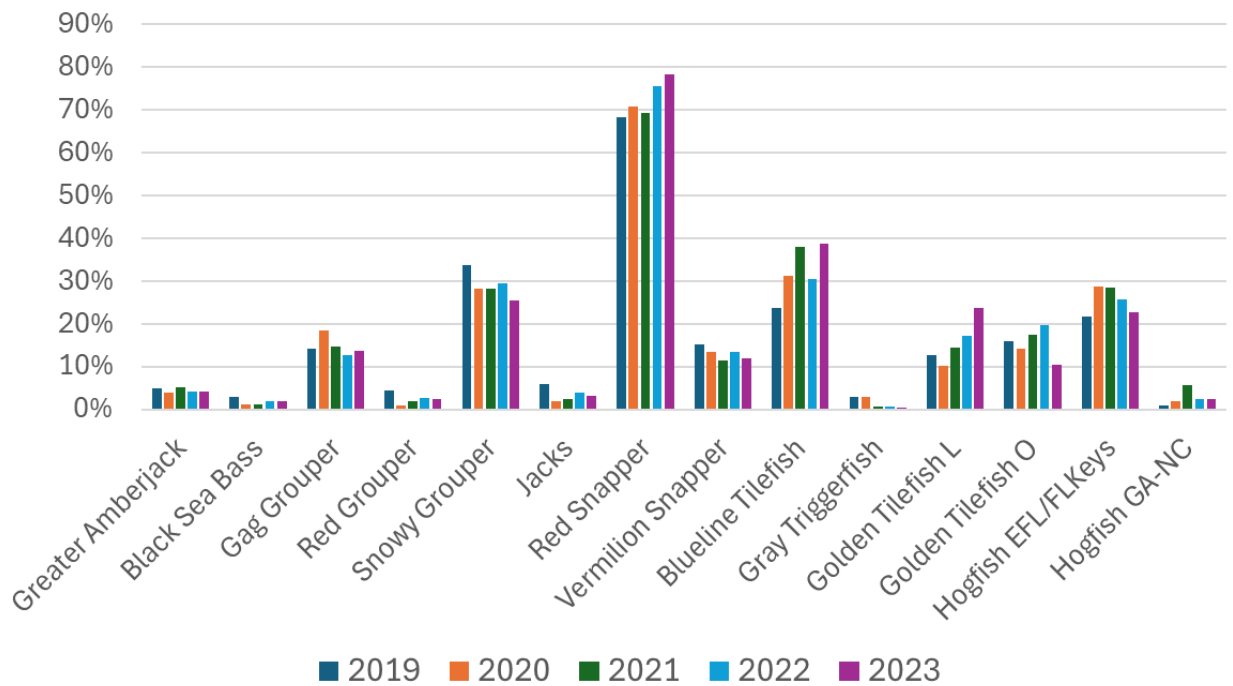


Figure 2. Percentage of trips landing 90% of the trip limit or more in the South Atlantic Region based on Coastal Logbook data, 2019 to 2023. Black Sea Bass and Blueline have season variation in trips limits that were accounted for in the calculation. Golden Tilefish was split into the longline fishery (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.