



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Snapper Grouper

Commercial Sub-Committee

Discussion Document, March 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.

The Sub-Committee met for the first time in November 2024 via webinar. At this meeting, they discussed some of the items initially listed for consideration and directed staff to compile and request information that could help prioritize commercial issues and develop potential management responses. The Sub-Committee has a bulleted list of items that could be addressed. This list will continue to be detailed and prioritized until the Sub-Committee is ready to recommend management actions to the Council.

Objectives for this Meeting (March 2025)

- Review compiled information from past reports and requested analyses, as available.
- Review and revise the list of commercial issues. Discuss additional details or potential management actions in response to each issue. Prioritize actions that are most important or should be addressed in the short-term.
- Direct staff on additional information to be compiled or developed ahead of the next Sub-Committee meeting. Discuss the timing and format (webinar or in-person, in conjunction with a Council meeting) of the next Sub-Committee meeting.

Potential Commercial Management Actions

The list of potential commercial issues to be addressed, as updated in November 2024, is shown below:

- 2-for-1 commercial permit policy
 - Evaluate whether this policy is still necessary and whether the commercial sector is currently over-capitalized.
 - Consider the number of 2-for-1 exchanges that have occurred over time to get an idea whether this transaction is reasonable for new entrants.
 - If the 2-for-1 policy is recommended to continue, define evaluation criteria and a process by which it can be removed in the future, when it is no longer needed.
- The portfolio of permits and fishing activities necessary to sustain commercial fishing businesses
 - Consider how necessary permits may be changing as stocks shift and expand across Council jurisdictional boundaries.
- Improving biomass of commercially important stocks
 - The success of the commercial fishery is primarily dependent on sustainable biomass that allows access to harvest.
 - Commercial fishermen need year-round access to enough biomass (even if from different stocks at different times of year) to run their businesses.
 - The current portfolio fishing model is necessary because several stocks have declined, leading to stricter management and reduced access
- Permit transfers
 - Examine relationships between individual and business permit holders.
 - Address potential loopholes that allow transfers in ways not originally intended.
 - Consider the number of transfers that have occurred over time to get an idea of the frequency as compared to the 2-for-1 exchanges.
- Permit leasing
- Commercial 225 lb permit policies
 - Evaluate the need for these permits in the current fishery
 - Consider repurposing the permit to be specifically for new entrants into the fishery
 - Consider a permit pool or bank to enable new entrance into the fishery
- Regional management
- Items from the Florida Commercial Fishing Summit
 - The primary issue relevant to federal snapper grouper management noted in the summit is identifying and addressing barriers to new entrants
- Competition with imports
 - Investigate the extent to which the commercial snapper grouper fishery competes with imported fish
 - If competition with imports is notable, explore methods within the Council's purview that may aid in domestic sales.
 - Council could consider import minimum size limits like Florida.
 - The Sub-Committee discussed sustainable seafood certifications and decided that these should not be established by the Council for the snapper grouper fishery due to potential conflicts of interest from the Council participating in business marketing.

- Several other organizations already have certification programs, and the Council is required by law to manage fisheries to be sustainable.
- Addressing potential competition with imports may not be an actionable item for the Council. Instead, this may be a consideration when issues that could affect the commercial market occur.
 - Different permit usage (e.g. “permit stacking”, others)
 - Ways to increase trip efficiency
 - “Step-ups” as the converse of step-downs that would increase trip limits if a percentage of the optimum yield has not been landed by a specified time of the fishing year.
 - Multi-day or day-based trip limits.
 - Environmental Equity and Justice (EEJ) concerns.
 - Look at the Implementation Plan to determine applicable actions for the commercial sector and this Sub-Committee.
 - *The EEJ Implementation Plan is no longer active on the NOAA Fisheries website and is not being pursued at this time.*
 - Climate change and ecosystem concerns
 - Incorporation of ecosystem-based or multi-species models could help move away from management being so reactive to single-species stock assessments.

Sub-Committee members commented that the Sub-Committee’s effort should identify barriers to the success of the commercial fishery and develop an initial vision of what the commercial fishery should look like in the next several years.

Sub-Committee Action

Edit, add details or potential management responses, and prioritize the bulleted list of potential issues to be addressed.

Timeline and Next Meeting

March 2024	Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee established
November 2024	Sub-Committee meeting via webinar. Additional information requested to inform prioritization of commercial issues.
March 2025	Sub-Committee meeting in-person
2025	Next Meeting?

Sub-Committee Action

Direct staff on the timing and format of the next Sub-Committee meeting, as well as potential agenda items and any necessary information to request or develop.