

## **Amendment 49**

to the Fishery Management Plan for the  
Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South  
Atlantic Region

**Catch Level Adjustments and Management Measure Modifications  
for Greater Amberjack and Removal of Recreational Annual Catch  
Targets for Snapper Grouper Species**



**Environmental Assessment, Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis, and  
Regulatory Impact Review**

**April 2023**

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
4055 Faber Place Drive; Suite 201  
North Charleston, SC 29405

Award Number FNA15NMF4410010

## Amendment 49 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

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**Proposed action(s):** Revise annual catch limits, sector allocations, commercial minimum size limit, commercial trip limits, and the April spawning closure for greater amberjack; Remove recreational annual catch targets for snapper grouper species.

### Responsible Agencies and Contact Persons

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council	843-571-4366
4055 Faber Place, Suite 201	843-769-4520 (fax)
North Charleston, South Carolina 29405	<a href="http://www.safmc.net">www.safmc.net</a>
IPT lead: Mike Schmidtke	
<a href="mailto:Mike.Schmidtke@safmc.net">Mike.Schmidtke@safmc.net</a>	

National Marine Fisheries Service	727-824-5305
Southeast Regional Office	727-824-5308 (fax)
263 13 <sup>th</sup> Avenue South	<a href="http://NMFS.SERO">NMFS SERO</a>
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701	
IPT lead: Mary Vara	
<a href="mailto:Mary.Vara@noaa.gov">Mary.Vara@noaa.gov</a>	

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	III
List of Appendices .....	VII
List of Figures .....	VIII
List of Tables .....	IX
Summary .....	S-1
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. What Actions are Being Proposed? .....	1
1.2. Who is Proposing the Actions?.....	1
1.3. Where is the Project Located? .....	2
1.4. Why are the Council and NMFS Considering Action? (Purpose and Need).....	2
1.5. How Has Recreational Data Collection Changed in the Southeast?.....	4
1.6. Are These Actions Within the Bounds of the Scientific Recommendations? .....	5
1.7. How Were the ACL Alternatives Determined? .....	6
1.8. What is the History of Management for Greater Amberjack? .....	7
Chapter 2. Proposed Actions .....	9
2.1. Action 1. Revise the Greater Amberjack Acceptable Biological Catch, Total Annual Catch Limit, and Annual Optimum Yield.....	9
2.1.1. Alternatives .....	9
2.1.2. Comparison of Alternatives .....	11
2.2. Action 2. Revise the Greater Amberjack Sector Allocations and Sector Annual Catch Limits .....	13
2.2.1. Alternatives .....	13
2.2.2. Comparison of Alternatives .....	17
2.3. Action 3. Reduce the Commercial Minimum Size Limit for Greater Amberjack.....	20
2.3.1. Alternatives .....	20
2.3.2. Comparison of Alternatives .....	20
2.4. Action 4. Increase the Seasonal Commercial Trip Limits for Greater Amberjack.....	22
2.4.1. Alternatives .....	22
2.4.2. Comparison of Alternatives .....	22
2.5. Action 5. Revise the April Spawning Closure for Greater Amberjack.....	24
2.5.1. Alternatives .....	24
2.5.2. Comparison of Alternatives .....	24
2.6. Action 6. Remove Recreational Annual Catch Targets from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.....	26
2.6.1. Alternatives .....	26
2.6.2. Comparison of Alternatives .....	26
Chapter 3. Affected Environment.....	27
3.1. Habitat Environment.....	27
3.1.1. Essential Fish Habitat .....	27
3.1.2. Habitat Areas of Particular Concern .....	28
3.2. Biological and Ecological Environment .....	29
3.2.1. Greater Amberjack, <i>Seriola dumerili</i> .....	29
3.2.2. Bycatch .....	32
3.2.3. Other Species Affected .....	33

3.2.4. Protected Species .....	33
3.3. Economic Environment .....	34
3.3.1. Commercial Sector.....	34
3.3.2. Recreational Sector .....	39
3.4. Social Environment.....	49
3.4.1. Commercial Sector.....	50
3.4.2. Recreational Sector .....	55
3.4.3. Environmental Justice.....	57
3.5. Administrative Environment.....	59
3.5.1. Federal Fishery Management.....	59
3.5.2. State Fishery Management.....	60
3.5.3. Enforcement.....	61
Chapter 4. Environmental Effects and Comparison of Alternatives .....	62
4.1. Action 1. Revise the Greater Amberjack Acceptable Biological Catch, Total Annual Catch Limit, and Annual Optimum Yield.....	62
4.1.1. Biological Effects.....	62
4.1.2. Economic Effects .....	65
4.1.3. Social Effects .....	70
4.1.4. Administrative Effects .....	71
4.2. Action 2. Revise the Greater Amberjack Sector Allocations and Sector Annual Catch Limits .....	72
4.2.1. Biological Effects.....	72
4.2.2. Economic Effects .....	80
4.2.3. Social Effects .....	85
4.2.4. Administrative Effects .....	86
4.3. Action 3. Reduce the Commercial Minimum Size Limit for Greater Amberjack.....	87
4.3.1. Biological Effects.....	87
4.3.2. Economic Effects .....	89
4.3.3. Social Effects .....	89
4.3.4. Administrative Effects .....	89
4.4. Action 4. Increase the Seasonal Commercial Trip Limits for Greater Amberjack.....	91
4.4.1. Biological Effects.....	91
4.4.2. Economic Effects .....	95
4.4.3. Social Effects .....	97
4.4.4. Administrative Effects .....	98
4.5. Action 5. Revise the April Spawning Closure for Greater Amberjack.....	99
4.5.1. Biological Effects.....	99
4.5.2. Economic Effects .....	101
4.5.3. Social Effects .....	102
4.5.4. Administrative Effects .....	102
4.6. Action 6. Remove Recreational Annual Catch Targets from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.....	103
4.6.1. Biological Effects.....	103
4.6.2. Economic Effects .....	103
4.6.3. Social Effects .....	104
4.6.4. Administrative Effects .....	104

Chapter 5. Council’s Choice for the Preferred Alternative .....	105
5.1. Action 1. Revise the Greater Amberjack Acceptable Biological Catch, Total Annual Catch Limit, and Annual Optimum Yield.....	105
5.1.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations .....	105
5.1.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations .....	106
5.1.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations .....	106
5.1.4. Public Comments and Recommendations .....	106
5.1.5. Council Rationale.....	107
5.1.6. How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery? .....	107
5.2. Action 2. Revise the Greater Amberjack Sector Allocations and Sector Annual Catch Limits .....	108
5.2.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations .....	108
5.2.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations .....	108
5.2.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations .....	108
5.2.4. Public Comments and Recommendations .....	109
5.2.5. Council Rationale.....	109
5.2.6. How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery? .....	110
5.3. Action 3. Reduce the Commercial Minimum Size Limit for Greater Amberjack.....	111
5.3.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations .....	111
5.3.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations .....	112
5.3.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations .....	112
5.3.4. Public Comments and Recommendations .....	112
5.3.5. Council Rationale.....	113
5.3.6. How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery? .....	114
5.4. Action 4. Increase the Commercial Trip Limits for Greater Amberjack.....	115
5.4.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations .....	115
5.4.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations .....	115
5.4.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations .....	115
5.4.4. Public Comments and Recommendations .....	115
5.4.5. Council Rationale.....	116
5.4.6. How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery? .....	116
5.5. Action 5. Revise the April Spawning Closure for Greater Amberjack.....	118
5.5.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations .....	118
5.5.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations .....	118
5.5.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations .....	118
5.5.4. Public Comments and Recommendations .....	119
5.5.5. Council Rationale.....	119
5.5.6. How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery? .....	120
5.6. Action 6. Remove Recreational Annual Catch Targets from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.....	121
5.6.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations .....	121

5.6.2.	Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations .....	121
5.6.3.	Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations .....	121
5.6.4.	Public Comments and Recommendations .....	121
5.6.5.	Council Rationale.....	122
5.6.6.	How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery? .....	122
Chapter 6.	Cumulative Effects.....	123
6.1.	Affected Area.....	123
6.2.	Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions Impacting the Affected Area .....	123
6.3.	Consideration of Climate Change and Other Non-Fishery Related Issues.....	126
6.4.	Overall Impacts Expected from Past, Present, and Future Actions .....	128
6.5.	Monitoring and Mitigation.....	128
Chapter 7.	List of Preparers .....	130
Chapter 8.	Agencies and Persons Consulted .....	131
Chapter 9.	References.....	132
Appendix A.	Other Applicable Law .....	138
Appendix B.	Regulatory Impact Review.....	142
Appendix C.	Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis.....	148
Appendix D.	Essential Fish Habitat and Move to Ecosystem Based Management.....	153
Appendix E.	Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis .....	160
Appendix F.	Data Analyses.....	162
Appendix G.	Bycatch Practicability Analysis .....	185
Appendix H.	Fishery Impact Statement.....	200
Appendix I.	Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan Goals and Objectives .....	204
Appendix J.	Allocation Review Trigger Policy.....	206
Appendix K.	Greater Amberjack Stock Projections .....	208

## **List of Appendices**

<b>Appendix A.</b>	Other Applicable Law
<b>Appendix B.</b>	Regulatory Impact Review
<b>Appendix C.</b>	Regulatory Flexibility Analysis
<b>Appendix D.</b>	Essential Fish Habitat & Ecosystem Based Management
<b>Appendix E.</b>	Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis
<b>Appendix F.</b>	Data Analyses
<b>Appendix G.</b>	Bycatch Practicability Analysis
<b>Appendix H.</b>	Fishery Impact Statement
<b>Appendix I.</b>	Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan Goals and Objectives
<b>Appendix J.</b>	Allocation Review Trigger Policy
<b>Appendix K.</b>	Greater Amberjack Stock Projections

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1.3.1.</b> Jurisdictional boundaries of the Council. ....	2
<b>Figure 3.3.2.1.</b> South Atlantic greater amberjack recreational target trips, by mode and wave (average of 2015 – 2019). ....	44
<b>Figure 3.4.1.1.</b> Top South Atlantic communities ranked by pounds and value RQ of greater amberjack. ....	52
<b>Figure 3.4.1.2.</b> Top fifteen species landed in Port Orange, Florida ranked by pounds and value LQ. ....	53
<b>Figure 3.4.1.3.</b> Top fifteen species landed in Cocoa, Florida ranked by pounds and value LQ. .	53
<b>Figure 3.4.1.4.</b> Top fifteen species landed in Mayport, Florida ranked by pounds and value LQ. ....	54
<b>Figure 3.4.1.5.</b> Commercial fishing engagement and reliance for top greater amberjack communities. ....	55
<b>Figure 3.4.2.1.</b> Top 20 communities by recreational fishing engagement and reliance. ....	57
<b>Figure 3.4.3.1.</b> Social vulnerability indices for top snapper grouper and greater amberjack communities. ....	58
<b>Figure 3.4.3.2.</b> Social vulnerability indices for top snapper grouper and greater amberjack communities continued. ....	59
<b>Figure 4.1.1.1.</b> Greater amberjack commercial and recreational landings (lbs ww) by year from 1986 through 2019. ....	64
<b>Figure 4.2.1.1.</b> South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings (lbs ww) by month through August, with a commercial closure in April, from 2016 to 2020, using a three-year average, and five-year average. ....	74
<b>Figure 4.2.1.2.</b> South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings (lbs ww) by month for September through February for recent years that did not have a closure, and the three-year average. ....	75
<b>Figure 4.2.1.3.</b> South Atlantic greater amberjack recreational landings (lbs ww) by two-month wave for the 2016/2017 to the 2020/2021 fishing years, and the three-year and five-year average. ....	78
<b>Figure 4.4.1.1.</b> Distribution of the South Atlantic greater amberjack commercially harvested per trip (lbs ww) for Season 1. ....	92
<b>Figure 4.4.1.2.</b> Distribution of the South Atlantic greater amberjack commercially harvested per trip (lbs ww) for Season 2. Season 2 is from September 1 through February 28. ....	94
<b>Figure 4.5.1.1.</b> South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings in pounds ww by month for Season 1 from 2016 to 2020, three-year average, and five-year average with predicted April landings. ....	100



## List of Tables

<b>Table S-1.</b> South Atlantic greater amberjack overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations, in pounds whole weight (ww), based on projections from SEDAR 59 (2020).....	2
<b>Table 1.4.1.</b> South Atlantic greater amberjack stock status criteria recommendations based on the results of SEDAR 59 (2020). .....	3
<b>Table 1.6.1.</b> South Atlantic greater amberjack OFL and ABC recommendations, in pounds whole weight (ww), based on projections updated from those of SEDAR 59 (2020).....	6
<b>Table 2.2.1.1.</b> Current and proposed South Atlantic greater amberjack allocations for <b>Alternatives 1 (No Action)-5</b> . .....	14
<b>Table 2.2.1.2.</b> Sector allocations for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b> in Action 1 for the 2023/2024 fishing year. The commercial season is allocated 60% to Season 1 (March-August) and 40% to Season 2 (September-February). 15	
<b>Table 2.2.1.3.</b> Sector ACLs and commercial seasonal quotas for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b> in Action 1 and allocation percentages from <b>Alternative 1 (No Action)</b> in Action 2 (59.34% recreational and 40.66% commercial). ....	15
<b>Table 2.2.1.4.</b> Sector ACLs for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b> in Action 1 and allocation percentages from <b>Alternative 2</b> in Action 2 (70.16% recreational and 29.84% commercial).....	16
<b>Table 2.2.1.5.</b> Sector ACLs for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b> in Action 1 and allocation percentages from <b>Preferred Alternative 3</b> in Action 2 (65.00% recreational and 35.00% commercial).....	16
<b>Table 2.2.1.6.</b> Sector ACLs for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b> in Action 1 and allocation percentages from <b>Alternative 4</b> in Action 2 (55.00% recreational and 45.00% commercial).....	17
<b>Table 2.2.1.7.</b> Sector ACLs for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b> in Action 1 and allocation percentages from <b>Alternative 5</b> in Action 2 (50.00% recreational and 50.00% commercial).....	17
<b>Table 3.2.1.1.</b> Age, fork length, and percent of mature females for South Atlantic greater amberjack. ....	30
<b>Table 3.2.1.2.</b> South Atlantic commercial landings (lbs gw) of greater amberjack from March 2014 through February 2020 and percentage of the commercial ACL landed each year.....	32
<b>Table 3.2.1.3.</b> Recreational landings of greater amberjack scaled to MRFSS for monitoring against the recreational ACL. ....	32
<b>Table 3.3.1.1.</b> Number of vessels, number of trips, and landings in pounds gw by year for South Atlantic greater amberjack. ....	35
<b>Table 3.3.1.2.</b> Number of vessels and ex-vessel revenue by year (2020 dollars) for South Atlantic greater amberjack. ....	36
<b>Table 3.3.1.3.</b> Purchase statistics for dealers that bought South Atlantic greater amberjack landings (2020 dollars). ....	37
<b>Table 3.3.1.4.</b> Average annual business activity (2015 through 2019) associated with the commercial harvest of greater amberjack in the South Atlantic. ....	39
<b>Table 3.3.2.1.</b> South Atlantic greater amberjack recreational target trips, by mode and state, 2015-2019.* .....	42

<b>Table 3.3.2.2.</b> South Atlantic greater amberjack recreational catch trips, by mode and state, 2015-2019. ....	43
<b>Table 3.3.2.3.</b> South Atlantic headboat angler days and percent distribution by state (2015 through 2019). ....	45
<b>Table 3.3.2.4.</b> South Atlantic headboat angler days and percent distribution by month (2015 through 2019). ....	46
<b>Table 3.3.2.5.</b> Estimated annual average economic impacts (2015-2019) from South Atlantic recreational greater amberjack target trips, by state and mode, using state-level multipliers. ....	49
<b>Table 3.4.1.1.</b> Top communities by number of South Atlantic snapper grouper unlimited permits and 225-lb trip-limited permits. ....	51
<b>Table 3.4.2.1.</b> Top communities by number of South Atlantic for-hire snapper grouper permits. ....	56
<b>Table 4.1.1.1.</b> South Atlantic greater amberjack new OFL and ABC recommendations in pounds ww, based on projections from SEDAR 59 (2020), and total ACL options for <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b> and <b>Alternatives 3-4</b> . ....	63
<b>Table 4.1.2.1.</b> South Atlantic greater amberjack landings for fishing years 2015/2016 to 2019/2020. ....	66
<b>Table 4.1.2.2.</b> Percent difference between the total ACLs in <b>Action 1</b> compared to 5-year average landings from fishing years 2015/2016 to 2019/2020 <sup>a</sup> . ....	67
<b>Table 4.1.2.3.</b> Estimated change in potential landings (lbs ww) to the commercial sector from <b>Action 1</b> . ....	68
<b>Table 4.1.2.4.</b> Estimated change in potential net economic benefits to the commercial sector (producer surplus) from <b>Action 1</b> (2020 \$). ....	68
<b>Table 4.1.2.5.</b> Estimated change in potential landings (lbs ww) to the recreational sector from <b>Action 1</b> . ....	68
<b>Table 4.1.2.6.</b> Estimated change in potential net economic benefits to the recreational sector (consumer surplus) from <b>Action 1</b> (2020 \$). ....	68
<b>Table 4.1.2.7.</b> Estimated change in potential net economic benefits (recreational and commercial combined) from <b>Action 1</b> (2020 \$) <sup>a</sup> . ....	69
<b>Table 4.2.1.1.</b> Sector allocation percentages for South Atlantic greater amberjack that would be applied to the revised total ACL from <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b> in Action 1. ....	73
<b>Table 4.2.1.2.</b> Sector ACLs (lbs ww for recreational and lbs gw for commercial) for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b> in Action 1 and allocation percentages from <b>Preferred Alternative 3</b> in Action 2 (65.00% recreational and 35.00% commercial). ....	73
<b>Table 4.2.1.3.</b> South Atlantic commercial landings (lbs gw) of greater amberjack from March 2014 through February 2020 and percentage of the commercial ACL landed each year. ....	74
<b>Table 4.2.1.4.</b> The projected Season 1 commercial closure dates for South Atlantic greater amberjack. ....	76
<b>Table 4.2.1.5.</b> The projected Season 2 commercial closure dates for South Atlantic greater amberjack. ....	77
<b>Table 4.2.1.6.</b> Recreational landings of greater amberjack from March 2016 through February 2021 based on MRFSS (lbs ww) and corresponding percentage of recreational ACL landed each year. ....	78
<b>Table 4.2.1.7.</b> The projected recreational closure dates for South Atlantic greater amberjack. ..	79

<b>Table 4.2.2.1.</b> Percent difference between the commercial sector ACLs in Action 2 (assuming the total ACL in <b>Preferred Alternative 2</b> of Action 1 to determine the total ACL) compared to 5-year average landings of greater amberjack from fishing years 2015/16-2019/20 (749,344 lbs gw) and comparison of sector ACLs. ....	81
<b>Table 4.2.2.2.</b> Estimated change in potential net economic benefits for the commercial sector (PS) from the alternatives in Action 2 compared to <b>Alternative 1 (No Action)</b> (2020 \$).....	82
<b>Table 4.2.2.3.</b> Percent difference between the recreational sector ACLs in Action 2 compared to 5-year average landings of greater amberjack from 2015/16-2019/20 (2,025,789 lbs ww) and comparison of sector ACLs. ....	83
<b>Table 4.2.2.4.</b> Estimated change in potential net economic benefits for the recreational sector (CS) from the alternatives in Action 2 compared to <b>Alternative 1 (No Action)</b> (2020 \$). ...	84
<b>Table 4.2.2.5.</b> Estimated change in potential net economic benefits from the alternatives in Action 2 compared to <b>Alternative 1 (No Action)</b> (2020 \$). ....	85
<b>Table 4.3.1.1.</b> Length distribution of greater amberjack landed from released fish in the commercial sector from 2018 through 2020. ....	88
<b>Table 4.4.1.1.</b> The projected closure dates for the greater amberjack commercial sector Season 1 from increasing the trip limit. ....	93
<b>Table 4.4.1.2.</b> The projected closure dates for the greater amberjack commercial sector Season 2 from increasing the trip limit. ....	95
<b>Table 4.4.2.1.</b> Marginal Increase in commercial trip limits for the sub-alternatives in Action 4 compared to <b>Alternative 1 (No Action)</b> . ....	96
<b>Table 4.4.2.2.</b> Comparison of the estimated change in commercial landings of greater amberjack and associated producer surplus (PS) for Action 4 (2020 \$). ....	97
<b>Table 4.5.1.1.</b> The projected closure dates for the greater amberjack commercial sector Season 1 if the commercial sector was open to commercial harvest in April.....	100
<b>Table 4.5.2.1.</b> Comparison of the estimated change in landings and economic benefits associated with Action 5.....	102

## Summary

### Why is the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council considering action?

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) is considering action to respond to the most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic greater amberjack, Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) 59 (2020). The assessment followed a standard approach using data through 2018 and revised estimates for recreational catch from the Marine Recreational Information Program based on the Fishing Effort Survey, which is considered more reliable and robust compared to the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey previously used to derive recreational catch estimates for greater amberjack. The results indicated that South Atlantic greater amberjack are not overfished or experiencing overfishing. Catch and data changes incorporated in the assessment provided information to update the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, annual optimum yield, and annual catch limits.

The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee recommended a new overfishing limit and acceptable biological catch based on results of the stock assessment, and the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield must be adjusted accordingly. The Council cannot set the acceptable biological catch and total annual catch limit above their Scientific and Statistical Committee's acceptable biological catch recommendation. In addition, sector allocations changes need to be considered following the new stock assessment per the Council's Allocation Review Trigger Policy (see Appendix J) and because of revisions to recreational landing estimates as explained above. The Council is also considering changes to the commercial minimum size limit, the seasonal commercial trip limits, and the April spawning closure in response to public feedback concerning sector equity and fishing efficiency for greater amberjack.

Additionally, the Council is considering action to remove recreational annual catch targets for species in the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan). In 2012, the Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment established annual catch limits and recreational annual catch targets (SAFMC 2011b). The latter are intended as a precautionary buffer to account for uncertainty in the recreational catch estimates. While annual catch targets were developed and established as part of the management process (thus, they must be changed through plan amendments as the annual catch limit changes), these values were not used in developing regulations and were not included in codified regulatory text. Since the Council has not used recreational annual catch targets to manage the snapper grouper fishery and has accounted for any management uncertainty when setting the annual catch limit, in March 2021, the Council added an action to this amendment that would consider removal of recreational annual catch targets throughout the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

#### **Purpose for Action**

The *purpose* of this amendment is to revise the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch and catch limits for greater amberjack in the South Atlantic based on the results of the latest stock assessment; revise sector allocations, the commercial minimum size limits, commercial trip

limits, and the April spawning closure for greater amberjack; and remove recreational annual catch targets for the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

### **Need for Action**

The *need* for this amendment is to ensure catch limits are based on the best scientific information available and to ensure overfishing does not occur for the South Atlantic greater amberjack stock, while increasing social and economic benefits through sustainable and profitable harvest of South Atlantic greater amberjack, consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and its National Standards. This amendment is also needed to make administrative efforts more efficient by removing recreational annual catch targets, which are not actively used in management, from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

## **What Are the Overfishing Limit and Acceptable Biological Catch Recommendations for Greater Amberjack?**

The Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee reviewed the greater amberjack stock assessment (SEDAR 59 2020) at their April 2020 meeting. The assessment followed a standard approach with data through 2018 and used revised estimates for recreational catch from the Marine Recreational Information Program based on the Fishing Effort Survey, which is considered more reliable and robust compared to the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey previously used to derive recreational catch estimates for greater amberjack (Section 1.5). The Scientific and Statistical Committee found that the assessment was conducted using the best scientific information available, was adequate for determining stock status and supporting fishing level recommendations, and addressed uncertainty consistent with expectations and available information. The findings of the assessment indicated that the South Atlantic greater amberjack stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing.

The Scientific and Statistical Committee provided overfishing limit and acceptable biological catch recommendations to the Council for 2022 through 2026, until modified (Table S-1). Because these recommendations are based on the best scientific information available, the Council based the total annual catch limit alternatives considered in Action 2 on these recommended values. Implementation of the actions in this amendment is expected to occur during the 2023/2024 fishing year.

**Table S-1.** South Atlantic greater amberjack overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations, in pounds whole weight (ww), based on projections from SEDAR 59 (2020). The assessment and these projections use recreational data calibrated to the Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey.

<b>Year</b>	<b>OFL Landings (lbs ww)</b>	<b>ABC Landings (lbs ww)</b>
2022	4,615,000	4,380,000
2023	3,283,000	3,233,000
2024	2,839,000	2,818,000
2025	2,719,000	2,699,000
2026	2,691,000	2,669,000

## What Actions are Being Proposed in This Amendment?

Amendment 49 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan proposes the following:

### **Action 1. Revise the greater amberjack acceptable biological catch, total annual catch limit, and annual optimum yield**

**Purpose of Action:** The latest stock assessment (SEDAR 59 2020) indicated the stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing. Action is needed because the Scientific and Statistical Committee recommended a new acceptable biological catch based on results of SEDAR 59, and the acceptable biological catch, total annual catch limit, and annual optimum yield must be adjusted accordingly. The Council cannot set the total annual catch limit above the recommended acceptable biological catch.

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Revise the acceptable biological catch and set it equal to the most recent recommendation from the Scientific and Statistical Committee. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack and set them equal to the recommended acceptable biological catch. The recommended acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey. The 2026/2027 total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

Fishing Year	ABC (lbs ww)	Annual OY (lbs ww)	Total ACL (lbs ww)
2022/2023	4,380,000	4,380,000	4,380,000
2023/2024	3,233,000	3,233,000	3,233,000
2024/2025	2,818,000	2,818,000	2,818,000
2025/2026	2,699,000	2,699,000	2,699,000
2026/2027+	2,669,000	2,669,000	2,669,000

### **Action 2. Revise the greater amberjack sector allocations and sector annual catch limits**

**Purpose of Action:** The Council's Allocations Trigger Policy (Appendix J) states the Council will review sector allocations upon completion of a stock assessment. In addition, recreational landings estimates have been revised to adopt the new Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey methodology. This action allows the Council to consider how to allocate the total annual catch limit between the commercial and recreational sectors from the 2022/2023 fishing year onwards under the revised catch levels.

**Preferred Alternative 3.** Allocate 65.00% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the recreational sector and 35.00% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the commercial sector.

### **Action 3. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack**

**Purpose of Action:** In response to public feedback gathered during scoping of this amendment and given the current stock status, the Council is considering changes to minimum size limits to

reduce the difference between the current recreational (28 inches fork length) and commercial (36 inches fork length) size limits. This action is intended to increase fairness and equity between sectors and commercial fishing efficiency.

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to 34 inches fork length.

#### **Action 4. Increase the Season 2 commercial trip limit for greater amberjack**

**Purpose of Action:** In response to public feedback gathered during scoping of this amendment and given the current stock status, the Council is considering increasing the Season 2 (September-February) commercial trip limit (1,000 lbs ww or gw) to make it equal to the Season 1 (March-August) commercial trip limit (1,200 lbs ww or gw). This action is intended to allow some increase to harvest of a stock that is not overfished and above its reference biomass level.

**Preferred Alternative 3.** Modify the September 1 through the end of February (Season 2) commercial trip limit for greater amberjack to be:

**Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a.** 1,200 lbs ww or gw.

#### **Action 5. Revise the April spawning closure for greater amberjack**

**Purpose of Action:** In response to public feedback gathered during scoping of this amendment, the Council is considering revising the current April spawning closure for the commercial sector to be a closure of both the recreational and commercial sectors in April. This action is intended to increase fairness and equity between sectors.

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Specify during April each year, no person may sell, purchase, harvest, or possess a greater amberjack from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone and the harvest and possession limits are zero. This closure would apply to both the recreational and commercial sectors.

#### **Action 6. Remove recreational annual catch targets from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan**

**Purpose of Action:** Recreational annual catch targets are not currently used in management of snapper grouper species, but are included as part of the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan and must be updated when the recreational annual catch limit changes. This action is intended to reduce administrative burden while not significantly altering effective management of the snapper grouper fishery.

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Remove recreational annual catch targets for species managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1. What Actions are Being Proposed?

The proposed actions in this plan amendment would revise the acceptable biological catch (ABC), annual catch limits (ACL), annual optimum yield (OY), and sector allocations for greater amberjack in the South Atlantic based on the results of the latest stock assessment. Other actions would modify the commercial minimum size limit, the commercial Season 1 and Season 2 trip limits, and the April spawning closure for greater amberjack. The plan amendment would also remove recreational annual catch targets (ACT) for snapper grouper species, which are not actively being used in the management of species under the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP).

The 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery (Vision Blueprint) was approved by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) at their December 2015 meeting and was intended to inform the management of the snapper grouper fishery through 2020. The Vision Blueprint serves as a “living document” to help guide future management, build on stakeholder input, and illustrate actions that could be developed through the amendment process to address the goals identified during the visioning process. These goals and objectives have been reviewed and recommended for adoption in the Snapper Grouper FMP by the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel. By including them in Snapper Grouper Amendment 49 (Appendix I), the Council intends to formally adopt them as the goals and objectives of the Snapper Grouper FMP.

### ***South Atlantic Fishery Management Council***

- Responsible for conservation and management of fish stocks in the South Atlantic Region.
- Consists of 13 voting members and 4 non-voting members; voting members include 1 representative from each of the 4 South Atlantic state fishery management agencies, 8 members appointed by the Secretary of Commerce, and the Southeast Regional Administrator of NMFS.
- Responsible for developing fishery management plans and amendments under the Magnuson-Stevens Act; recommends actions to NMFS for implementation.
- Management area is from 3 to 200 nautical miles off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida through Key West, except for mackerel which is from New York to Florida, and dolphin and wahoo, which is from Maine to Florida.

## 1.2. Who is Proposing the Actions?

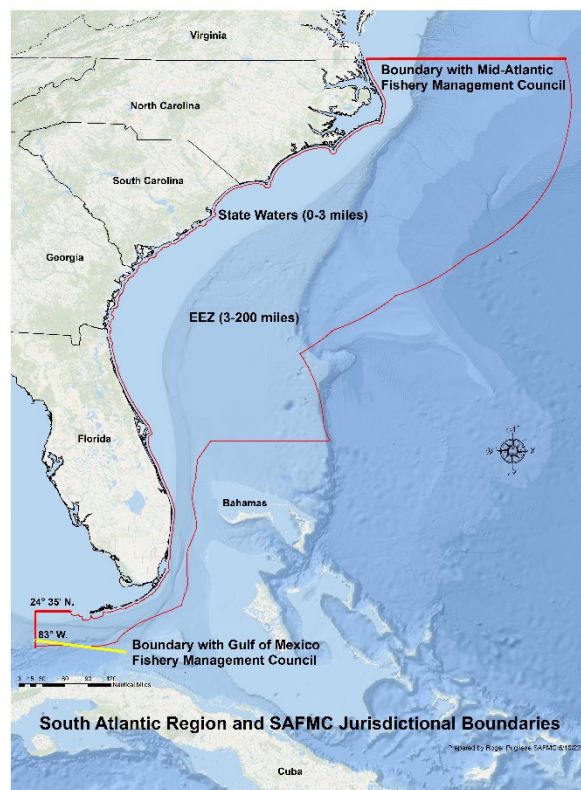
The Council is responsible for managing fish stocks in the South Atlantic Region. The Council develops the amendment and sends it to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), who decides whether to approve the amendment and publish a rule to implement the amendment on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce. NMFS is an agency of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration within the Department of Commerce. Guided by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the Council works with NMFS, other partners, and stakeholders to assess the status of fish stocks, specify catch limits, reduce bycatch, and ensure compliance with fisheries regulations.



The Council and NMFS are also responsible for making this amendment available for public comment. The draft environmental assessment (EA) is combined with the amendment and was available to the public during the scoping process, public hearings, and in Council meeting briefing books. The final EA and amendment will be made available for public comment during the proposed rule stage of the rulemaking process. The final EA and amendment will be found on the Council's website at <http://www.safmc.net>.

### 1.3. Where is the Project Located?

Management of the federal snapper grouper fishery located off the southeastern United States (South Atlantic) in the 3-200 nautical miles U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is conducted under the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 1983) (Figure 1.3.1). There are fifty-five species managed by the Council under the Snapper Grouper FMP.



**Figure 1.3.1.** Jurisdictional boundaries of the Council.

### 1.4. Why are the Council and NMFS Considering Action? (Purpose and Need)

**Purpose:** The *purpose* of this amendment is to revise the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch and catch limits for greater amberjack in the South Atlantic based on the results of the latest stock assessment; revise sector allocations, the commercial minimum size limit, commercial trip limits, and the April spawning closure for greater amberjack; and remove recreational annual catch targets for the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

**Need:** The *need* for this amendment is to ensure catch limits are based on the best scientific information available and to ensure overfishing does not occur for the South Atlantic greater amberjack stock, while increasing social and economic benefits through sustainable and profitable harvest of South Atlantic greater amberjack, consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and its National Standards. This amendment is also needed to make administrative efforts more efficient by removing recreational annual catch targets, which are not actively used in management, from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

### **Background**

The Council is considering action to respond to the most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic greater amberjack, Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) 59 (2020). The assessment followed a standard approach using data through 2018 and revised estimates for recreational catch from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) based on the mail-based Fishing Effort Survey (FES), which is considered more reliable and robust compared to the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) previously used to estimate recreational catches for greater amberjack. The assessment results indicated that South Atlantic greater amberjack are not overfished or experiencing overfishing (Table 1.4.1). Updated catch and data changes incorporated in the assessment provided information to update the OFL, ABC, annual OY, and ACLs. The Council is not exploring options for adjusting the stock status criteria or formulas for determining the associated stock status values in this FMP amendment. This FMP amendment would adopt the values as determined by the SEDAR 59 assessment and recommended by the SSC (probabilistic values in Table 1.4.1).

**Table 1.4.1.** South Atlantic greater amberjack stock status criteria recommendations based on the results of SEDAR 59 (2020).

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Deterministic</b>	<b>Probabilistic</b>
Overfished evaluation (SSB/SSB <sub>MSY</sub> )	2.10	2.39
Overfishing evaluation	0.40	0.28
MFMT (F <sub>MSY</sub> )	0.69	1.07
SSB <sub>MSY</sub> (mt mature female biomass)	3,291	2,642
MSST (mt mature female biomass)	2,468	2,066
MSY (1,000 lbs)	2,342	2,474

During public scoping of this amendment and initial feedback from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (April 2021), the Council received comments requesting consideration of changes to the commercial minimum size limit, commercial trip limits, and April spawning closure. The Council is considering a reduction of the commercial minimum size limit to reduce the difference in size limits between sectors, which would increase fairness and equity between sectors and commercial fishing efficiency. The Council is considering increases to the commercial trip limits to allow some increase in harvest of a stock that is not overfished and above its reference biomass level. The Council is also considering changes to the April spawning closure such that both sectors would have similar access or restrictions during April. This action is intended to increase fairness and equity between sectors.

Additionally, the Council is considering an action to remove recreational ACTs from species in the Snapper Grouper FMP. In 2012, the Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment for the

South Atlantic Region (Comprehensive ACL Amendment) established ACLs and recreational ACTs (SAFMC 2011b). The latter are intended as a precautionary buffer to account for uncertainty in the recreational catch estimates. While ACTs were developed and established as part of the management process (thus, they must be changed through plan amendments as the ACL changes), these values were not used in developing regulations and were not included in codified regulatory text. Since the Council has not used the ACT to manage the snapper grouper fishery and has accounted for any management uncertainty when setting the ACL, in March 2021, the Council added an action to this amendment that would consider removal of recreational ACTs throughout the Snapper Grouper FMP.

## 1.5. How Has Recreational Data Collection Changed in the Southeast?

MRFSS was created in 1979 by NMFS. The program included the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS), which consists of onsite interviews at marinas and other points where recreational anglers fish, to determine catch. MRFSS also included the Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS), which used random-digit dialing of homes in coastal counties to contact anglers to determine fishing effort. In 2000, the For-Hire Survey (FHS) was implemented to incorporate for-hire effort due to lack of coverage of charter boat anglers by the CHTS. The FHS used a directory of all known charter boats and a weekly telephone sample of the charter boat operators to obtain effort information.

MRIP replaced MRFSS in 2013 to meet increasing demand for more precise, accurate, and timely recreational catch estimates. A description of MRIP may be found at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/recreational-fishing-data/about-marine-recreational-information-program/>. MRIP is a more scientifically sound methodology for estimating catch because it reduces some sources of potential bias compared to MRFSS, resulting in more accurate catch estimates. Specifically, CHTS was improved to better estimate private angling effort. Instead of random telephone calls, MRIP-CHTS used targeted calls to anglers registered with a federal or state saltwater fishing registry. MRIP also incorporated a new survey design for APAIS in 2013. This new design addressed concerns regarding the validity of the survey approach, specifically that trips recorded during a given time period are representative of trips for a full day (Foster et al. 2018). The more complete temporal coverage with the new survey design provides for consistent increases or decreases in APAIS angler catch rate statistics, which are used in stock assessments and management, for at least some species (NMFS 2021a).

For greater amberjack, recreational catch estimates from MRIP were back-calibrated to reflect the scale of MRFSS estimates because while MRFSS estimation methods were being improved ahead of the transition to MRIP, the SEDAR 15 stock assessment of greater amberjack (2008) was already underway using MRFSS data. Therefore, the results of that assessment used MRFSS as the recreational catch estimation method.

MRIP transitioned from the legacy CHTS to FES beginning in 2015, and in 2018, the FES replaced the CHTS as the method MRIP uses to estimate fishing effort. A detailed explanation and description of the changes may be found at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/recreational-fishing-data/effort-survey-improvements>. Both survey methods collect data needed to estimate

marine recreational fishing effort (number of fishing trips) by shore and private/rental boat anglers on the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts. The new mail-based FES uses angler license and registration information as one way to identify and contact anglers (supplemented with data from the U.S. Postal Service, which includes virtually all U.S. households). Because the FES and CHTS are substantially different, the catch estimates produced from the data obtained through the two methods are not directly comparable, i.e., an estimated number of fish harvested by one method is not equivalent to the same estimated number of fish harvested by the other method. Consequently, NMFS conducted side-by-side testing of the two methods from 2015 to 2018 and developed calibration procedures to convert the historical catch estimates (MRFSS, MRIP-CHTS, MRIP-AP AIS [collectively MRFSS]) into MRIP-FES. In general, landings estimates are higher using the MRIP-FES as compared to the MRFSS estimates. This is because the FES is designed to more accurately measure fishing activity than the CHTS, not because there was a sudden rise in fishing effort. NMFS developed a calibration model to adjust historic effort estimates so that they can be accurately compared to new estimates from the FES. The new effort estimates alone do not lead to definitive conclusions about stock size or status in the past or at current. NMFS determined that the MRIP-FES data, when fully calibrated to ensure comparability among years and across states, produced the best available data for use in stock assessments and management (NMFS 2021a).

For monitoring the greater amberjack recreational catches and ACL, which were still being evaluated using estimates back-calibrated to MRFSS, catches from 2018 on were estimated using the current MRIP-FES then back-calibrated to reflect the scale of MRFSS estimates. The SEDAR 59 stock assessment of greater amberjack (2020) used recreational catch estimates collected through and calibrated to MRIP-FES. Therefore, the recreational catch levels and ACL will be evaluated and monitored through the MRIP-FES upon implementation of this amendment.

## **1.6. Are These Actions Within the Bounds of the Scientific Recommendations?**

The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed SEDAR 59 (2020) during their April 2020 meeting and found that the assessment addressed the terms of reference appropriately, was conducted using the best scientific information available (BSIA), is adequate for determining stock status and supporting fishing level recommendations, and the methods to address uncertainty were consistent with expectations and available information. The SSC recommended revising the overfishing limit (OFL) based on projections under a fishing mortality rate ( $F$ ) that would produce maximum sustainable yield ( $F = F_{MSY}$ ) and applied the ABC control rule to recommend the ABC for greater amberjack. These recommendations were updated using additional projections from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) that applied the new recommended OFL and ABC from 2022 through 2026 (Table 1.6.1). Discards were projected as separate values from the landings shown in Table 1.6.1 (for full projections of landings and discards updated from SEDAR 59, see Appendix K). The OFL and ABC recommendations are based on BSIA; therefore, the Council is accepting the recommendations in this Snapper Grouper FMP amendment and basing the total ACL options in Action 1 on these values.

The fishing year for greater amberjack runs from March 1 through the end of February. The stock assessment results are provided in calendar years because of changes to the fishing year that have happened throughout the stock’s management history. Therefore, the SSC’s recommendations based on the stock assessment are also in calendar years. When developing options for ACLs, the annual ABC for each calendar year was considered to apply to the fishing year that started in March of that calendar year. This was done to align ABC projections with the catch monitoring timeframe applied for this stock and because the majority of the fishing year occurs within the first of the two partial calendar years it spans. For example, the 2022 ABC from Table 1.6.1 would be used to define the ACL for the March 2022-February 2023 fishing year. However, the actions in this amendment are expected to be implemented during the 2023/2024 fishing year.

**Table 1.6.1.** South Atlantic greater amberjack OFL and ABC recommendations, in pounds whole weight (ww), based on projections updated from those of SEDAR 59 (2020). The assessment and these projections use recreational data calibrated to the MRIP-FES.

Year	OFL (lbs ww)	ABC (lbs ww)
2022	4,615,000	4,380,000
2023	3,283,000	3,233,000
2024	2,839,000	2,818,000
2025	2,719,000	2,699,000
2026	2,691,000	2,669,000

## 1.7. How Were the ACL Alternatives Determined?

The total ACL alternatives (Action 1) were determined based on ABCs recommended by the SSC, based on the results of SEDAR 59 (2020). Considered alternatives are based on 100% (**Preferred Alternative 2**), 90% (**Alternative 3**), and 80% (**Alternative 4**) of the recommended annual ABCs. The total ACL may not exceed the ABC recommended by the SSC for a given year.

The current allocation percentages used to determine commercial and recreational ACLs from the total ACL are based on an allocation formula that takes a weighted average of long-term (1986-2008) and short-term (2006-2008) proportions of landings from each sector. These time periods were chosen because they did not include currently required sector ACLs that limit annual harvest. The most recent stock assessment at that time (SEDAR 15) used MRFSS estimates of recreational catch. Therefore, the ACLs and the recreational catch estimates used to estimate allocation percentages were based on MRFSS as well. Although MRFSS/MRIP estimation methods changed over time (as described in Section 1.5), estimates of recreational catch for greater amberjack were back-calibrated to reflect the scale of MRFSS estimates so the annually monitored recreational catch could be comparable to the ACL. In 2018, MRIP fully transitioned its estimation of recreational effort to the FES, as discussed in Section 1.5. Following implementation of this amendment, recreational catch estimation and monitoring of the ACL will be done using MRIP-FES. Alternatives for allocation percentages (Action 2) are based on applying the current allocation formula to landings data that include MRIP-FES recreational estimates (**Alternative 2**) and an approximate middle allocation between

percentages resulting from original and re-application of the allocation formula (**Preferred Alternative 3**). Additional alternatives (**Alternative 4** and **Alternative 5**) were included to consider the growing commercial importance of greater amberjack amidst recent ACL reductions to other commercially important snapper grouper species.

## 1.8. What is the History of Management for Greater Amberjack?

Snapper grouper regulations in the South Atlantic were first implemented in 1983. Below are amendments to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 1983) addressing South Atlantic greater amberjack catch levels and management measures, as well as recreational ACTs. An application providing an overview of the South Atlantic greater amberjack stock, including a more complete management history, landings, and assessment information is available here: [https://safmc-shinyapps.shinyapps.io/SA\\_FisheryDataGreaterAmberjack/](https://safmc-shinyapps.shinyapps.io/SA_FisheryDataGreaterAmberjack/).

### Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 1983)

The Snapper Grouper FMP included provisions to prevent growth overfishing in thirteen species in the snapper grouper complex and established a procedure for preventing overfishing in other species; established minimum size limits for red snapper, yellowtail snapper, red grouper, Nassau grouper, and black sea bass; established a 4-inch trawl mesh size to achieve a 12-inch total length minimum size limit for vermilion snapper; and included additional harvest and gear limitations.

### Amendment 4 (SAFMC 1991)

The amendment prohibited the use of various gear, including fish traps, the use of bottom longlines for wreckfish, and powerheads in special management zones off South Carolina; defined overfishing/overfished and established rebuilding timeframe: greater amberjack  $\leq 10$  years (year 1 = 1991); established bag limits (3 recreational greater amberjack per person per day) and minimum size limits for several species (28-inch fork length [FL] minimum size limit for recreational greater amberjack; 36-inch FL or 28-inch core length minimum size limit for commercial greater amberjack); required permits (commercial and for-hire) and specified data collection regulations; and required that all snapper grouper species possessed in the South Atlantic EEZ must have heads and fins intact through landing.

### Amendment 9 (SAFMC 1998a; Resubmitted in 1999)

The amendment established a 1-fish recreational bag limit for greater amberjack, a commercial greater amberjack quota of 1,169,931 lbs, and started the fishing year for greater amberjack on May 1. The amendment also prohibited purchase, sale, or possession of more than one greater amberjack per person during April and prohibited coring. The resubmitted version of this amendment additionally established a 1,000-lb commercial trip limit for greater amberjack.

### Amendment 11 (SAFMC 1998b)

The amendment amended the Snapper Grouper FMP to make definitions of maximum sustainable yield, OY, overfishing, and overfished consistent with National Standard Guidelines. Amendment 11 also identified and defined fishing communities, addressed bycatch management measures, and defined the greater amberjack  $F_{MSY}$  proxy as  $F_{30\%}$  static spawning potential ratio.



**Regulatory Amendment 9 (SAFMC 2011a)**

The amendment increased the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack to 1,200 lbs.

**Amendment 25/Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment (SAFMC 2011b)**

The amendment established ABC control rules and ABCs, ACLs, recreational ACTs, and accountability measures (AM) for species not undergoing overfishing (including greater amberjack). The values established by this amendment for greater amberjack were as follows: ABC = 1,968,000 lbs ww; commercial ACL = 800,163 lbs ww; recreational ACL = 1,167,837 lbs ww; and recreational ACT = 992,662 lbs ww.

**Regulatory Amendment 14 (SAFMC 2014a)**

The amendment modified the commercial and recreational fishing year for greater amberjack to March-February.

**Regulatory Amendment 21 (SAFMC 2014b)**

The amendment modified the definition of the overfished threshold for several species, including greater amberjack.

**Amendment 34/Generic AM Amendment (SAFMC 2015)**

The amendment modified AMs for greater amberjack.

**Vision Blueprint Commercial Regulatory Amendment 27 SAFMC (2019b)**

The amendment established split seasons for the commercial sector for greater amberjack, allocated the commercial ACL 60/40 between the two seasons, and established trip limits for each commercial season (Season 1: 1,200 lbs; Season 2: 1,000 lbs).

## Chapter 2. Proposed Actions

### 2.1. Action 1. Revise the Greater Amberjack Acceptable Biological Catch, Total Annual Catch Limit, and Annual Optimum Yield

Note: Implementation of the actions in this amendment, including revised acceptable biological catch (ABC) and annual catch limits (ACLs), is expected to occur early in the 2023/2024 fishing year.

#### 2.1.1. Alternatives

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack are equal to the **current** acceptable biological catch (1,968,001 pounds whole weight). The current acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program's Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey.

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Revise the acceptable biological catch and set it equal to the most recent recommendations from the Scientific and Statistical Committee. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack and set them equal to the **recommended** acceptable biological catch. The recommended acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey. The 2026/2027 total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

Fishing Year	Acceptable Biological Catch (lbs ww)	Annual Optimum Yield (lbs ww)	Total Annual Catch Limit (lbs ww)
2022/2023	4,380,000	4,380,000	4,380,000
2023/2024	3,233,000	3,233,000	3,233,000
2024/2025	2,818,000	2,818,000	2,818,000
2025/2026	2,699,000	2,699,000	2,699,000
2026/2027+	2,669,000	2,669,000	2,669,000



**Alternative 3.** Revise the acceptable biological catch and set it equal to the most recent recommendations from the Scientific and Statistical Committee. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack and set them equal to 90% of the **recommended** acceptable biological catch. The recommended acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program’s Fishing Effort Survey. The 2026/2027 total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

<b>Fishing Year</b>	<b>Acceptable Biological Catch (lbs ww)</b>	<b>Annual Optimum Yield (lbs ww)</b>	<b>Total Annual Catch Limit (lbs ww)</b>
2022/2023	4,380,000	3,942,000	3,942,000
2023/2024	3,233,000	2,909,700	2,909,700
2024/2025	2,818,000	2,536,200	2,536,200
2025/2026	2,699,000	2,429,100	2,429,100
2026/2027+	2,669,000	2,402,100	2,402,100

**Alternative 4.** Revise the acceptable biological catch and set it equal to the most recent recommendations from the Scientific and Statistical Committee. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack and set them equal to 80% of the **recommended** acceptable biological catch. The recommended acceptable biological catch is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program’s Fishing Effort Survey. The 2026/2027 total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

<b>Fishing Year</b>	<b>Acceptable Biological Catch (lbs ww)</b>	<b>Annual Optimum Yield (lbs ww)</b>	<b>Total Annual Catch Limit (lbs ww)</b>
2022/2023	4,380,000	3,504,000	3,504,000
2023/2024	3,233,000	2,586,400	2,586,400
2024/2025	2,818,000	2,254,400	2,254,400
2025/2026	2,699,000	2,159,200	2,159,200
2026/2027+	2,669,000	2,135,200	2,135,200

### **Discussion**

The revised ACLs proposed in **Preferred Alternative 2, Alternative 3, and Alternative 4** are based on the Scientific and Statistical Committee’s (SSC) new overfishing limit (OFL) and ABC recommendations that were developed following the Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) 59 stock assessment (2020) (Table 1.6.1). The stock assessment indicates that the increase in the ABC recommended by the SSC is a function of both an improved condition of the stock and the change in the recreational survey from Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) to the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) and Fishing Effort Survey (FES) (see Section 1.5); therefore, the total ACL can be increased without having negative effects on the sustainability of the stock.

Per the guidance provided at 50 CFR § 600.310(f)(4)(iv), the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) has chosen to specify optimum yield (OY) for greater amberjack on an annual basis and set it equal to the ACL.

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** would retain the current ABC, total ACL, and annual OY implemented through Amendment 25 (Comprehensive ACL Amendment) to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP; SAFMC 2011b). **Preferred Alternative 2** is based on the SSC's recommendations and would set the ACL equal to the ABC. **Alternatives 3 and 4** would add a 10% and 20% buffer, respectively, between the total ACL and the ABC. For **Preferred Alternative 2** through **Alternative 4**, the ACL in the final year of projections recommended by the SSC (2026/2027) would remain in place until modified by a future amendment.

For **Preferred Alternative 2** through **Alternative 4**, proposed ACLs are based on recreational data from MRIP-FES. Future recreational catches under these limits would be monitored by MRIP-FES without any back-calibration to the MRFSS scale (as is done currently to estimate recreational catches and compare to the ACL; see Section 1.5). MRIP-FES catch estimates for greater amberjack are greater than those scaled to MRFSS, so catches as currently monitored are not comparable to limits in **Alternatives 2 (Preferred)** through **4**. For comparison to the ACLs considered in **Alternatives 2 (Preferred)** through **4**, average annual total (commercial and recreational) landings of greater amberjack from 2015-2019 calculated using MRIP-FES estimates for the recreational sector were 2.73 million lbs whole weight (ww). A more comprehensive analysis of predicted landings and ACLs considered in Action 1 is included in Appendix F.

### 2.1.2. Comparison of Alternatives

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** is not a viable alternative because it would retain the current ABC and total ACL for greater amberjack (equal to the current ABC), which is no longer based on the best scientific information available. Therefore, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** is not included in further comparisons.

**Alternatives 3 and 4** would have greater long-term positive biological effects than **Preferred Alternative 2** because they would most limit harvest by creating a buffer between the ACL/annual OY and ABC, with **Alternative 4** setting the most conservative buffer at 80% of the ABC. When totaling the annual ACL from 2022 through 2027, **Alternative 4** has the lowest cumulative ACL which is expected to have the greatest long-term biological benefits to the stock, followed by **Alternative 3**, and **Preferred Alternative 2**.

Total ACLs that allow for more fish to be landed can result in increased positive economic effects if harvest increases without notable long-term effects on the health of a stock. The ACL does not directly impact the fishery for a species unless harvest changes, fishing behavior changes, or the ACL is exceeded, thereby potentially triggering restrictive accountability measures (AM) being triggered that would lead to short-term negative economic effects. Nevertheless, ACLs set above observed harvest levels do create a gap between the ACL and typical landings that may be utilized in years of exceptional abundance or accessibility to a species, thus providing the opportunity for increased landings and a reduced likelihood of

triggering restrictive AMs. As such, there are potential economic benefits from ACLs that allow for such a gap. Thus, under this notion, from a short-term economic perspective under initial implementation, **Preferred Alternative 2** would have the highest potential net economic benefits, followed by **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4**.

In general, a higher ACL would lower the chance of triggering a recreational AM and result in the lowest level of negative effects on the recreational sector. Additionally, higher ACLs may provide opportunity for commercial and recreational fishermen to expand their harvest providing social benefits associated with increased income to fishing businesses within the community and higher trip satisfaction. Among the action alternatives, **Preferred Alternative 2** would be the most beneficial for fishermen, followed by **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4**.

**Alternatives 2 (Preferred), 3, and 4** would not result in significant administrative cost or time burdens other than notifying fishery participants of the change in the sector ACLs and continued monitoring of the sector ACLs.

## 2.2. Action 2. Revise the Greater Amberjack Sector Allocations and Sector Annual Catch Limits

### 2.2.1. Alternatives

**Note:** The revised sector annual catch limits in Alternatives 1 (No Action) through 5 reflect the revised total annual catch limit in Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 1. The revised total annual catch limit in Preferred Alternative 2 of Action 1 is based on catch data used in SEDAR 59 (2020), including recreational catch estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program using its Fishing Effort Survey rather than recreational catch estimates scaled to the former Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey.

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Retain the current recreational sector and commercial sector allocations as 59.34% and 40.66%, respectively, of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack.

**Alternative 2.** Allocate 70.16% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the recreational sector and 29.84% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the commercial sector.

**Preferred Alternative 3.** Allocate 65.00% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the recreational sector and 35.00% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the commercial sector.

**Alternative 4.** Allocate 55.00% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the recreational sector and 45.00% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the commercial sector.

**Alternative 5.** Allocate 50.00% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the recreational sector and 50.00% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the commercial sector.

#### **Discussion**

The allocation percentages in **Alternative 1 (No Action)** were originally derived by applying the formula of sector ACL = ((mean landings 2006-2008)\*0.5) + ((mean landings 1986-2008)\*0.5) to the landings dataset used in the Comprehensive ACL Amendment (SAFMC 2011b), which included recreational estimates from MRFSS. The Council considered several allocation alternatives based on the previously used allocation formula, recent fishery performance, and expected needs of the fishery in the near-term future (Table 2.2.1.1). Future recreational catches under all Action 2 alternatives (including **Alternative 1 (No Action)**), would be monitored via MRIP-FES.

**Table 2.2.1.1. Current and proposed South Atlantic greater amberjack allocations for Alternatives 1 (No Action)-5.**

Action 2 (Allocations)	Recreational Allocation	Commercial Allocation	Rationale
Alternative 1 (No Action)	59.34%	40.66%	Current sector allocations were developed in the Comprehensive ACL Amendment through an equation that used historic catch data, which included recreational catch estimates scaled to MRFSS.
Alternative 2*	70.16%	29.84%	This allocation is based on applying the formula of sector annual catch limit = ((mean landings 2006-2008)*0.5)) + ((mean landings 1986-2008)*0.5) to a revised dataset that is inclusive of MRIP-FES.
<b>Preferred Alternative 3</b>	<b>65.0%</b>	<b>35.0%</b>	<b>This allocation is based on these percentages being approximate midpoints between Alternative 1 and Alternative 2. These percentages are also approximate (rounded to the nearest whole percentage) averages of annual percentages of total landings for each sector from 2010-2019.</b>
Alternative 4	55.00%	45.00%	Additional option considering increase to commercial allocation given growing commercial importance of greater amberjack and ACL reductions to other commercially important snapper grouper species.
Alternative 5	50.00%	50.00%	Additional option considering increase to commercial allocation given growing commercial importance of greater amberjack and ACL reductions to other commercially important snapper grouper species.

\*The percentages for **Alternative 2** reflect recreational data as estimated by MRIP using the FES method, as well as the most current updates to commercial and for-hire landings.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 27 (SAFMC 2019b) split the commercial fishing year for greater amberjack into two seasons (quotas): 60% of the commercial ACL is allocated to the period of March 1 through August 31 (Season 1) and 40% to the period of September 1 through the end of February (Season 2). Any remaining quota from Season 1 transfers to Season 2, but any remaining quota from Season 2 would not be carried forward. During April each year, no person may sell or purchase a greater amberjack harvested from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and the harvest and possession limit is one per person per day or one per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive.

Sector ACLs shown in this section are derived by multiplying the respective allocation percentages under each Action 2 alternative (Table 2.2.1.1) by the revised total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1 (Table 2.2.1.2). New ACLs would become effective during the 2023/2024 fishing year. Based on the recommended OFL, ABC, and revised total ACL, the sector ACLs and commercial seasonal quotas for each alternative proposed under Action 2 are

greatest in the 2022/2023 fishing years, and decrease each year until the 2026/2027 fishing year (Tables 2.2.1.3 through 2.2.1.7).

**Table 2.2.1.2.** Sector allocations for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1 for the 2023/2024 fishing year. The commercial season is allocated 60% to Season 1 (March-August) and 40% to Season 2 (September-February).

Alternative	Recreational Allocation of Total ACL	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial Allocation of Total ACL	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)
1 (No Action)	59.34%	1,918,462	40.66%	1,263,979	758,387	505,591
2	70.16%	2,268,273	29.84%	927,622	556,573	371,049
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>65.00%</b>	<b>2,101,450</b>	<b>35.00%</b>	<b>1,088,029</b>	<b>652,817</b>	<b>435,212</b>
4	55.00%	1,778,150	45.00%	1,398,894	839,337	559,558
5	50.00%	1,616,500	50.00%	1,554,327	932,596	621,731

\*The total ACL is allocated in pounds ww to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gutted weight (gw) (divided by 1.04) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

\*\*Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** allocates 59.34% of the total ACL to the recreational sector and 40.66% to the commercial sector (Table 2.2.1.3).

**Table 2.2.1.3.** Sector ACLs and commercial seasonal quotas for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1 and allocation percentages from **Alternative 1 (No Action)** in Action 2 (59.34% recreational and 40.66% commercial). The commercial season is allocated 60% to Season 1 (March-August) and 40% to Season 2 (September-February).

Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)
2022/2023	4,380,000	2,599,092	1,712,412	1,027,447	684,965
2023/2024	3,233,000	1,918,462	1,263,979	758,387	505,591
2024/2025	2,818,000	1,672,201	1,101,730	661,038	440,692
2025/2026	2,699,000	1,601,587	1,055,205	633,123	422,082
2026/2027+	2,669,000	1,583,785	1,043,476	626,086	417,391

\*The total ACL is allocated in pounds ww to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gw (divided by 1.04) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

\*\*Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

The allocation percentages in **Alternative 2** are based on applying the formula of sector annual catch limit = ((mean landings 2006-2008)\*0.5) + ((mean landings 1986-2008)\*0.5) to a revised dataset that uses MRIP-FES estimates for the recreational sector. **Alternative 2** allocates 70.16% of the total ACL to the recreational sector and 29.84% to the commercial sector (Table 2.2.1.4).

**Table 2.2.1.4.** Sector ACLs for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1 and allocation percentages from **Alternative 2** in Action 2 (70.16% recreational and 29.84% commercial). The commercial season is allocated 60% to Season 1 (March-August) and 40% to Season 2 (September-February).

Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)
2022/2023	4,380,000	3,073,008	1,256,723	754,034	502,689
2023/2024	3,233,000	2,268,273	927,622	556,573	371,049
2024/2025	2,818,000	1,977,109	808,549	485,130	323,420
2025/2026	2,699,000	1,893,618	774,405	464,643	309,762
2026/2027+	2,669,000	1,872,570	765,798	459,479	306,319

\*The total ACL is allocated in pounds ww to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gw (divided by 1.04) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

\*\*Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

The allocation percentages in **Preferred Alternative 3** are approximate midpoints between **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Alternative 2** in Action 2. These percentages are also approximate (rounded to the nearest whole percentage) averages of annual percentages of total landings for each sector from 2010-2019. **Preferred Alternative 3** allocates 65.00% of the total ACL to the recreational sector and 35.00% to the commercial sector (Table 2.2.1.5).

**Table 2.2.1.5.** Sector ACLs for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1 and allocation percentages from **Preferred Alternative 3** in Action 2 (65.00% recreational and 35.00% commercial). The commercial season is allocated 60% to Season 1 (March-August) and 40% to Season 2 (September-February).

Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)
2022/2023	4,380,000	2,847,000	1,474,038	884,423	589,615
2023/2024	3,233,000	2,101,450	1,088,029	652,817	435,212
2024/2025	2,818,000	1,831,700	948,365	569,019	379,346
2025/2026	2,699,000	1,754,350	908,317	544,990	363,327
2026/2027+	2,669,000	1,734,850	898,221	538,933	359,288

\*The total ACL is allocated in pounds ww to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gw (divided by 1.04) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

\*\*Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

The allocation percentages in **Alternative 4** and **Alternative 5** were considered under Action 2 due to growing consumer demand for greater amberjack and the growing importance of this species to the South Atlantic snapper grouper commercial sector amidst recent or upcoming ACL reductions to several other snapper grouper species (e.g. gag, red porgy, red snapper, snowy grouper). **Alternative 4** allocates 55.00% of the total ACL to the recreational sector and 45.00%

to the commercial sector (Table 2.2.1.6). **Alternative 5** allocates 50.00% of the total ACL to each sector (Table 2.2.1.7).

**Table 2.2.1.6.** Sector ACLs for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1 and allocation percentages from **Alternative 4** in Action 2 (55.00% recreational and 45.00% commercial). The commercial season is allocated 60% to Season 1 (March-August) and 40% to Season 2 (September-February).

Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)
2022/2023	4,380,000	2,409,000	1,895,192	1,137,115	758,077
2023/2024	3,233,000	1,778,150	1,398,894	839,337	559,558
2024/2025	2,818,000	1,549,900	1,219,327	731,596	487,731
2025/2026	2,699,000	1,484,450	1,167,837	700,702	467,135
2026/2027+	2,669,000	1,467,950	1,154,856	692,913	461,942

\*The total ACL is allocated in pounds ww to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gw (divided by 1.04) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

\*\*Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

**Table 2.2.1.7.** Sector ACLs for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1 and allocation percentages from **Alternative 5** in Action 2 (50.00% recreational and 50.00% commercial). The commercial season is allocated 60% to Season 1 (March-August) and 40% to Season 2 (September-February).

Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)
2022/2023	4,380,000	2,190,000	2,105,769	1,263,462	842,308
2023/2024	3,233,000	1,616,500	1,554,327	932,596	621,731
2024/2025	2,818,000	1,409,000	1,354,808	812,885	541,923
2025/2026	2,699,000	1,349,500	1,297,596	778,558	519,038
2026/2027+	2,669,000	1,334,500	1,283,173	769,904	513,269

\*The total ACL is allocated in pounds ww to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gw (divided by 1.04) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

\*\*Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

## 2.2.2. Comparison of Alternatives

Biological effects are not expected to be substantially different among **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Alternatives 2, 4 and 5**, and **Preferred Alternative 3**, since each sector has aspects of its management (commercial spawning closure, different possession limits, different minimum size limits, etc.) that provide relatively greater biological benefits to the stock. Additionally, Action 2 would not change the total harvest, which is limited to the total ACL specified in Action 1. **Alternative 5** would allocate the highest percentage to the commercial sector (and lowest percentage to the recreational sector), followed by **Alternative 4**, **Alternative 1 (No**



**Action**), **Preferred Alternative 3** and **Alternative 2**. Therefore, **Alternative 2** allocates the lowest percentage to the commercial sector and the highest to the recreational sector. However, both the commercial and recreational sectors have effective in-season and post-season AMs in place to prevent their respective ACL from being exceeded and prevent the total ACL from being exceeded, thus preventing overfishing and adverse biological effects. Additionally, since a commercial in-season closure is not expected under almost all of the alternatives proposed under **Action 2**, and predicted in-season closures for each of the alternatives vary through the season for the recreational sector from 2022/2023 through 2026/2027, the biological effects to the stock would be neutral among each of the alternatives in **Action 2**.

Sector ACLs that allow for more fish to be landed can result in increased positive economic effects if harvest increases without notable long-term effects on the health of a stock. The sector ACL does not directly impact the fishery for a species unless harvest changes, fishing behavior changes, or the ACL is exceeded, thereby potentially triggering restrictive AMs that would lead to short-term negative economic effects. Nevertheless, ACLs set above observed harvest levels do create a gap between the ACL and typical landings that may be utilized in years of exceptional abundance or accessibility to a species, thus providing the opportunity for increased landings and a reduced likelihood of triggering restrictive AMs. As such, there are potential economic benefits from ACLs that allow for such a gap. Under this notion, the alternatives in **Action 2** can be ranked for the commercial sector from a short-term economic perspective with **Alternative 5** resulting in the highest potential benefits followed by **Alternative 4**, **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 2**. For the recreational sector, the ranking would be the opposite with **Alternative 2** resulting in the highest potential benefits followed by **Preferred Alternative 3**, **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternative 4**, and **Alternative 5**. In terms of total estimated net economic benefits for the action, the same ranking would apply as stated for the recreational sector.

Sector allocations exist for the recreational and commercial sectors already. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would maintain the current allocation percentages and may have few social effects as both sectors would see an increase in available poundage. With **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3**, there would be a decrease in the commercial percentage compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, which could have some negative social effects if commercial fishermen have a negative perception of this change due to the decrease in fishing opportunity and concerns about long-term social effects, especially if future actions further decrease harvest opportunities. However, the increase in poundage may mitigate some of these concerns and result in positive social benefits associated with increased harvest in the short-term.

Under the proposed total ACL in **Action 1 (Preferred Alternative 2)**, projections indicate that the commercial ACL for greater amberjack would not be reached under any of the alternatives proposed in **Action 2** if landings are equal to the recent 3-year or 5-year averages. The commercial ACL could be reached for the later years (with lower ACLs) if landings are at the maximum observed in the most recent 5 years of data (see Section 4.2.1 and Appendix F for more complete description and analyses). However, the recreational ACL could be reached in fishing year 2026/27 under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternative 4**, and **Alternative 5** if landings are equal to the most recent five-year average (see Section 4.2.1 and Appendix F for more complete description and analyses). As a result, the recreational sector may experience

negative social effects associated with AMs which, when triggered, can restrict harvest in the current season or subsequent seasons (see Section 4.1.3).

None of the action alternatives under consideration for greater amberjack allocations would result in substantially different administrative burdens, outside of required public notification of any changes.

## 2.3. Action 3. Reduce the Commercial Minimum Size Limit for Greater Amberjack

### 2.3.1. Alternatives

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The commercial minimum size limit is 36 inches fork length.

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to 34 inches fork length.

**Alternative 3.** Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to 32 inches fork length.

**Alternative 4.** Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to 30 inches fork length.

**Alternative 5.** Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to 28 inches fork length.

#### **Discussion**

The minimum size limits for the commercial and recreational sectors are 36 inches and 28 inches fork length (FL), respectively (Snapper Grouper Amendment 4, SAFMC 1991). Consideration of a reduced commercial minimum size limit was recommended during public scoping (April 2021) and from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) at their April 2021 meeting. The AP recommended consideration of this change to:

- Increase equity between the sectors.
- Reduce time needed to bring fish on board. Larger fish require longer boarding times, which reduce trip efficiency and may serve as an attractant for sharks, potentially leading to depredation.
- Reduce risk of injury to fishermen and fish when trying to bring larger greater amberjack on board. Injuries to the fish can impact release survival, especially for fish just below the minimum size limit.
- Increase access to smaller greater amberjack, which are more commercially desirable.
- Harvest more of the available biomass. The stock assessment indicates that the greater amberjack biomass is above the biomass that would achieve maximum sustainable yield. Thus, the population could possibly sustain harvest of smaller fish.

After further discussion, the AP expressed concern based on more recent personal observations that the stock may not be as healthy as indicated by the stock assessment in all areas. The AP recommended decreasing the commercial minimum size limit but also recommended against decreasing the limit to the smallest sizes considered.

### 2.3.2. Comparison of Alternatives

Because fish less than the current minimum size limit cannot be retained, data are not available that would provide full quantitative analysis of this action. Limited data on commercial discards, which gives some perspective on how frequently smaller greater amberjack are caught, is included in Appendix F. Due to this lack of information, Action 3 alternatives are primarily evaluated in a qualitative fashion, based on general principles associated with changing minimum size limits.

Reducing the current 36-inch FL commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack under **Preferred Alternative 2, Alternative 3, Alternative 4, and Alternative 5** could be expected to increase commercial landings and the probability of landings reaching the ACL, resulting in a closure earlier in the season than under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Discards can be expected to decrease as the minimum size limit decreases, as more fish can be kept rather than discarded. However, because commercial harvest is still constrained by the ACL, and AMs are in place to prevent the ACL from being exceeded, any increase in harvest should not result in adverse biological consequences to the stock. Therefore, the biological effects to the stock from **Preferred Alternative 2, Alternative 3, Alternative 4, and Alternative 5** would be neutral relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the smaller the minimum size limit, the more the overall harvest is expected to increase, thereby increasing economic benefits incurred from such harvest. Under this notion, the highest economic benefits would occur under **Alternative 5**, followed by **Alternative 4, Alternative 3, Preferred Alternative 2, and Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

There is a trade-off with reducing the minimum size limit (**Preferred Alternative 2, Alternative 3, Alternative 4, Alternative 5**) in that an increase in the number of fish that can be kept may improve commercial trip profitability but may also increase the harvest rate and trigger AMs if landings reach the ACL sooner in the fishing year.

None of the action alternatives under consideration for greater amberjack commercial minimum size limits would result in substantially different administrative burdens, outside of required public notification of any changes, and the effects would be neutral under **Preferred Alternative 2 through Alternative 5** compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

## 2.4. Action 4. Increase the Seasonal Commercial Trip Limits for Greater Amberjack

### 2.4.1. Alternatives

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The March 1 through August 31 (Season 1) commercial trip limit is 1,200 pounds gutted or whole weight for greater amberjack, and the September 1 through the end of February (Season 2) commercial trip limit is 1,000 pounds gutted or whole weight.

**Alternative 2.** Modify the March 1 through August 31 (Season 1) commercial trip limit for greater amberjack to be:

**Sub-Alternative 2a.** 1,500 pounds gutted or whole weight.

**Sub-Alternative 2b.** 2,000 pounds gutted or whole weight.

**Sub-Alternative 2c.** 2,500 pounds gutted or whole weight.

**Preferred Alternative 3.** Modify the September 1 through the end of February (Season 2) commercial trip limit for greater amberjack to be:

**Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a.** 1,200 pounds gutted or whole weight.

**Sub-Alternative 3b.** 1,500 pounds gutted or whole weight.

**Sub-Alternative 3c.** 2,000 pounds gutted or whole weight.

**Sub-Alternative 3d.** 2,500 pounds gutted or whole weight.

### Discussion

The fishing year for greater amberjack is from March 1 through the end of February. The current commercial ACL for greater amberjack is allocated into two quotas: 60% for Season 1 and 40% for Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 1 transfers to Season 2, but any remaining quota from Season 2 does not carry forward. Currently, under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, the Season 1 trip limit equals 1,200 lbs ww, and the Season 2 trip limit equals 1,000 lbs ww.<sup>1</sup>

**Alternative 2** and its sub-alternatives would modify the Season 1 trip limit, and **Preferred Alternative 3** and its sub-alternatives would modify the Season 2 trip limit.

### 2.4.2. Comparison of Alternatives

The biological effects of **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3**, and their sub-alternatives would not differ from **Alternative 1 (No Action)** in terms of the risk of overfishing, as overall

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<sup>1</sup> Each split season trip limit may currently be harvested and possessed in either pounds ww or pounds gw. The conversion factor between the two measurements is 1.04. Hence, the discrepancy in specifying the proposed trip limit in pounds ww is not statistically significant and does not change the outcome of any analyses presented in this amendment.

harvest would be limited to the commercial ACL or split-season quotas and AMs would be triggered if the ACL or quotas were reached. As harvest rates could be expected to increase under an increased trip limit under **Alternative 2** (Season 1) and **Preferred Alternative 3** (Season 2) and their sub-alternatives, the commercial fishing seasons may be shortened under current AMs if the quota is met in-season. However, because commercial harvest is still constrained by the ACL, and AMs are in place to prevent the ACL from being exceeded, any increase in harvest should not result in adverse biological consequences to the stock. Therefore, the biological effects to the stock from **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** and their sub-alternatives are expected to be neutral relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Higher trip limits could also likely result in the commercial AMs being triggered sooner, thus creating an earlier commercial harvest closure for the species. Conversely, lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial greater amberjack harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where greater amberjack are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL, which in this case would be increasing through Actions 1 and 2 in this amendment. Potential net economic benefits would be highest under **Sub-Alternative 3d**, followed by **Sub-Alternative 3c**, **Sub-Alternative 2c**, **Sub-Alternative 3b**, **Sub-Alternative 2b**, **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a**, **Sub-Alternative 2a**, and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons. Given most of the projected commercial ACLs are not expected to be met, positive social effects of increased commercial harvest rates under **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** and their sub-alternatives could outweigh potential negative social effects of the commercial ACL being reached and closures occurring earlier in the season.

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** would not change the administrative environment from its current condition. Under increased trip limits with **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3**, and their sub-alternatives, the quota may be met faster than under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and an in-season closure notice would then be required. However, increased administrative effects would be expected to be neutral and not would not be unusually burdensome under **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** and their sub-alternatives compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

## 2.5. Action 5. Revise the April Spawning Closure for Greater Amberjack

### 2.5.1. Alternatives

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** During April each year, no person may sell or purchase a greater amberjack harvested from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone and the harvest and possession limit is one per person per day or one per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive.

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Specify during April each year, no person may sell, purchase, harvest, or possess a greater amberjack from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone and the harvest and possession limits are zero. This closure would apply to both the recreational and commercial sectors.

**Alternative 3.** Remove the April spawning closure for greater amberjack. Allow purchase, harvest, and possession of greater amberjack from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone according to regulations specified for the rest of the year.

#### Discussion

The peak spawning month for greater amberjack is during April and spawning aggregations are very vulnerable to fishing effort during this time of the year (SAFMC 2019b). Due to concerns of high catch rates of greater amberjack in spawning aggregations, Amendment 4 implemented a spawning season closure for commercial harvest of greater amberjack in which commercial fishermen were restricted to a 3 fish per person per day limit (the same as the recreational bag limit at the time) during April (SAFMC 1991). Those possession limit and sale/purchase restrictions were further modified in Snapper Grouper Amendment 9 (SAFMC 1998). Currently, harvest and possession of greater amberjack is limited to one fish per person per day or one per person per trip during April each year, and subject to the prohibition on sale or purchase.

### 2.5.2. Comparison of Alternatives

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** offers some protection to spawning fish by currently allowing for a bag limit of only one fish per person per day or per trip which may have positive biological effects on the stock. **Preferred Alternative 2** would also result in additional positive, indirect biological effects if greater harvest restrictions are applied during the peak spawning month of April. **Alternative 3** would have direct negative effects on the stock by removing the spawning closure during a peak spawning month for this species. Therefore, while both **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2** would offer some protection to the stock, overall, **Preferred Alternative 2** would indirectly provide the greatest biological benefits compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** in that it encompasses stricter management measures for both sectors during the spawning season. Removing the spawning closure, as proposed under **Alternative 3**, could have negative biological effects relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2**, since harvest would be allowed during the peak spawning month.

In general, providing increased protection for spawning greater amberjack would be expected to result in improvements in stock abundance and biomass and create indirect, long-term, positive

economic effects presumably through the availability of increased numbers of fish in the future. Removing the April spawning season closure to allow for commercial quantities of greater amberjack to be harvested and sold under **Alternative 3** would be expected to increase commercial landings and net operating revenue, as measured in producer surplus. From a short-term economic benefits perspective, **Alternative 3** would provide the highest economic benefits followed by **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2**.

Assuming that closing harvest during spawning ensures sustainable harvest of greater amberjack, as envisioned, long-term benefits to fishing communities in the form of consistent access to the resource would be highest under **Preferred Alternative 2**, followed by **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, and **Alternative 3**. Alternatively, short-term negative effects on fishing communities due to restrictions in fishing opportunities would be lowest under **Alternative 3** followed by **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, and **Preferred Alternative 2**.

Administrative effects would not vary greatly between **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2**. Currently, both the commercial and recreational sectors for greater amberjack may only harvest and possess the recreational bag limit during April each year, which is already being monitored for enforcement and compliance. Bag limit regulations under **Alternative 3** would vary between the sectors during the month of April; therefore, beneficial administrative effects would be expected from **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2**, when compared with **Alternative 3**. Alternatives that specify consistent regulations in federal waters throughout the Council's jurisdiction would contribute to a more favorable administrative environment by helping the public avoid confusion with regulations and aid law enforcement. Administrative impacts on the agency would be incurred by rulemaking, outreach, education, and enforcement.



## 2.6. Action 6. Remove Recreational Annual Catch Targets from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan

### 2.6.1. Alternatives

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Retain recreational annual catch targets for species managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

**Preferred Alternative 2.** Remove recreational annual catch targets for species managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

#### Discussion

Recreational annual catch targets (ACT) for the species in the Snapper Grouper FMP, were established through the Comprehensive ACL Amendment (SAFMC 2011b) to account for uncertainty in recreational catch estimates. They are calculated using the formula:  $ACT = ACL * [(1 - PSE) \text{ OR } 0.5, \text{ whichever is greater}]$ , where ACL is the recreational annual catch limit and PSE is the average of percent standard errors for recreational harvest estimates from the 5 most recent years of data.

Recreational ACTs are not codified, and are not currently used for management purposes. However, because the recreational ACT is based on the recreational ACL, the recreational ACT values continue to be updated in the Snapper Grouper FMP when ACLs are changed. **Preferred Alternative 2** would remove the need for recreational ACTs to be evaluated and changed when changes are made to the recreational ACL. Some recreational ACTs are applied to individual species, while others are applied to species complexes. **Preferred Alternative 2** would remove recreational ACTs from both individual species and complexes. Removal of recreational ACTs throughout the Snapper Grouper FMP through **Preferred Alternative 2** does not restrict the Council from re-establishing ACTs on a species-by-species basis through future amendments, if deemed useful.

### 2.6.2. Comparison of Alternatives

The recreational ACTs covered by this action only apply to the recreational sector and are not currently tied to any AMs or other management functions; therefore, there are no expected biological, economic, or social effects associated with their removal (**Preferred Alternative 2**).

Under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, recreational ACTs must be specified whenever recreational ACLs change. However, because the recreational ACTs for snapper grouper species do not trigger any corrective or preventative action, no additional in-season monitoring is required regardless of where the recreational ACT level is set. Therefore, the administrative burden is expected to be reduced by a small amount under **Preferred Alternative 2**, compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

## Chapter 3. Affected Environment

This section describes the affected environment in the proposed project area. The affected environment is divided into five major components:

- **Habitat Environment** (Section 3.1)
- **Biological and Ecological Environment** (Section 3.2)
- **Economic Environment** (Sections 3.3)
- **Social Environment** (Section 3.4)
- **Administrative Environment** (Section 3.5)

### 3.1. Habitat Environment

Information on the habitat utilized by species in the snapper grouper fishery management unit (Snapper Grouper FMU) and managed through the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP) is included in Volume II of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP; SAFMC 2011c) and the FEP II Dashboard (under revision) which are incorporated here by reference. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) designated essential fish habitat (EFH) and EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (EFH-HAPC) are presented in the [SAFMC User Guide](#). Web Services and spatial representations of EFH and other habitat related layers are accessible through the Council's [SAFMC Atlas](#), a platform for searching and visualizing GIS data relevant to the Council's mission and download of GIS layers and information on regional partners is available through the [SAFMC Digital Dashboard](#).

#### 3.1.1. Essential Fish Habitat

EFH is defined in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) as “those waters and substrates necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity” (16 U.S. C. 1802(10)). EFH for species in the Snapper Grouper FMU includes coral reefs, live/hard bottom, submerged aquatic vegetation, artificial reefs and medium to high profile outcroppings on and around the shelf break zone from shore to at least 600 ft (but to at least 2,000 ft for wreckfish) where the annual water temperature range is sufficiently warm to maintain adult populations of members of this largely tropical complex. EFH includes the spawning area in the water column above the adult habitat and the additional pelagic environment, including *Sargassum*, required for larval survival and growth up to and including settlement. In addition, the Gulf Stream is an EFH because it provides a mechanism to disperse snapper grouper larvae.

For specific life stages of estuarine dependent and nearshore snapper grouper species, EFH includes areas inshore of the 100-foot contour, such as attached macroalgae; submerged rooted vascular plants (seagrasses); estuarine emergent vegetated wetlands (saltmarshes, brackish marsh); tidal creeks; estuarine scrub/shrub (mangrove fringe); oyster reefs and shell banks; unconsolidated bottom (soft sediments); artificial reefs; and coral reefs and live/hard bottom.

### **3.1.2. Habitat Areas of Particular Concern**

EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (EFH-HAPCs) for species in the snapper-grouper management unit include medium to high profile offshore hard bottoms where spawning normally occurs; localities of known or likely periodic spawning aggregations; nearshore hard bottom areas; The Point, The Ten Fathom Ledge, and Big Rock (North Carolina); The Charleston Bump (South Carolina); mangrove habitat; seagrass habitat; oyster/shell habitat; all coastal inlets; all state-designated nursery habitats of particular importance to snapper grouper (e.g., Primary and Secondary Nursery Areas designated in North Carolina); pelagic and benthic Sargassum; Hoyt Hills for wreckfish; the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern; all hermatypic coral habitats and reefs; manganese outcroppings on the Blake Plateau; and Council-designated Artificial Reef Special Management Zones (SMZs). Areas that meet the criteria for EFH-HAPCs include habitats required during each life stage (including egg, larval, post-larval, juvenile, and adult stages).

EFH-HAPCs for golden tilefish includes irregular bottom comprised of troughs and terraces inter-mingled with sand, mud, or shell hash bottom. Mud-clay bottoms in depths of 150-300 meters are HAPC. Golden tilefish are generally found in 80-540 meters, but most commonly found in 200-meter depths.

EFH-HAPC for blueline tilefish includes irregular bottom habitats along the shelf edge in 45-65 meters depth; shelf break; or upper slope along the 100-fathom contour (150-225 meters); hardbottom habitats characterized as rock overhangs, rock outcrops, manganese-phosphorite rock slab formations, or rocky reefs in the South Atlantic Bight; and the Georgetown Hole (Charleston Lumps) off Georgetown, SC.

EFH-HAPCs for the snapper grouper complex include the following deepwater marine protected areas (MPA) as designated in Snapper Grouper Amendment 14: Snowy Grouper Wreck MPA, Northern South Carolina MPA, Edisto MPA, Charleston Deep Artificial Reef MPA, Georgia MPA, North Florida MPA, St. Lucie Hump MPA, and East Hump MPA.

The Council established the special management zone (SMZ) designation process in 1983 in the Snapper Grouper FMP, and SMZs have been designated in federal waters off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida since that time. The purpose of the original SMZ designation process, and the subsequent specification of SMZs, was to protect snapper grouper populations at the relatively small, permitted artificial reef sites and “create fishing opportunities that would not otherwise exist.” Thus, the SMZ designation process was centered around protecting the relatively small habitats, which are known to attract desirable snapper grouper species.

Similarly, in the Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1 (CE-BA 1; SAFMC 2009b), the Council designated EFH areas and EFH-HAPCs under the Snapper Grouper FMP. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, FMPs are required to describe and identify EFH and to minimize the adverse effects of fishing on such habitat to the extent practicable. An EFH-HAPC designation adds an additional layer to the EFH designation. Under the Snapper Grouper FMP, EFH-HAPCs are designated based upon ecological importance, susceptibility to human-induced environmental degradation, susceptibility to stress from development, or rarity of habitat type. The Council determined in CE-BA 1 that the Council-designated SMZs met the criteria to be EFH-HAPCs for species included in the Snapper Grouper FMP. Since CE-BA 1, the Council has designated additional SMZs in the Snapper Grouper FMP including Spawning SMZs. The SMZ and EFH-HAPC designations serve similar purposes in pursuit of identifying and protecting valuable and unique habitat for the benefit of fish populations, which are important to both fish and fishers. Therefore, the Council determined that a designated SMZ meets the criteria for an EFH-HAPC designation, and the Council intends that all SMZs designated under the Snapper Grouper FMP also be designated as EFH-HAPCs under the Snapper Grouper FMP.

## 3.2. Biological and Ecological Environment

The waters off the South Atlantic coast are home to a diverse population of fish. The Snapper Grouper FMU contains 55 species of fish, many of them neither “snappers” nor “groupers.” These species live in depths from a few feet (typically as juveniles) to hundreds of feet. As far as north/south distribution, the more temperate species tend to live in the upper reaches of the South Atlantic management area (e.g., black sea bass, red porgy) while the tropical variety’s core residence is in the waters off south Florida, Caribbean Islands, and northern South America (e.g., black grouper, mutton snapper). These are reef-dwelling species that live amongst each other. These species rely on the reef environment for protection and food. There are several reef tracts that follow the southeastern coast. The fact that these fish populations congregate dictates the nature of the fishery (multi-species) and further forms the type of management regulations proposed in this document.

### 3.2.1. Greater Amberjack, *Seriola dumerili*

#### Life History

Greater amberjack, *Seriola dumerili*, is a pelagic species in the jacks family (Carangidae) (Manooch and Potts 1997a). This species occurs in the Indo-West Pacific, and in the Western and Eastern Atlantic Oceans. In the Western Atlantic, it occurs as far north as Nova Scotia, Canada, southward to Brazil, including the Gulf of Mexico (Carpenter 2002, Manooch and Potts 1997a, Manooch and Potts 1997b). Primary food items include fishes, such as bigeye scad, and invertebrates (Paxton et al. 1989).

Greater amberjack are typically found in 60 to 240 feet of water and juveniles may occur in water less than 30 feet deep (FWC). South Atlantic greater amberjack are estimated to have a low release mortality rate of 20% (sensitivity range: 10-30%) (SEDAR 15 2008 and SEDAR 59 2020). Spawning in the South Atlantic region occurs from January through June, with a peak in April and May. Harris et al. (2007) caught fish in spawning condition from North Carolina through the Florida Keys; however, spawning appears to occur primarily off south Florida and the Florida Keys (Harris et al. 2007). Greater amberjack in spawning condition were found in

different depths, although the bulk of samples were from the shelf break. Tagging data indicated that greater amberjack are capable of extensive movement that might be related to spawning activity. Greater amberjack tagged off South Carolina have been recaptured off Georgia, east Florida, Florida Keys, west Florida, Cancun Mexico, Cuba, and the Bahamas (Marine Resources Monitoring, Assessment, and Prediction [MARMAP], unpublished data). This species is the largest jack with a maximum reported size of 190 cm (75 in) and 80.6 kg (177.7 lbs) (Paxton et al. 1989). Female greater amberjack are generally larger at age than males (Harris et al. 2007). The maximum reported age is 17 years (Manooch and Potts 1997a). According to Harris et al. (2007), the size at which 50% of males are mature is 644 mm FL (25 in), whereas all males are mature at 29.5-31 in and age six. Based on data used in the most recent stock assessment, age at 53% maturity for females was 1 year and all females were mature by 32.1 inches fork length and age four (SEDAR 59 2020) (Table 3.2.1.1).

**Table 3.2.1.1.** Age, fork length, and percent of mature females for South Atlantic greater amberjack.

Age	Fork Length (in)	Female Maturity
1	19.6	53%
2	25.0	89%
3	29.1	99%
4	32.1	100%
5	34.4	100%

Source: SEDAR 59 (2020)

### **Stock Status**

Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process is a cooperative Fishery Management Council initiative to improve the quality and reliability of fishery stock assessments in the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and U.S. Caribbean. SEDAR seeks improvements in the scientific quality of stock assessments, constituent and stakeholder participation in assessment development, transparency in the assessment process, and a rigorous and independent scientific review of completed stock assessments.



SEDAR is organized around three public workshops. First is the Data Workshop, during which fisheries monitoring and life history data are reviewed and compiled. Second is the Assessment Workshop, which may be conducted via a workshop and several webinars, during which assessment models are developed and population parameters are estimated using the information provided from the Data Workshop. Third and final is the Review Workshop, during which independent experts review the input data, assessment methods, and assessment products. The completed assessment, including the reports of all three workshops and all supporting documentation, are then forwarded to the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The SSC considers whether the assessment is useful for management and develops fishing level recommendations for Council consideration.

The South Atlantic greater amberjack stock has been assessed in 1999 (Legault and Turner), 2008 (SEDAR 15), and most recently in 2020 (SEDAR 59). Due to limited data, the 1999 assessment (Legault and Turner 1999) evaluated stock status relative to several scenarios of

varying maturity schedules, natural mortalities, and biological reference points (or proxies). Most of these scenarios indicated the stock was likely not overfished nor experiencing overfishing. However, this assessment was conducted prior to the approval of reference points for management use, so no formal determination of stock status for greater amberjack could be concluded. A subsequent assessment was conducted through the SEDAR process in 2008 (SEDAR 15 2008). The SEDAR 15 (2008) assessment concluded the stock was not overfished nor experiencing overfishing. The current total annual catch limit (ACL) and annual optimum yield (OY) for greater amberjack are equal to the acceptable biological catch (ABC), which was estimated using the ABC Control Rule and implemented in 2012 through the Comprehensive ACL Amendment (SAFMC 2011b). The current combined commercial and recreational annual catch limit is 1,968,001 lbs whole weight (ww), based on the SSC's ABC recommendation, which included recreational landings for greater amberjack tracked using Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey (MRFSS) estimation methods.

See Section 1.4 for the most recent stock assessment information for South Atlantic greater amberjack, completed in 2020 (SEDAR 59 2020).

### **Landings**

#### **Commercial**

Commercial landings of South Atlantic greater amberjack have declined since 2015 (Table 3.2.1.2). Landings from 2015 to present have been monitored in pounds gutted weight (gw). Prior to the implementation of the split seasons for greater amberjack from Regulatory Amendment 27 (SAFMC 2019b), there have been recent in-season closures towards the end of the fishing year for the 2015/2016, 2016/2017, 2017/2018 seasons. Therefore, the closure analysis described in Appendix F used different years of data for different time periods and different sectors because some years had limited landings data due to closures in Season 2.

**Table 3.2.1.2.** South Atlantic commercial landings (lbs gw) of greater amberjack from March 2014 through February 2020 and percentage of the commercial ACL landed each year. Years with in-season closures due to approaching or exceeding the commercial ACL are indicated with the closure date.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Landings (lbs gw)</b>	<b>Commercial ACL (lbs gw)</b>	<b>ACL %</b>	<b>Closure Date</b>
2019/2020	413,643	769,388	53.8	
2018/2019	660,495	769,388	85.8	
2017/2018	1,005,937	769,388	130.7	10/18/17
2016/2017	762,796	769,388	99.1	10/4/16
2015/2016	903,851	769,388	117.5	1/21/16
2014/2015	924,783	769,388	120.2	

Source: SERO Commercial ACL data provided from the SEFSC on September 29, 2021.

\*Commercial closure in April for all years.

\*\*2020 landings were considered preliminary.

### **Recreational**

Recreational landings of South Atlantic greater amberjack have declined since 2017 (Table 3.2.1.3). As described in Section 1.5, estimates of recreational catch and landings have changed over the years and with each change, estimates were recalibrated before being used to develop management measures. Since 2018, recreational catch data have been collected via the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) and the mail-based Fishing Effort Survey (FES) and back-calculated to the scale of the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) for comparison to the recreational ACL. Upon implementation of this amendment, recreational catch estimates would be developed and compared to the ACL using MRIP-FES, without any conversion to previous estimation methods.

**Table 3.2.1.3.** Recreational landings of greater amberjack scaled to MRFSS for monitoring against the recreational ACL. The table also provides the corresponding percentage of recreational ACL landed each year and dates of recreational closures, when they occurred.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Landings (lbs ww)</b>	<b>Recreational ACL (lbs ww)</b>	<b>ACL %</b>	<b>Closure Date</b>
2020/2021	615,674	1,167,837	52.7%	
2019/2020	922,221	1,167,837	79.0%	
2018/2019	673,768	1,167,837	57.7%	
2017/2018	1,062,659	1,167,837	91.0%	10/31/2017
2016/2017	1,411,357	1,167,837	120.9%	11/30/2016

Source: SEFSC MRFSS Recreational ACL dataset [January 10, 2022]

### **3.2.2. Bycatch**

The implications of bycatch on the greater amberjack stock and snapper grouper fishery are discussed in Appendix G (Bycatch Practicability Analysis).



### 3.2.3. Other Species Affected

This amendment indirectly affects other species in the Snapper Grouper FMU (including red porgy, vermilion snapper, red snapper, and gray triggerfish) that are caught while fishing for greater amberjack. For summary information on other snapper grouper species that may be affected by the actions in this plan amendment, refer to Section 3.2.1 in Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 27 (SAFMC 2019b).

### 3.2.4. Protected Species

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) manages marine protected species in the Southeast region under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). There are 29 ESA-listed species or distinct population segments (DPS) of marine mammals, sea turtles, fish, and corals managed by NMFS that may occur in federal waters of the South Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico. There are 91 stocks of marine mammals managed within the Southeast region plus the addition of the stocks such as North Atlantic right whales (NARW), and humpback, sei, fin, minke, and blue whales that regularly or sometimes occur in Southeast region managed waters for a portion of the year (Hayes et al. 2017). All marine mammals in U.S. waters are protected under the MMPA. The MMPA requires that each commercial fishery be classified by the number of marine mammals they seriously injure or kill. NMFS's List of Fisheries (LOF)<sup>2</sup> classifies U.S. commercial fisheries into three categories based on the number of incidental mortality or serious injury they cause to marine mammals.

Five of the marine mammal species (sperm, sei, fin, blue, and NARW) protected by the MMPA, are also listed as endangered under the ESA. In addition to those five marine mammals, six species or DPSs of sea turtles [green (the North Atlantic DPS and the South Atlantic DPS), hawksbill, Kemp's ridley, leatherback, and the Northwest Atlantic DPS of loggerhead]; nine species or DPSs of fish (the smalltooth sawfish; five DPSs of Atlantic sturgeon; Nassau grouper; oceanic whitetip shark, and giant manta ray); and seven species of coral (elkhorn coral, staghorn coral, rough cactus coral, pillar coral, lobed star coral, mountainous star coral, and boulder coral) are also protected under the ESA and occur within the action area of the snapper grouper fishery. Portions of designated critical habitat for NARW, the Northwest Atlantic DPS of loggerhead sea turtles, and *Acropora* corals occur within the Council's jurisdiction.

NMFS completed a formal consultation and resulting biological opinion (Bi-Op) on the conservation regulations under the ESA and the authorization of the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery in federal waters under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, including the fishery managed by the Snapper Grouper FMP, on threatened and endangered species and designated critical habitat dated December 1, 2016. NMFS concluded that the activities addressed in the consultation are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any threatened or endangered species, including the North Atlantic right whale, loggerhead sea turtle Northwest Atlantic DPS, leatherback sea turtle, Kemp's ridley sea turtle, green sea turtle North Atlantic DPS, green sea turtle South Atlantic DPS, hawksbill sea turtle, smalltooth sawfish U.S. DPS, or Nassau grouper.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/marine-mammal-protection-act-list-fisheries/>



Since completing the December 2016 Bi-Op, NMFS published several final rules that listed additional species and designated critical habitat. On January 22, 2018, the giant manta ray (*Manta birostris*) was listed as threatened under the ESA, effective February 21, 2018. On January 30, 2018, the oceanic whitetip shark (*Carcharinus longimanus*) was listed as threatened under the ESA, effective March 1, 2018. Giant manta rays and oceanic whitetip sharks are found in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and may be affected by the subject fishery via incidental capture in snapper grouper fishing gear. NMFS has reinitiated formal consultation to address these listings and concluded the authorization of the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery in federal waters during the re-initiation period will not violate ESA Sections 7(a)(2) or 7(d). For summary information on the protected species that may be adversely affected by the snapper grouper fishery and how they are affected refer to Section 3.2.5 in [Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 27](#) (SAFMC 2019b).

### 3.3. Economic Environment

#### 3.3.1. Commercial Sector

Economic information pertaining to the commercial snapper grouper fishery is provided in Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 29 (SAFMC 2020a), Buck (2018), and Overstreet et al. (2018) and is incorporated herein by reference. Select updates to this information specific to greater amberjack are provided below. The major sources of data summarized in this section are the NMFS Southeast Regional Office (SERO) Permits Information Management System (PIMS) and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center's (SEFSC) Socioeconomic Panel<sup>3</sup> data set. Inflation adjusted values are reported in 2020 dollars.

##### Permits

Any fishing vessel that harvests and sells any of the snapper grouper species from the South Atlantic EEZ must have a valid South Atlantic commercial snapper grouper permit, which is a limited access permit. As of August 26, 2021, there were 579 valid or renewable<sup>4</sup> South Atlantic Snapper Grouper unlimited permits and 112 valid or renewable 225-lb trip-limited permits. Commercial harvest of snapper grouper species in the EEZ may only be sold to dealers with a federal dealer permit. As of August 26, 2021, there were 379 entities with a federal Gulf and South Atlantic Dealers (GSAD) permit.

##### Landings, Value, and Effort

The number of federally permitted commercial vessels that landed South Atlantic greater amberjack experienced a downward trend from 2015 through 2019, decreasing by approximately 22% overall (Table 3.3.1.1). Landings of greater amberjack also decreased by almost half during this time period. On average (2015 through 2019), vessels that landed greater amberjack did so on approximately 20% of their South Atlantic trips and greater amberjack accounted for approximately 7% of their annual all species revenue, including revenue from Gulf of Mexico

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<sup>3</sup> This data set is compiled by the SEFSC Social Science Research Group from Federal Logbook System data, supplemented by average prices calculated from the Accumulated Landings System. Because these landings are self-reported, they may diverge slightly from dealer-reported landings presented elsewhere.

<sup>4</sup> A renewable permit is an expired limited access permit that cannot be actively fished, but can be renewed for up to one year after expiration.

trips (Table 3.3.1.1 and Table 3.3.1.2). Average all species vessel-level revenue for these vessels fluctuated from 2015 through 2019 (Table 3.3.1.2). During this time period, the average annual price per pound of greater amberjack ranged from \$1.73 to \$1.92 (2020 dollars), with an annual average of \$1.80.

**Table 3.3.1.1.** Number of vessels, number of trips, and landings in pounds gw by year for South Atlantic greater amberjack.

Year	# of vessels that caught greater amberjack (> 0 lbs gw)	# of trips that caught greater amberjack	greater amberjack landings (lbs gw)	Other species' landings jointly caught w/ greater amberjack (lbs gw)	# of South Atlantic trips that only caught other species	Other species' landings on South Atlantic trips w/o greater amberjack (lbs gw)	All species landings on Gulf trips (lbs gw)
2015	273	2,343	807,617	1,239,111	7,175	3,639,829	379,448
2016	262	1,974	758,309	941,066	7,745	3,775,400	341,113
2017	229	1,764	766,832	842,833	7,609	3,596,325	217,402
2018	234	1,688	590,660	944,627	7,235	2,902,192	262,845
2019	213	1,533	416,031	960,652	6,397	3,277,920	228,537
Average	242	1,860	667,890	985,658	7,232	3,438,333	285,869

Source: SEFSC-SSRG Socioeconomic Panel (January 2021 version).

Note 1: South Atlantic trips refer to trips taken in Council jurisdictional waters and Gulf trips refer to trips taken in Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council jurisdictional waters.

Note 2: Calendar estimates are provided here for all statistics; however, because the greater amberjack fishing year does not align with the calendar year (it runs from March through February), these will differ from greater amberjack fishing year landings estimates. Additionally, landings from state waters by vessels without federal permits are not included.

**Table 3.3.1.2.** Number of vessels and ex-vessel revenue by year (2020 dollars) for South Atlantic greater amberjack.

Year	# of vessels that caught greater amberjack (> 0 lbs gw)	Dockside revenue from greater amberjack	Dockside revenue from 'other species' jointly caught w/ greater amberjack	Dockside revenue from 'other species' caught on South Atlantic trips w/o greater amberjack	Dockside revenue from 'all species' caught on Gulf trips	Total dockside revenue	Average total dockside revenue per vessel
2015	273	\$1,395,935	\$4,804,182	\$11,374,797	\$923,565	\$18,498,479	\$67,760
2016	262	\$1,374,139	\$3,680,417	\$11,486,206	\$912,313	\$17,453,076	\$66,615
2017	229	\$1,323,258	\$3,273,507	\$11,979,494	\$499,067	\$17,075,327	\$74,565
2018	234	\$1,072,863	\$3,790,639	\$9,354,327	\$779,695	\$14,997,523	\$64,092
2019	213	\$799,212	\$3,724,235	\$9,593,804	\$625,171	\$14,742,422	\$69,213
Average	242	\$1,193,081	\$3,854,596	\$10,757,726	\$747,962	\$16,553,365	\$68,449

Source: SEFSC-SSRG Socioeconomic Panel (January 2021 version).

Note 1: South Atlantic trips refer to trips taken in Council jurisdictional waters and Gulf trips refer to trips taken in Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council jurisdictional waters.

Note 2: Calendar estimates are provided here for all statistics; however, because the greater amberjack fishing year does not align with the calendar year (it runs from March through February), these will differ from greater amberjack fishing year landings estimates. Additionally, landings from state waters by vessels without federal permits are not included.

Estimates of net revenue specific to the vessels affected by this amendment are not readily available; however, it is assumed there is an overlap between these vessels and vessels that participate in the commercial South Atlantic jacks fishery in general (almaco jack, banded rudderfish, greater amberjack, and lesser amberjack,). C. Liese (NMFS SEFSC, pers. comm. 2022) generated annual vessel-level estimates of costs (as a percentage of revenue) and net revenue from operations for vessels that harvested jacks species in the South Atlantic. Estimates of producer surplus (PS) can be calculated from the cost information. PS is total annual revenue minus the costs for fuel, other supplies, hired crew, and the opportunity cost of an owner's time as captain. Net revenue from operations, which most closely represents economic profits to the owner(s), is total annual revenue minus the costs for fuel, other supplies, hired crew, vessel repair and maintenance, insurance, overhead, and the opportunity cost of an owner's time as captain, as well as the vessel's depreciation. According to C. Liese (NMFS SEFSC, pers. comm. 2022), PS for commercial vessels that harvested South Atlantic jacks species was approximately 35% of their annual gross revenue, on average, from 2014 through 2018. Net revenue from operations was 4% of their annual gross revenue, on average, during this period. Applying these percentages to the results provided in Table 3.3.1.2 would result in an estimated per vessel average annual PS of \$23,957 (2021 dollars) and an average annual net revenue from operations of \$2,738 per year.

C. Liese (NMFS SEFSC, pers. comm. 2022) also generated annual trip-level estimates of net revenue, which can be interpreted as a measure of PS at the trip-level for trips that harvested

jacks. According to C. Liese (NMFS SEFSC, pers. comm. 2022), trip-level PS for commercial trips that harvested South Atlantic jacks species was approximately 28% of gross trip revenue, on average, from 2014 through 2018.

### Dealers

The information in Table 3.3.1.3 illustrates the purchasing activities of dealers that bought South Atlantic greater amberjack landings from vessels during 2015 through 2019.<sup>5</sup> Like vessels, dealer participation in particular fisheries is fluid, and not all dealers purchased greater amberjack in each year during this time. On average, from 2015 through 2019, greater amberjack purchases comprised approximately 1% of all purchases made by these dealers. The average annual value of total purchases per greater amberjack dealer was fairly stable from 2015 through 2019, with a 5-year low in 2018 (Table 3.3.1.3). Although not shown in the table, the maximum annual value of all purchases made by a single greater amberjack dealer from 2015 through 2019 was \$10.8 million (2020 dollars) in 2019.

**Table 3.3.1.3.** Purchase statistics for dealers that bought South Atlantic greater amberjack landings (2020 dollars).

Year	Number of Dealers	Greater Amberjack landed (lbs gw)	Greater Amberjack Purchases	Other South Atlantic Purchases	Gulf Purchases	Average purchases value per dealer
2015	101	792,660	\$1,384,991	\$94,062,213	\$14,438,358	\$1,087,976
2016	97	772,650	\$1,397,442	\$101,112,617	\$13,839,384	\$1,199,479
2017	89	807,265	\$1,397,578	\$89,410,857	\$11,702,633	\$1,151,810
2018	102	596,568	\$1,078,793	\$85,635,420	\$11,545,250	\$963,328
2019	94	434,648	\$813,956	\$94,235,163	\$11,891,063	\$1,137,662
Average	97	680,758	\$1,214,552	\$92,891,254	\$12,683,338	\$1,108,051

Source: SEFSC Fishing Communities Web Query Tool (Version May 29, 2022 Years: 2015-2019).

### Imports

Imports of seafood products compete in the domestic seafood market and have in fact dominated many segments of the seafood market. Imports affect the price for domestic seafood products and tend to set the price in the market segments in which they dominate. Seafood imports have downstream effects on the local fish market. At the harvest level for snapper and grouper species (inclusive of other species that are part of the Snapper Grouper FMP such as greater amberjack), imports affect the returns to fishermen through the ex-vessel prices they receive for their landings. As substitutes to the domestic production of snapper and grouper species, imports tend to cushion the adverse economic effects on consumers resulting from a reduction in domestic landings. The following describes the imports of fish products that directly compete with the domestic harvest of snapper and grouper species. Import data for greater amberjack, in particular, are not available.

<sup>5</sup> The estimates in this table are based on Accumulated Landings System data, which tends to produce slightly different estimates of ex-vessel landings and value for greater amberjack than the SEFSC-SSRG socio-economic panel database.

Imports<sup>6</sup> of fresh snapper increased from 26.1 million lbs product weight (pw) in 2015 to 32.8 million lbs pw in 2019. During this time, total revenue from fresh snapper imports ranged from approximately \$85.7 million (2020 dollars<sup>7</sup>) to \$110.8 million. Imports of fresh snappers primarily originated in Mexico or Central America and entered the U.S. through the port of Miami, Florida. Imports of fresh snapper were highest on average (2015 through 2019) during the months of March through July. Imports of frozen snapper increased from 12.3 million lbs pw in 2015 to 14.4 million lbs pw in 2016, then decreased steadily to 11.4 million lbs pw in 2019. The annual value of these imports ranged from approximately \$35.2 million (2020 dollars) to \$40.8 million, with a peak in 2016. Imports of frozen snapper primarily originated in South America (especially Brazil), Indonesia, Mexico, and Central America. The majority of frozen snapper imports entered the U.S. through the ports of Miami, Florida, New York, New York, and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Imports of frozen snappers tended to be lowest during March through May when fresh snapper imports were high.

Imports of fresh grouper ranged from 10.7 million lbs pw to 12.5 million lbs pw from 2015 through 2019. During this time, total revenue from fresh grouper imports ranged from approximately \$48.2 million (2020 dollars) to \$55.2 million. Imports of fresh grouper primarily originated in Mexico, Central America, or South America and entered the U.S. through the ports of Miami, Florida and Tampa, Florida. On average (2015 through 2019), monthly imports of fresh grouper were mostly stable with a peak in July. Imports of frozen grouper ranged from 0.8 million lbs pw to 4.6 million lbs pw during 2015 through 2019. The annual value of these imports ranged from approximately \$1.6 million (2020 dollars) to \$5.9 million, with a peak in 2018. Imports of frozen grouper primarily originated in Mexico and India. The majority of frozen grouper imports entered the U.S. through the ports of Miami, Florida, Tampa, Florida, and New York, New York. On average (2015 through 2019), monthly imports of frozen groupers were greatest during the months of January through March and July.

### **Business Activity**

The commercial harvest and subsequent sales and consumption of fish generates business activity as fishermen expend funds to harvest the fish and consumers spend money on goods and services, such as seafood purchased at a local fish market and served during restaurant visits. These expenditures spur additional business activity in the region(s) where the harvest and purchases are made, such as jobs in local fish markets, grocers, restaurants, and fishing supply establishments. In the absence of the availability of a given species for purchase, consumers would spend their money on substitute goods, such as other finfish or seafood products, and services, such as visits to different food service establishments. As a result, the analysis presented below represents a distributional analysis only; that is, it only shows how economic

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<sup>6</sup> National Marine Fisheries Service purchases fisheries trade data from the Foreign Trade Division of the U.S. Census Bureau. Data are available for download at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/sustainable-fisheries/foreign-fishery-trade-data>

<sup>7</sup> Converted to 2020 dollars using the annual, not seasonally adjusted GDP implicit price deflator provided by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

effects may be distributed through regional markets and should not be interpreted to represent the impacts if these species are not available for harvest or purchase.

Estimates of the U.S. average annual business activity associated with the commercial harvest of greater amberjack in the South Atlantic were derived using the model developed for and applied in NMFS (2021b) and are provided in Table 3.3.1.4.<sup>8</sup> This business activity is characterized as jobs (full- and part-time), income impacts (wages, salaries, and self-employed income), output impacts (gross business sales), and value-added impacts, which represent the contribution made to the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP). These impacts should not be added together because this would result in double counting. These results are based on average relationships developed through the analysis of many fishing operations that harvest many different species. Separate models to address individual species are not available. For example, the results provided here apply to a general “all other finfish” category, rather than just greater amberjack, and a harvester job is “generated” for approximately every \$35,700 (2020 dollars) in ex-vessel revenue. These results contrast with the number of harvesters (vessels) with recorded landings of greater amberjack presented in Table 3.3.1.1.

**Table 3.3.1.4.** Average annual business activity (2015 through 2019) associated with the commercial harvest of greater amberjack in the South Atlantic. All monetary estimates are in 2020 dollars.\*

Species	Average Ex-vessel Value (\$ thousands)	Total Jobs	Harvester Jobs	Output (Sales) Impacts (\$ thousands)	Income Impacts (\$ thousands)	Value Added (\$ thousands)
Greater Amberjack	\$1,193	147	33	\$11,867	\$4,300	\$6,107

Source: Calculated by NMFS SERO using the model developed for and applied in NMFS (2021b).

\*Converted to 2020 dollars using the annual, not seasonally adjusted GDP implicit price deflator provided by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

### 3.3.2. Recreational Sector

The recreational sector is comprised of the private and for-hire modes. The private mode includes anglers fishing from shore (all land-based structures) and private/rental boats. The for-hire mode is composed of charter vessels and headboats. Charter vessels generally carry fewer passengers and charge a fee on an entire vessel basis, whereas headboats carry more passengers and payment is per person. The type of service, from a vessel- or passenger-size perspective, affects the flexibility to search different fishing locations during the course of a trip and target different species because larger concentrations of fish are required to satisfy larger groups of anglers.

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<sup>8</sup> A detailed description of the input/output model is provided in NMFS (2021b).



### **Permits**

For-hire vessels are required to have a for-hire snapper grouper permit to fish for or possess snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic EEZ. As of August 26, 2021, there were 1,930 valid for-hire snapper grouper permits. This sector operates as an open access fishery and not all permitted vessels are necessarily active in the fishery. Some vessel owners may have obtained open access permits as insurance for uncertainties in the fisheries in which they currently operate.

Although the for-hire permit application collects information on the primary method of operation, the permit itself does not identify the permitted vessel as either a headboat or a charter vessel and vessels may operate in both capacities. However, only federally permitted headboats are required to submit harvest and effort information to the NMFS Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS).<sup>9</sup> Participation in the SRHS is based on a determination by the SEFSC that the vessel primarily operates as a headboat. As of March 9, 2021, 64 Gulf headboats were registered in the SRHS (K. Fitzpatrick, NMFS SEFSC, pers. comm. 2021). The majority of these headboats were located in Florida/Georgia (39), followed by North Carolina (14) and South Carolina (11).

There are no specific Federal permitting requirements for recreational anglers to harvest snapper grouper species. Instead, anglers are required to possess either a state recreational fishing permit that authorizes saltwater fishing in general or be registered in the federal National Saltwater Angler Registry system, subject to appropriate exemptions. As a result, it is not possible to identify with available data how many individual anglers would be expected to be affected by this proposed amendment.

### **Angler Effort**

Recreational effort derived from the MRIP database can be characterized in terms of the number of trips as follows:

- Target effort - The number of individual angler trips, regardless of duration, where the intercepted angler indicated that the species or a species in the species group was targeted as either the first or the second primary target for the trip. The species did not have to be caught.
- Catch effort - The number of individual angler trips, regardless of duration and target intent, where the individual species or a species in the species group was caught. The fish did not have to be kept.
- Total recreational trips - The total estimated number of recreational trips in the South Atlantic, regardless of target intent or catch success.

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<sup>9</sup> All federal charter/headboat permit holders, including charter vessel owners or operators, are required to comply with the new Southeast For-Hire Electronic Reporting Program as of January 2021. Under this program, all such permit holders must submit logbooks weekly, by 11:59 pm, local time, the Tuesday following a reporting week (Monday-Sunday). Those vessels selected to report to the SRHS (i.e., federally permitted headboats) will continue to submit their reports under the new requirements directly to the SRHS program. For more information, see: [https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/recreational-fishing-data/southeast-hire-electronic-reporting-program?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/recreational-fishing-data/southeast-hire-electronic-reporting-program?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)

Estimates of greater amberjack target and catch effort are provided in Table 3.3.2.1 and Table 3.3.2.2, respectively. It is important to note that in 2018, MRIP transitioned from the Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) to the mail-based FES. The estimates presented in Table 3.3.2.1 and Table 3.3.2.2 are calibrated to the MRIP-FES and may be greater than estimates that are non-calibrated.<sup>10</sup> The majority of greater amberjack target and catch trips in the South Atlantic, as estimated by MRIP, were recorded in Florida and the private/rental mode was the predominant mode of fishing on these trips (Table 3.3.2.1 and Table 3.3.2.2). The overall number of target trips for greater amberjack steadily increased in the South Atlantic from 2015 through 2017 but then decreased through 2019 (Table 3.3.2.1). South Atlantic greater amberjack catch trips fluctuated during this time period with a peak in 2016 (Table 3.3.2.2).

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<sup>10</sup> As of August 2018, all directed trip estimate information provided by MRIP (public use survey data and directed trip query results) for the entire time series were updated to account for both the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) design change in 2013, as well as the transition from the CHTS to the FES in 2018. Back-calibrated estimates of directed effort are not available. For more information, see: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/recreational-fishing-data/recreational-fishing-estimate-updates>.



**Table 3.3.2.1.** South Atlantic greater amberjack recreational target trips, by mode and state, 2015-2019.\*

Year	Mode	FL	GA	NC	SC	Total
2015	Shore	0	0	0	0	0
2016	Shore	0	0	0	0	0
2017	Shore	0	0	0	0	0
2018	Shore	0	0	0	0	0
2019	Shore	0	0	0	0	0
Average	Shore	0	0	0	0	0
2015	Charter	4,813	0	21	0	4,834
2016	Charter	2,127	0	464	0	2,591
2017	Charter	0	0	331	1,465	1,795
2018	Charter	2,969	0	51	0	3,020
2019	Charter	3,380	0	424	422	4,226
Average	Charter	2,658	0	258	377	3,293
2015	Private/Rental	3,342	0	2,694	0	6,036
2016	Private/Rental	18,722	1,155	4,932	0	24,808
2017	Private/Rental	28,232	0	3,058	4,166	35,457
2018	Private/Rental	15,762	0	768	1,387	17,918
2019	Private/Rental	12,479	0	0	0	12,479
Average	Private/Rental	15,707	231	2,290	1,111	19,340
2015	All	8,155	0	2,715	0	10,870
2016	All	20,848	1,155	5,396	0	27,399
2017	All	28,232	0	3,389	5,631	37,252
2018	All	18,731	0	819	1,387	20,938
2019	All	15,859	0	424	422	16,705
Average	All	18,365	231	2,549	1,488	22,633

Source: MRIP database, SERO, NMFS (October, 2021).

\* Headboat data are unavailable.

Note 1: These estimates are based on the MRIP-FES. Directed effort estimates that are calibrated to the MRIP mail-based FES may be greater than non-calibrated estimates presented elsewhere.

Note 2: Calendar estimates are provided here for all statistics; however, because the greater amberjack fishing year does not align with the calendar year (it runs from March through February), these will differ from greater amberjack fishing year effort estimates.

Note 3: Includes post-stratified effort estimates from Monroe County, FL to align with SEDAR estimates.

**Table 3.3.2.2.** South Atlantic greater amberjack recreational catch trips, by mode and state, 2015-2019.

Year	Mode	FL	GA	NC	SC	Total
2015	Shore	0	0	0	0	0
2016	Shore	6,269	0	0	0	6,269
2017	Shore	43,606	0	0	0	43,606
2018	Shore	0	0	0	0	0
2019	Shore	0	0	0	0	0
Average	Shore	9,975	0	0	0	9,975
2015	Charter	35,790	1,435	10,802	3,130	51,158
2016	Charter	33,096	930	7,842	650	42,517
2017	Charter	22,819	104	4,895	12,143	39,962
2018	Charter	18,193	698	4,774	677	24,342
2019	Charter	40,270	204	3,461	530	44,465
Average	Charter	30,034	674	6,355	3,426	40,489
2015	Private/Rental	109,208	0	20,997	4,574	134,779
2016	Private/Rental	213,728	2,199	27,745	12,637	256,309
2017	Private/Rental	76,639	9,476	9,800	46,070	141,986
2018	Private/Rental	51,609	2,290	13,329	796	68,024
2019	Private/Rental	117,441	7,553	7,184	4,555	136,735
Average	Private/Rental	113,725	4,304	15,811	13,726	147,567
2015	All	144,998	1,435	31,798	7,704	185,936
2016	All	253,092	3,129	35,587	13,287	305,095
2017	All	143,064	9,580	14,695	58,213	225,553
2018	All	69,802	2,987	18,103	1,473	92,365
2019	All	157,712	7,757	10,645	5,086	181,200
Average	All	153,734	4,978	22,166	17,153	198,030

Source: MRIP database, SERO, NMFS (October, 2021).

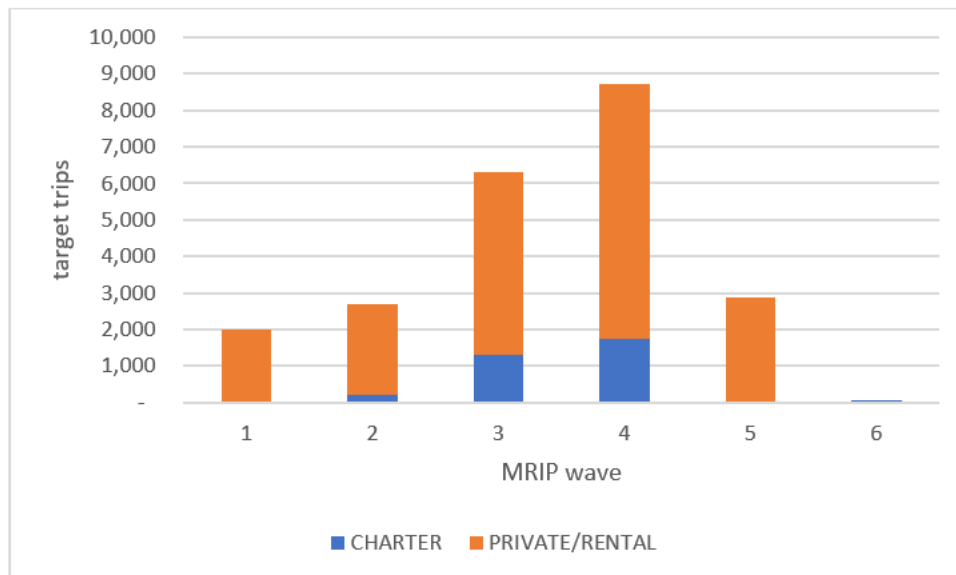
\* Headboat data are unavailable.

Note 1: These estimates are based on the MRIP-FES. Directed effort estimates that are calibrated to the new MRIP mail-based FES may be greater than non-calibrated estimates presented elsewhere.

Note 2: Calendar estimates are provided here for all statistics; however, because the greater amberjack fishing year does not align with the calendar year (it runs from March through February), these will differ from greater amberjack fishing year effort estimates.

Note 3: Includes post-stratified effort estimates from Monroe County, FL to align with SEDAR estimates.

On average, from 2015 through 2019, South Atlantic target trips for greater amberjack were concentrated most heavily in MRIP waves 3 and 4 (May-August; Figure 3.3.2.1). Almost all of the charter effort, in particular, occurred within these waves, which is notably outside of the April spawning closure for greater amberjack.



**Figure 3.3.2.1.** South Atlantic greater amberjack recreational target trips, by mode and wave (average of 2015 – 2019).

Source: MRIP database, SERO, NMFS (October, 2021).

Note: There were no shore mode target trips recorded during the time period.

Similar analysis of recreational angler trips is not possible for the headboat mode because headboat data are not collected at the angler level. Estimates of effort by the headboat mode are provided in terms of angler days, or the total number of standardized full-day angler trips.<sup>11</sup> From 2015 through 2019, headboat effort in the South Atlantic, in terms of angler days, decreased substantially in Florida through Georgia (39% decline) and in North Carolina (32% decline). In South Carolina, there were modest fluctuations in headboat effort during this time period (Table 3.3.2.3). Headboat effort was the highest, on average, during the summer months of June through August (Table 3.3.2.4).

<sup>11</sup> Headboat trip categories include half-, three-quarter-, full-, and 2-day trips. A full-day trip equals one angler day, a half-day trip equals .5 angler days, etc. Angler days are not standardized to an hourly measure of effort and actual trip durations may vary within each category.

**Table 3.3.2.3.** South Atlantic headboat angler days and percent distribution by state (2015 through 2019).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Angler Days FL/GA*</b>	<b>Angler Days NC</b>	<b>Angler Days SC</b>	<b>% Distribution FL/GA</b>	<b>% Distribution NC</b>	<b>% Distribution SC</b>
<b>2015</b>	194,979	22,716	39,702	75.8%	8.8%	15.4%
<b>2016</b>	196,660	21,565	42,207	75.5%	8.3%	16.2%
<b>2017</b>	126,126	20,170	36,914	68.8%	11.0%	20.1%
<b>2018</b>	120,560	16,813	37,611	68.9%	9.6%	21.5%
<b>2019</b>	119,712	15,546	41,470	67.7%	8.8%	23.5%
<b>Average</b>	151,607	19,362	39,581	71.3%	9.3%	19.3%

\*East Florida and Georgia are combined for confidentiality purposes.

Source: NMFS Southeast Region Headboat Survey (March, 2021).

**Table 3.3.2.4.** South Atlantic headboat angler days and percent distribution by month (2015 through 2019).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Angler Days Jan</b>	<b>Angler Days Feb</b>	<b>Angler Days Mar</b>	<b>Angler Days Apr</b>	<b>Angler Days May</b>	<b>Angler Days Jun</b>	<b>Angler Days Jul</b>	<b>Angler Days Aug</b>	<b>Angler Days Sep</b>	<b>Angler Days Oct</b>	<b>Angler Days Nov</b>	<b>Angler Days Dec</b>
<b>2015</b>	12,661	11,148	21,842	25,128	25,172	36,907	42,558	30,772	15,649	13,375	9,623	12,562
<b>2016</b>	9,818	12,243	23,872	22,217	27,374	37,454	45,744	29,223	17,061	9,202	12,820	13,404
<b>2017</b>	7,693	10,066	13,382	17,448	19,377	27,050	33,356	21,037	6,684	8,928	8,929	9,260
<b>2018</b>	4,428	9,862	14,080	15,167	13,264	29,038	30,235	26,233	9,715	8,072	7,673	7,217
<b>2019</b>	7,746	8,476	15,186	15,566	19,368	26,587	32,914	20,177	6,716	9,011	8,587	6,394
<b>Avg</b>	8,469	10,359	17,672	19,105	20,911	31,407	36,961	25,488	11,165	9,718	9,526	9,767
<b>Year</b>	<b>% Dist Jan</b>	<b>% Dist Feb</b>	<b>% Dist Mar</b>	<b>% Dist Apr</b>	<b>% Dist May</b>	<b>% Dist Jun</b>	<b>% Dist Jul</b>	<b>% Dist Aug</b>	<b>% Dist Sep</b>	<b>% Dist Oct</b>	<b>% Dist Nov</b>	<b>% Dist Dec</b>
<b>2015</b>	5%	4%	8%	10%	10%	14%	17%	12%	6%	5%	4%	5%
<b>2016</b>	4%	5%	9%	9%	11%	14%	18%	11%	7%	4%	5%	5%
<b>2017</b>	4%	5%	7%	10%	11%	15%	18%	11%	4%	5%	5%	5%
<b>2018</b>	3%	6%	8%	9%	8%	17%	17%	15%	6%	5%	4%	4%
<b>2019</b>	4%	5%	9%	9%	11%	15%	19%	11%	4%	5%	5%	4%
<b>Avg</b>	4%	5%	8%	9%	10%	15%	18%	12%	5%	5%	5%	5%

Source: NMFS SRHS (March, 2021).

### **Economic Value**

Participation, effort, and harvest are indicators of the value of saltwater recreational fishing. However, a more specific indicator of value is the satisfaction that anglers experience over and above their costs of fishing. The monetary value of this satisfaction is referred to as consumer surplus (CS). The value or benefit derived from the recreational experience is dependent on several quality determinants, which include fish size, catch success rate, and the number of fish kept. These variables help determine the value of a fishing trip and influence total demand for recreational fishing trips.

Direct estimates of the CS for greater amberjack are not currently available. There are, however, estimates for snapper and grouper species in general. Haab et al. (2012) estimated the CS (willingness to pay [WTP] for one additional fish caught and kept) for snappers and groupers in the Southeastern U.S. using four separate econometric modeling techniques. The finite mixture model, which takes into account variation in the preferences of fishermen, had the best prediction rates of the four models and, therefore, was selected for presentation here. The WTP for an additional snapper (excluding red snapper) estimated by this model was \$13.11 (2020 dollars).<sup>12</sup> Although this estimate is not specific to greater amberjack, the study did include the amberjack genus as part of the snapper group. This value may seem low and may be strongly influenced by the pooling effect inherent to the model in which it was estimated. The WTP for an additional red snapper, in comparison, was estimated to be \$148.57 (2020 dollars). The WTP for an additional grouper was estimated to be \$142.74 (2020 dollars).

The foregoing estimates of economic value should not be confused with economic impacts associated with recreational fishing expenditures. Although expenditures for a specific good or service may represent a proxy or lower bound of value (a person would not logically pay more for something than it was worth to them), they do not represent the net value (benefits minus cost), nor the change in value associated with a change in the fishing experience.

With regard to for-hire businesses, economic value can be measured by producer surplus (PS) per passenger trip (the amount of money that a vessel owner earns in excess of the cost of providing the trip). Estimates of the PS per for-hire passenger trip are not available. Instead, trip net revenue (TNR), which is the return used to pay all labor wages, returns to capital, and owner profits, is used as a proxy for PS. When TNR is divided by the number of anglers on a trip, it represents cash flow per angler (CFpA). The estimated CFpA value for an average South Atlantic charter angler trip is \$203 (2020 dollars) and the estimated CFpA value for an average South Atlantic headboat angler trip is \$71 (Souza and Liese 2019). Estimates of CFpA for a greater amberjack target trip, in particular, are not available.

According to Holland et al. (2012), the average charter vessel operating in the South Atlantic is estimated to receive approximately \$127,000 (2020 dollars) in gross revenue annually. The average headboat is estimated to receive approximately \$224,000 (2020 dollars) in gross revenue annually. However, a more recent estimate of average annual gross revenue for South Atlantic headboats is available from D. Carter (pers. comm., March 15, 2018). Carter (pers. comm.,

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<sup>12</sup> Converted to 2020 dollars using the annual, not seasonally adjusted GDP implicit price deflator provided by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA).

March 15, 2018) recently estimated that average annual gross revenue for South Atlantic headboats was approximately \$307,770 (2020 dollars) in 2017. This estimate is likely the best current estimate of annual gross revenue for South Atlantic headboats, as it is based on a relatively large sample and is more recent. The difference in the Holland et al. (2012) and Carter (pers. comm., March 15, 2018) estimates for headboats suggests that the estimate for charter vessels based on Holland et al. (2012) is likely an underestimate of current average annual revenue for charter vessels in the South Atlantic. Comparable estimates of annual net income for South Atlantic charter vessels and headboats are not available.

### **Business Activity**

The desire for recreational fishing generates economic activity as consumers spend their income on various goods and services needed for recreational fishing. This income spurs economic activity in the region where recreational fishing occurs. It should be clearly noted that, in the absence of the opportunity to fish, the income would presumably be spent on other goods and services and these expenditures would similarly generate economic activity in the region where the expenditure occurs. As such, the analysis below represents a distributional analysis only.

Estimates of the business activity (economic impacts) associated with recreational angling for South Atlantic greater amberjack were calculated using average trip-level impact coefficients derived from the 2017 Fisheries Economics of the U.S. report (NMFS 2021b) and underlying data provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Science and Technology. Economic impact estimates in 2017 dollars were adjusted to 2020 dollars using the annual, not seasonally adjusted GDP implicit price deflator provided by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Business activity (economic impacts) for the recreational sector is characterized in the form of jobs (full- and part-time), income impacts (wages, salaries, and self-employed income), output impacts (gross business sales), and value-added impacts (contribution to the GDP in a state or region). Estimates of the average annual economic impacts (2015-2019) resulting from South Atlantic recreational greater amberjack target trips are provided in Table 3.3.2.5. The average impact coefficients, or multipliers, used in the model are invariant to the “type” of effort (e.g., target or catch) and can therefore be directly used to measure the impact of other effort measures such as greater amberjack catch trips. To calculate the multipliers from Table 3.3.2.5, simply divide the desired impact measure (sales impact, value-added impact, income impact or employment) associated with a given state and mode by the number of target trips for that state and mode.

The estimates provided in Table 3.3.2.5 only apply at the state-level. Addition of the state-level estimates to produce a regional (or national) total may underestimate the actual amount of total business activity, because state-level impact multipliers do not account for interstate and interregional trading. It is also important to note, that these economic impacts estimates are based on trip expenditures only and do not account for durable expenditures. Durable expenditures cannot be reasonably apportioned to individual species or species groups. As such, the estimates provided in Table 3.3.2.5 may be considered a lower bound on the economic activity associated with those trips that targeted greater amberjack.

Estimates of the business activity associated with headboat effort are not available. Headboat vessels are not covered in MRIP, so, in addition to the absence of estimates of target effort, estimation of the appropriate business activity coefficients for headboat effort has not been conducted.

**Table 3.3.2.5.** Estimated annual average economic impacts (2015-2019) from South Atlantic recreational greater amberjack target trips, by state and mode, using state-level multipliers. All monetary estimates are in 2020 dollars (in thousands).

<b>Data Type</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>SC</b>	<b>GA</b>	<b>FL</b>
Target Trips	Charter	258	377	0	2,658
Value Added Impacts	Charter	\$110	\$93	\$0	\$631
Sales Impacts	Charter	\$191	\$162	\$0	\$1,058
Income Impacts	Charter	\$65	\$54	\$0	\$373
Employment (Jobs)	Charter	2	2	0	10
Target Trips	Private/ Rental	2,290	1,111	231	15,707
Value Added Impacts	Private/ Rental	\$72	\$26	\$6	\$438
Sales Impacts	Private/ Rental	\$119	\$40	\$9	\$653
Income Impacts	Private/ Rental	\$42	\$12	\$3	\$216
Employment (Jobs)	Private/ Rental	1	1	0	6
Target Trips	Shore	0	0	0	0
Value Added Impacts	Shore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Sales Impacts	Shore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Income Impacts	Shore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Employment (Jobs)	Shore	0	0	0	0
Target Trips	All	2,549	1,488	231	18,365
Value Added Impacts	All	\$182	\$119	\$6	\$1,069
Sales Impacts	All	\$311	\$202	\$9	\$1,712
Income Impacts	All	\$106	\$66	\$3	\$589
Employment (Jobs)	All	3	2	0	16

Source: Effort data from MRIP; economic impact results calculated by NMFS SERO using NMFS (2021) and underlying data provided by the NOAA Office of Science and Technology.

### 3.4. Social Environment

This section provides the background for the proposed actions, which are evaluated in Chapter 4. Commercial and recreational landings and permits by state are included to provide information on the geographic distribution of fishing involvement. Descriptions of the top-ranking communities by the number of commercial snapper grouper permits are included, top communities based on commercial landings of greater amberjack, commercial engagement and



reliance for the top communities based on commercial landings of greater amberjack, local quotient for the top three communities based on commercial greater amberjack landings, top-ranking communities by the number of for-hire snapper grouper permits, and top communities based on recreational engagement and reliance. Community level data are presented in order to meet the requirements of National Standard 8 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which requires the consideration of the importance of fishery resources to human communities when changes to fishing regulations are considered. Lastly, social vulnerability data are presented to assess the potential for environmental justice concerns. Additional detailed information about communities in the following analysis can be found on the SERO's Community Snapshots website.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.4.1. Commercial Sector

#### *Landings by State*

The greatest proportion of commercial greater amberjack landings came from waters adjacent to Florida and Georgia (average of 80.9% from 2015-2019, SEFSC Commercial ACL File), followed by North Carolina (10.4%), and South Carolina (8.8%). The landings for Florida and Georgia are combined to protect confidentiality.

#### *Permits*

The majority of snapper grouper unlimited permits are issued to individuals in Florida (67.2%), followed by North Carolina (19.3%), South Carolina (7.9%), and Georgia (1.5%; SERO Permits Office, April 8, 2021). Residents of other states (Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Texas, and West Virginia) also hold snapper grouper unlimited permits, but these states represent a small percentage of the issued permits.

South Atlantic snapper grouper unlimited permits are held by individuals with mailing addresses in 152 communities (SERO Permits Office, April 8, 2021). Communities with the most snapper grouper unlimited permits are located in Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Texas (Table 3.4.1.1). The communities with the most snapper grouper unlimited permits are Key West (9.8% of snapper grouper unlimited permits), Jacksonville (7.9%), and Miami, Florida (3.7%).

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/socioeconomics/snapshots-human-communities-and-fisheries-gulf-mexico-and-south-atlantic>

**Table 3.4.1.1.** Top communities by number of South Atlantic snapper grouper unlimited permits and 225-lb trip-limited permits.

State	Community	Unlimited Permits	State	Community	225-lb Trip-Limited Permits
FL	Key West	51	FL	Key West	9
FL	Jacksonville	41	FL	Marathon	8
FL	Miami	19	FL	Jupiter	6
FL	Rockledge	13	FL	Big Pine Key	5
SC	Little River	12	FL	Miami	5
FL	Marathon	11	FL	Summerland Key	5
NC	Southport	11	FL	Fort Pierce	3
FL	Key Largo	10	FL	Key Largo	3
FL	Summerland Key	10	NC	Wilmington	3
NC	Hampstead	10			
SC	Murrells Inlet	10			
FL	Hialeah	9			
FL	Jupiter	9			
FL	Port Orange	9			
FL	Tavernier	9			
FL	Winter Springs	8			
TX	Corpus Christi	8			

Source: SERO Permits Office, April 8, 2021.

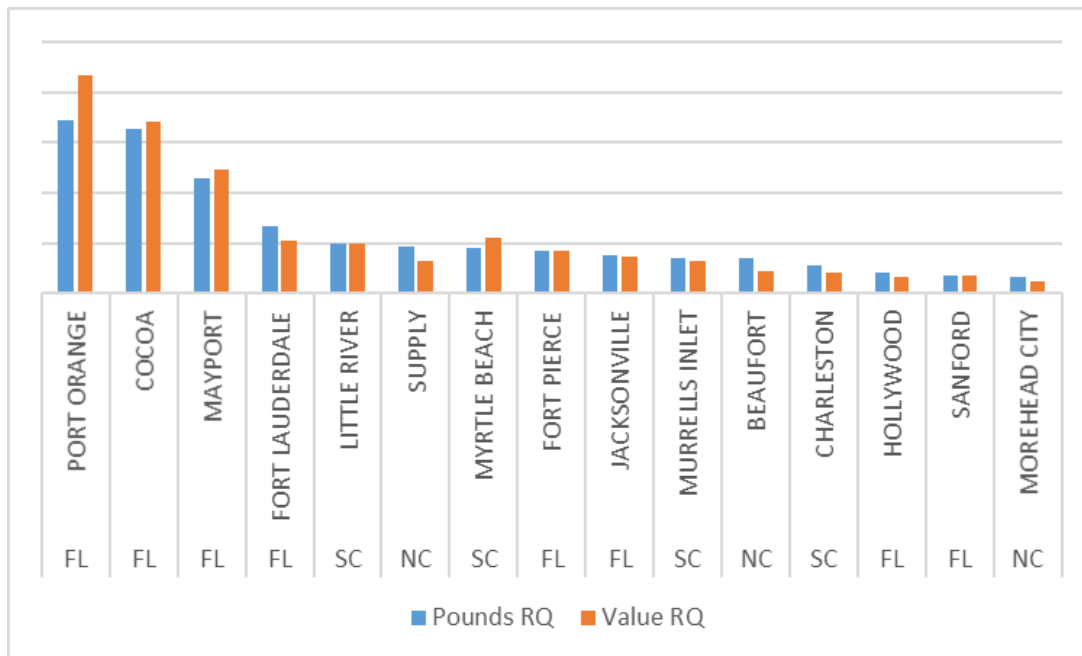
The majority of snapper grouper 225-lb trip-limited permits are issued to individuals in Florida (85.6%), followed by North Carolina (9.3%, SERO Permits Office, April 8, 2021). Residents of other states (New Jersey, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia) also hold snapper grouper 225-lb trip-limited permits, but these states represent a small percentage of the issued permits.

South Atlantic commercial snapper grouper 225-lb trip-limited permits are held by individuals with mailing addresses in 51 communities (SERO Permits Office, April 8, 2021). Communities with the most commercial snapper grouper 225-lb trip-limited permits are located in Florida and North Carolina (Table 3.4.1.1). The communities with the most snapper grouper 225-lb trip-limited permits are Key West (9.3% of snapper grouper 225-lb trip-limited permits), Marathon (8.2%), and Jupiter, Florida (6.2%).

### **Regional Quotient**

The descriptions of communities include information about the top communities based on a “regional quotient” (RQ) of commercial landings for greater amberjack. The RQ is the proportion of landings out of the total landings of that species for that region and that year, and is a relative measure. Figure 3.4.1.1 includes the communities with the strongest relationship to the commercial sector of the greater amberjack fishery by RQ landings and value during 2019. The top greater amberjack communities are located in Florida, South Carolina, and North Carolina.

About 17% of greater amberjack is landed in the top community of Port Orange, Florida, representing about 22% of the South Atlantic ex-vessel value for the species.



**Figure 3.4.1.1.** Top South Atlantic communities ranked by pounds and value RQ of greater amberjack. The actual RQ values (y-axis) are omitted from the figure to maintain confidentiality.

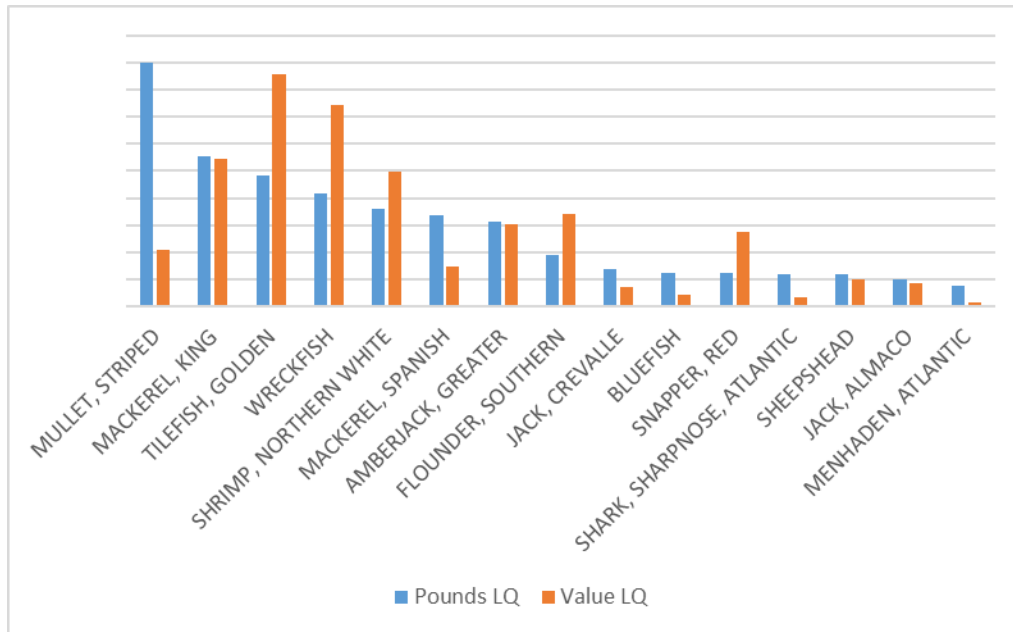
Source: SERO, Community ALS 2019.

### Local Quotient

The top three communities of Port Orange, Florida; Cocoa, Florida; and Mayport, Florida include the greatest proportion of greater amberjack landings (Figure 3.4.1.1) and have been selected to receive more in-depth descriptions of their fishing involvement. The description of these communities include information about the top species landed in the community based on the “local quotient” (LQ) of commercial landings. The LQ is the proportion of landings for each species out of the total landings for all species for that community and that year, and is a relative measure.

### **Port Orange**

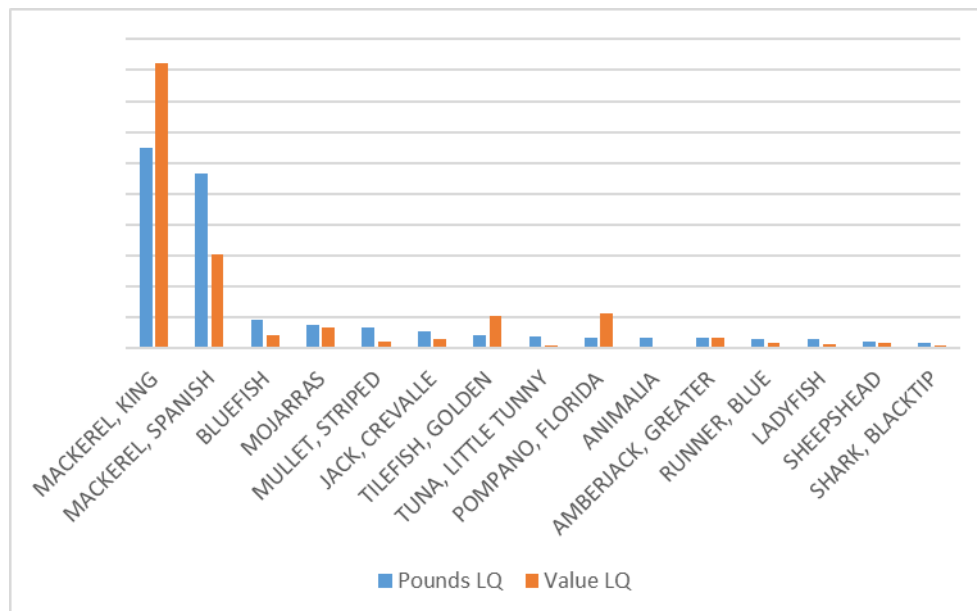
The top species by pounds landed in Port Orange, Florida are striped mullet, king mackerel, golden tilefish, wreckfish, and northern white shrimp (Figure 3.4.1.2). However, the top species by value in Port Orange in ranked order are golden tilefish, wreckfish, northern white shrimp, king mackerel, and southern flounder. Greater amberjack ranks sixth by LQ value and seventh by LQ pounds for Port Orange.



**Figure 3.4.1.2.** Top fifteen species landed in Port Orange, Florida ranked by pounds and value LQ. The actual LQ values (y-axis) are omitted from the figure to maintain confidentiality.  
Source: SERO, Community ALS 2019.

### Cocoa

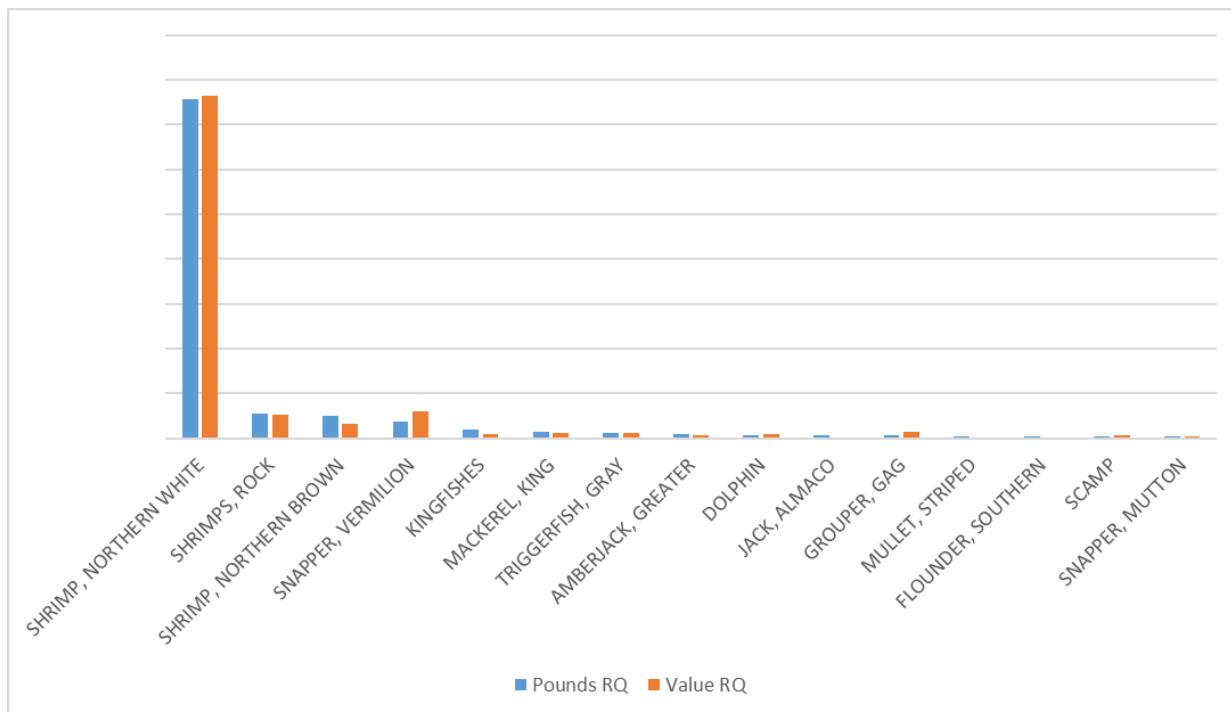
The top species landed in Cocoa, Florida are king mackerel and Spanish mackerel, which make up the majority of landings in the community (Figure 3.4.1.3). Greater amberjack ranks eleventh by LQ pounds and seventh by LQ value for Cocoa.



**Figure 3.4.1.3.** Top fifteen species landed in Cocoa, Florida ranked by pounds and value LQ. The actual LQ values (y-axis) are omitted from the figure to maintain confidentiality.  
Source: SERO, Community ALS 2019.

## Mayport

The top species landed in Mayport, Florida is northern white shrimp, which makes up the majority of landings in the community (Figure 3.4.1.4). Greater amberjack ranks eighth by LQ pounds and tenth by LQ value for Mayport.

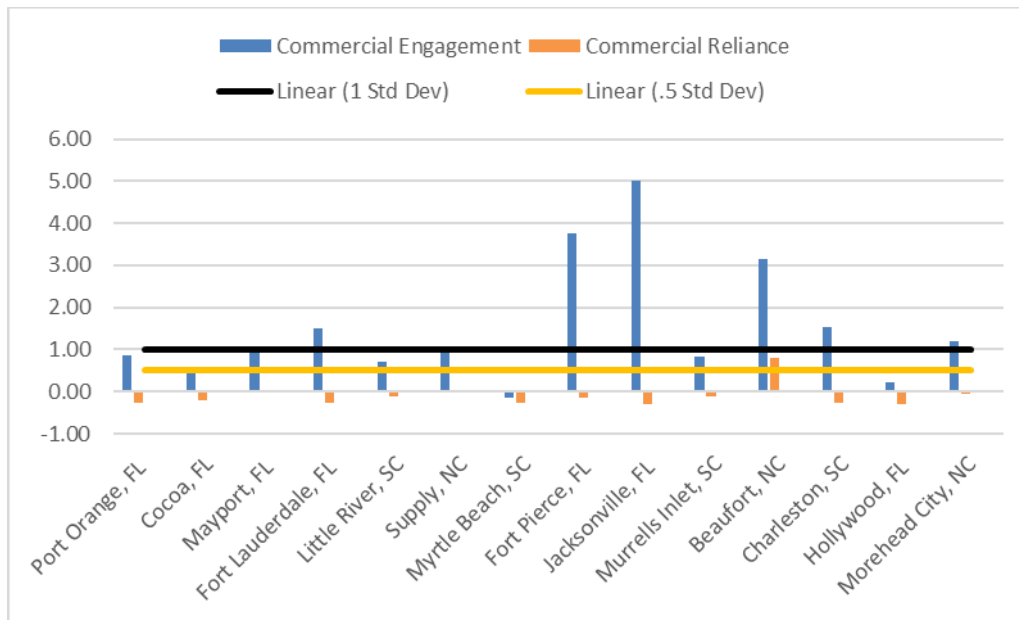


**Figure 3.4.1.4.** Top fifteen species landed in Mayport, Florida ranked by pounds and value LQ. The actual LQ values (y-axis) are omitted from the figure to maintain confidentiality.

Source: SERO, Community ALS 2019.

### Engagement and Reliance

Figure 3.4.1.5 is an overall measure of a community's commercial fishing engagement and reliance and includes the communities with the strongest relationship to the commercial sector for greater amberjack as depicted in Figure 3.4.1.1. Most communities in Figure 3.4.1.5 would be considered to be highly or moderately engaged in commercial fishing, as several are at or above 1 standard deviation of the mean factor score and most are at or above  $\frac{1}{2}$  standard deviation. Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and Hollywood, Florida show the least amount of engagement in commercial fishing overall. Only Beaufort, North Carolina demonstrates a moderate to high level of commercial reliance.



**Figure 3.4.1.5.** Commercial fishing engagement and reliance for top greater amberjack communities.

Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database 2019.

### 3.4.2. Recreational Sector

#### Landings by State

The greatest proportion of recreational greater amberjack landings came from waters adjacent to Florida and Georgia (average of 79.6% from 2015-2019, SEFSC MRIP-FES Recreational ACL Dataset), followed by North Carolina (13.3%), and South Carolina (7.1%). The landings for Florida and Georgia are combined because of the manner in which headboat landings are reported for confidentiality.

#### Permits

The majority of for-hire snapper grouper permits are issued to individuals in Florida (63.3%), followed by North Carolina (17.2%), South Carolina (8.8%), and Georgia (2.5%, SERO Permits Office, April 8, 2021). Residents of other Gulf states (Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas) also hold a sizable amount of for-hire snapper grouper permits (2.5%). Residents of other states and territories (Arkansas, California, Delaware, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, and Virginia) also hold for-hire snapper grouper permits.

South Atlantic for-hire snapper grouper permits are held by those with mailing addresses in 429 communities (SERO Permits Office, April 8, 2021). Communities with the most for-hire snapper grouper permits are located in communities in Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina (Table 3.4.2.1). A large number of communities with the most for-hire snapper grouper permits are located in the Florida Keys (Key West, Marathon, Islamorada, Tavernier, Summerland Key, and Key Largo). The communities with most South Atlantic for-hire snapper grouper permits are Key West (8.4% of for-hire snapper grouper permits), Marathon (3%), and Islamorada, Florida (2.9%).

**Table 3.4.2.1.** Top communities by number of South Atlantic for-hire snapper grouper permits.

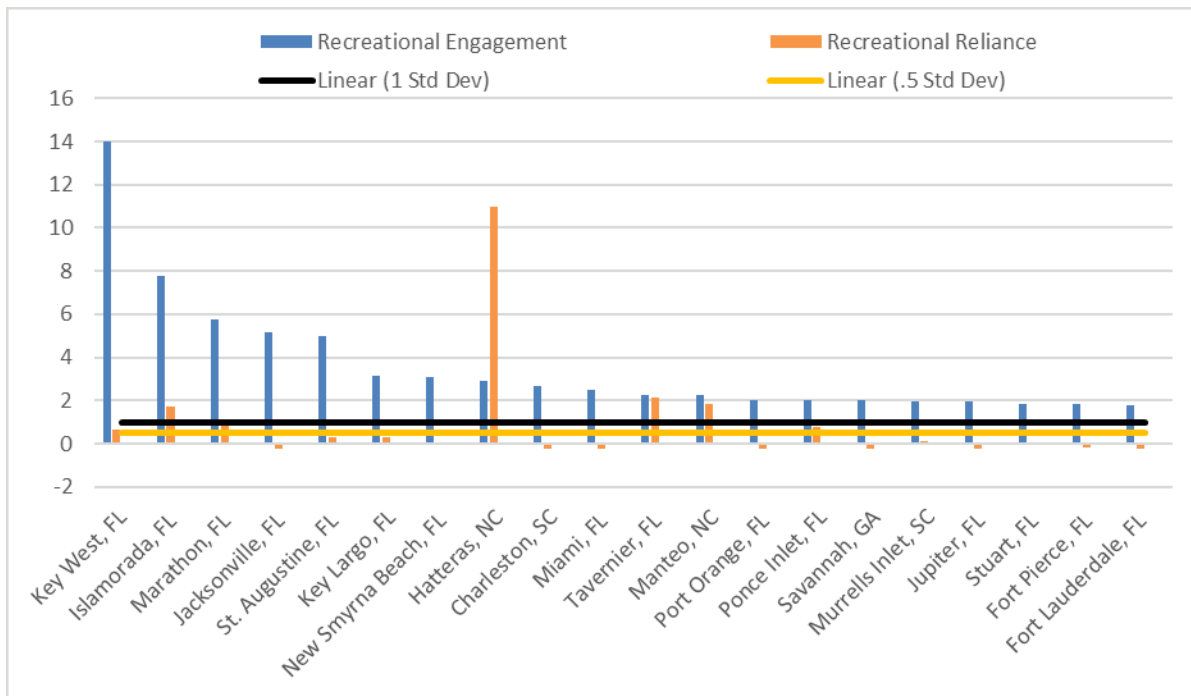
State	Community	Permits
FL	Key West	136
FL	Marathon	49
FL	Islamorada	47
FL	Tavernier	36
FL	St. Augustine	35
FL	Fort Lauderdale	30
FL	Jacksonville	29
FL	Merritt Island	28
FL	Jupiter	23
NC	Wilmington	23
FL	Summerland Key	22
NC	Hatteras	22
FL	Key Largo	21
FL	Port Orange	19
SC	Charleston	19
FL	Miami	18
SC	Mt. Pleasant	18

Source: SERO Permits Office, April 8, 2021.

### **Engagement and Reliance**

Landings for the recreational sector are not available by species at the community level, making it difficult to identify communities as dependent on recreational fishing for greater amberjack. Because limited data are available concerning how communities are engaged and reliant on specific species in the recreational sector, indices were created using secondary data from permit and infrastructure information for the southeast recreational fishing sector at the community level (Jacob et al. 2013; Jepson and Colburn 2013). Recreational fishing engagement is represented by the number of recreational permits and vessels designated as “recreational” by homeport and owner address. Fishing reliance includes the same variables as fishing engagement, divided by population. Factor scores of both engagement and reliance were plotted by community.

Figure 3.4.2.1 identifies the top communities that are engaged and reliant upon recreational fishing in general. All included communities demonstrate high levels of recreational engagement. Four communities (Islamorada, Florida; Hatteras, North Carolina; Tavernier, Florida; and Manteo, North Carolina) demonstrate high levels of recreational reliance.



**Figure 3.4.2.1.** Top 20 communities by recreational fishing engagement and reliance.

Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database 2019.

The description of fishing activities presented here highlights which communities may be most involved in South Atlantic greater amberjack fishing and snapper grouper fishing. It is expected that the impacts from the regulatory action in this amendment, whether positive or negative, will most likely affect those communities identified above.

### 3.4.3. Environmental Justice

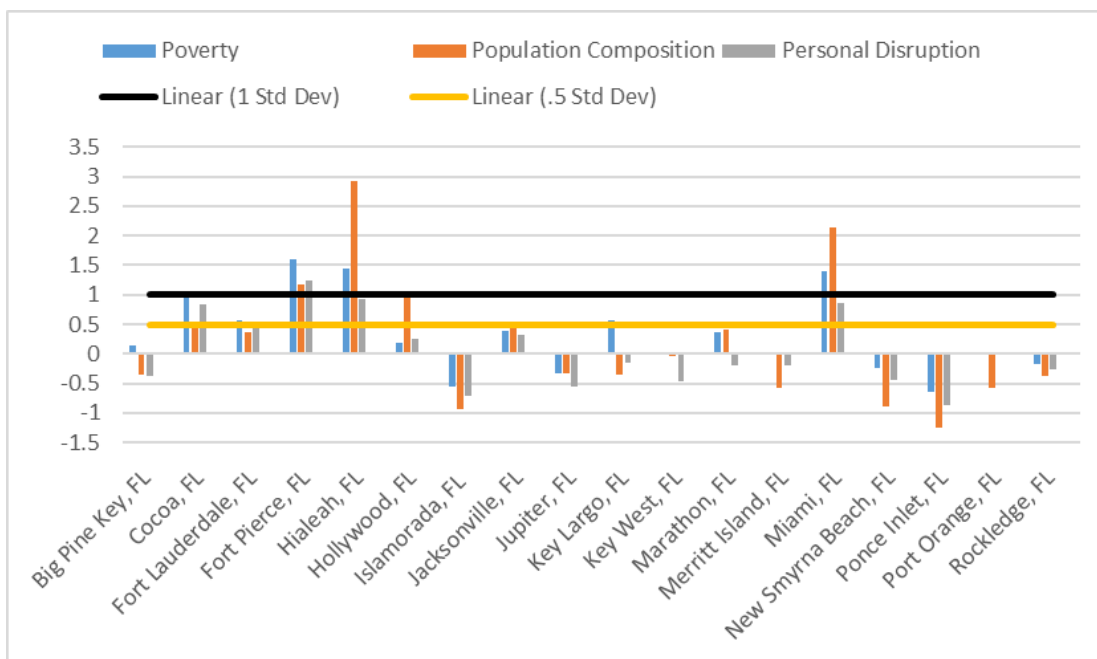
Executive Order (E.O.) 12898 (1994) requires federal agencies conduct their programs, policies, and activities in a manner to ensure individuals or populations are not excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination because of their race, color, or national origin, which is referred to as “environmental justice” (EJ). In addition, and specifically with respect to subsistence consumption of fish and wildlife, federal agencies are required to collect, maintain, and analyze information on the consumption patterns of populations who principally rely on fish and/or wildlife for subsistence. The main focus of E.O. 12898 is to consider “the disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations in the United States and its territories...”

Information is available concerning communities overall status with regard to minorities and poverty (e.g., census data). To help assess whether any EJ concerns may be present within regional communities, a suite of indices were created to examine the social vulnerability of coastal communities within the region. The three indices are poverty, population composition, and personal disruptions. The variables included in each of these indices have been identified through the literature as being important components that contribute to a community’s vulnerability. Indicators such as increased poverty rates for different groups, more single



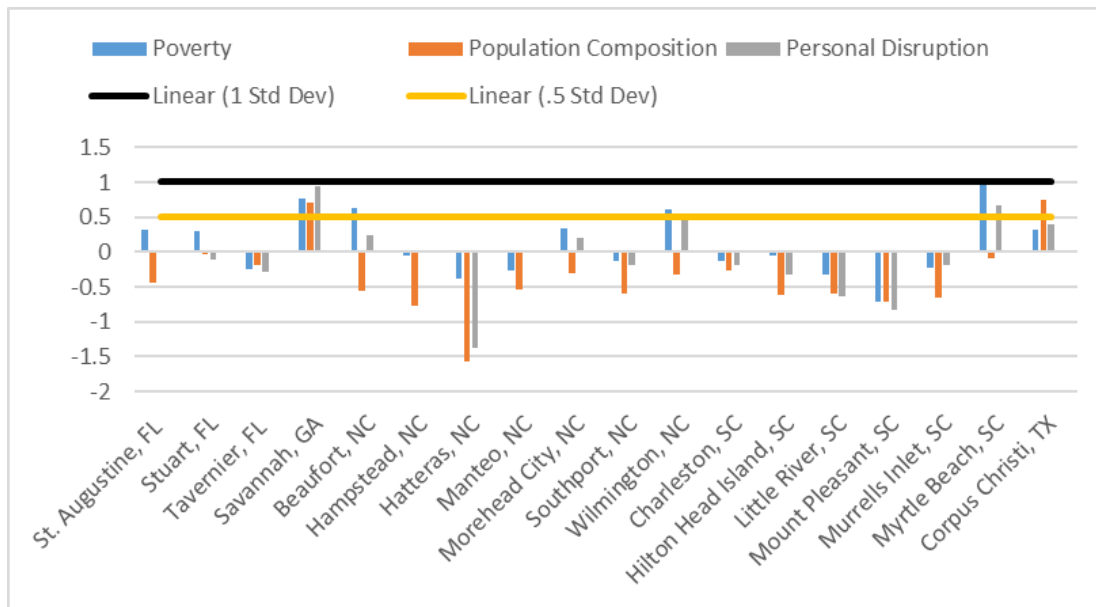
female-headed households and households with children under the age of five, disruptions such as higher separation rates, higher crime rates, and unemployment all are signs of populations experiencing vulnerabilities. Again, for those communities that exceed the threshold it would be expected that they would exhibit vulnerabilities to sudden changes or social disruption that might accrue from regulatory change.

Figures 3.4.3.1 and 3.4.3.2 provide the social vulnerability of the top communities by commercial and recreational snapper grouper permits, RQ of commercial greater amberjack, and recreational fishing engagement and reliance. One community exceeds the threshold of one standard deviation above the mean for all three indices, Fort Pierce, Florida. Two other communities exceed the threshold of one standard deviation above the mean for at least one of the indices (Hialeah, Florida and Miami, Florida). These communities would be the most likely to exhibit vulnerabilities to social or economic disruption due to negative impacts from regulatory change.



**Figure 3.4.3.1.** Social vulnerability indices for top snapper grouper and greater amberjack communities.

Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database 2018.



**Figure 3.4.3.2.** Social vulnerability indices for top snapper grouper and greater amberjack communities continued.

Source: SERO, Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Database 2018.

People in these communities may be affected by fishing regulations in two ways: participation and employment. Although these communities may have the greatest potential for EJ concerns, complete data are not available on the race and income status for those involved in the local fishing industry (employment), or for their dependence on greater amberjack specifically (participation). Although no EJ issues have been identified in this amendment, the absence of potential EJ concerns cannot be assumed.

### 3.5. Administrative Environment

#### 3.5.1. Federal Fishery Management

Federal fishery management is conducted under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.), originally enacted in 1976 as the Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Magnuson-Stevens Act claims sovereign rights and exclusive fishery management authority over most fishery resources within the EEZ, an area extending 200 nm from the seaward boundary of each of the coastal states, and authority over U.S. anadromous species and continental shelf resources that occur beyond the U.S. EEZ.

Responsibility for federal fishery management decision-making is divided between the U.S. Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) and eight regional fishery management councils that represent the expertise and interests of constituent states. Regional councils are responsible for preparing, monitoring, and revising management plans for fisheries needing management within their jurisdiction. The Secretary is responsible for collecting and providing the data necessary for the councils to prepare fishery management plans and for promulgating regulations to implement proposed plans and amendments after ensuring that management measures are

consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and with other applicable laws. In most cases, the Secretary has delegated this authority to NMFS.

The Council is responsible for conservation and management of fishery resources in federal waters of the U.S. South Atlantic. These waters extend from 3 to 200 mi offshore from the seaward boundary of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and east Florida to Key West. The Council has thirteen voting members: one from NMFS; one each from the state fishery agencies of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida; and eight public members appointed by the Secretary. Two public members represent each of the four South Atlantic States. Non-voting members include representatives of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), State Department, and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). The Council has adopted procedures whereby the non-voting members serving on the Council Committees have full voting rights at the Committee level but not at the full Council level. The Council also established two voting seats for the Mid-Atlantic Council on the South Atlantic Mackerel Committee. Council members serve three-year terms and are recommended by state governors and appointed by the Secretary from lists of nominees submitted by state governors. Appointed members may serve a maximum of three consecutive terms.

Public interests also are involved in the fishery management process through participation on advisory panels and through council meetings, which, with few exceptions for discussing personnel and legal matters, are open to the public. The Council uses its SSC to review the data and science being used in assessments and fishery management plans/amendments. In addition, the regulatory process is in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, in the form of “notice and comment” rulemaking.

### **3.5.2. State Fishery Management**

The state governments of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida have the authority to manage fisheries that occur in waters extending three nautical miles from their respective shorelines. North Carolina’s marine fisheries are managed by the Marine Fisheries Division of the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality. The Marine Resources Division of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources manages South Carolina’s marine fisheries. Georgia’s marine fisheries are managed by the Coastal Resources Division of the Department of Natural Resources. The Division of Marine Fisheries Management of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is responsible for managing Florida’s marine fisheries. Each state fishery management agency has a designated seat on the Council. The purpose of state representation at the Council level is to ensure state participation in federal fishery management decision-making and to promote the development of compatible regulations in state and federal waters.

The South Atlantic states are also involved through ASMFC in management of marine fisheries. This commission was created to coordinate state regulations and develop management plans for interstate fisheries. It has significant authority, through the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act and the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act, to compel adoption of complementary state regulations to conserve coastal species. The ASFMC is also represented at the Council but does not have voting authority at the Council level.

NMFS's State-Federal Fisheries Division is responsible for building cooperative partnerships to strengthen marine fisheries management and conservation at the state, inter-regional, and national levels. This division implements and oversees the distribution of grants for two national (Inter-jurisdictional Fisheries Act and Anadromous Fish Conservation Act) and two regional (Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act and Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act) programs. Additionally, it works with the ASMFC to develop and implement cooperative State-Federal fisheries regulations.

### **3.5.3. Enforcement**

Both the NMFS Office for Law Enforcement (NOAA/OLE) and the USCG have the authority and the responsibility to enforce Council regulations. NOAA/OLE agents, who specialize in living marine resource violations, provide fisheries expertise and investigative support for the overall fisheries mission. The USCG is a multi-mission agency, which provides at sea patrol services for the fisheries mission.

Neither NOAA/OLE nor the USCG can provide a continuous law enforcement presence in all areas due to the limited resources of NOAA/OLE and the priority tasking of the USCG. To supplement at sea and dockside inspections of fishing vessels, NOAA entered into Cooperative Enforcement Agreements with all but one of the states in the Southeast Region (North Carolina), which granted authority to state officers to enforce the laws for which NOAA/OLE has jurisdiction. In recent years, the level of involvement by the states has increased through Joint Enforcement Agreements, whereby states conduct patrols that focus on federal priorities and, in some circumstances, prosecute resultant violators through the state when a state violation has occurred.

The NOAA Office of General Counsel Penalty Policy and Penalty Schedule is available online at <http://www.gc.noaa.gov/enforce-office3.html>.

## Chapter 4. Environmental Effects and Comparison of Alternatives

### 4.1. Action 1. Revise the Greater Amberjack Acceptable Biological Catch, Total Annual Catch Limit, and Annual Optimum Yield

#### 4.1.1. Biological Effects

##### Expected effects to greater amberjack

The current overfishing limit (OFL) for greater amberjack is 2,005,000 lbs whole weight (ww). The current total (combined commercial and recreational) annual catch limit (ACL) is 1,968,001 lbs ww. The ACL is based on the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) previous acceptable biological catch (ABC)

recommendation. The current ABC incorporates recreational landings for greater amberjack that were tracked using Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey (MRFSS) estimation methods. Therefore, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** is not a viable alternative because it would retain the current total ACL for greater amberjack (equal to the current ABC), and optimum yield (OY), which is not based on the best scientific information available (BSIA).

The ACLs in **Preferred Alternative 2**, and **Alternatives 3** through **4**, are based on the SSC's new OFL and ABC recommendations and are viable alternatives for further analysis (Table 1.6.1 and Table 4.1.1.1). The larger catch level recommendation from the Council's SSC are due to an improved condition of the stock as well as a change in the recreational survey from MRFSS to the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES). Historical landings by sector, and revised sector ACLs, for greater amberjack are discussed in Action 2. Revising greater amberjack catch levels as proposed in **Preferred Alternative 2**, and **Alternatives 3** and **4**, would not be expected to result in negative biological impacts since overall catch would be constrained to the ACL and accountability measures (AM) would prevent the ACL from being exceeded, correct for overages if they occur (if the stock is in an overfished condition), and prevent overfishing. In addition, the proposed increase in the total ACL for greater amberjack is based on the SSC's recommended OFL and ABC for greater amberjack in the South Atlantic region, and is considered BSIA. SEDAR 59 (2020) indicates that the greater amberjack ACL can be increased without having negative effects on the sustainability of the stock.

#### **Alternatives**

1. (No Action). The total ACL for greater amberjack is equal to the current ABC.
- 2. Revise the ABC. The total ACL for greater amberjack is equal to the SSC recommended ABC.**
3. Revise the OFL and ABC. The total ACL for greater amberjack is equal to 90% of the SSC recommended ABC.
4. Revise the OFL and ABC. The total ACL for greater amberjack is equal to 80% of the SSC recommended ABC.

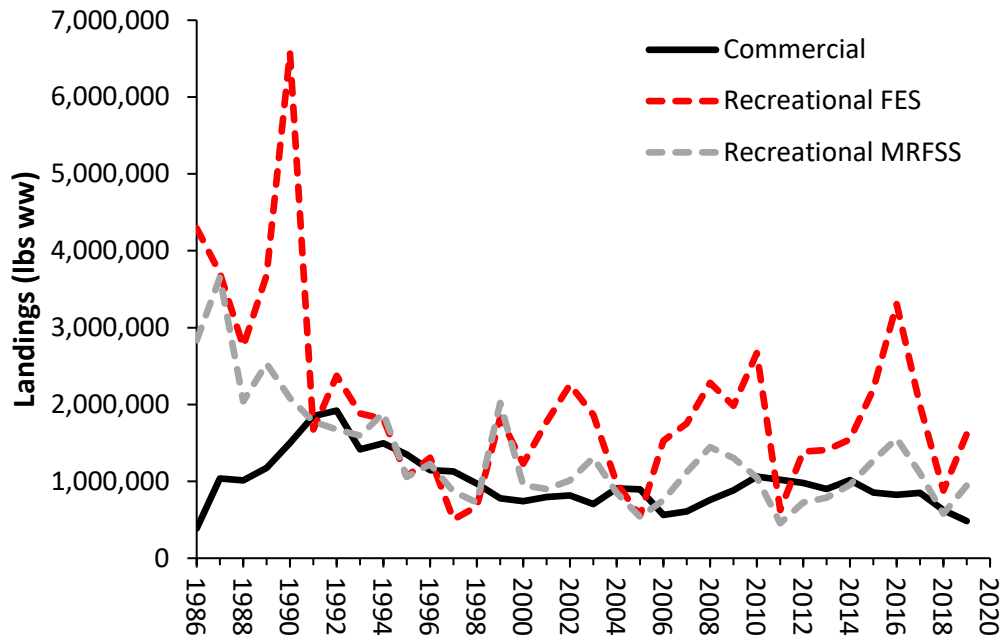
\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.

**Table 4.1.1.1.** South Atlantic greater amberjack new OFL and ABC recommendations in pounds ww, based on projections from SEDAR 59 (2020), and total ACL options for **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternatives 3-4**. The assessment and these projections use recreational data calibrated to the MRIP-FES. Fishing years are from March through the end of February.

<b>Fishing Year</b>	<b>OFL (lbs ww)</b>	<b>Preferred Alternative 2 ABC = Total ACL (lbs ww)</b>	<b>Alternative 3  Total ACL = 90%ABC (lbs ww)</b>	<b>Alternative 4  Total ACL = 80%ABC (lbs ww)</b>
2022/2023	4,615,000	<b>4,380,000</b>	3,942,000	3,504,000
2023/2024	3,283,000	<b>3,233,000</b>	2,909,700	2,586,400
2024/2025	2,839,000	<b>2,818,000</b>	2,536,200	2,254,400
2025/2026	2,719,000	<b>2,699,000</b>	2,429,100	2,159,200
2026/2027+	2,691,000	<b>2,669,000</b>	2,402,100	2,135,200

NOTE: Proposed ACLs are based on recreational data calibrated to the FES. Future recreational catches under these limits would be monitored by the MRIP using the FES.

Greater amberjack commercial landings have remained fairly steady from 1986 through 2019, with a downward trend in recent years (Figure 4.1.1.1). Recreational landings as estimated with both MRFSS and MRIP-FES methodologies were very high when record-keeping began and have been sporadic since 1986.



**Figure 4.1.1.1.** Greater amberjack commercial and recreational landings (lbs ww) by year from 1986 through 2019. Commercial landings using data or methods from SEDAR 59 are in black. Recreational landings estimates based on the MRFSS are in gray and revised recreational landings estimates based on the FES are in red.

Sources: SEDAR 59 Assessment Report (2020), Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) MRFSS Recreational ACL datasets (5/19/20; 9/15/20), SEFSC MRIP-FES Recreational ACL dataset (9/16/20)

**Alternatives 3 and 4** would have greater long-term positive biological effects than **Preferred Alternative 2** because they would create a buffer between the ACL/annual OY and ABC, with **Alternative 4** setting the most conservative buffer at 80% of the ABC. Specifying a buffer between the ACL/annual OY and ABC, as proposed under **Alternatives 3 and 4**, would provide greater assurance that overfishing is prevented, and the long-term average biomass is near or above the spawning stock biomass (SSB) that produces maximum sustainable yield (MSY) ( $SSB_{MSY}$ ). **Preferred Alternative 2** would set the ACL and annual OY equal to the ABC leaving no buffer between the two harvest parameters, which may increase risk that harvest could exceed the ABC. However, the Council's ABC control rule accounts for scientific uncertainty. The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act's (Magnuson-Stevens Act) National Standard 1 (NS 1) guidelines indicate an ACL may typically be set very close to the ABC. Setting a buffer between the ACL and ABC would be appropriate in situations where there is uncertainty in whether management measures are constraining fishing mortality to target levels. Since **Alternative 1 (No Action)** does not incorporate the recent stock assessment (SEDAR 59 2020), and no longer represents BSIA, it is not a viable alternative. When totaling the annual ACL from 2022 through 2027, **Alternative 4** has the lowest cumulative ACL which is expected to have the greatest biological benefits to the stock, followed by **Alternative 3**, and **Preferred Alternative 2**.



### **Expected Effects to Bycatch and Discards**

When compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, increasing the total ACLs under each of **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternatives 3 and 4** would allow for more fish to be harvested and reduce the likelihood of in-season closures. Therefore, it is expected that there would be a decrease in regulatory discards because more fish can be kept rather than discarded, which is indirectly beneficial to the greater amberjack stock. However, since it is estimated that South Atlantic greater amberjack have a low release mortality rate of 20% (sensitivity range: 10-30%) (SEDAR 15 2008 and SEDAR 59 2020), dead discards are expected to be minimal. See Appendix G (Bycatch Practicability Analysis) for information on bycatch and discards. Additionally, substantial changes in fishing effort or behavior are not expected as a result of this action, thus the proposed ACLs under this action would not be expected to result in any biological effects, positive or negative, on co-occurring species (refer to BPA in Appendix G).

### **Expected Effects to Protected Species and Essential Fish Habitat**

The alternatives under this action would not significantly modify the way in which the snapper grouper fishery is prosecuted in terms of gear types used and would not alter fishing behavior in a way that would cause new effects to listed species or critical habitat that were not considered in the previous consultations or that will be considered in the reinitiated consultation. The proposed action is not expected to increase overall effort in the snapper grouper fishery or alter fishing behavior to the extent that additional listed species interactions would result. Therefore, there are no additional impacts on Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species or designated critical habitats anticipated as a result of this action (see Sections 3.1 and 3.2 for a detailed description of ESA-listed species and critical habitat in the action area). Furthermore, no adverse impacts on essential fish habitat (EFH) or EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern are expected to result from any of the alternatives considered for this action (see Section 3.1 and Appendix D for access to detailed descriptions of EFH in the South Atlantic region).

These predicted effects on EFH and ESA-listed species and designated critical habitats are applicable to all actions in this amendment.

## **4.1.2. Economic Effects**

In general, ACLs that allow for more fish to be landed can result in increased positive economic effects if harvest increases without notable long-term effects on the health of a stock. The ACL does not directly impact the fishery for a species unless harvest changes, fishing behavior changes, or the ACL is exceeded, thereby potentially triggering AMs such as harvest closures or other restrictive measures. As such, ACLs that are set above the observed landings in the fishery for a species and do not change harvest or fishing behavior may not have realized economic effects each year. Nevertheless, ACLs set above observed harvest levels do create a gap between the ACL and typical landings that may be utilized in years of exceptional abundance or accessibility to a species, thus providing the opportunity for increased landings and a reduced likelihood of triggering restrictive AMs. As such, there are potential economic benefits from ACLs that allow for such a gap. The opposite is true for ACLs that constrain harvest or fishing effort within a fishery or reduce the previously described gap between average landings and the ACL.



As noted in Section 4.1.1, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** is not a viable alternative. Although not viable since it does not implement BSIA, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would not be expected to be constraining on harvest when compared to recent 5-year average landings. The ACL is set equal to the ABC in **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2**, with the differences between the two in part occurring due to the current versus updated ABC and how the non-headboat recreational component of the total ACL would be accounted for moving forward. Specifically, the current ABC is inclusive of MRFSS-scaled estimates to account for private recreational and charter landings while the updated ABC would be inclusive of MRIP-FES estimates for these landings. Projections that allow for conversion between both units for the recreational sector are not available, as there is no forward-looking conversion between the two estimates. As such, a direct comparison of **Alternative 1 (No Action)** to **Preferred Alternative 2** is not possible. This applies to comparisons of **Alternative 1 (No Action)** to **Alternatives 3** and **4** as well, since these two alternatives also incorporate the updated ABC and thus MRIP-FES estimates. As a proxy for the status quo (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**), the five-year (2015/16 - 2019/20) average landings of greater amberjack are compared to **Preferred Alternative 2**, **Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 4** to estimate the economic effects of each alternative.

Analyses of the economic effects of this action begin with the 2023/2024 fishing year, which is the first full or almost full fishing year that regulation changes occurring from this action would likely be implemented. The potential revised total ACLs for greater amberjack when initially implemented in **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** are higher than the 5-year average observed landings in recent years (Table 4.1.2.1; Table 4.1.2.2), thus there would be room for an expansion in landings and associated economic benefits. **Alternative 4** would be constraining on harvest and there would be an associated estimated decrease in economic benefits from this alternative when initially implemented. Five-year average landings from the 2015/2016 to the 2019/2020 fishing years was used as a baseline in this analysis since the 2019/2020 fishing year was the most recent year that total landings (commercial and recreational) data were available when these analyses were prepared. While recreational landings data for 2020/2021 were available at the time, commercial landings and logbook data for this fishing year were not available. Thus, 2019/2020 was chosen as the terminal year for both sectors to provide a proper comparison of landings that rely on the same timeline.

**Table 4.1.2.1.** South Atlantic greater amberjack landings for fishing years 2015/2016 to 2019/2020.

Fishing Year	Commercial landings (lbs ww)	Recreational landings <sup>a</sup> (lbs ww)	Total landings (lbs ww)
2015/2016	940,005	2,773,589	3,713,594
2016/2017	793,308	2,773,177	3,566,485
2017/2018	1,046,174	1,938,506	2,984,680
2018/2019	686,915	1,115,270	1,802,185
2019/2020	430,189	1,528,402	1,958,591
5-year average	779,318	2,025,789	2,805,107

<sup>a</sup>Recreational landings are inclusive of FES estimates.

**Table 4.1.2.2.** Percent difference between the total ACLs in **Action 1** compared to 5-year average landings from fishing years 2015/2016 to 2019/2020<sup>a</sup>.

Fishing Year	Percent difference between the ACL and 5-year average annual landings for Preferred Alternative 2	Percent difference between the ACL and 5-year average annual landings for Alternative 3	Percent difference between the ACL and 5-year average annual landings for Alternative 4
2023/2024	15%	4%	-8%
2024/2025	0%	-10%	-20%
2025/2026	-4%	-13%	-23%
2026/2027+	-5%	-14%	-24%

<sup>a</sup>**Alternative 1 (No Action)** is tracked in part using MRFSS estimates for charter and private recreational landings while **Alternatives 2 (Preferred)** through **4** would be tracked in part using FES estimates for charter and private recreational landings. Charter and private recreational landings make up a notable portion of greater amberjack landings. As such, the economic effects of **Alternative 1 (No Action)** cannot be compared in a quantitative manner to the other alternatives since the accounting methods used to track the MRFSS and FES are vastly different and are not comparable. Thus, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** cannot be considered in this analysis.

In later years, the total ACL would be constraining on harvest as the ACL decreases and this would result in direct negative economic effects from decreased harvest and an associated decrease in economic benefits, assuming harvest is capped at the total ACL. **Alternative 4** would provide the lowest total ACL and thus would be expected to constrain harvest sooner and more severely limit harvest in subsequent years, thus there would be elevated negative economic effects anticipated from this restricted harvest. **Alternative 3** offers a higher ACL and would not be expected to be constraining on harvest until the 2024/2025 fishing year. **Preferred Alternative 2** would provide the highest ACL of the viable alternatives being considered and would not be constraining on harvest until the 2025/2026 fishing year. From an economic benefits perspective, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would provide the highest short-term economic benefits, since it is not constraining on harvest but this alternative is not viable. **Preferred Alternative 2** would provide the highest potential economic benefits of the viable alternatives being considered followed by **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4** (Table 4.1.2.2).

The estimated change in potential landings by sector under **Preferred Alternative 2** through **Alternative 4** are provided in Table 4.1.2.3 and Table 4.1.2.5. Table 4.1.2.4 and Table 4.1.2.6 show the resulting estimated change in net economic benefits by sector and Table 4.1.2.7 shows the estimated change in net economic benefits for **Action 1** in aggregate for both sectors combined. In the 2023/2024 fishing year, **Preferred Alternative 2** is estimated to result in an increase in potential net economic benefits of \$309,861 for the commercial sector, a decrease in potential net economic benefits of \$71,606 for the recreational sector, and an increase in potential net economic benefits of \$238,255 for both sectors combined (2020 \$). By the 2026/2027 fishing year and beyond, **Preferred Alternative 2** is estimated to result in an increase in potential net economic benefits of \$171,716 for the commercial sector, a decrease in potential net economic benefits of \$294,895 for the recreational sector, and a decrease in potential net economic benefits of \$123,178 for both sectors combined (2020 \$).

**Table 4.1.2.3.** Estimated change in potential landings (lbs ww) to the commercial sector from **Action 1**.

<b>Fishing Year</b>	<b>Preferred Alternative 2</b>	<b>Alternative 3</b>	<b>Alternative 4</b>
2023/2024	<b>514,374</b>	382,921	251,467
2024/2025	<b>345,635</b>	231,055	116,476
2025/2026	<b>297,250</b>	187,509	77,767
2026/2027+	<b>285,052</b>	176,530	68,009

**Table 4.1.2.4.** Estimated change in potential net economic benefits to the commercial sector (producer surplus) from **Action 1** (2020 \$).

<b>Fishing Year</b>	<b>Preferred Alternative 2</b>	<b>Alternative 3</b>	<b>Alternative 4</b>
2023/2024	<b>\$309,861</b>	\$230,673	\$151,485
2024/2025	<b>\$208,212</b>	\$139,189	\$70,165
2025/2026	<b>\$179,064</b>	\$112,956	\$46,847
2026/2027+	<b>\$171,716</b>	\$106,343	\$40,969

**Table 4.1.2.5.** Estimated change in potential landings (lbs ww) to the recreational sector from **Action 1**.

<b>Fishing Year</b>	<b>Preferred Alternative 2</b>	<b>Alternative 3</b>	<b>Alternative 4</b>
2023/2024	<b>-107,327</b>	-299,173	-491,019
2024/2025	<b>-353,588</b>	-520,808	-688,028
2025/2026	<b>-424,202</b>	-584,361	-744,520
2026/2027+	<b>-442,004</b>	-600,383	-758,761

**Table 4.1.2.6.** Estimated change in potential net economic benefits to the recreational sector (consumer surplus) from **Action 1** (2020 \$).

<b>Fishing Year</b>	<b>Preferred Alternative 2</b>	<b>Alternative 3</b>	<b>Alternative 4</b>
2023/2024	<b>-\$71,606</b>	-\$199,601	-\$327,596
2024/2025	<b>-\$235,905</b>	-\$347,470	-\$459,036
2025/2026	<b>-\$283,017</b>	-\$389,871	-\$496,725
2026/2027+	<b>-\$294,895</b>	-\$400,561	-\$506,227

**Table 4.1.2.7.** Estimated change in potential net economic benefits (recreational and commercial combined) from **Action 1** (2020 \$)<sup>a</sup>.

<b>Fishing Year</b>	<b>Preferred Alternative 2</b>	<b>Alternative 3</b>	<b>Alternative 4</b>
2023/2024	<b>\$238,255</b>	\$31,072	-\$176,112
2024/2025	<b>-\$27,693</b>	-\$208,282	-\$388,870
2025/2026	<b>-\$103,953</b>	-\$276,916	-\$449,878
2026/2027+	<b>-\$123,178</b>	-\$294,218	-\$465,258

<sup>a</sup>**Alternative 1 (No Action)** is tracked in part using MRFSS estimates for charter and private recreational landings while **Alternatives 2 (Preferred)** through **4** would be tracked in part using FES estimates for charter and private recreational landings. Charter and private recreational landings make up a notable portion of greater amberjack landings. As such, the economic effects of **Alternative 1 (No Action)** cannot be compared in a quantitative manner to the other alternatives since the accounting methods used to track the MRFSS and MRIP-FES are vastly different and are not comparable. Thus, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** cannot be considered in this analysis.

Assumptions used in calculating these estimates include application of the status quo allocation of the total ACL (40.66% commercial, 59.34% recreational) to the new ACL for each alternative to estimate economic benefits. This allocation is then compared to the baseline scenario (i.e., a proxy for **Alternative 1 (No Action)**) to determine the gap between the baseline scenario and the ACL by sector under the assumption that both sectors would fully harvest their respective ACLs. For the commercial sector, the current sector ACL of 769,388 lbs gutted weight (gw) is used as the baseline scenario since the units measuring this portion of the total ACL are not changing due to this action. For the recreational sector, 5-year average landings (2015/2016-2019/2020) in FES terms are used as the baseline scenario since a forward looking conversion of MRFSS and MRIP-FES units is not available that would allow direct comparison of the current recreational sector ACL under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, which is in MRFSS terms, to the resulting new recreational sector ACL under **Alternatives 2 (Preferred)** through **4** which are in MRIP-FES terms.

To estimate net economic benefits from the commercial portion of the gap between landings and the potential ACL, a ratio of 1.04 is used to convert pounds ww to pounds gw. This allows application of the appropriate price (\$1.79/lb gw; Tables 3.3.1.1 and 3.3.1.2) along with a scaling factor of 35% of gross revenue (Section 3.3.1.2; National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC), pers. comm. 2022) to estimate producer surplus (PS) for the commercial sector. Although there are no currently available estimates of the demand elasticity for greater amberjack, it is assumed that there would be no expected change to consumer surplus (CS) from the commercial perspective since there is likely a high degree of substitutability of greater amberjack for other species. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above.

To estimate net economic benefits for the recreational sector, a CS estimate of \$13.11 for a “generic snapper” kept on a recreational trip is used (2020 \$; Section 3.3). This marginal value estimate is used as a proxy value since one is not currently available specifically for greater amberjack. A weight of 19.65 lbs ww per greater amberjack is used to convert the recreational

portion of the buffer from lbs ww to numbers of fish (Personal Communication, NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center SAFE Dataset, March 17, 2021). It is assumed that changes in the recreational portion of the total ACL would only affect catch per trip and not the overall number of trips taken. This includes no direct change to for-hire fishing activity and thus no change in direct economic effects for the for-hire component of the recreational sector. As such, there are no estimated changes in PS provided for the recreational sector.

### 4.1.3. Social Effects

The ACL for any stock does not directly affect resource users unless the ACL is met or exceeded, in which case AMs that restrict or close harvest could negatively impact the commercial, for-hire, and private recreational sectors. AMs can have significant direct and indirect social effects because, when triggered, they can restrict harvest in the current season or subsequent seasons. While the negative effects are usually short-term, they may at times induce other indirect effects through changes in fishing behavior or business operations that could have long-term social effects, such as increased pressure on another species, or fishermen having to stop fishing altogether due to regulatory closures. However, restrictions on harvest contribute to sustainable management goals, and are expected to be beneficial to fishermen and communities in the long term. Generally, the higher the ACL the greater the short-term social benefits that would be expected to accrue if harvest is sustainable.

Under **Preferred Alternative 2** through **Alternative 4**, the ACL for greater amberjack would be based on the most recent stock assessment and updated MRIP-FES estimates. Adjustments in an ACL based on updated information are necessary to ensure harvest remains sustainable and fishermen continue to have access to the resource over time. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would not update the greater amberjack ACL based on current information and would not provide the social benefits associated with accurate accounting of non-headboat recreational harvest.

Commercial and recreational landings are estimated to vary year by year (Figure 4.1.1.1), and projections show that, depending on the sector allocations chosen in Action 2, there could be some years in which recreational landings would be projected to reach their respective ACL and AMs would be triggered (see Section 4.2.1). There would likely be some negative effects on recreational fishermen and for-hire businesses that target greater amberjack. In general, a higher ACL would lower the chance of triggering a recreational AM and result in the lowest level of negative effects on the recreational sector. Additionally, higher ACLs may provide opportunity for commercial and recreational fishermen to expand their harvest providing social benefits associated with increased income to fishing businesses within the community and higher trip satisfaction.

The communities that would be most affected by a revision to the greater amberjack ABC and ACL are discussed in Section 3.4. Fishing communities in Florida and Georgia consistently experience the highest recreational and commercial landings of greater amberjack, followed by North Carolina and South Carolina. In particular, the community of Port Orange, Florida represents a substantial amount of commercial harvest (17% of landings and 22% of ex-vessel value). As a result, Port Orange is likely to see positive social effects related to increases in income and employment under a higher ACL, especially considering that Port Orange, Florida is moderately engaged in commercial fishing. Mayport, Florida has comparatively lower landings

than Port Orange, but it highly engaged in commercial fishing and may also experience positive social effects from a higher ACL. Similarly, there are a substantial number of for-hire permit holders located in the Florida Keys. Fishing communities within the Florida Keys are likely to also experience benefits of a higher ACL and consistent access to greater amberjack such as increased trips and trip satisfaction, especially if anglers desire to specifically target greater amberjack. Communities in the Florida Keys are all highly engaged in recreational fishing with Islamorada and Marathon also being highly reliant upon the recreational fishing industry.

Among the action alternatives, **Preferred Alternative 2** would be the most beneficial for fishermen, followed by **Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 4**. As stated in Section 4.1.1, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** is not a viable alternative because it is not based on BSIA.

#### **4.1.4. Administrative Effects**

Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, none of the Action 1 alternatives under consideration to modify the ABC and total ACLs would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Since a total ACL is already in place for greater amberjack, administrative impacts of this action are likely to be minimal. **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Alternative 2**, and **Alternatives 3 and 4** would not result in significant administrative cost or time burdens other than notifying fishery participants of the change in the ACL and continued monitoring of the ACL.

## 4.2. Action 2. Revise the Greater Amberjack Sector Allocations and Sector Annual Catch Limits

### 4.2.1. Biological Effects

#### Expected effects to greater amberjack

Biological effects to the greater amberjack stock are not expected to vary among alternatives in **Action 2**, since they do not change the total ACL specified in **Action 1**. Management differences between the commercial and recreational sectors make an overall net biological effect attributable solely to sector allocation difficult to distinguish. The stock gains relatively more biological benefits from the commercial sector in terms of a closure of that sector during April, when greater amberjack are spawning. The stock gains relatively more biological benefits from the recreational sector in terms of a lower possession limit (compared to the commercial trip limit). The commercial sector has a larger minimum size limit, which provides biological benefits of reducing catch rates and allowing more juvenile fish to mature and enter the spawning population. The recreational sector has a smaller minimum size limit, which has biological benefits from reducing discard mortality to fish that are undersized. Due to relatively greater benefits from each of the sectors in different aspects of their management, no biological effects are expected to be relatively neutral for the greater amberjack stock based on allocation. Furthermore, effective AMs are in place to prevent the commercial and recreational ACLs from being exceeded. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** through **Alternative 5**, including **Preferred Alternative 3**, include sector allocation percentages, which would be applied to the revised total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1; Table 4.2.1.1).

#### **Alternatives**

1 (No Action). Retain the current recreational and commercial sector allocations as 59.34% and 40.66%, respectively, of the revised total ACL for greater amberjack.

2. Apply the current allocation formula to the total ACL using the FES-calibrated recreational landings and commercial landings used in SEDAR 59 (2020). This would result in a recreational allocation of 70.16% and a commercial allocation of 29.84%.

**3. Allocate 65.00% of the total ACL to the recreational sector and 35.00% of the ACL to the commercial sector.**

4. Allocate 55.00% of the total ACL to the recreational sector and 45.00% of the total ACL to the commercial sector.

5. Allocate 50.00% of the total ACL to the recreational sector and 50.00% of the total ACL to the commercial sector.

\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.

**Table 4.2.1.1.** Sector allocation percentages for South Atlantic greater amberjack that would be applied to the revised total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1.

Alternative	Percent Recreational Allocation	Percent Commercial Allocation
Alternative 1 (No Action)	59.34%	40.66%
Alternative 2	70.16%	29.84%
<b>Preferred Alternative 3</b>	<b>65.00%</b>	<b>35.00%</b>
Alternative 4	55.00%	45.00%
Alternative 5	50.00%	50.00%

Of the alternatives considered in Action 2, **Alternative 5** would allocate the *highest* percentage of the total ACL to the commercial sector (50.00%), followed by **Alternative 4** (45.00%), **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (40.66%), **Preferred Alternative 3** (35.00%), and **Alternative 2** (29.84%). Conversely, **Alternative 2** would allocate the *highest* percentage of the total ACL to the recreational sector (70.16%), followed by **Preferred Alternative 3** (65.00%), **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (59.34%), **Alternative 4** (55.00%), and **Alternative 5** with the lowest recreational allocation (50.00%).

Section 2.2.1 shows the sector ACLs resulting from applying the sector allocation percentages from **Alternative 1 (No Action)** through **Alternative 5** to the total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1. Based on the recommended ABC and revised total ACL, the sector ACLs for each alternative proposed under Action 2 are greatest in the 2022/2023 fishing year, and decrease each year until the 2026/2027 fishing year (Table 4.2.1.2).

**Table 4.2.1.2.** Sector ACLs (lbs ww for recreational and lbs gw for commercial) for greater amberjack based on the revised total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1 and allocation percentages from **Preferred Alternative 3** in Action 2 (65.00% recreational and 35.00% commercial). The commercial ACL allocates 60% of the quota to Season 1 and 40% to Season 2.

Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)
2022/2023	4,380,000	2,847,000	1,474,038	884,423	589,615
2023/2024	3,233,000	2,101,450	1,088,029	652,817	435,212
2024/2025	2,818,000	1,831,700	948,365	569,019	379,346
2025/2026	2,699,000	1,754,350	908,317	544,990	363,327
2026/2027+	2,669,000	1,734,850	898,221	538,933	359,288

\*The total ACL is allocated in pounds ww to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gw (divided by 1.04) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

\*\*Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.



### **Commercial Sector Landings and Predicted Closures**

Average commercial landings of greater amberjack in the South Atlantic from March 2015 to February 2020 were 685,492 lbs gw (Table 4.2.1.3), or 89.1% of the commercial ACL, with commercial in-season closures occurring during the 2015/16, 2016/17, and 2017/18 fishing years. Landings were highest during the months of March through June, except for April due to the seasonal closure, with a peak in May (Figures 4.2.1.1 and 4.2.1.2).

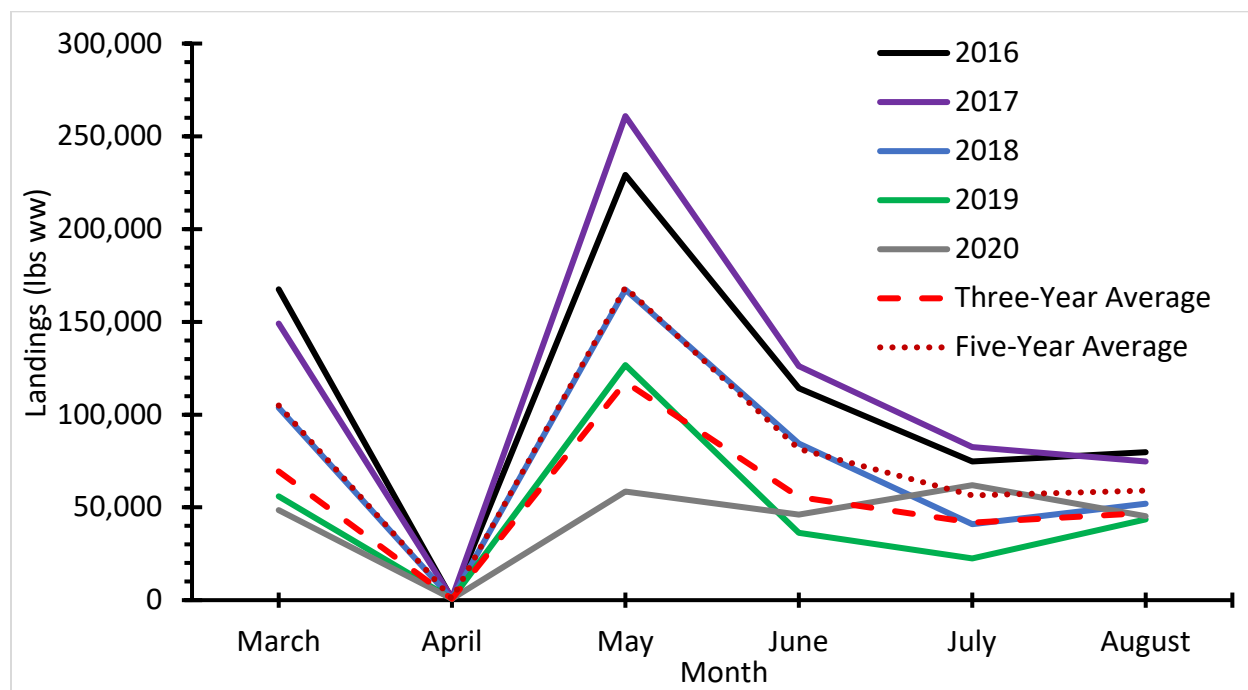
**Table 4.2.1.3.** South Atlantic commercial landings (lbs gw) of greater amberjack from March 2014 through February 2020 and percentage of the commercial ACL landed each year. Years with in-season closures due to approaching or exceeding the commercial ACL are indicated with the closure date.

Year	Total Landings (lbs gw)	Commercial ACL (lbs gw)	ACL %	Closure Date
2019/2020	413,643	769,388	53.8	
2018/2019	660,495	769,388	85.8	
2017/2018	1,005,937	769,388	130.7	10/18/17
2016/2017	762,796	769,388	99.1	10/4/16
2015/2016	903,851	769,388	117.5	1/21/16
2014/2015	924,783	769,388	120.2	

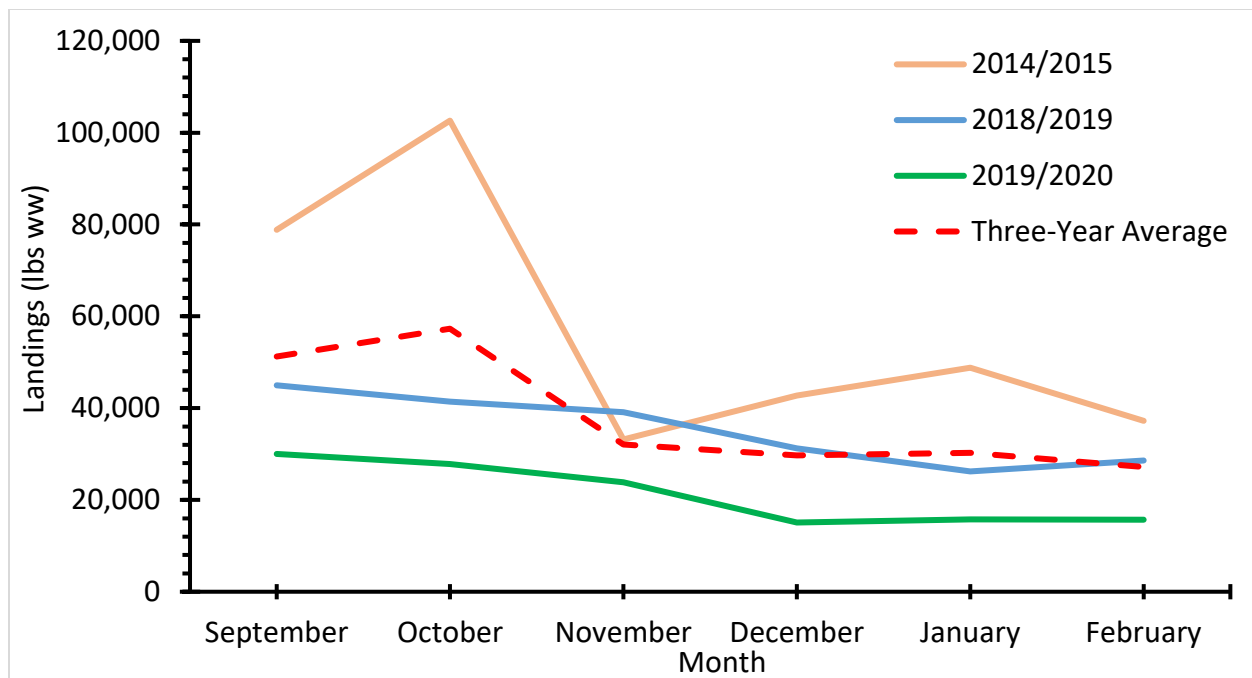
Source: SERO Commercial ACL data provided from the SEFSC on September 29, 2021.

\*Commercial closure in April for all years.

\*\*2020 landings were considered preliminary.



**Figure 4.2.1.1.** South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings (lbs ww) by month through August, with a commercial closure in April, from 2016 to 2020, using a three-year average, and five-year average.



**Figure 4.2.1.2.** South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings (lbs ww) by month for September through February for recent years that did not have a closure, and the three-year average. The three-year average came from the most recent years of complete data (2014/2015, 2018/2019, and 2019/2020).

Analyses of three scenarios<sup>14</sup> comparing when commercial sector landings would reach the proposed commercial sector ACLs for Season 1 are in Table 4.2.1.4. The scenarios, based on a three-year and five-year average and the maximum annual landings during the last five years, reveal that the commercial ACL for greater amberjack is not projected to be reached during Season 1 under **Preferred Alternative 3** for Scenarios 1 and 2. Predicted closure dates for Scenario 3 span from July 1 to no closure needed (Table 4.2.1.4). No closures were predicted for Season 2 for **Preferred Alternative 3** Scenarios 1 and 2 (Table 4.2.1.5.).

<sup>14</sup> For Season 1: The most recent five years of complete data are from the fishing years of 2016 through 2020. These data were used to generate three potential future commercial landings scenarios: 1) three year average of the most recent years of complete data (2018, 2019, and 2020), 2) five year average of the most recent years of complete data (2016 through 2020), and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data. The year with the maximum commercial landings in Season 1 in the last five years is 2017. For Season 2: the years of 2015/2016, 2016/2017, 2017/2018 all had closures that prevented a full six months of an open Season 2. The most recent three years of complete data are from the fishing seasons of 2014/2015, 2018/2019, and 2019/2020. These data were used to generate two potential future commercial landings scenarios: 1) three year average of the most recent years of complete data (2014/2015, 2018/2019, and 2019/2020), and, 2) the maximum landings in the last five years. The year with the maximum commercial landings in Season 2 in the last five years came from 2014/2015. Scenario 3 could not be used to estimate the closure dates for Season 2 due to recent Season 2 in-season closures, resulting in incomplete data. These values can be found in Tables F.10 and F.17 in Appendix F.

**Table 4.2.1.4.** The projected Season 1 commercial closure dates for South Atlantic greater amberjack. These projections assume the total ACLs from Action 1-**Preferred Alternative 2** and include the initial (2022-23) and terminal (2026-27) projected fishing years for Action 2.

<b>Action 2 Alternative</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Commercial ACL Season 1 (lbs)</b>	<b>Scenario 1 Closure Date</b>	<b>Scenario 2 Closure Date</b>	<b>Scenario 3 Closure Date</b>
1	2022/2023	1,027,447	None	None	None
1	2024/2025	661,038	None	None	18-Aug
1	2026/2027	626,086	None	None	3-Aug
2	2022/2023	754,034	None	None	None
2	2024/2025	485,130	None	None	18-Jun
2	2026/2027	459,479	None	25-Aug	12-Jun
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>884,423</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>569,019</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>12-Jul</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2026/2027</b>	<b>538,933</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>1-Jul</b>
4	2022/2023	1,137,115	None	None	None
4	2024/2025	731,596	None	None	None
4	2026/2027	692,913	None	None	31-Aug
5	2022/2023	1,263,462	None	None	None
5	2024/2025	812,885	None	None	None
5	2026/2027	769,904	None	None	None

\*Commercial ACLs (lbs ww) for greater amberjack are based on the revised total ACL from Preferred **Alternative 2** in Action 1, and **Alternative 3** in Action 2.

**Table 4.2.1.5.** The projected Season 2 commercial closure dates for South Atlantic greater amberjack. These projections assume the total ACLs from Action 1-**Preferred Alternative 2** and include the initial (2022-23) and terminal (2026-27) projected fishing years for Action 2.

Action 2 Alternative	Year	Commercial ACL Season 2	Scenario 1 Closure Date	Scenario 2 Closure Date
1	2022/2023	684,965	None	None
1	2024/2025	440,692	None	None
1	2026/2027	417,391	None	None
2	2022/2023	502,689	None	None
2	2024/2025	323,420	None	13-Feb
2	2026/2027	306,319	None	1-Feb
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>589,615</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>379,346</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2026/2027</b>	<b>359,288</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
4	2022/2023	758,077	None	None
4	2024/2025	487,731	None	None
4	2026/2027	461,942	None	None
5	2022/2023	842,308	None	None
5	2024/2025	541,923	None	None
5	2026/2027	513,269	None	None

\*Commercial ACLs (lbs ww) for greater amberjack are based on the revised total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1, and **Alternative 3** in Action 2.

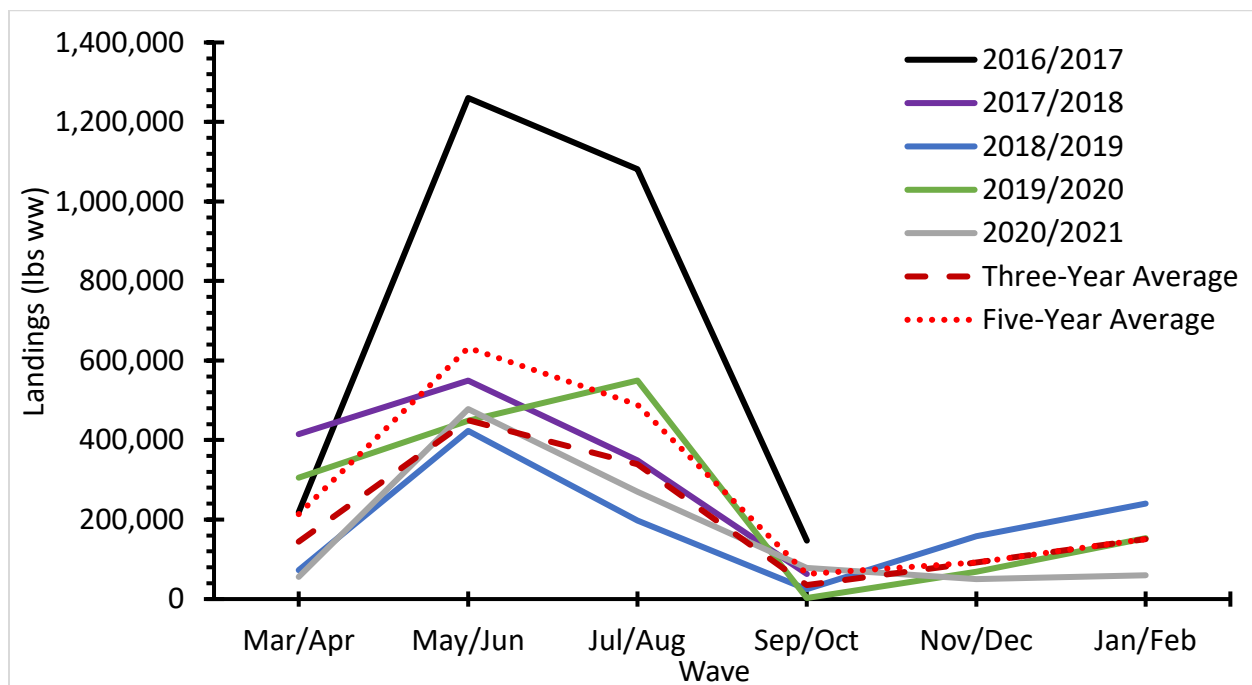
#### **Recreational Sector Landings and Predicted Closures**

Average recreational landings (MRFSS) of greater amberjack in the South Atlantic from March 2015 to February 2020 were 1,037,831 lbs ww (Table 4.2.1.6), or 88.9% of the recreational ACL, with recreational in-season closures occurring during the 2016/17, and 2017/18 fishing seasons. Landings were highest during the months of May through August (Figure 4.2.1.3.).

**Table 4.2.1.6.** Recreational landings of greater amberjack from March 2016 through February 2021 based on MRFSS (lbs ww) and corresponding percentage of recreational ACL landed each year.

Year	Total Landings (lbs ww)	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	ACL %	Closure Date
2020/2021	615,674	1,167,837	52.7%	NA
2019/2020	922,221	1,167,837	79.0%	NA
2018/2019	673,768	1,167,837	57.7%	NA
2017/2018	1,062,659	1,167,837	91.0%	10/31/2017
2016/2017	1,411,357	1,167,837	120.9%	11/30/2016

Source: SEFSC MRFSS Recreational ACL dataset [January 10, 2022].



**Figure 4.2.1.3.** South Atlantic greater amberjack recreational landings (lbs ww) by two-month wave for the 2016/2017 to the 2020/2021 fishing years, and the three-year and five-year average. The fishing years of 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 are not for the full fishing year because these fishing years had recreational closures.

Analyses of three scenarios<sup>15</sup> comparing when recreational sector landings would reach the proposed recreational sector ACLs are in Table 4.2.1.7. The scenarios, based on a three-year and five-year average and the maximum annual landings during the last five years, reveal that the recreational ACL for greater amberjack is projected to be met during dates spanning from May 5 under Scenario 3 to no closure needed. **Preferred Alternative 3** could result in a closure as early as July 15 to no closure needed during the fishing year. No closure dates were predicted for landings under Scenario 1 because the three-year average of the recreational landings generated landings below all of the recreational ACLs provided in Action 2.

**Table 4.2.1.7.** The projected recreational closure dates for South Atlantic greater amberjack.

Action 2 Alternative	Year	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	Scenario 1 Closure Date	Scenario 2 Closure Date	Scenario 3 Closure Date
1	2022/2023	2,599,092	None	None	17-Sep
1	2024/2025	1,672,201	None	None	12-Jul
1	2026/2027	1,583,785	None	6-Feb	7-Jul
2	2022/2023	3,073,008	None	None	None
2	2024/2025	1,977,109	None	None	29-Jul
2	2026/2027	1,872,570	None	None	23-Jul
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>2,847,000</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>19-Jan</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>1,831,700</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>21-Jul</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2026/2027</b>	<b>1,734,850</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>15-Jul</b>
4	2022/2023	2,409,000	None	None	29-Jul
4	2024/2025	1,549,900	None	3-Feb	17-May
4	2026/2027	1,467,950	None	12-Jan	12-May
5	2022/2023	2,190,000	None	None	22-Jun
5	2024/2025	1,409,000	None	24-Dec	9-May
5	2026/2027	1,334,500	None	24-Nov	5-May

\*Recreational ACLs (lbs ww) for greater amberjack are based on the revised total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1, and **Alternative 3** in Action 2.

<sup>15</sup> The most recent complete five years of data are from the fishing years of 2016/2017 to 2020/2021. These data were used to generate three potential future recreational landings scenarios: 1) three year average of the most recent years of complete data (2018/2019, 2019/2020, and 2020/2021), 2) five year average of the most recent years of complete data (2016/2017 through 2020/2021), and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data. The year with the maximum landings in the last five years is the 2016/2017 fishing year. Due to closures in the 2016/2017 fishing year (closed on November 30, 2016) and the 2017/2018 fishing year (closed on October 31, 2017) both landings for scenario 2 and also scenario 3 used the three-year average landings for the November/December and January/February time periods. Table F.1 in Appendix F shows the recreational landings used in this analysis.

### **Expected Effects to Bycatch and Discards**

In general, reducing sector allocations results in less landings available to a sector for harvest and increases the likelihood of an in-season closure. Therefore, in-season closures could have adverse effects to the stock if discard mortality increases when fish are returned to the water during the closure. However, since it is estimated that South Atlantic greater amberjack have a low release mortality rate of 20% (sensitivity range: 10-30%) (SEDAR 15 2008 and SEDAR 59 2020), should an in-season closure occur, dead discards are expected to be minimal. See Appendix G (BPA) for information on bycatch and discards.

### **4.2.2. Economic Effects**

In general, sector ACLs that allow for more fish to be landed can result in increased positive economic effects if harvest increases without notable long-term effects on the health of a stock. The sector ACL does not directly impact the fishery for a species unless harvest changes, fishing behavior changes, or the sector ACL is exceeded, thereby potentially triggering AMs such as harvest closures or other restrictive measures. As such, sector ACLs that are set above observed landings in a fishery for a species and do not change harvest or fishing behavior may not have realized economic effects each year. Nevertheless, sector ACLs set above observed average harvest levels do create a gap between the sector ACL and typical landings that may be utilized in years of exceptional abundance or accessibility of a species, thus providing the opportunity for increased landings and a reduced likelihood of triggering restrictive AMs. There are potential economic benefits from sector ACLs that allow for such a gap.

### **Commercial Sector**

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** would maintain the current commercial allocation of 40.66% of the total ACL. **Alternatives 2 and 3 (Preferred)** would result in comparatively lower commercial sector allocations and sector ACLs (29.84% and 35.00% of the total ACL respectively).

**Alternatives 4 and 5** would result in comparatively higher commercial sector allocations and sector ACLs (45.00% and 50.00% of the total ACL respectively). Although none of the commercial ACL alternatives in Action 2 are estimated to be constraining based on the 5-year average annual landings from the 2015/2016 to 2019/2020 fishing years (749,344 lbs gw; Table 4.2.1.3) and are all higher than the current sector ACL of 769,388 lbs gw, it is assumed that the commercial sector could fully harvest its ACL, if conditions allowed, and there would be fewer potential landings of greater amberjack under **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. These relatively reduced landings would be expected to comparatively decrease total potential PS for the commercial sector. Conversely, **Alternative 4** and **Alternative 5** would allow higher potential commercial landings, which would comparatively increase total potential PS for the commercial sector (Table 4.2.2.1). When compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternative 2** would result in the largest estimated reduction in PS of \$210,728 in fishing year 2023/24 and a reduction in PS of \$173,965 by fishing year 2026/27, followed by **Preferred Alternative 3** with an estimated reduction in PS of \$110,233 in fishing year 2023/24 and a reduction in PS of \$91,002 by fishing year 2026/27 (2020 \$). Comparatively, **Alternative 5** would result in the largest estimated increase in PS of \$181,903 in fishing year 2023/24 and an increase in PS of \$150,170 by fishing year 2026/27, followed by **Alternative 4** with an estimated increase in PS of \$84,524 in fishing year 2023/24 and an increase in PS of \$69,779 by fishing year 2026/27 (2020 \$) (Table 4.2.2.2). Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not

possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above.

**Table 4.2.2.1.** Percent difference between the commercial sector ACLs in Action 2 (assuming the total ACL in **Preferred Alternative 2** of Action 1 to determine the total ACL) compared to 5-year average landings of greater amberjack from fishing years 2015/16-2019/20 (749,344 lbs gw) and comparison of sector ACLs.

Action 2 Alternative	Fishing Year	Commercial sector ACL (lbs gw)	Percent difference between the sector ACL and 5-year average landings	Difference from Alternative 1 (No Action) sector ACL (lbs gw)
1 (No Action)	2023/24	1,263,979	69%	-
1 (No Action)	2024/25	1,101,730	47%	-
1 (No Action)	2025/26	1,055,205	41%	-
1 (No Action)	2026/27+	1,043,476	39%	-
2	2023/24	927,622	24%	-336,357
2	2024/25	808,549	8%	-293,181
2	2025/26	774,405	3%	-280,800
2	2026/27+	765,798	2%	-277,678
3	2023/24	1,088,029	45%	-175,950
3	2024/25	948,365	27%	-153,365
3	2025/26	908,317	21%	-146,888
3	2026/27+	898,221	20%	-145,255
4	2023/24	1,398,894	87%	134,915
4	2024/25	1,219,327	63%	117,597
4	2025/26	1,167,837	56%	112,632
4	2026/27+	1,154,856	54%	111,380
5	2023/24	1,554,327	107%	290,348
5	2024/25	1,354,808	81%	253,078
5	2025/26	1,297,596	73%	242,391
5	2026/27+	1,283,173	71%	239,697



**Table 4.2.2.2.** Estimated change in potential net economic benefits for the commercial sector (PS) from the alternatives in Action 2 compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (2020 \$).

Fishing Year	Alternative 2	Preferred Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
2023/2024	-\$210,728	<b>-\$110,233</b>	\$84,524	\$181,903
2024/2025	-\$183,678	<b>-\$96,083</b>	\$73,674	\$158,553
2025/2026	-\$175,921	<b>-\$92,025</b>	\$70,564	\$151,858
2026/2027+	-\$173,965	<b>-\$91,002</b>	\$69,779	\$150,170

Assumptions used in calculating the estimates in Table 4.2.2.2 include a comparison of the sector ACL in **Alternative 1 (No Action)** to the appropriate sector ACL resulting from the other alternatives. To estimate the change in potential net economic benefits, the difference in pounds gw is applied to the appropriate price (\$1.79/lb gw; Tables 3.3.1.1 and 3.3.1.2) along with a scaling factor of 35% of gross revenue (Section 3.3.1.2; NMFS SEFSC, pers. comm. 2022) to estimate PS for the commercial sector. Although there are no currently available estimates of the demand elasticity for greater amberjack, it is assumed that there would be no expected change to CS from the commercial perspective since there is likely a high degree of substitutability of greater amberjack for other species. The total ACL for which the sector ACLs are based upon is derived from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1.

### **Recreational Sector**

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** would maintain the current recreational allocation of 59.34% of the total ACL. **Alternatives 2 and 3 (Preferred)** would result in comparatively higher recreational sector allocations and sector ACLs (70.16% and 65.00% of the total ACL respectively). Most of the recreational ACLs in Action 2 are estimated to be constraining based the 5-year average annual landings from the 2015/2016 to 2019/2020 fishing years (2,025,789 lbs ww; Table 4.1.2.1), and it is assumed that the recreational sector could fully harvest its ACL if conditions allowed. There would be higher potential landings of greater amberjack under **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. These relatively increased landings would be expected to comparatively increase total CS for the recreational sector. Conversely, **Alternative 4** and **Alternative 5** would result in comparatively lower recreational sector allocations and sector ACLs (55.00% and 50.00% of the total ACL respectively) and would allow lower potential recreational landings which would comparatively decrease total potential CS for the recreational sector (Table 4.2.2.3). When compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternative 2** would result in the largest estimated increase in CS of \$233,385 in fishing year 2023/24 and an increase in CS of \$192,670 by fishing year 2026/27, followed by **Preferred Alternative 3** with an estimated increase in CS of \$122,085 in fishing year 2023/24 and an increase in CS of \$100,787 by fishing year 2026/27 (2020 \$). Comparatively, **Alternative 5** would result in the largest estimated decrease in CS of \$201,462 in fishing year 2023/24 and a decrease in CS of \$166,317 by fishing year 2026/27, followed by **Alternative 4** with an estimated decrease in CS of \$93,613 in fishing year 2023/24 and a decrease in CS of \$77,282 by fishing year 2026/27 (2020 \$) (Table 4.2.2.4).

**Table 4.2.2.3.** Percent difference between the recreational sector ACLs in Action 2 compared to 5-year average landings of greater amberjack from 2015/16-2019/20 (2,025,789 lbs ww) and comparison of sector ACLs.

Action 2 Alternative	Fishing Year	Recreational sector ACL (lbs ww)	Percent difference between the sector ACL and 5-year average landings	Difference from Alternative 1 (No Action) (lbs ww)
1 (No Action)	2023/24	1,918,462	-5%	-
1 (No Action)	2024/25	1,672,201	-17%	-
1 (No Action)	2025/26	1,601,587	-21%	-
1 (No Action)	2026/27+	1,583,785	-22%	-
2	2023/24	2,268,273	12%	349,811
2	2024/25	1,977,109	-2%	304,908
2	2025/26	1,893,618	-7%	292,031
2	2026/27+	1,872,570	-8%	288,785
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2,101,450</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>182,988</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>1,831,700</b>	<b>-10%</b>	<b>159,499</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2025/26</b>	<b>1,754,350</b>	<b>-13%</b>	<b>152,763</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2026/27+</b>	<b>1,734,850</b>	<b>-14%</b>	<b>151,065</b>
4	2023/24	1,778,150	-12%	-140,312
4	2024/25	1,549,900	-23%	-122,301
4	2025/26	1,484,450	-27%	-117,137
4	2026/27+	1,467,950	-28%	-115,835
5	2023/24	1,616,500	-20%	-301,962
5	2024/25	1,409,000	-30%	-263,201
5	2025/26	1,349,500	-33%	-252,087
5	2026/27+	1,334,500	-34%	-249,285

\*Assumes the total ACL in **Preferred Alternative 2** of Action 1 to determine the sector ACL.

**Table 4.2.2.4.** Estimated change in potential net economic benefits for the recreational sector (CS) from the alternatives in Action 2 compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (2020 \$).

<b>Fishing Year</b>	<b>Alternative 2</b>	<b>Preferred Alternative 3</b>	<b>Alternative 4</b>	<b>Alternative 5</b>
2023/2024	\$233,385	<b>\$122,085</b>	-\$93,613	-\$201,462
2024/2025	\$203,427	<b>\$106,414</b>	-\$81,596	-\$175,601
2025/2026	\$194,836	<b>\$101,920</b>	-\$78,151	-\$168,186
2026/2027+	\$192,670	<b>\$100,787</b>	-\$77,282	-\$166,317

Assumptions used in calculating these estimates include application of the status quo allocation of the total ACL (40.66% commercial, 59.34% recreational) to the new ACL for each alternative to estimate economic benefits. This allocation is then compared to 5-year average landings (2015/2016-2019/2020) (2,025,789 lbs ww; Table 4.1.2.1) to determine the buffer between average annual landings and the ACL by sector under the assumption that both sectors would fully harvest their respective ACLs. To estimate net economic benefits for the recreational sector, a CS estimate of \$13.11 for a “generic snapper” kept on a recreational trip is used (2020 \$; Section 3.3). This marginal value estimate is used as a proxy value since one is not currently available specifically for greater amberjack. A weight of 19.65 lbs ww per greater amberjack is used to convert the recreational portion of the buffer from lbs ww to numbers of fish (Personal Communication, NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center SAFE Dataset, March 17, 2021). It is assumed that changes in the recreational portion of the total ACL would only affect catch per trip and not the overall number of trips taken due to the low bag limit for greater amberjack and a large number of potential substitute target species. Additionally, this consistent with the assumptions made in the analysis provided in Appendix F. This assumption includes no direct change to for-hire fishing activity and thus no change in direct economic effects for the for-hire component of the recreational sector. As such, there are no estimated changes in PS provided for the recreational sector. In comparing alternatives, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** was used as a baseline which applied the current allocation of 59.34% of the total ACL to the recreational sector. The total ACL in this case was based on **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1 and applied to the alternatives in **Action 2**.

### **Total**

The alternatives in Action 2 can be ranked for the commercial sector from a short-term economic perspective with **Alternative 5** resulting in the highest potential benefits followed by **Alternative 4**, **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Alternative 3**, and **Alternative 2**. For the recreational sector, the ranking would be the opposite with **Alternative 2** resulting in the highest potential benefits followed by **Preferred Alternative 3**, **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternative 4**, and **Alternative 5**. In terms of total estimated net economic benefits for the action, the same ranking would apply as stated for the recreational sector. In comparison to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternative 2** would increase net economic benefits by \$22,658, **Preferred Alternative 3** would increase net economic benefits by \$11,852, **Alternative 4** would decrease net economic benefits by \$9,088, and **Alternative 5** would decrease net economic benefits by \$19,599 in the 2023/2024 fishing year (Table 4.2.2.5)(2020 \$).

**Table 4.2.2.5.** Estimated change in potential net economic benefits from the alternatives in Action 2 compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (2020 \$).

<b>Fishing Year</b>	<b>Alternative 2</b>	<b>Preferred Alternative 3</b>	<b>Alternative 4</b>	<b>Alternative 5</b>
2023/2024	\$22,658	<b>\$11,852</b>	-\$9,088	-\$19,559
2024/2025	\$19,749	<b>\$10,331</b>	-\$7,922	-\$17,048
2025/2026	\$18,915	<b>\$9,894</b>	-\$7,587	-\$16,328
2026/2027+	\$18,705	<b>\$9,785</b>	-\$7,503	-\$16,147

### 4.2.3. Social Effects

Since sector allocations exist for the recreational and commercial sectors already, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would maintain the current allocation percentages and may have few social effects as both sectors would see an increase in available poundage. With **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3**, there would be a decrease in the commercial percentage compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, which could have some negative social effects if commercial fishermen have a negative perception of this change due to the decrease in fishing opportunity and concerns about long-term social effects, especially if future actions further decreased harvest opportunities. However, the increase in poundage may mitigate some of these concerns and result in positive social benefits associated with increased harvest in the short-term. Alternatively, under **Alternative 4** and **Alternative 5** there would be a decrease in the recreational percentage compared the **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, which may result in similar negative social effects for the recreational sector.

Fishing communities in Florida and Georgia consistently experience the highest recreational and commercial landings of greater amberjack, followed by North Carolina and South Carolina. Communities that land a substantial proportion of greater amberjack and are reliant upon commercial and recreational fishing and thus would be most affected by a decrease in allocation percentage under **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** (commercial) and **Alternative 4** and **Alternative 5** (recreational) are discussed in Section 3.4. Ultimately, the **Alternative 2**, **Preferred Alternative 3**, **Alternative 4**, and **Alternative 5** would promote conservation by updating catch levels based on the most recent stock assessment ensuring the resource is well-managed and would remain available to a diverse group of users in order to optimize social benefits.

As mentioned, there can be many different social effects that result as further allocations are discussed, and perceptions are formed. In the past there has been some resistance to further decreasing a given sector's percentage allocation. It is difficult to predict the social effects with any allocation scheme as it would depend upon other actions in conjunction with this one. A reduction in allocation for one sector may be compounded by a restrictive choice of ABC or ACL (Action 1). Therefore, the choice of an allocation would need to be assessed with other actions within this amendment to determine the overall social effects and whether short-term losses are offset by any long-term biological gains.

Projections for Action 1 – **Preferred Alternative 2** indicate that the commercial ACL for greater amberjack would not be reached under the any of the alternatives proposed in Action 2, apart

from a possible closures in Season 1 and Season 2 under the high landings scenario (maximum landings over the last five years and three years, respectively) (Tables 4.2.1.4 and 4.2.1.5). However, the recreational ACL could be reached in fishing year 2026-27 under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternative 4**, and **Alternative 5** (Table 4.2.1.7) using the five-year average landings. As a result, the recreational sector may experience negative social effects associated with AMs which, when triggered, can restrict harvest in the current season or subsequent seasons (Section 4.1.3).

The communities most likely to experience those impacts are those that are highly reliant upon recreational fishing including the Florida Keys, Florida (Islamorada and Tavernier); Hatteras, North Carolina, and Manteo, North Carolina (Figure 3.4.2.1). While none of these communities exceed thresholds related to social vulnerability (Figure 3.4.3.1) that would make them susceptible to negative social effects due to regulatory changes, and individual fishing businesses may experience negative social effects in short-term such as cancelled trips or lower trip satisfaction if anglers are unable to retain fish caught during a closure.

#### 4.2.4. Administrative Effects

Compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, none of the Action 2 alternatives under consideration to modify greater amberjack allocations and sector ACLs would result in significant impacts on the administrative environment. Similar to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Alternatives 2, 3 (Preferred)**, **4**, and **5** are not likely to result in increased staff time, require increased agency funding, or alter the manner in which law enforcement efforts are presently carried out. Other administrative burdens that may result from **Alternatives 2** through **5** would take the form of development and dissemination of outreach and education materials for fishery participants and law enforcement. Overall, because sector allocations and ACLs are currently in place for greater amberjack, the impacts on the administrative environment are expected to be neutral. Additionally, the burden on law enforcement would not change under any of the considered alternatives because quota closures implemented in-season are currently enforced.

### 4.3. Action 3. Reduce the Commercial Minimum Size Limit for Greater Amberjack

For detailed methodology of the analysis to evaluate the effects of reducing the current commercial minimum size limit of greater amberjack, refer to Appendix F.

#### 4.3.1. Biological Effects

##### **Expected effects to greater amberjack**

Reducing the current 36-inch fork length (FL) commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack as proposed under **Preferred Alternative 2, Alternative 3, Alternative 4,** and **Alternative 5** is expected to result in increased commercial landings compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, as a larger amount of smaller fish that would be discarded could be kept (Figure 4.3.1.1).<sup>16</sup>

As harvest rates could be expected to increase under a reduced minimum size limit, the commercial fishing season may be shortened under current AMs if the quota is met in-season. However, because commercial harvest is still constrained by the ACL, and

AMs are in place to prevent the ACL from being exceeded, any increase in harvest should not result in adverse biological consequences to the stock. Therefore, the biological effects to the stock due to increased harvest under **Preferred Alternative 2, Alternative 3, and Alternatives 4 and 5** would be neutral relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

##### **Alternatives**

1 (No Action). The current commercial minimum size limit is 36 inches FL.

**2. Decrease the commercial minimum size limit to 34 inches FL.**

3. Decrease the commercial minimum size limit to 32 inches FL.

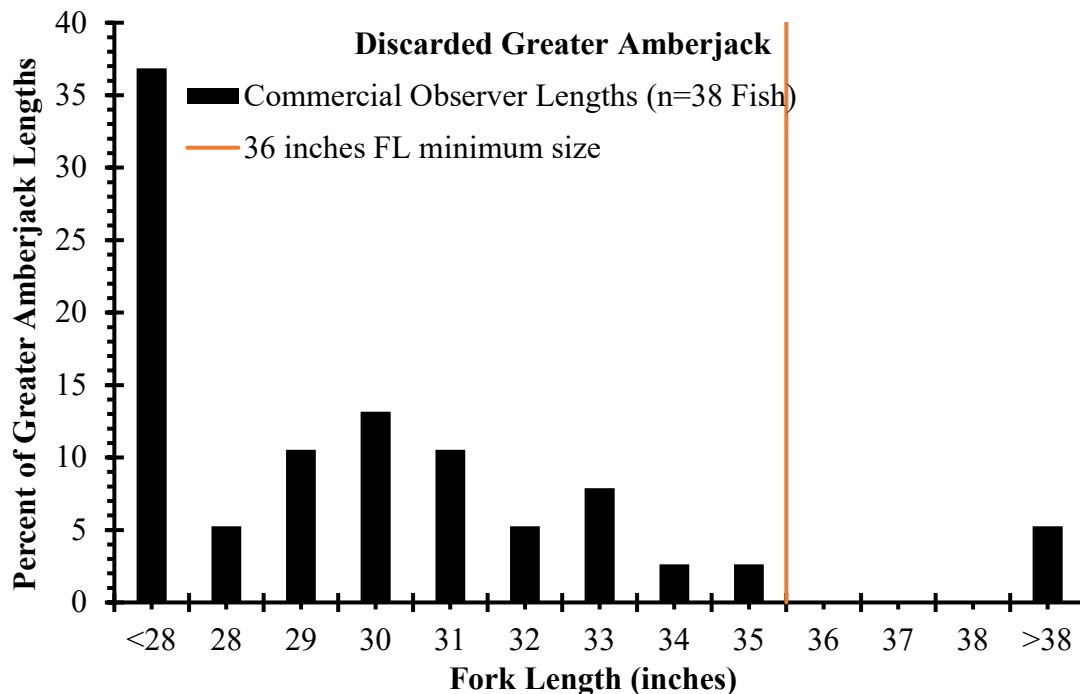
4. Decrease the commercial minimum size limit to 30 inches FL.

5. Decrease the commercial minimum size limit to 28 inches FL.

\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.

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<sup>16</sup> Harvest datasets were not useful for this analysis since it is illegal to harvest greater amberjack below the minimum size limit, and this results in dockside commercial harvest surveys collecting very little length data for greater amberjack below the minimum size limit. However, observer data include length information for released fish, and observer data were provided from the SEFSC. The commercial observer program started in the South Atlantic region in 2008 with a voluntary program where captains could volunteer to have an observer on their boat. This changed in 2014 where observer coverage was made mandatory. However, the South Atlantic observer data program only sampled a small proportion of the commercial fleet and greater amberjack data are only available for the years of 2018, 2019, and 2020.



**Table 4.3.1.1.** Length distribution of greater amberjack landed from released fish in the commercial sector from 2018 through 2020. The data were plotted in 1-inch length increments, and the length data are in fork length. The data came from the commercial observer program which had limited greater amberjack observer data. The orange line represents the current commercial minimum size limit of 36 inches FL.

#### **Expected Effects to Bycatch and Discards**

A low release mortality rate of 20% (sensitivity range: 10-30%) was estimated for greater amberjack in the South Atlantic (SEDAR 15 2008 and SEDAR 59 2020). The regulation ‘not legal size’ was the most common reason selected for released greater amberjack (Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 27, SAMFC 2019b). Reducing the current 36-inch FL commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack under **Preferred Alternative 2, Alternative 3, Alternative 4, and Alternative 5** would likely reduce discards during the months that harvest is allowed, compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Increased commercial landings, up to the commercial ACL, are also expected as more fish that would be discarded under the current size limit could be kept. Greater amberjack have a low estimated release mortality, so a high percentage of fish released under the current size limit likely survive. Overall fishing mortality and negative biological effects are expected to increase with smaller minimum size limits, because more small fish that would otherwise be released with a high probability of survival would now be legal for harvest. However, given the small percentage of fishing removals projected to occur as dead discards (about 1%; see Appendix K) and landings limits both on an annual and biannual scale, biological effects on the population from reducing the commercial minimum size limit, likely reducing bycatch and increasing the rate of landings, are expected to be small and limited.

### 4.3.2. Economic Effects

Reducing the commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack under **Preferred Alternative 2, Alternative 3, Alternative 4, and Alternative 5** would increase harvest since smaller fish that were previously discarded due to the current 36-inch FL minimum size limit (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**) could be landed. This would provide positive direct economic effects for the commercial sector provided there are no long-term negative effects for the stock from the increased harvest. In general, the lower the size limit, the more that overall harvest would increase in the short-term, thereby increasing economic benefits incurred from such harvest. These economic benefits may accrue in the form of increased net revenue for commercial vessels, thus increasing PS for the commercial sector. Under this notion, the highest economic benefits would occur under **Alternative 5**, followed by **Alternative 4, Alternative 3, Preferred Alternative 2, and Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Data are not available that would provide quantitative analysis of this action (Appendix F). Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is also not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above.

### 4.3.3. Social Effects

Some social effects of minimum size limits would be associated with the biological effects on greater amberjack (see Section 4.3.1). Additionally, there is a trade-off with reducing the minimum size limit in that an increase in the number of fish that can be kept may improve commercial trip profitability but may also increase the harvest rate and trigger AMs if landings reach the ACL sooner in the fishing year.

Available discard data show that just under 40% of discarded greater amberjack are less than 28-inches FL, with the vast majority being under the current size limit (Figure 4.3.1.1). As such, reducing the minimum size limit (**Preferred Alternative 2, Alternative 3, Alternative 4, Alternative 5**) may result in positive social effects for greater amberjack fishermen by increasing the number of fish that can be retained, which may increase trip profitability. Positive effects of decreasing the minimum size limit would result from reduced discards. This would be expected to reduce waste for this portion of the snapper grouper fishery and may improve perceptions of management performance.

Currently, the minimum size limit for the recreational sector is lower than that for the commercial sector. Creating consistency in regulations between the two sectors (**Alternative 5**) would simplify regulations and may improve enforcement and compliance.

### 4.3.4. Administrative Effects

Reducing the commercial minimum size limit is expected to allow more fish to be kept, which could increase the chances that an in-season closure could occur which would require in-season notices. Administrative impacts on the agency associated with the action alternatives would be incurred by rulemaking, outreach, education, and enforcement. Therefore, although the



administrative burden would be negative under each alternative considered if the quota is met and an in-season closure is required, an increase in administrative effects would be expected to be neutral under **Preferred Alternatives 2** through **5** compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

## 4.4. Action 4. Increase the Seasonal Commercial Trip Limits for Greater Amberjack

For detailed methodology of the analysis to evaluate the effects of increasing the current commercial trip limits of greater amberjack, refer to Appendix F. The greater amberjack trip limits may currently be harvested and possessed in either pounds ww or pounds gw. The conversion factor between the two measurements is 1.04. Hence, the discrepancy in specifying the proposed trip limits in pounds ww is not statistically significant and does not change the outcome of analyses presented in this amendment.

### 4.4.1. Biological Effects

#### Expected effects to greater amberjack

The biological effects of **Alternatives 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** and their sub-alternatives would not differ from **Alternative 1 (No Action)** in terms of the risk of overfishing as overall harvest would be limited to the commercial ACL or split-season quotas, and AMs would be triggered if the ACL were reached.

#### Season 1 landings and predicted closures (Alternative 2 and Sub-Alternatives 2a-2c)

During the first commercial season (Season 1 is from March through August), the majority of commercial trips harvest less than the current trip limit of 1,200 lbs, with very few trips landing more than 1,400 lbs (Figure 4.4.1.1). **Alternative 2** and its sub-alternatives consider increasing the commercial trip limit for Season 1 from the current 1,200 lbs up to 2,500 lbs (**Sub-Alternative 2c**). As harvest rates could be expected to increase under an increased trip limit, the commercial fishing season may be shortened under current AMs if the quota is met in-season. Predicted future landings and potential in-season closure dates for **Alternative 2** and its sub-alternatives are shown in Table 4.4.1.1. The closure dates were generated from the three different landings scenarios<sup>17</sup> of 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data, 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data, and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data. With a single exception, closures are only predicted under the maximum landings (scenario 3). Under scenario 3 the future commercial landings are assumed to reflect the maximum landings for a single year in the past 5 years. The predicted in-season closure dates from scenario 3 span from as early as June 14 under **Sub-Alternative 2c** to no in-season closure needed. The Season 1 quota could be reached as early as June 20 under **Sub-Alternative 2b**, June 27 under **Sub-Alternative 2a**, and June 14 under **Sub-Alternative 2c**.

#### **Alternatives**

1 (No Action). The current Season 1 commercial trip limit for greater amberjack is 1,200 lbs, and the Season 2 commercial trip limit is 1,000 lbs.

2. Increase the Season 1 trip limit for greater amberjack to:

Sub-Alt 2a. 1,500 lbs.

Sub-Alt 2b 2,000 lbs.

Sub-Alt 2c 2,500 lbs.

3. Increase the Season 2 trip limit for greater amberjack to:

**Sub-Alt 3a. 1,200 lbs.**

Sub-Alt 3b: 1,500 lbs.

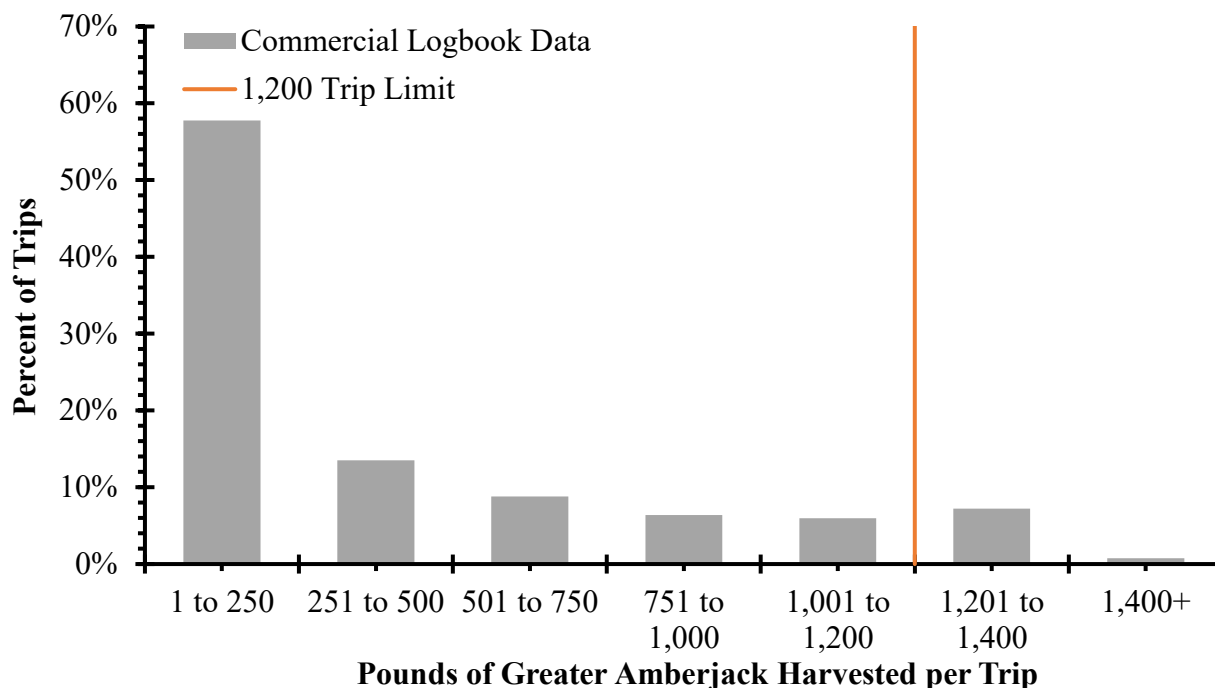
Sub-Alt 3c 2,000 lbs.

Sub-Alt 3d 2,500 lbs.

\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.

<sup>17</sup> These values can be found in Tables F.10 and F.17 in Appendix F.

The most conservative projected landings are under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** in which Season 1 would retain the lowest trip limit at 1,200 lbs, resulting in a possible in-season closure by July 1. However, because commercial harvest is still constrained by the ACL, and AMs are in place to prevent the ACL from being exceeded, any increase in harvest should not result in adverse biological consequences to the stock. Therefore, the biological effects to the stock from **Alternative 2** and its sub-alternatives would be neutral relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.



**Figure 4.4.1.1.** Distribution of the South Atlantic greater amberjack commercially harvested per trip (lbs ww) for Season 1. Season 1 is from March 1 through August 31. Data are from the commercial logbook dataset from 2016 to 2020 (n = 7,720 trips), and the weight unit is pounds ww. The orange line represents the current commercial trip limit of 1,200 lbs ww.

**Table 4.4.1.1.** The projected closure dates for the greater amberjack commercial sector Season 1 from increasing the trip limit.

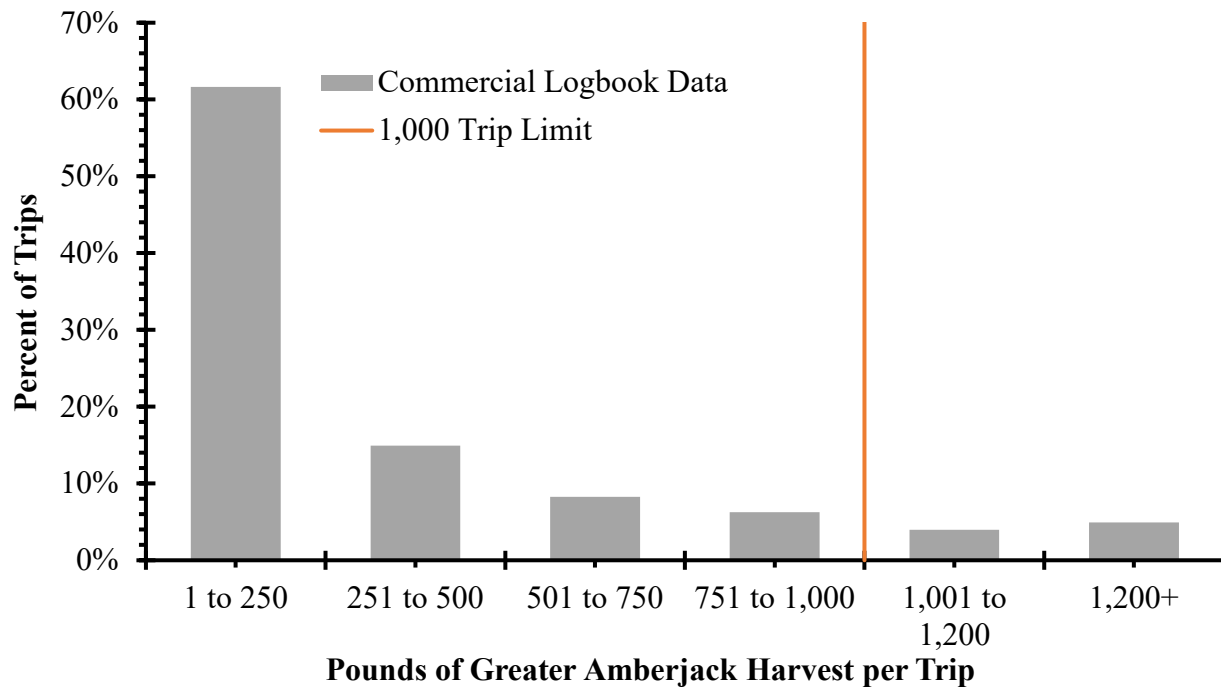
Action 4 Alternative	Fishing Year	Commercial ACL Season 1 (lbs gw)	Scenario 1 Closure Date	Scenario 2 Closure Date	Scenario 3 Closure Date
1 (No Action) (1,200 lbs)	2022/2023	884,423	None	None	None
1 (No Action) (1,200 lbs)	2024/2025	569,019	None	None	12-Jul
1 (No Action) (1,200 lbs)	2026/2027	538,933	None	None	1-Jul
2a (1,500 lbs)	2022/2023	884,423	None	None	None
2a (1,500 lbs)	2024/2025	569,019	None	None	5-Jul
2a (1,500 lbs)	2026/2027	538,933	None	None	27-Jun
2b (2,000 lbs)	2022/2023	884,423	None	None	None
2b (2,000 lbs)	2024/2025	569,019	None	None	27-Jun
2b (2,000 lbs)	2026/2027	538,933	None	None	20-Jun
2c (2,500 lbs)	2022/2023	884,423	None	None	None
2c (2,500 lbs)	2024/2025	569,019	None	None	21-Jun
2c (2,500 lbs)	2026/2027	538,933	None	30-Aug	14-Jun

\*Commercial ACLs (lbs ww) for greater amberjack are based on the revised total ACL from **Preferred Alternative 2** in Action 1, and **Alternative 3** in Action 2.

\*\*Data years used for Scenarios 1-3 can be found in Section F.2 in Appendix F.

**Season 2 landings and predicted closures (Alternative 3 and Sub-Alternatives 3a-3d)**

During Season 2 (September through the end of February), the majority of commercial trips harvest less than the current trip limit of 1,000 lbs, with less than 10% trips landing more than 1,000 to 1,200 lbs (Figure 4.4.1.2). **Preferred Alternative 3** and its sub-alternatives consider increasing the commercial trip limit for Season 2 from the current 1,000 lbs up to 2,500 lbs (**Sub-Alternative 3d**). As harvest rates could be expected to increase under an increased trip limit, the commercial fishing season may be shortened under current AMs if the quota is met in-season. A prediction of future landings and potential in-season closure dates are shown in Table 4.4.1.2. For all **Alternative 3** sub-alternatives, the predicted in-season closure dates span from as early as January 10 to no in-season closure needed. The Season 2 quota could be reached as early as January 10 under **Sub-Alternative 3d**, February 4 under **Sub-Alternative 3c**, February 11 under **Sub-Alternative 3b**, and no in-season closures expected under **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a**. The most conservative projected landings are under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** in which Season 2 would retain the lowest trip limit at 1,000 lbs, resulting in no expected closures. However, because commercial harvest is still constrained by the ACL, and AMs are in place to prevent the ACL from being exceeded, any increase in harvest should not result in adverse biological consequences to the stock. Therefore, the biological effects to the stock from **Preferred Alternatives 3** and its **sub-alternatives** would be neutral relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.



**Figure 4.4.1.2.** Distribution of the South Atlantic greater amberjack commercially harvested per trip (lbs ww) for Season 2. Season 2 is from September 1 through February 28. Data are from the commercial logbook dataset from 2015 to 2020 (n = 3,075 trips), and the weight unit is lbs ww. The orange line represents the current commercial trip limit of 1,000 lbs ww.

**Table 4.4.1.2.** The projected closure dates for the greater amberjack commercial sector Season 2 from increasing the trip limit.

Alternative	Year	Commercial ACL Season 2	Scenario 1 Closure Date	Scenario 2 Closure Date
1 (No Action)	2022/2023	684,965	None	None
1 (No Action)	2024/2025	440,692	None	None
1 (No Action)	2026/2027	417,391	None	None
2	2022/2023	502,689	None	None
2	2024/2025	323,420	None	13-Feb
2	2026/2027	306,319	None	1-Feb
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>589,615</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>379,346</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2026/2027</b>	<b>359,288</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
4	2022/2023	758,077	None	None
4	2024/2025	487,731	None	None
4	2026/2027	461,942	None	None
5	2022/2023	842,308	None	None
5	2024/2025	541,923	None	None
5	2026/2027	513,269	None	None

\*Commercial ACLs (lbs ww) for greater amberjack are based on the revised total ACL from Preferred **Alternative 2** in Action 1, and **Preferred Alternative 3** in Action 2.

\*\*Data years used for Scenarios 1-2 can be found in Section F.2 in Appendix F.

#### **Expected Effects to Bycatch and Discards**

Commercial discards of greater amberjack from 2014 through 2016 were low relative to landings (Appendix F) and compared to discards of other snapper grouper species, indicating that fishers are likely better able to selectively harvest greater amberjack. In addition to the low release mortality rate of 20% estimated for greater amberjack in the South Atlantic (SEDAR 15 2008 and SEDAR 59 2020), increasing the Season 1 and/or Season 2 commercial trip limit under **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** and their sub-alternatives could result in fewer discards of greater amberjack compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** because more fish can be kept, which is beneficial to the greater amberjack stock.

#### **4.4.2. Economic Effects**

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for greater amberjack that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that must stop retaining greater amberjack because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least amount of direct negative economic effects.

Increasing trip limits would allow for increased revenue on trips that land greater amberjack, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue. For comparison purposes, the increase in the trip limit by sub-alternative compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** is provided in Table 4.4.2.1.

**Table 4.4.2.1.** Marginal Increase in commercial trip limits for the sub-alternatives in Action 4 compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

<b>Alternative</b>	<b>Difference from Alternative 1 (No Action)(lbs gw)</b>
Sub-Alternative 2a	300
Sub-Alternative 2b	800
Sub-Alternative 2c	1,300
<b>Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a</b>	<b>200</b>
Sub-Alternative 3b	500
Sub-Alternative 3c	1,000
Sub-Alternative 3d	1,500

The quantitative economic effects of this action are largely captured in the economic effects described in Action 1 and Action 2 for the commercial sector, since increased trip limits would allow for the commercial sector to better utilize the increase in the sector ACL. Thus, the quantitative effects in Table 4.4.2.2 are not necessarily additive to the effects shown in Action 1 and 2, but rather show the estimated economic effects of Action 4 with all other conditions remaining the same. The estimated change in landings is based on 5-year average commercial landings of 749,344 lbs gw (Table 4.2.1.3) paired with Tables F.2 and F.4 in the commercial analyses of Appendix F that show the expected percent increase in commercial landings under the various trip limit scenarios. The estimated change in landings is paired with the appropriate price (\$1.79/lb gw; Tables 3.3.1.1 and 3.3.1.2) along with a scaling factor of 35% of gross revenue (Section 3.3.1.2; NMFS SEFSC, pers. comm. 2022) to estimate PS for the commercial sector. **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a** is estimated to increase net economic benefits by \$28,806 (2020 \$).

**Table 4.4.2.2.** Comparison of the estimated change in commercial landings of greater amberjack and associated producer surplus (PS) for Action 4 (2020 \$).

Alternative	Estimated change in landings (lbs gw)	Estimated change in PS (2020 \$)
Alternative 1 (No Action)	0	\$0
Sub-Alternative 2a	27,276	\$17,088
Sub-Alternative 2b	71,697	\$44,918
Sub-Alternative 2c	116,118	\$72,748
<b>Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a</b>	<b>45,980</b>	<b>\$28,806</b>
Sub-Alternative 3b	95,856	\$60,054
Sub-Alternative 3c	171,450	\$107,413
Sub-Alternative 3d	247,823	\$155,261

Higher trip limits could also likely result in the commercial AMs being triggered sooner, thus creating an earlier commercial harvest closure for the species. Conversely, lower trip limits, such as **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, would allow for some level of commercial greater amberjack harvest over a longer period but contribute less to net operating revenue on trips where greater amberjack are landed. Lower trip limits may also restrict the ability of the sector to fully harvest its sector ACL, which in this case would be increasing through Actions 1 and 2 in this amendment. In terms of potential net economic benefits **Sub-Alternative 3d**, followed by **Sub-Alternative 3c**, **Sub-Alternative 2c**, **Sub-Alternative 3b**, **Sub-Alternative 2b**, **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a**, **Sub-Alternative 2a**, and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Estimates of net revenues or economic profit are not available for snapper grouper dealers. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the effect of changes in purchases on their profits. However, in general, dealers are indirectly affected whenever gross revenues to commercial fishing vessels are expected to change (e.g., increases in gross revenues are expected to indirectly benefit dealers and vice versa). Thus, the ranking of economic benefits to dealers would be the same as stated above.

#### 4.4.3. Social Effects

**Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** propose higher commercial trip limits during season one and season two, respectively, for greater amberjack and would be expected to directly benefit fishermen operating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) by allowing for larger landings and thereby increasing trip efficiency when compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons, which is likely to vary by individual fishing business. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. The social benefits from the proposed increase in commercial trip limit are likely to be highest in communities that already land a high proportion of greater amberjack, such as Port Orange, Cocoa, and Mayport, Florida; Little River, South Carolina; and Supply, North Carolina (Figure 3.4.1.1).



Projections indicate that the commercial ACLs for greater amberjack (Action 2) would not be reached under any of the alternatives proposed in Action 2, and the status quo trip limit in **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, apart from a possible closure during the 2026/2027 season (Tables 4.2.1.4 and 4.2.1.5). If the higher commercial trip limit for greater amberjack increases overall landings, it is possible the commercial ACL could be reached, triggering AMs and resulting in an early closure and associated negative social effects resulting from decreased fishing opportunities. However, none of the trip limits proposed in **Sub-Alternative 2a**, **Sub-Alternative 2b**, or **Sub-Alternative 2c**, are anticipated to result in a closure, except when using the maximum landings over the last five years (Scenario 3) (Table 4.4.1.1). Similarly, for season two, trip limits proposed under **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a**, **Sub-Alternative 3b**, **Sub-Alternative 3c**, or **Sub-Alternative 3d** are not anticipated to result in a closure, except when using the maximum landings over the last five years (Scenario 3) (Table 4.4.1.2).

#### 4.4.4. Administrative Effects

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** would not change the administrative environment from its current condition. Currently, there is a commercial quota monitoring system in place for greater amberjack that is utilized to monitor landings. If the quota for each season is reached prior to the end of the fishing year, NMFS prepares and issues closure notices and enforcement personnel monitors the closures. Since the 2015/2016 fishing year, commercial harvest has experienced an in-season closure three consecutive years due to the quota being reached. Under increased trip limits with **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** and their sub-alternatives, the quota may be met faster than under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and an in-season closure notice would be required. The likelihood that a quota closure would occur is higher with higher commercial trip limits. However, with an in-season quota closure, there is also potential that the landings would not reach 100% of the ACL. In that circumstance, guidance from the Council to NMFS has recommended that harvest for a snapper grouper species should reopen if landings are less than 95% of the ACL, and the projected number of days to meet the ACL is two or more days.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, NMFS would have to monitor the landings and prepare a reopen notice. Since the yearly quota is currently allocated into two fishing seasons under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, there is potential that NMFS may have to prepare four in-season notices (i.e., closure notice and reopening notice if it is subsequently determined that a portion of the ACL was not harvested for each of two seasons). Additionally, enforcement personnel would be burdened with potential harvest closures, which they would have to monitor. Outreach materials for each in-season action would take the form of fishery bulletins and updates to NMFS Southeast Regional Office's web site. Similarly, **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** and their sub-alternatives could potentially require four in-season notices. Therefore, although the administrative burden would be negative under each alternative considered if the quota is met and an in-season closure is required, an increase in administrative effects would be expected to be neutral under **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** and their sub-alternatives compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

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<sup>18</sup>See the Council's March 6-10, 2017, Summary of Approved Council Motions.

## 4.5. Action 5. Revise the April Spawning Closure for Greater Amberjack

For detailed methodology of the analysis to evaluate the effects of revising the April spawning closure greater amberjack, refer to Appendix F.

### 4.5.1. Biological Effects

#### **Expected effects to greater amberjack**

**Alternative 1 (No Action)** offers some protection to spawning fish during April by currently limiting possession to only one fish per person per day or per trip and prohibiting the sale or purchase, which may have positive biological effects on the stock. **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** consider revising the April spawning closure which takes place during the first commercial season (Season 1).

**Preferred Alternative 2** would also result in additional, and positive, indirect biological effects if greater harvest restrictions are applied during the peak spawning month of April. Although regulatory discarding may slightly increase since a bag limit is not allowed and fish would need to be discarded rather than kept, greater amberjack have a low release mortality rate of 20% and the effects to the stock should be minimal. **Alternative 3** would have direct negative effects on the stock by removing the spawning closure during a peak spawning month for this species. Therefore, while both **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2** would offer some protection to the stock, overall, **Preferred Alternative 2** would indirectly provide the greatest biological benefits compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** in that it encompasses stricter management measures for both sectors during spawning season. Whereas removing the spawning closure, as proposed under **Alternative 3**, could have negative biological effects relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2** since harvest would be allowed during the peak spawning month.

Under **Preferred Alternative 2**, harvest would be prohibited during April for both sectors, which could be expected to result in reduced landings and positive effects on the stock compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Since the commercial sector has, in effect, been closed in the month of April for more than twenty years (SAFMC 1991) predicted April landings were obtained by taking the average of the landings from the two closest months to April (March and May) from 2016 to 2020 (Figure 4.5.1.1 and Appendix F). A prediction of future landings and potential in-season closure dates are shown in Table 4.5.1.1. Under **Alternative 3**, if the April spawning closure were removed altogether and regular commercial harvest were allowed under

#### **Alternatives**

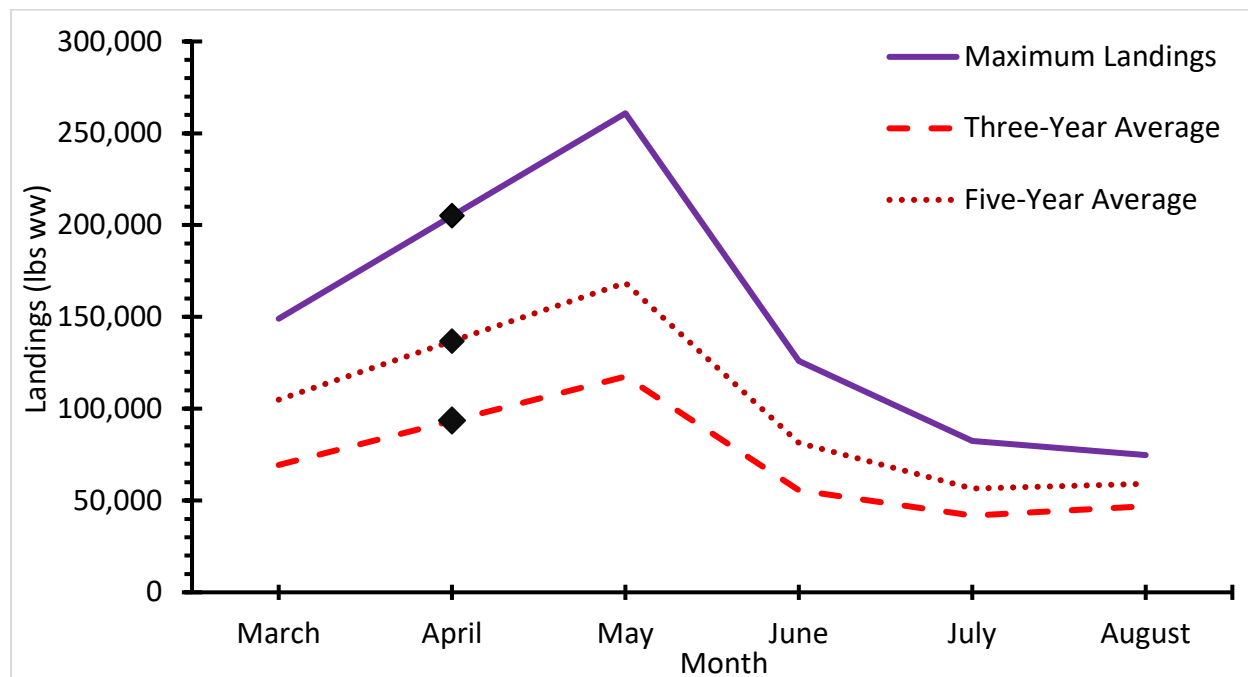
1. (No Action). During April each year, no person may sell or purchase a greater amberjack harvested from the South Atlantic EEZ and the harvest and possession limit is one per person per day or one per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive.

2. **Specify during April each year, no person may sell or purchase, harvest or possess a greater amberjack from the South Atlantic EEZ and the harvest and possession limit is zero.**

3. Remove the April spawning closure for greater amberjack. Allow purchase, harvest, and possession of greater amberjack from the South Atlantic EEZ according to regulations specified for the rest of the year.

\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.

the current Season 1 trip limit of 1,200 lbs (Section 4.4), the predicted in-season closure dates span from as early as May 22 to no in-season closure needed.



**Figure 4.5.1.1.** South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings in pounds ww by month for Season 1 from 2016 to 2020, three-year average, and five-year average with predicted April landings. Predicted April landings are represented with a black diamond.

**Table 4.5.1.1.** The projected closure dates for the greater amberjack commercial sector Season 1 if the commercial sector was open to commercial harvest in April.

Year	Commercial ACL Season 1 (lbs gw)	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
2022/2023	884,423	None	None	26-Aug
2024/2025	569,019	None	11-Aug	26-May
2026/2027	538,933	None	26-Jul	22-May

\*Commercial ACLs (lbs gw) for greater amberjack are based on the revised total ACL from Preferred Alternative 2 in Action 1, and Preferred Alternative 3 in Action 2.

#### **Expected Effects to Bycatch and Discards**

Commercial discards of greater amberjack from 2014 through 2016 were low relative to landings (Appendix F) and compared to discards of other snapper grouper species, indicating that fishermen are likely better able to selectively harvest greater amberjack. Greater amberjack have a low release mortality rate of 20% estimated in the South Atlantic (SEDAR 15 2008 and SEDAR 59 2020). In addition, removing the April spawning season closure under **Alternative 3** compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2**, some of the fish that would result in dead discards could be kept, which could result in beneficial impacts to the greater amberjack stock.

#### 4.5.2. Economic Effects

In general, providing increased protection for spawning greater amberjack would be expected to result in improvements in stock abundance and biomass and create indirect, long-term, positive economic effects presumably through the availability of increased numbers of fish in the future. However, there can be some direct, short-term negative economic effects as fewer fish could be available to harvest until the biomass of harvestable fish increases due to the decrease in the amount of time the species are open to harvest.

Implementing a spawning season closure and harvest prohibition for the recreational sector would be expected to reduce landings of greater amberjack in the short-term and, consequently, CS as well under **Preferred Alternative 2** in comparison to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Removing the April spawning season closure to allow for commercial quantities of greater amberjack to be harvested and sold under **Alternative 3** would be expected to increase commercial landings and net operating revenue, as measured in PS. From a short-term economic benefits perspective, **Alternative 3** would provide the highest economic benefits followed by **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2**.

The quantitative economic effects of this action may be at least partially captured in the economic effects described in Action 1 and Action 2 for the commercial and recreational sectors, since allowing harvest in April would allow for the commercial sector to better utilize the increase in the sector ACL and prohibiting harvest for the recreational sector would contribute to the reduction in landings that would need to occur. Thus, the quantitative effects in Table 4.5.2.1 are not necessarily additive to the effects shown in Action 1 and 2, but rather show the estimated economic effects of Action 5, all other conditions remaining the same. To estimate the change in net economic benefits for the recreational sector (**Preferred Alternative 2**), the estimated change in landings is based on 5-year average recreational landings from the predicted landings for April in Table F.7 of the recreational analysis in Appendix F that shows the expected decrease in recreational landings from Action 5 under various landings scenarios. A CS estimate of \$13.11 for a “generic snapper” kept on a recreational trip is used (2020 \$; Section 3.3) and applied to the landings reduction estimate. This marginal value estimate is used as a proxy value since one is not currently available specifically for greater amberjack. A weight of 19.65 lbs ww per greater amberjack is used to convert recreational lbs ww to numbers of fish (Personal Communication, NFMS SEFSC SAFE Dataset, March 17, 2021). To convert pounds ww to pounds gw, a conversion factor of 1.04 is used. For the commercial sector (**Alternative 3**), the estimated change in landings are based on 5-year average commercial landings from the predicted landings for April in Table F.14 of the commercial analysis in Appendix F that shows the expected increase commercial landings under various landings scenarios. The estimated change in landings is paired with the appropriate price (\$1.79/lb gw; Tables 3.3.1.1 and 3.3.1.2) along with a scaling factor of 35% of gross revenue (Section 3.3.1.2; NMFS SEFSC, pers. comm. 2022) to estimate PS for the commercial sector. **Preferred Alternative 2** is estimated to decrease net economic benefits by \$69,981 (2020 \$).

**Table 4.5.2.1.** Comparison of the estimated change in landings and economic benefits associated with Action 5.

Alternative	Estimated change in landings (lbs gw)	Estimated change in net economic benefits (2020 \$)
Alternative 1 (No Action)	0	\$0
<b>Preferred Alternative 2</b>	<b>-100,858</b>	<b>-\$69,981</b>
Alternative 3	136,748	\$85,673

### 4.5.3. Social Effects

The potential effects on coastal communities of modifying the greater amberjack spawning season closure sale and harvest limits would be a trade-off between the biological benefits of reduced harvest during the spawning season and resulting long term social benefits from a healthier stock and the social benefits of year-round access to fishing opportunities for greater amberjack improving trip profitability and fish available on the market. In general, more restrictive management during spawning seasons may be biologically beneficial to the stock and contribute to sustainable fishing opportunities in the future. Communities that are likely to experience these short-term versus long-term benefits are discussed in Section 3.4 and are primarily located along the Florida coast.

Allowing commercial harvest during the spawning season may also increase the harvest rate and trigger AMs if landings reach the ACL sooner in the fishing year. Under **Alternative 3**, the only alternative that would allow commercial harvest of amberjack during the month of April (season one) may not experience any closure or may close as early as May 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Assuming that closing harvest during spawning ensures sustainable harvest of greater amberjack, as envisioned, long-term benefits to fishing communities in the form of consistent access to the resource would be highest under **Preferred Alternative 2**, followed by **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, and **Alternative 3**. Alternatively, short-term negative effects on fishing communities due to restrictions in fishing opportunities would be lowest under **Alternative 3** followed by **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, and **Preferred Alternative 2**.

### 4.5.4. Administrative Effects

Administrative effects would not vary greatly between **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2**. Currently, both the commercial and recreational sectors for greater amberjack may only harvest and possess the recreational bag limit during April each year, which is already being monitored for enforcement and compliance. Bag limit regulations under **Alternative 3** would vary between the sectors during the month of April; therefore, beneficial administrative effects would be expected from **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2**, when compared with **Alternative 3**. Alternatives that specify consistent regulations in federal waters throughout the Council's jurisdiction would contribute to a more favorable administrative environment by helping the public avoid confusion with regulations and aid law enforcement. Administrative impacts on the agency associated with the action alternatives would be incurred by rulemaking, outreach, education and enforcement.

## 4.6. Action 6. Remove Recreational Annual Catch Targets from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan

### 4.6.1. Biological Effects

#### Expected Effects to Snapper Grouper Species

Management controls, such as AMs, are put in place to prevent ACLs from being exceeded, and to correct or mitigate overages of the ACL if they occur. As explained in Sections 1.4 and 2.6, recreational annual catch targets (ACT) can also be used to prevent ACLs from being exceeded if management measures are tied to those target levels. In managing the snapper grouper fishery, however, the Council is considering removing the recreational ACTs from the Snapper Grouper FMP in this amendment because the Council has not used the ACT to manage the snapper grouper fishery and therefore, these targets are not used in regulations. However, the Council has accounted for any management uncertainty when setting the ACL. Since the recreational ACT is meant to be set lower than the ACL (and would therefore be reached sooner), using a recreational ACT rather than the ACL as a trigger for AMs in the recreational sector may reduce the incidence of ACL overages and the need to compensate for them. This more conservative approach would likely help to ensure that recreational data uncertainties do not cause or contribute to excessive ACL overages for vulnerable species. Therefore, retaining recreational ACTs under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** could have beneficial effects to snapper grouper species but only if a management measure, such as an AM or a bag limit reduction, was triggered when landings reach the target. Because the Council has not employed recreational ACTs in its management strategy for the snapper grouper fishery, the biological effects of **Preferred Alternative 2** would be neutral compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

#### **Alternatives**

1 (No Action). Retain current recreational ACTs for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP.

**2. Remove current recreational ACTs for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP.**

\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.

#### Expected Effects to Bycatch and Discards

This action would not be expected to affect discards and/or bycatch, since the only consequence of reaching the ACT would be to continue to monitor the landings, which MRIP does continually. For more information on bycatch and discards, see Appendix G (BPA).

### 4.6.2. Economic Effects

The purpose of ACTs is to help prevent a sector from exceeding its ACL due to management uncertainty. Exceeding an ACL would have direct negative economic effects on all sectors potentially due to a reduced stock size. If a species was closed too early for a sector based on the ACT, there would be direct negative economic effects as well because the sector was prohibited from harvesting fish. The ACTs covered by this action only apply to the recreational sector and are not currently tied to any management measure, such as AMs; therefore, there are no expected economic effects associated with their removal. From a comparison of economic benefits perspective, **Preferred Alternative 2** would be neutral compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.



### 4.6.3. Social Effects

If tied to management action such as AMs, ACTs would result in negative social impacts in the short term because these would be linked to reduced economic benefits and reduced fishing opportunities. Reductions in harvest thresholds may have potential negative social effects, which can range from changes in fishing behavior to other social disruptions that go beyond impacts to the fishery and may extend to the community or region. However, there would be long-term social benefits for fishermen, communities, and the public by preventing overfishing through an ACT for a stock that has potential to exceed the ACL. Those benefits would include more fishing opportunities and increased income, which should benefit the coastal economy and contribute to community resilience for those involved in these fisheries.

However, as stated in Section 4.6.1, recreational ACTs are currently not an active part of the management strategy for snapper grouper species and AMs are in place to ensure that ACLs are not exceeded. Therefore, the social effects of **Preferred Alternative 2** would be neutral compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

### 4.6.4. Administrative Effects

Under this action, it is important to note that recreational data collection can be more administratively burdensome due to time delays and lengthy reviews. Specifying a recreational ACT alone would not increase the administrative burden over the status quo, other than adding an additional layer of precautionary monitoring to the system of AMs. In-season monitoring needed for tracking how much of the recreational ACT has been harvested throughout a particular fishing season can potentially result in a need for additional cost and personnel resources if a monitoring mechanism is not already in place. However, because the recreational ACT alternatives as they are presented here do not trigger any corrective or preventative action, no additional in-season monitoring is required regardless of where the recreational ACT level is set. Therefore, administrative burden is expected to be reduced in a small amount under **Preferred Alternative 2**, compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

## Chapter 5. Council's Choice for the Preferred Alternative

### 5.1. Action 1. Revise the Greater Amberjack Acceptable Biological Catch, Total Annual Catch Limit, and Annual Optimum Yield

#### 5.1.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) discussed Amendment 49 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP; Amendment 49) via webinar on April 21-23, 2021, and in-person on April 18-20, 2022. The AP also received an update on development of the amendment during their October 19-21, 2021, webinar meeting and had no additional comments at that time.

#### **Alternatives**

1. (No Action). The total ACL for greater amberjack is equal to the current ABC.
- 2. Revise the ABC. The total ACL for greater amberjack is equal to the SSC recommended ABC.**
3. Revise the OFL and ABC. The total ACL for greater amberjack is equal to 90% of the SSC recommended ABC.
4. Revise the OFL and ABC. The total ACL for greater amberjack is equal to 80% of the SSC recommended ABC.

\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.

In April 2021, the AP provided the following comments and recommendations on the total annual catch limit:

- For Action 1 (Acceptable Biological Catch [ABC], Total Annual Catch Limit [ACL] and Optimum Yield [OY]), rather than **Preferred Alternative 2** that results in a large, short-term increase to the ACL, the AP recommended a more conservative approach that benefits both sectors and consideration of a consistent ACL. The AP also recommended the Council consider the potential economic implications of large, sudden changes in the ACL.
- The AP also discussed a consistent/constant ACL that is the same throughout the projection period and does not result in a large, immediate upswing. Use a number approximately in the middle, so that the "surplus" is not completely used up in a short timeframe.
- Consider the potential of increased pressure on greater amberjack as other harvest for other species become more restricted.
- Consider economic implications of a large increase to the recreational ACL possibly resulting in an influx of new entrants into the fishery, followed by reductions to the ACL over time and limiting use of the resource to the recent entrants.
- There is not a huge public demand for greater amberjack, so no need for very large increase to the commercial ACL (i.e., the supply). This could negatively impact the price, which currently is pretty good.
- Greater amberjack are a redirected target for the Florida charter component when they are not able to target dolphin.



- The AP recommended the Council consider an additional Action 1 alternative of a consistent 2.8 million pound total ACL.

The Council added and later removed an alternative for Action 1 that would set harvest at 2,818,000 pounds for the first three years of new management before setting the ACL equal to the ABC (see Appendix E).

In April 2022, the AP provided the following comments and recommendations:

- In general, there were concerns over the health of the greater amberjack stock. It was noted that:
  - Greater amberjack may be in similar situation to gag or snowy grouper in that they appear to be declining in abundance; may be better to be more conservative now (North Carolina).
  - Not seeing as many greater amberjack in recent years (North Carolina; Cape Canaveral and Stuart, Florida).
  - The fishery for greater amberjack has not been catching ACL as it currently stands.
- The AP recommended the Council set the total ACL for all years equal to the 2026/2027+ ABC (2,669,000 lbs whole weight).

Recommendations from the April 2022 AP meeting were developed with consideration of multiple actions considered in Amendment 49. These recommendations were developed through compromise and working together between sectors and regions for the most equitable fishery possible and retaining sustainability in the amberjack fishery. The AP expressed general consensus that they do not feel the stock is as healthy as suggested by the assessment.

### **5.1.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations**

The Law Enforcement AP convened in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 10, 2022. The AP received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations.

### **5.1.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations**

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) convened in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 26-28, 2022. The SSC received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations.

### **5.1.4. Public Comments and Recommendations**

Scoping hearings were held via webinar on April 14 and 15, 2021. Four written comments were submitted online. Nine members of the public attended scoping hearings, though not all attendees provided verbal comments. During scoping:

- All comments received supported **Alternative 2**.

Public comments also were solicited from May 27, 2022, through June 17, 2022, in conjunction with the Council’s June 2022 meeting. Seven written comments were submitted online during this comment period. Public comments were also accepted online throughout the amendment’s development and during scheduled meetings (Council, APs, SSC). Additionally, a public hearing was held during the Council’s regularly scheduled public comment session at the June 2022 meeting. One verbal comment on greater amberjack was received at the public hearing.

Comments on the ABC, total ACL, and OY are summarized below:

- One comment supported **Alternative 2**.
  - This comment was included in a letter submitted by an organization.
- One comment supported maintaining status quo.

### 5.1.5. Council Rationale

The current greater amberjack total ACL is set equal to the ABC. The overfishing limit (OFL) and ABC recommended by the SSC in this amendment would update that value to be based on the best scientific information available from the latest stock assessment. Therefore, the Council expects that setting the ABC, total ACL, and annual OY at the recommended ABC levels prevents overfishing. The SSC’s recommended ABC accounts for the change in recreational catch estimation from the Marine Recreational Fishing Statistical Survey (MRFSS) methodology to the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES). Setting the total ACL and annual OY equal to the recommended ABCs decreases the likelihood of accountability measures (AM) being triggered, thus reducing negative impacts to fishing communities. Additionally, with the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) 59 (2020) stock assessment indicating the stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing, the Council determined that there is no indication that a buffer between ABC and total ACL is needed to maintain the health of the stock at this time.

The Council chose to maintain the relationship of the total ACL and annual OY equaling the ABC and chose to update the ABC to the values most recently recommended by the SSC by selecting **Preferred Alternative 2**. The Council determined that **Preferred Alternative 2** would best meet the purpose of adjusting catch levels to prevent overfishing of the greater amberjack stock using the best scientific information available while also maximizing social and economic benefits from increased harvest opportunities while the stock’s biomass is above the biomass that produces maximum sustainable yield ( $B_{MSY}$ ). The Council decided that **Preferred Alternative 2** best meets the goals and objectives of the Snapper Grouper FMP, as amended, while complying with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) and other applicable law.

### 5.1.6. How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery?

This action addresses actions under Strategy 1.1: *Evaluate existing data collection, monitoring, and reporting programs affecting fisheries managed by the Council*, as data collection programs are evaluated through SEDAR stock assessments. Notably, SEDAR 59 (2020) incorporated the most up to date methodology for estimating recreational catch: MRIP-FES.

## 5.2. Action 2. Revise the Greater Amberjack Sector Allocations and Sector Annual Catch Limits

### 5.2.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

The Snapper Grouper AP discussed Amendment 49 via webinar on April 21-23, 2021, and in-person on April 18-20, 2022. In April 2021, the AP recommended the Council consider a preferred alternative of Action 2-**Alternative 1** (maintain current sector allocations).

The AP received an update on the amendment during their October 19-21, 2021, webinar meeting and had no additional comments at that time.

In April 2022, the AP maintained their recommendation for the Council to select **Alternative 1** under Action 2, which would maintain current sector allocations.

Recommendations from the April 2022 AP meeting were developed with consideration of multiple actions considered in Amendment 49. These recommendations were developed through compromise and working together between sectors and regions for the most equitable fishery possible and retaining sustainability in the greater amberjack portion of the snapper grouper fishery. The AP expressed general consensus that they do not feel the stock is as healthy as suggested by the assessment.

### 5.2.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

The Law Enforcement AP convened in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 10, 2022. The AP received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations.

### 5.2.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

The SSC convened in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 26-28, 2022. The SSC received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations.

#### **Alternatives**

1 (No Action). Retain the current recreational and commercial sector allocations as 59.34% and 40.66%, respectively, of the revised total ACL for greater amberjack.

2. Apply the current allocation formula to the total ACL using the FES-calibrated recreational landings and commercial landings used in SEDAR 59 (2020). This would result in a recreational allocation of 70.16% and a commercial allocation of 29.84%.

**3. Allocate 65.00% of the total ACL to the recreational sector and 35.00% of the ACL to the commercial sector.**

4. Allocate 55.00% of the total ACL to the recreational sector and 45.00% of the total ACL to the commercial sector.

5. Allocate 50.00% of the total ACL to the recreational sector and 50.00% of the total ACL to the commercial sector.

\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.

#### 5.2.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

Scoping hearings were held via webinar on April 14 and 15, 2021. Four written comments were submitted online. Nine members of the public attended scoping hearings, though not all attendees provided verbal comments. During scoping:

- Two comments supported **Alternative 3**.
- One comment supported **Alternative 1**.
- One comment supported **Alternative 1**, with secondary preference for **Alternative 3**.

Public comments also were solicited from May 27, 2022, through June 17, 2022, in conjunction with the Council's June 2022 meeting. Seven written comments were submitted online during this comment period. Public comments were also accepted online throughout the amendment's development and during scheduled meetings (Council, APs, SSC). Additionally, a public hearing was held during the Council's regularly scheduled public comment session at the June 2022 meeting. One verbal comment on greater amberjack was received at the public hearing.

Comments on sector allocations are summarized below:

- Most comments supported **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.
  - Including one letter from an organization.
  - Some comments stated the current allocation is fair and should remain in place.

#### 5.2.5. Council Rationale

Current sector allocations were developed in the Comprehensive ACL Amendment through an equation that used historic catch data, which included recreational catch estimates from MRFSS. SEDAR 59 and the catch levels recommended by the SSC are based on data that include recreational catch estimates from the MRIP-FES, which estimates recreational catch to be greater than was estimated through MRFSS. Greater recreational catch estimates would have a greater probability of exceeding the sector ACL under the current allocation percentages. Therefore, the Council decided that the recreational allocation percentage should increase to account for the increase in recreational catch estimates under the new estimation method.

Several recently completed assessments for other snapper grouper species have indicated poor stock status and necessitated reduced harvest of commercially significant snapper grouper stocks, making greater amberjack potentially more important to the commercial sector in future years. Therefore, the Council decided that while the recreational percentage allocation needs to be increased due to the change in recreational catch estimates, it does not need to be changed to the extent of applying the current allocation formula used in Action 2-**Alternative 2** to landings that include the MRIP-FES estimates. The Council chose a less extreme shift in allocation toward the recreational sector and decided this shift in allocation could more fairly meet the needs of both sectors.

**Preferred Alternative 3** increases the allocation percentage for the recreational sector, which the Council acknowledged lessens the probability of that sector exceeding its ACL under the new recreational survey method. **Preferred Alternative 3** is also an approximate midpoint between

the current allocation percentages and those resulting from the same allocation equation as applied when using MRIP-FES catch estimates for the recreational sector. **Preferred Alternative 3**, as combined with the total ACL from Action 1-**Preferred Alternative 2**, also is not expected to result in closures due to meeting the ACL for either sector, based on recent average harvest levels. The Council determined that their choice of allocation is fair and equitable to all fishermen and does not give any individual, corporation or any entity an excessive share of the amberjack resource. The Council decided the allocation was a wise use of the resource and is reasonably calculated to promote conservation and achieve optimum yield. The Council decided this allocation is a rational use of the amberjack resource that will optimize social and economic benefits for all sectors and components, and would provide fishing opportunities throughout the fishing year and throughout the South Atlantic region. The Council determined that **Preferred Alternative 3** would maintain the greater amberjack resource to ensure it remains available to a diverse group of users.

The Council determined that **Preferred Alternative 3** would best meet the purpose of revising sector allocations using the best scientific information available while minimizing adverse social and economic effects. **Preferred Alternative 3** best meets the goals and objectives of the Snapper Grouper FMP, as amended, while complying with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable law.

#### **5.2.6. How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery?**

*This action addresses actions under Strategies 6.1: Support management approaches that consider the mechanics of designing allocation strategies and 6.2: Identify alternative methods for determining allocation shifts and managing allocations within the fishery under Objective 6 – Develop management measures that support optimal sector allocations for the Snapper Grouper Fishery.*

## 5.3. Action 3. Reduce the Commercial Minimum Size Limit for Greater Amberjack

### 5.3.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

The Snapper Grouper AP discussed Amendment 49 via webinar on April 21-23, 2021, and in-person on April 18-20, 2022. In April 2021, the AP provided the following comments and recommendations:

- The AP discussed decreasing the commercial minimum size limit. A fish near 36 inches fork length (FL) is quite large and means fish near this limit are more likely to need to be gaffed to be measured. This could impact survivorship of the fish after release.
- Florida's state commercial minimum size limit is 36 inches FL, which was part of the reasoning for setting the federal minimum size limit at that length, as opposed to other options considered.
- Smaller greater amberjack are preferred due to fewer potential for worms, less potential for ciguatera toxin, easier/quicker to board for increased trip efficiency and to reduce damage to fish that are potentially discarded due to the size limit.
- Increasing harvest of preferred, smaller fish may be biologically beneficial, as larger fish would not be harvested as often and would be left to spawn in the future.
- Consideration should be given to reproductive capabilities in potentially changing the size limit(s).
- Consider decreasing the commercial minimum size limit (34 inches FL, 32 inches FL, or 30 inches FL).
- Consider equal commercial and recreational size limit of 28 inches FL, 30 inches FL, or 32 inches FL.

The AP received an update on the amendment during their October 19-21, 2021, webinar meeting and had no additional comments at that time.

In April 2022, the AP recommended the Council change the commercial minimum size limit to 34 inches FL (Action 3-**Preferred Alternative 2**).

Recommendations from the April 2022 AP meeting were developed with consideration of multiple actions considered in Amendment 49. These recommendations were developed through compromise and working together between sectors and regions for the most equitable fishery possible and retaining sustainability in the greater amberjack portion of the snapper grouper

#### **Alternatives**

1 (No Action). The current commercial minimum size limit is 36 inches FL.

**2. Decrease the commercial minimum size limit to 34 inches FL.**

3. Decrease the commercial minimum size limit to 32 inches FL.

4. Decrease the commercial minimum size limit to 30 inches FL.

5. Decrease the commercial minimum size limit to 28 inches FL.

\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.

fishery. The AP expressed general consensus that they do not feel the stock is as healthy as suggested by the assessment.

### 5.3.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

The Law Enforcement AP convened in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 10, 2022. The AP received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations.

### 5.3.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

The SSC convened in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 26-28, 2022. The SSC received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations.

### 5.3.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

Scoping hearings were held via webinar on April 14 and 15, 2021. Four written comments were submitted online. Nine members of the public attended scoping hearings, though not all attendees provided verbal comments. During scoping, an action considering reduction of the commercial minimum size limit had not yet been included in the amendment. The following comments related to the commercial minimum size limit were received during scoping:

- Two comments supported a reduction or removal of the 36-inch commercial minimum size limit.
- One comment stated that larger greater amberjack are more susceptible to shark depredation due to larger size and longer fighting times. Smaller greater amberjack are brought onboard more quickly, but are more likely to be beneath the minimum size limit and subject to shark predation upon release.
- One comment stated that smaller amberjack are more commercially marketable due to fewer parasites and lower risk of ciguatera exposure.

Public comments also were solicited from May 27, 2022, through June 17, 2022, in conjunction with the Council's June 2022 meeting. Seven written comments were submitted online during this comment period. Public comments were also accepted online throughout the amendment's development and during scheduled meetings (Council, APs, SSC). Additionally, a public hearing was held during the Council's regularly scheduled public comment session at the June 2022 meeting. One verbal comment on greater amberjack was received at the public hearing.

Comments on the commercial minimum size limit are summarized below:

- Action 3 received the most comments of any single action in Amendment 49.
- Most comments supported a reduction of the commercial minimum size limit.
  - 2 of these comments supported making the commercial minimum size limit the same as the current recreational minimum size limit, 28 inches FL (**Alternative 5**).
    - 1 of these comments was included in a letter submitted by an organization.
  - 2 of these comments supported a 32-inch FL commercial minimum size limit (**Preferred Alternative 3**).



- 1 of these comments supported a commercial minimum size limit between 30 and 33 inches FL.
- 1 of these comments supported equal commercial and recreational minimum size limits at 32 inches FL (**Preferred Alternative 3** for the commercial sector), stating this would be fairer and easier to enforce than different size limits for each sector.
- Comments to reduce the commercial minimum size limit were supported by rationale that included reducing shark depredation, fewer parasites in smaller greater amberjack, and increased numbers of large spawning females.
- One comment supported maintaining the current commercial minimum size limit of 36 inches FL (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**) and stated that the recreational minimum size limit should be increased to equal that of the commercial. This comment stated that equal size limits for both sectors would reduce confusion about regulation differences between sectors and regions (referring to the Gulf of Mexico minimum size limit of 36 inches FL).
- One comment supported aligning the commercial and recreational size limits for greater amberjack to reduce confusion and regulatory discards.

### 5.3.5. Council Rationale

The Council added consideration of reducing the commercial minimum size limit after hearing a desire for consideration of this change from public comments during scoping and the initial Snapper Grouper AP input. The Council selected **Preferred Alternative 2** to decrease the commercial minimum size limit from 36 inches FL to 34 inches FL for similar reasons as those provided through public and Snapper Grouper AP comments: reduced regulatory discards, reduced risk of shark depredation, and greater commercial desirability for smaller fish. Reducing risk of shark depredation and increasing access to commercially desirable smaller greater amberjack align with National Standard 5 (Efficiency) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Reducing regulatory discards aligns with National Standard 9 (Bycatch) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The Council discussed comments from the Snapper Grouper AP about concern over the future status of the stock based on recent, on-the-water observations and the Snapper Grouper AP's recommendation against reducing the commercial size limit to the smallest sizes considered.

The Council also discussed the uncertainty of catch projections used to develop the ABC when fishing conditions, such as size limits, are changed. Catch projections assume that management measures and fishing conditions remain unchanged. If conditions change significantly and do not match assumptions of the projection model, there can be uncertainty about whether projections can adequately predict future harvest rates.

Based on their discussions of the Snapper Grouper AP recommendation and catch projections, the Council decided against setting the commercial minimum size limit equal to the recreational 28-inch FL minimum size limit. The Council also decided that a reduction to 34 inches FL likely would not jeopardize the positive stock status, given other management constraints on the commercial sector such as in-season accountability measures, trip limits, and split season quotas.

The Council determined that **Preferred Alternative 2** would best meet the purpose of revising the commercial minimum size limit to increase efficiency of commercial fishing for greater amberjack, while minimizing adverse social and economic effects. **Preferred Alternative 2** best



meets the goals and objectives of the Snapper Grouper FMP, as amended, while complying with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable law.

### **5.3.6. How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery?**

This action addresses actions under Strategy 2.5: *Consider development of alternative management approaches to expand access to the fishery* under Objective 2 – *Develop innovative management measures that allow consistent access to the fishery for all sectors*, Strategy 3.1: *Consider development of management approaches that assist fishery-dependent businesses to operate efficiently and profitably* under Objective 3 – *Ensure that management decisions help maximize social and economic opportunity for all sectors*, and Strategy 4.3: *Reconsider management strategies that use size limits to reduce bycatch* under Objective 4 – *Develop management measures that reduce and mitigate discards*.

## 5.4. Action 4. Increase the Commercial Trip Limits for Greater Amberjack

### 5.4.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

The Snapper Grouper AP discussed Amendment 49 via webinar on April 21-23, 2021, and in-person on April 18-20, 2022. In April 2021, the AP recommended the Council to consider increasing the commercial Season 2 (September-February) trip limit to 1,200 lbs (same as Season 1/March-August).

The AP received an update on the amendment during their October 19-21, 2021, webinar meeting and had no additional comments at that time.

In April 2022, the AP recommended the Council retain the current trip limit for both commercial seasons (Action 5 – **Alternative 1**).

Recommendations from the April 2022 AP meeting were developed with consideration of multiple actions considered in Amendment 49. These recommendations were developed through compromise and working together between sectors and regions for the most equitable fishery possible and retaining sustainability in the greater amberjack portion of the snapper grouper fishery. The AP expressed general consensus that they do not feel the stock is as healthy as suggested by the assessment.

#### **Alternatives**

1 (No Action). The current Season 1 commercial trip limit for greater amberjack is 1,200 lbs, and the Season 2 commercial trip limit is 1,000 lbs.

2. Increase the Season 1 trip limit for greater amberjack to:  
Sub-Alt 2a. 1,500 lbs.  
Sub-Alt 2b 2,000 lbs.  
Sub-Alt 2c 2,500 lbs.

3. Increase the Season 2 trip limit for greater amberjack to:  
**Sub-Alt 3a. 1,200 lbs.**  
Sub-Alt 3b: 1,500 lbs.  
Sub-Alt 3c 2,000 lbs.  
Sub-Alt 3d 2,500 lbs.

\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.

### 5.4.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

The Law Enforcement AP convened in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 10, 2022. The AP received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations.

### 5.4.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

The SSC convened in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 26-28, 2022. The SSC received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations.

### 5.4.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

Scoping hearings were held via webinar on April 14 and 15, 2021. Four written comments were submitted online. Nine members of the public attended scoping hearings, though not all attendees provided verbal comments. During scoping, an action considering increase of the

commercial trip limit had not yet been included in the amendment. No comments specific to commercial trip limits were received during scoping.

Public comments also were solicited from May 27, 2022, through June 17, 2022, in conjunction with the Council's June 2022 meeting. Seven written comments were submitted online during this comment period. Public comments were also accepted online throughout the amendment's development and during scheduled meetings (Council, APs, SSC). Additionally, a public hearing was held during the Council's regularly scheduled public comment session at the June 2022 meeting. One verbal comment on greater amberjack was received at the public hearing.

Comments on the commercial trip limits are summarized below:

- Most comments supported a 1,500-pound trip limit for the entire year (**Alternative 2-Sub-Alternative 2a** and **Preferred Alternative 3-Sub-Alternative 3b**), noting the increased ACL and benefits of increased trip efficiency such as offsetting rising fuel and other fishing-related expenses.
- One comment supported increasing the commercial trip limit to 2,000 lbs (**Alternative 2-Sub-Alternative 2b** for Season 1 and **Preferred Alternative 3-Sub-Alternative 3c** for Season 2).
- One comment supported a 3-fish possession limit for both sectors.

#### 5.4.5. Council Rationale

The Council added consideration of increasing the seasonal commercial trip limits after hearing a desire for consideration of this change from the Snapper Grouper AP during their initial input. The Council selected **Preferred Alternative 3 – Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a** to increase the commercial minimum size limit in Season 2 (August-February) from 1,000 lbs to 1,200 lbs. The Council selected this option to have more regulatory consistency by having the same commercial trip limit throughout the year. Additionally, the trip limit increase aligns with National Standard 5 (Efficiency) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act by potentially reducing the effort (in number of trips) to harvest the Season 2 commercial quota of greater amberjack. The Council acknowledged that the analyses considered in this amendment indicate that under this limit, the commercial sector is not expected to experience a closure in Season 2 (Appendix F).

The Council determined that **Preferred Alternative 3 – Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a** would best meet the purpose of revising the commercial trip limit to increase efficiency of commercial fishing for greater amberjack, while minimizing adverse social and economic effects. **Preferred Alternative 3 – Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a** best meets the goals and objectives of the Snapper Grouper FMP, as amended, while complying with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable law.

#### 5.4.6. How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery?

This action addresses actions under Strategy 3.1: *Consider development of management approaches that assist fishery-dependent businesses to operate efficiently and profitably under*

*Objective 3 – Ensure that management decisions help maximize social and economic opportunity for all sectors.*

## 5.5. Action 5. Revise the April Spawning Closure for Greater Amberjack

### 5.5.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

The Snapper Grouper AP discussed Amendment 49 via webinar on April 21-23, 2021, and in-person on April 18-20, 2022. In April 2021, the AP recommended the Council to consider including the recreational sector in the April closure of greater amberjack, allowing sale of commercially-landed fish during April, or full closure for both sectors (this recommendation was not unanimous).

The AP received an update on the amendment during their October 19-21, 2021, webinar meeting and had no additional comments at that time.

In April 2022, the AP provided the following comment and recommendation:

- It is important to keep greater amberjack open, including April, as a larger species that can be retained on a recreational trip.
- The AP recommended that the Council keep the April spawning closure as it currently is (Action 5 – **Alternative 1 (No Action)**)

Recommendations from the April 2022 AP meeting were developed with consideration of multiple actions considered in Amendment 49. These recommendations were developed through compromise and working together between sectors and regions for the most equitable fishery possible and retaining sustainability in the amberjack fishery. The AP expressed general consensus that they do not feel the stock is as healthy as suggested by the assessment.

### 5.5.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

The Law Enforcement AP convened in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 10, 2022. The AP received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations.

### 5.5.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

The SSC convened in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 26-28, 2022. The SSC received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations.

#### **Alternatives**

1. (No Action). During April each year, no person may sell or purchase a greater amberjack harvested from the South Atlantic EEZ and the harvest and possession limit is one per person per day or one per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive.

**2. Specify during April each year, no person may sell or purchase, harvest or possess a greater amberjack from the South Atlantic EEZ and the harvest and possession limit is zero.**

3. Remove the April spawning closure for greater amberjack. Allow purchase, harvest, and possession of greater amberjack from the South Atlantic EEZ according to regulations specified for the rest of the year.

\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.

#### 5.5.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

Scoping hearings were held via webinar on April 14 and 15, 2021. Four written comments were submitted online. Nine members of the public attended scoping hearings, though not all attendees provided verbal comments. During scoping, an action considering revision of the April spawning closure had not yet been included in the amendment. No comments specific to the April spawning closure were received during scoping.

Public comments also were solicited from May 27, 2022, through June 17, 2022, in conjunction with the Council's June 2022 meeting. Seven written comments were submitted online during this comment period. Public comments were also accepted online throughout the amendment's development and during scheduled meetings (Council, APs, SSC). Additionally, a public hearing was held during the Council's regularly scheduled public comment session at the June 2022 meeting. One verbal comment on greater amberjack was received at the public hearing.

Comments on the April spawning closure received during the public comment period are summarized below:

- Most comments supported removal of the April spawning closure (**Alternative 3**).
- Two comments supported the allowance to sell commercial greater amberjack harvested during the April spawning closure. One of these comments additionally stated that if commercial sale would remain closed, then there should be a complete closure of both sectors in April (**Preferred Alternative 2**).
- One comment supported maintaining the April spawning closure (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**).
  - This comment stated that the closure has helped the sustainability of the greater amberjack stock.

#### 5.5.5. Council Rationale

The Council added consideration of revising the April spawning closure after hearing a desire for consideration of this change from the Snapper Grouper AP during their initial input. The Council selected **Preferred Alternative 2** to revise the April spawning closure to be a complete closure of both sectors during April and determined that this option would be more equitable for both sectors, in accordance with National Standard 4 (Allocation) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Currently during April, the commercial sector is restricted to the recreational possession limit of 1 fish per person per day or one per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive, and is not allowed to sell that fish. During April, the recreational sector has the same possession limits for greater amberjack that they have during the rest of the year. The Council determined that to protect greater amberjack during a portion of their peak spawning period (April-May), both sectors should fully participate in this effort by not allowing either sector to harvest greater amberjack. Increased conservation of greater amberjack during their peak spawning period is in accordance with National Standard 2 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, promoting conservation based on the best scientific information available.

The Council determined that **Preferred Alternative 2** would best meet the purpose of revising the April spawning closure to be more equitable between sectors and use the best scientific

information available, while minimizing adverse social and economic effects. **Preferred Alternative 2** best meets the goals and objectives of the Snapper Grouper FMP, as amended, while complying with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable law.

#### **5.5.6. How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery?**

This action addresses actions under Strategy 2.3: *Support development of management approaches that account for the seasonality of the snapper grouper fishery under Objective 2 – Develop innovative management measures that allow consistent access to the fishery for all sectors*, Strategy 4.1: *Consider management approaches that consider catch limits, seasons, and the biology of the fishery in order to minimize bycatch of snapper grouper species under Objective 4 – Develop management measures that reduce and mitigate discards.*

## 5.6. Action 6. Remove Recreational Annual Catch Targets from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan

### 5.6.1. Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

The Snapper Grouper AP discussed Amendment 49 via webinar on April 21-23, 2021, and in-person on April 18-20, 2022. In April 2021, the AP recommended the Council select Action 6-**Preferred Alternative 2** as preferred, removing recreational annual catch targets (ACT).

#### ***Alternatives***

1 (No Action). Retain current recreational annual catch targets for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP.

**2. Remove current recreational annual catch targets for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP.**

\*See Chapter 2 for detailed language of alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.

The AP received an update on the amendment during their October 19-21, 2021, webinar meeting and had no additional comments at that time.

### 5.6.2. Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Comments and Recommendations

The Law Enforcement AP convened in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 10, 2022. The AP received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations.

### 5.6.3. Scientific and Statistical Committee Comments and Recommendations

The SSC convened in Charleston, South Carolina, on February 26-28, 2022. The SSC received a briefing on the amendment and had no comments or recommendations.

### 5.6.4. Public Comments and Recommendations

Scoping hearings were held via webinar on April 14 and 15, 2021. Four written comments were submitted online. Nine members of the public attended scoping hearings, though not all attendees provided verbal comments. No comments specific to recreational ACTs were received during scoping.

Public comments also were solicited from May 27, 2022, through June 17, 2022, in conjunction with the Council's June 2022 meeting. Seven written comments were submitted online during this comment period. Public comments were also accepted online throughout the amendment's development and during scheduled meetings (Council, APs, SSC). Additionally, a public hearing was held during the Council's regularly scheduled public comment session at the June 2022 meeting. One verbal comment on greater amberjack was received at the public hearing.

Comments on the removal of recreational ACTs are summarized below:

- One comment supported **Preferred Alternative 2**.
  - This comment was included in a letter submitted by an organization.



### 5.6.5. Council Rationale

The Council does not currently use recreational ACTs in its management of snapper grouper species, but the Council must update the ACTs when the Council changes the recreational ACLs under the Snapper Grouper FMP. Removal of recreational ACTs from the Snapper Grouper FMP (**Preferred Alternative 2**) would reduce an administrative burden without affecting the Council's ability under the FMP to manage the snapper grouper fishery. In addition, the Council determined that ACTs were not necessary because the Council accounts for any management uncertainty when setting ACLs. The Council acknowledged that if they desire to use an ACT in the future, the Council could take action to add an ACT back into the FMP on a case-by-case basis through a future amendment.

The Council determined that **Preferred Alternative 2** would best meet the purpose of removing recreational annual catch targets for the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan to increase administrative efficiency, while minimizing adverse biological, social, and economic effects. **Preferred Alternative 2** best meets the goals and objectives of the Snapper Grouper FMP, as amended, while complying with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable law.

### 5.6.6. How is this Action Addressing the Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery?

This action does not directly address management objectives in the Vision Blueprint.

Removal of recreational ACTs from the Snapper Grouper FMP does not impact the Council's ability to effectively manage snapper grouper species.

## Chapter 6. Cumulative Effects

While this environmental assessment (EA) is being prepared using the 2020 Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations, the cumulative effects discussed in this section meet the two-part standard for “reasonable foreseeability” and “reasonably close causal connection” required by the new definition of effects or impacts. Below is the five-step cumulative effects analysis that identifies criteria that must be considered in an EA.

### 6.1. Affected Area

While this environmental assessment (EA) is being prepared using the 2020 Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations, the cumulative effects discussed in this section meet the two-part standard for “reasonable foreseeability” and “reasonably close causal connection” required by the new definition of effects or impacts. Below is the five-step cumulative effects analysis that identifies criteria that must be considered in an EA.

### 6.2. Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions Impacting the Affected Area

Fishery managers implemented the first significant regulations pertaining to snapper grouper species in 1983 through the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 1983). Listed below are other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions occurring in the South Atlantic Region. These actions, when added to the proposed management measures, may result in cumulative effects on the biophysical and socio-economic environment.

#### Past Actions

Amendment 36 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2016a), effective on July 31, 2017, was implemented to establish new spawning special management zones (SMZ) to protect spawning areas for snapper grouper species.

Amendment 37 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2016b), effective on August 24, 2017, modified the hogfish fishery management unit in response to genetically different stocks along the South Atlantic, specified fishing levels for the two stocks, established a rebuilding plan for the Florida Keys/East Florida stock, and established or revised management measures for both hogfish stocks such as size limits, recreational bag limits, and commercial trip limits.

Amendment 43 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2017a), effective on July 26, 2017, specified recreational and commercial annual catch limits (ACL) for red snapper beginning in 2018.

Abbreviated Framework 1 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2017b), effective on August 27, 2018, was implemented to address overfishing of red grouper, and reduced the commercial and recreational ACLs for red grouper in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Abbreviated Framework 2 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2018), effective on May 9, 2019, revised fishing levels for black sea bass and vermilion snapper in response to the latest stock assessments for those species in the South Atlantic.

Amendment 42 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2019a), effective on January 8, 2020, added three newly approved sea turtle release devices and updated the regulations to simplify and clarify the specifications for other release gear requirements. The new devices and updates provide more options to fulfill the requirements for sea turtle release gear on board vessels with commercial and charter/for-hire snapper grouper permits in the South Atlantic. The amendment also streamlines the procedure to implement newly approved devices and handling procedures in the future.

Vision Blueprint Commercial Regulatory Amendment 27 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2019b), effective on February 26, 2020, addresses specific action items in the 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the commercial sector of the snapper grouper fishery. The framework amendment revised commercial regulations for blueline tilefish, snowy grouper, greater amberjack, red porgy, vermilion snapper, almaco jack, Other Jacks Complex (lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish), queen snapper, silk snapper, blackfin snapper, and gray triggerfish. Actions include modifying fishing seasons, trip limits, and minimum size limits.

Regulatory Amendment 30 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2019c), effective on March 9, 2020, revised the rebuilding plan for red grouper, extended the annual spawning closure for that species off North and South Carolina, and established a commercial trip limit.

Regulatory Amendment 26 (Vision Blueprint Regulatory Amendment 26) to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2019d), effective on March 30, 2020, addresses specific action items in the 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the recreational sector of the snapper grouper fishery. The framework amendment modified the 20-fish aggregate bag limits, and minimum size limits for certain species.

Regulatory Amendment 29 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2020a), effective July 15, 2020, modified gear requirements for South Atlantic snapper grouper species. Actions included requirements for descending and venting devices, and modifications to requirements for circle hooks and powerheads.

Abbreviated Framework 3 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2020b), effective August 17, 2020, revised fishing levels for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic region.

Regulatory Amendment 33 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2020c), effective August 17, 2020, removed the requirement that if projections indicate the South Atlantic red snapper season (commercial or recreational) would be three days or fewer, the commercial and/or recreational seasons would not open for that fishing year. If this requirement is removed, red snapper harvest could be open for either recreational or commercial harvest for fewer than four days.

Amendment 39 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC and GMFMC 2017), effective September 1, 2020 (corrected January 4, 2021), modified reporting requirements for federally-permitted charter vessels and headboats in the snapper grouper, dolphin wahoo, and coastal migratory pelagics (mackerel and cobia) fisheries.

Regulatory Amendment 34 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2020e), effective May 3, 2021, created 34 special management zones around artificial reefs off North Carolina and South Carolina.

Amendment 50 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2021), effective January 19, 2023, addresses the results of the latest stock assessment for the red porgy stock in the South Atlantic region. Red porgy are overfished and overfishing is occurring. The Council is required to establish a rebuilding plan by June 2022 and adjust catch levels and management measures to end overfishing.

Comprehensive Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rule Amendment (Amendment 45 to the Snapper Grouper FMP) would modify the ABC control rule, specify an approach for determining the acceptable risk of overfishing and the probability of rebuilding success for overfished stocks, allow phase-in of ABC changes, and allow carry-over of unharvested catch. This amendment was approved by the Council in December 2022.

Amendment 51 to the Snapper Grouper FMP would address the results of the latest stock assessment for the snowy grouper stock in the South Atlantic region. Snowy grouper was determined to be overfished and undergoing overfishing. Amendment 51 was approved by the Council at their December 2022 meeting.

Amendment 52 to the Snapper Grouper FMP would respond to the latest stock assessment for golden tilefish (SEDAR 66). Golden tilefish are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The amendment would also respond to increased recreational effort on blueline tilefish by adjusting the recreational bag limit for blueline tilefish and modifying recreational accountability measures. Amendment 52 was approved by the Council at their December 2022 meeting.

Amendment 53 to the Snapper Grouper FMP would address the results of the latest stock assessment for the gag stock in the South Atlantic region. Gag was determined to be overfished and undergoing overfishing. Amendment 53 was approved by the Council at their March 2023 meeting.

Regulatory Amendment 35 to the Snapper Grouper FMP would address results of the latest stock assessment for the red snapper stock in the southeast, release mortality issues in the snapper grouper fishery, and modifications to red snapper catch levels. Regulatory Amendment 35 was approved by the Council at their March 2023 meeting.

### **Present Actions**

Amendment 44 to the Snapper Grouper FMP would address the results of the latest stock assessment for the yellowtail snapper stock in the southeast.

Amendment 46 to the Snapper Grouper FMP proposes establishment of a private recreational permit to fish for snapper grouper species.

### **Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions**

Regulatory Amendment 31 to the Snapper Grouper FMP could include actions to revise recreational accountability measures to allow more flexibility in managing recreational fisheries. Development of this regulatory amendment is currently on hold.

### **Expected Impacts from Past, Present, and Future Actions**

The intent of Amendment 49 is to modify management of South Atlantic greater amberjack. Actions include revising ACLs, sector allocations, and management measures for the commercial and recreational sectors. Development of Amendment 49 is a response to the most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic greater amberjack (SEDAR 59 2020). The proposed actions in Amendment 49 are not expected to result in significant cumulative adverse biological or socio-economic effects (see Chapter 4). In recent years, participants in the snapper grouper fishery and associated businesses have experienced some negative economic and social impacts due to changes in ACLs and early closures during the fishing years. Factors such as distance to fishing grounds, weather, and water temperature affect availability of species to the recreational fleets in different parts of the Council's jurisdiction. The proposed actions could result in decreased regulatory discards of greater amberjack.

When combined with the impacts of past, present, and future actions affecting the snapper grouper fishery, minor cumulative impacts are likely to accrue. For example, there could be beneficial cumulative effects from the actions in this amendment, in addition to future proposed actions to reduce overfishing of snapper grouper species. Also, there may be cumulative socio-economic effects by promoting access to the fishery, which would improve recreational fishing opportunities and benefits to associated businesses and communities; however, the actions in this amendment are not expected to result in significant cumulative adverse biological or socio-economic effects to the snapper grouper fishery when combined with the impacts of past, present, and future actions (see Chapter 4).

## **6.3. Consideration of Climate Change and Other Non-Fishery Related Issues**

### **Climate Change**

Global climate changes could have significant effects on Atlantic fisheries, though the extent of these effects on the dolphin and wahoo, snapper grouper, and golden crab fisheries is not known at this time. The Environmental Protection Agency's climate change webpage<sup>19</sup>, and NOAA's Office of Science and Technology climate webpage<sup>20</sup>, provides background information on climate change, including indicators which measure or anticipate effects on oceans, weather and climate, ecosystems, health and society, and greenhouse gases. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report (February 28, 2022), U.S. Global Change Research Program (USGCRP)'s Fourth Climate Assessment (2018), and the Ecosystem Status Report for the U.S. South Atlantic Region (Craig et al. 2021) also provide a compilation of scientific information on climate change. Those findings are summarized below.

Ocean acidification, or a decrease in surface ocean pH due to absorption of anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions, affects the chemistry and temperature of the water. Increased thermal stratification alters ocean circulation patterns, and causes a loss of sea ice, sea level rise, increased wave height and frequency, reduced upwelling, and changes in precipitation and wind

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/marine-species-distribution>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/climate>

patterns. Changes in coastal and marine ecosystems can influence organism metabolism and alter ecological processes such as productivity, species interactions, migration, range and distribution, larval and juvenile survival, prey availability, and susceptibility to predators. The “center of biomass,” a geographical representation of each species’ weight distribution, is being used to identify the shifting of fish populations. Warming sea temperature trends in the southeast have been documented, and animals must migrate to cooler waters, if possible, if water temperatures exceed survivable ranges (Needham et al. 2012). Rising water temperatures, ocean acidification, retreating arctic sea ice, sea level rise, high-tide flooding, coastal erosion, higher storm surge, and heavier precipitation events are projected to continue, putting ocean and marine species at risk, decreasing the productivity of certain fisheries, and threatening communities that rely on marine ecosystems for livelihoods and recreation (USGCRP 2018). Harvesting and habitat changes also causes geographic population shifts. Changes in water temperatures may also affect the distribution of native and exotic species, allowing invasive species to establish communities in areas they may not have been able to survive previously. The numerous changes to the marine ecosystem may cause an increased risk of disease in marine biota. An increase in the occurrence and intensity of toxic algae blooms will negatively influence the productivity of keystone animals, such as corals, and critical coastal ecosystems such as wetlands, estuaries, and coral reefs (Kennedy et al. 2002; IPCC 2022). Free et al. (2019) investigated the impacts of historical warming on marine fisheries production and found that climate change is altering habitats for marine fishes and invertebrates, but the net effect of these changes on potential food production is unknown.

Climate driven movement of fish stocks is causing commercial, small-scale, artisanal, and recreational fishing activities to shift poleward and diversify harvests (IPCC 2022). In the South Atlantic Region, species richness and abundance of offshore hard bottom reef fishes have generally declined over time while richness and abundance of demersal fishes in soft sediment habitats on the nearshore shelf have increased. Potential explanations for these patterns include changes in harvest (directed and bycatch), trophic interactions, and environment effects on recruitment (Craig et al. 2021). Climate change may impact dolphin and wahoo, snapper grouper species, and golden crab in the future, but the level of impacts cannot be quantified at this time, nor is the time frame known in which these impacts will occur. Public comments stating the lack of large dolphin in the Florida Keys may have to do with the fish moving out of the area in search of suitable temperature and food availability. Studies have shown that seasonal abundance of dolphin along the east coast of the U.S. and Gulf of Mexico is heavily influenced by sea surface temperature and distance to temperature fronts, chlorophyll-*a* concentration, and *Sargassum* mats (Kleisner 2009; Farrell et al. 2014; Merten et al. 2014).

Patterns from stock assessments in the South Atlantic Region indicate biomass of most assessed species generally show declines from the 1970s through the 1990s with some species showing signs of recovery beginning in the early to mid-2000s. Recruitment of a number of snapper-grouper species has declined since the early 2010s; whereas, recruitment of red snapper and some pelagic species has increased in recent years (Craig et al. 2021). In the near term, it is unlikely that the actions in Amendment 49 would compound or exacerbate the ongoing effects of climate change on greater amberjack.

### **Weather Variables**

Hurricane season is from June 1 to November 30, and accounts for 97% of all tropical activity affecting the Atlantic basin. These storms, although unpredictable in their annual occurrence, can devastate areas when they occur. Although these effects may be temporary, those fishing-related businesses whose profitability is marginal may go out of business if a hurricane strikes.

## **6.4. Overall Impacts Expected from Past, Present, and Future Actions**

The proposed management actions are summarized in Chapter 2 of this document. Detailed discussions of the magnitude and significance of the impacts of the alternatives on the human environment appear in Chapter 4 of this document. None of the impacts of the actions in this amendment, in combination with past, present, and future actions have been determined to be significant. Although several other management actions, in addition to this amendment, are expected to affect snapper grouper species, any additive effects, beneficial and adverse, are not expected to result in a significant level of cumulative impacts.

The proposed actions would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as these are not in the South Atlantic EEZ. These actions are not likely to result in direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to unique areas, such as significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources, park land, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas as the proposed action is not expected to substantially increase fishing effort or the spatial and/or temporal distribution of current fishing effort within the South Atlantic region. The U.S. Monitor, Gray's Reef, and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuaries are within the boundaries of the South Atlantic EEZ. The proposed actions are not likely to cause loss or destruction of these national marine sanctuaries because the actions are not expected to result in appreciable changes to current fishing practices. Additionally, the proposed actions are not likely to change the way in which the snapper grouper fishery is prosecuted; therefore, the actions are not expected to result in adverse impacts on health or human safety beyond the status quo.

## **6.5. Monitoring and Mitigation**

Fishery-independent and fishery-dependent data comprise a significant portion of information used in stock assessments. Fishery-independent data are being collected through the Southeast Fishery Information Survey and the Marine Resources Monitoring Assessment and Prediction Program. The effects of the proposed actions are, and would continue to be, monitored through collection of recreational landings data by all the four states in the South Atlantic Region (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina). The National Marine Fisheries Service would continue to monitor and collect information on snapper grouper species for stock assessments and stock assessment updates, life history studies, economic and social analyses, and other scientific observations. The proposed actions relate to the harvest of indigenous species in the Atlantic, and the activities/regulations being altered do not introduce non-indigenous species, and are not reasonably expected to facilitate the spread of such species through depressing the populations of native species. Additionally, these alternatives do not

propose any activity, such as increased ballast water discharge from foreign vessels, which is associated with the introduction or spread on non-indigenous species.



## Chapter 7. List of Preparers

Name	Agency/Division	Title
Mike Schmidtke	SAFMC	Fishery Scientist/Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT) Lead
Myra Brouwer	SAFMC	Deputy Director for Management
Chip Collier	SAFMC	Deputy Director for Science and Statistics
Christina Wiegand	SAFMC	Social Scientist
John Hadley	SAFMC	Economist
Cameron Rhodes	SAFMC	Outreach Program Manager
Mary Vara	SERO/SF	Fishery Biologist/IPT Lead
Rick DeVictor	SERO/SF	South Atlantic Branch Chief
Scott Sandorf	SERO/SF	Technical Writer and Editor
Jeff Pulver	SERO/SF	Data Analyst
Mike Larkin	SERO/SF	Data Analyst
Christina Package-Ward	SERO/SF	Social Scientist
David Records	SERO/SF	Economist
Pat Opay	SERO/PR	Biologist
David Dale	SERO/HC	Regional Essential Fish Habitat Coordinator
Shepherd Grimes	NOAA GC	General Counsel
Monica Smit-Brunello	NOAA GC	General Counsel
Manny Antonaras	SERO/OLE	Deputy Special Agent in Charge
Matt Walia	SERO/OLE	Enforcement Technician
Kevin Craig	SEFSC	Biologist
David Carter	SEFSC	Economist

SAFMC = South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, SERO = Southeast Regional Office, SF = Sustainable Fisheries Division, PR = Protected Resources Division, HC = Habitat Conservation Division, NOAA=National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, GC = General Counsel, OLE = Office of Law Enforcement, SEFSC = Southeast Fisheries Science Center

## Chapter 8. Agencies and Persons Consulted

### Responsible Agencies

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Administrative Lead)  
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201  
N. Charleston, South Carolina 29405  
843-571-4366/ 866-SAFMC-10 (TEL)  
843-769-4520 (FAX)  
www.safmc.net

NMFS, Southeast Region  
263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701  
727- 824-5301 (TEL)  
727-824-5320 (FAX)

### List of Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Consulted

SAFMC Law Enforcement Advisory Panel  
SAFMC Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel  
SAFMC Scientific and Statistical Committee  
North Carolina Coastal Zone Management Program  
South Carolina Coastal Zone Management Program  
Georgia Coastal Zone Management Program  
Florida Coastal Zone Management Program  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
South Carolina Department of Natural Resources  
North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries  
North Carolina Sea Grant  
South Carolina Sea Grant  
Georgia Sea Grant  
Florida Sea Grant  
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
    -Washington Office  
    -Office of Ecology and Conservation  
    -Southeast Regional Office  
    -Southeast Fisheries Science Center

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## Appendix A. Other Applicable Law

### A.1. Administrative Procedure Act (APA)

All federal rulemaking is governed under the provisions of the APA (5 U.S.C. Subchapter II), which establishes a “notice and comment” procedure to enable public participation in the rulemaking process. Among other things under the APA, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is required to publish notification of proposed rules in the *Federal Register* and to solicit, consider and respond to public comment on those rules before they are finalized. The APA also establishes a 30-day wait period from the time a final rule is published until it takes effect, with some exceptions. Amendment 49 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 49) complies with the provisions of the APA through the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council’s (Council) extensive use of public meetings, requests for comments and consideration of comments. The proposed rule associated with this plan amendment will have a request for public comments, which complies with the APA, and upon publication of the final rule, unless the rule falls within an APA exception, there will be a 30-day wait period before the regulations are effective.

### A.2. Information Quality Act (IQA)

The IQA (Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law 106-443)) which took effect October 1, 2002, directed the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to issue government-wide guidelines that “provide policy and procedural guidelines to federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information disseminated by federal agencies.” OMB directed each federal agency to issue its own guidelines, establish administrative mechanisms allowing affected persons to seek and obtain correction of information that does not comply with OMB guidelines, and report periodically to OMB on the number and nature of complaints. The NOAA Section 515 Information Quality Guidelines require a series of actions for each new information product subject to the IQA. Amendment 49 uses the best available information and made a broad presentation thereof. The information contained in this document was developed using best available scientific information. Therefore, this document is in compliance with the IQA.

### A.3. Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA)

Section 307(c)(1) of the federal CZMA of 1972 requires that all federal activities that directly affect the coastal zone be consistent with approved state coastal zone management programs to the maximum extent practicable. While it is the goal of the Council to have management measures that complement those of the states, federal and state administrative procedures vary and regulatory changes are unlikely to be fully instituted at the same time. The Council believes the actions in this plan amendment are consistent to the maximum extent practicable with the Coastal Zone Management Plans of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. Pursuant to Section 307 of the CZMA, this determination will be submitted to the responsible state agencies who administer the approved Coastal Zone Management Programs in the States of Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, and North Carolina.

#### **A.4. Executive Order 12612: Federalism**

Executive Order (E.O.) 12612 requires agencies to be guided by the fundamental federalism principles when formulating and implementing policies that have federalism implications. The purpose of the Order is to guarantee the division of governmental responsibilities between the federal government and the states, as intended by the framers of the Constitution. No federalism issues have been identified relative to the actions proposed in this document and associated regulations. Therefore, preparation of a Federalism assessment under E.O. 12612 is not necessary.

#### **A.5. Executive Order 12962: Recreational Fisheries**

E.O. 12962 requires federal agencies, in cooperation with states and tribes, to improve the quantity, function, sustainable productivity, and distribution of U.S. aquatic resources for increased recreational fishing opportunities through a variety of methods. Additionally, the Order establishes a seven-member National Recreational Fisheries Coordination Council responsible for, among other things, ensuring that social and economic values of healthy aquatic systems that support recreational fisheries are considered by federal agencies in the course of their actions, sharing the latest resource information and management technologies, and reducing duplicative and cost-inefficient programs among federal agencies involved in conserving or managing recreational fisheries. The National Recreational Fisheries Coordination Council also is responsible for developing, in cooperation with federal agencies, states and tribes, a Recreational Fishery Resource Conservation Plan to include a five-year agenda. Finally, the Order requires NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a joint agency policy for administering the ESA.

The alternatives considered in this document are consistent with the directives of E.O. 12962.

#### **A.6. Executive Order 13089: Coral Reef Protection**

E.O. 13089, signed by President William Clinton on June 11, 1998, recognizes the ecological, social, and economic values provided by the Nation's coral reefs and ensures that federal agencies are protecting these ecosystems. More specifically, the Order requires federal agencies to identify actions that may harm U.S. coral reef ecosystems, to utilize their program and authorities to protect and enhance the conditions of such ecosystems, and to ensure that their actions do not degrade the condition of the coral reef ecosystem.

The alternatives considered in this document are consistent with the directives of E.O. 13089.

#### **A.7. Executive Order 13158: Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)**

E.O. 13158 was signed on May 26, 2000, to strengthen the protection of U.S. ocean and coastal resources through the use of MPAs. The E.O. defined MPAs as "any area of the marine environment that has been reserved by federal, state, territorial, tribal, or local laws or regulations to provide lasting protection for part or all of the natural and cultural resources therein." It directs federal agencies to work closely with state, local and non-governmental

partners to create a comprehensive network of MPAs “representing diverse U.S. marine ecosystems, and the Nation’s natural and cultural resources.”

The alternatives considered in this document are consistent with the directives of E.O. 13158.

## **A.8. National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA)**

Under the NMSA (also known as Title III of the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act of 1972), as amended, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce is authorized to designate National Marine Sanctuaries to protect distinctive natural and cultural resources whose protection and beneficial use requires comprehensive planning and management. The National Marine Sanctuary Program is administered by the Sanctuaries and Reserves Division of NOAA. The NMSA provides authority for comprehensive and coordinated conservation and management of these marine areas. The National Marine Sanctuary Program currently comprises 13 sanctuaries around the country, including sites in American Samoa and Hawaii. These sites include significant coral reef and kelp forest habitats, and breeding and feeding grounds of whales, sea lions, sharks, and sea turtles. The three sanctuaries in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone are the USS Monitor, Gray’s Reef, and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuaries.

The alternatives considered in this document are not expected to have any adverse impacts on the resources managed by the National Marine Sanctuaries.

## **A.9. Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA)**

The purpose of the PRA is to minimize the burden on the public. The PRA is intended to ensure that the information collected under the proposed action is needed and is collected in an efficient manner (44 U.S.C. 3501 (1)). The authority to manage information collection and record keeping requirements is vested with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). This authority encompasses establishment of guidelines and policies, approval of information collection requests, and reduction of paperwork burdens and duplications. The PRA requires NMFS to obtain approval from the OMB before requesting most types of fishery information from the public. Actions in this document are not expected to affect PRA.

## **A.10. Small Business Act (SBA)**

Enacted in 1953, the SBA requires that agencies assist and protect small-business interests to the extent possible to preserve free competitive enterprise. The objectives of the SBA are to foster business ownership by individuals who are both socially and economically disadvantaged; and to promote the competitive viability of such firms by providing business development assistance including, but not limited to, management and technical assistance, access to capital and other forms of financial assistance, business training, and counseling, and access to sole source and limited competition federal contract opportunities, to help firms achieve competitive viability. Because most businesses associated with fishing are considered small businesses, NMFS, in implementing regulations, must make an assessment of how those regulations will affect small businesses.

## **A.11. Public Law 99-659: Vessel Safety**

Public Law 99-659 amended the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to require that a Fishery Management Plan (FMP) or FMP amendment must consider, and may provide for, temporary adjustments (after consultation with the U.S. Coast Guard and persons utilizing the fishery) regarding access to a fishery for vessels that would be otherwise prevented from participating in the fishery because of safety concerns related to weather or to other ocean conditions. No vessel would be forced to participate in South Atlantic fisheries under adverse weather or ocean conditions as a result of the imposition of management regulations proposed in this amendment. No concerns have been raised by South Atlantic fishermen or by the U.S. Coast Guard that the proposed management measures directly or indirectly pose a hazard to crew or vessel safety under adverse weather or ocean conditions

## Appendix B. Regulatory Impact Review

### B.1. Introduction

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) requires a Regulatory Impact Review (RIR) for all regulatory actions that are of public interest to satisfy the obligations under Executive Order (E.O.) 12866, as amended. In conjunction with the analysis of direct and indirect effects in the “Environmental Consequences” section of this Amendment, the RIR: 1) provides a comprehensive review of the level and incidence of impacts associated with a regulatory action; 2) provides a review of the problems and policy objectives prompting the regulatory proposals and an evaluation of the major alternatives which could be used to solve the problem; and 3) ensures that the regulatory agency systematically and comprehensively considers all available alternatives so that the public welfare can be enhanced in the most efficient and cost effective way. The RIR also serves as the basis for determining whether any proposed regulations are a “significant regulatory action” under certain criteria provided in Executive Order (E.O.) 12866. In addition, the RIR provides some information that may be used in conducting an analysis of the effects on small entities pursuant to the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA). This RIR analyzes the effects this regulatory action would be expected to have on the recreational and commercial sectors of the greater amberjack fishery.

### B.2. Problems and Objectives

The problems and objectives for the proposed actions are presented in Section 1.4 of this amendment and are incorporated herein by reference.

### B.3. Description of Fisheries

A description of the recreational and commercial sectors of the greater amberjack fishery is provided in Section 3.3 of this amendment and is incorporated herein by reference.

### B.4. Effects of Management Measures

#### **Action 1. Revise the greater amberjack acceptable biological catch, total annual catch limit, and annual optimum yield**

A detailed analysis and discussion of the expected economic effects of the proposed action is included in Section 4.1.2. The following discussion summarizes the expected economic effects of the Council preferred alternative relative to the No Action alternative (i.e., the status quo).

In general, total ACLs that allow for more fish to be landed can result in increased positive economic effects if harvest increases without notable long-term effects on the health of a stock. The ACL does not directly impact the fishery for a species unless harvest changes, fishing behavior changes, or the ACL is exceeded, thereby potentially triggering AMs such as harvest closures or other restrictive measures. As such, ACLs that are set above the observed landings in the fishery for a species and do not change harvest or fishing behavior may not have realized economic effects each year. Nevertheless, ACLs set above observed harvest levels do create a

gap between the ACL and typical landings that may be utilized in years of exceptional abundance or accessibility to a species, thus providing the opportunity for increased landings and a reduced likelihood of triggering restrictive AMs. As such, there are potential economic benefits from ACLs that allow for such a gap. The opposite is true for ACLs that constrain harvest or fishing effort within a fishery or reduce the previously described gap between average landings and the ACL.

**Preferred Alternative 2** would provide the highest ACL of the viable alternatives being considered and would not be constraining on harvest until the 2025/2026 fishing year. In the 2023/2024 fishing year, **Preferred Alternative 2** is estimated to result in an increase in potential net economic benefits of \$309,861 for the commercial sector, a decrease in potential net economic benefits of \$71,606 for the recreational sector, and an increase in potential net economic benefits of \$238,255 for both sectors combined (2020 \$). By the 2026/2027 fishing year and beyond, **Preferred Alternative 2** is estimated to result in an increase in potential net economic benefits of \$171,716 for the commercial sector, a decrease in potential net economic benefits of \$294,895 for the recreational sector, and a decrease in potential net economic benefits of \$123,178 for both sectors combined (2020 \$).

## **Action 2. Revise the greater amberjack sector allocations and sector annual catch limits**

A detailed analysis and discussion of the expected economic effects of the proposed action is included in Section 4.2.2. The following discussion summarizes the expected economic effects of the Council preferred alternative relative to the No Action alternative (i.e., the status quo).

In general, sector ACLs that allow for more fish to be landed can result in increased positive economic effects if harvest increases without notable long-term effects on the health of a stock. The sector ACL does not directly impact the fishery for a species unless harvest changes, fishing behavior changes, or the sector ACL is exceeded, thereby potentially triggering AMs such as harvest closures or other restrictive measures. As such, sector ACLs that are set above observed landings in a fishery for a species and do not change harvest or fishing behavior may not have realized economic effects each year. Nevertheless, sector ACLs set above observed average harvest levels do create a gap between the sector ACL and typical landings that may be utilized in years of exceptional abundance or accessibility of a species, thus providing the opportunity for increased landings and a reduced likelihood of triggering restrictive AMs. As such there are potential economic benefits from sector ACLs that allow for such a gap.

### **Commercial Sector**

**Preferred Alternative 3** would result in a comparatively lower commercial sector allocation and sector ACL (35.00% of the total ACL). Although **Preferred Alternative 3** is not estimated to be constraining based on the average annual landings over the last five years of available data and is higher than the current sector ACL of 769,388 lbs gw, it is assumed that the commercial sector could fully harvest its ACL, if conditions allowed, and there would be fewer potential landings of greater amberjack under **Preferred Alternative 3** relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. These relatively reduced landings would be expected to comparatively decrease total potential producer surplus (PS) for the commercial sector. When compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Alternative 3** would result in an estimated reduction in PS of \$110,233 in fishing year 2023/24 and a reduction in PS of \$91,002 by fishing year 2026/27 (2020 \$).

### **Recreational Sector**

**Preferred Alternative 3** would result in a comparatively higher recreational sector allocation and sector ACL (65.00% of the total ACL). Most of the recreational ACLs in **Action 2** are estimated to be constraining based on the average annual landings over the last five years of available data (Table 4.2.2.3), and it is assumed that the recreational sector could fully harvest its ACL if conditions allowed. There would be higher potential landings of greater amberjack under **Alternative 2** and **Preferred Alternative 3** relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. These relatively increased landings would be expected to comparatively increase total consumer surplus (CS) for the recreational sector. **Preferred Alternative 3** with an estimated increase in CS of \$122,085 in fishing year 2023/24 and an increase in CS of \$100,787 by fishing year 2026/27 (2020 \$).

### **Total**

In comparison to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, **Preferred Alternative 3** would be estimated to increase net economic benefits by \$11,852 in fishing year 2023/24 and increase net economic benefits by \$9,785 in fishing year 2026/27 (2020 \$).

### **Action 3. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack**

A detailed analysis and discussion of the expected economic effects of the proposed action is included in Section 4.3.2. The following discussion summarizes the expected economic effects of the Council preferred alternative relative to the No Action alternative (i.e., the status quo).

Reducing the commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack to 34 inches fork length under **Preferred Alternative 2** would increase harvest since smaller fish that were previously discarded due to the current 36-inch minimum size limit (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**) could be landed. This would provide positive direct economic effects for the commercial sector provided there are no long-term negative effects for the stock from the increased harvest. In general, the lower the size limit, the more that overall harvest would increase in the short-term, thereby increasing economic benefits incurred from such harvest. These economic benefits may accrue in the form of increased net revenue for commercial vessels, thus increasing PS for the commercial sector.

### **Action 4. Increase the seasonal commercial trip limits for greater amberjack**

A detailed analysis and discussion of the expected economic effects of the proposed action is included in Section 4.4.2. The following discussion summarizes the expected economic effects of the Council preferred alternative relative to the No Action alternative (i.e., the status quo).

Generally, commercial trip limits are not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Given the ACL for greater amberjack that restricts maximum harvest to sustainable levels, the alternative with the fewest number of trips that have to stop retaining greater amberjack because the trip limit has been reached would result in the least amount of direct negative economic effects.

Increasing trip limits (**Preferred Alternative 3**) would allow for increased revenue on trips that land greater amberjack, thereby resulting in an increase in economic benefits to commercial vessels participating in the fishery through increased revenue. Higher trip limits would allow for higher levels of revenue in fewer trips, thus potentially increasing net economic benefits through increased net revenue.

The quantitative economic effects of this action are largely captured in the economic effects described in Action 1 and Action 2 for the commercial sector, since increased trip limits would allow for the commercial sector to better utilize the increase in the sector ACL. Thus, the quantitative effects are not necessarily additive to the effects shown in Action 1 and 2, but rather show the estimated economic effects of **Action 4** with all other conditions remaining the same. **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a** is estimated to increase net economic benefits by \$28,806 (2020 \$).

#### **Action 5. Revise the April spawning closure for greater amberjack**

A detailed analysis and discussion of the expected economic effects of the proposed action is included in Section 4.5. The following discussion summarizes the expected economic effects of the Council preferred alternative relative to the No Action alternative (i.e., the status quo).

In general, providing increased protection for spawning greater amberjack would be expected to result in improvements in stock abundance and biomass and create indirect, long-term, positive economic effects presumably through the availability of increased numbers of fish in the future. However, there can be some direct, short-term negative economic effects as fewer fish could be available to harvest until the biomass of harvestable fish increases due to the decrease in the amount of time the species is open to harvest.

Implementing a spawning season closure and harvest prohibition for the recreational sector would be expected to reduce landings of greater amberjack in the short-term and, consequently, CS as well under **Preferred Alternative 2** in comparison to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. The quantitative economic effects of this action may be at least partially captured in the economic effects described in Action 1 and Action 2 for recreational sector, since prohibiting harvest for the recreational sector would contribute to the reduction in landings that would need to occur. Thus, the quantitative effects are not necessarily additive to the effects shown in Action 1 and 2, but rather show the estimated economic effects of **Action 5** all other conditions remaining the same. **Preferred Alternative 2** is estimated to decrease net economic benefits by \$69,981 (2020 \$).

#### **Action 6. Remove recreational annual catch targets from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan**

A detailed analysis and discussion of the expected economic effects of the proposed action is included in Section 4.6.2. The following discussion summarizes the expected economic effects of the Council preferred alternative relative to the No Action alternative (i.e., the status quo).

The purpose of ACTs is to help prevent a sector from exceeding its ACL due to management uncertainty. Exceeding an ACL would have direct negative economic effects on all sectors potentially due to a reduced stock size. If a species were closed too early for a sector based on



the ACT, there would be direct negative economic effects as well because the sector was prohibited from harvesting fish. The ACTs covered by this action only apply to the recreational sector and are not currently tied to any AMs or other management measures; therefore, there are no expected economic effects associated with their removal. From a comparison of economic benefits perspective, **Preferred Alternative 2** would be neutral compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

## B.5. Public Costs of Regulations

The preparation, implementation, enforcement, and monitoring of this or any federal action involves the expenditure of public and private resources, which can be expressed as costs associated with the regulations. Costs to the private sector are discussed in the effects of management measures. Estimated public costs associated with this action include:

South Atlantic Council costs of document preparation, meetings, public hearings, and information dissemination	\$64,329
NMFS administrative costs of document preparation, meetings, and review	\$51,472
TOTAL	\$115,802

The estimate provided above does not include any law enforcement costs. Any enforcement duties associated with this action would be expected to be covered under routine enforcement costs rather than an expenditure of new funds. The South Atlantic Council and NMFS administrative costs directly attributable to this amendment and the rulemaking process would be incurred prior to the effective date of the final rule implementing this amendment.

## B.6. Net Benefits of Regulatory Action

It is important to specify the time period being considered when evaluating benefits and costs. According to OMB's FAQs regarding Circular A-4,<sup>21</sup> "When choosing the appropriate time horizon for estimating costs and benefits, agencies should consider how long the regulation being analyzed is likely to have resulting effects. The time horizon begins when the regulatory action is implemented and ends when those effects are expected to cease. Ideally, analysis should include all future costs and benefits. Here as elsewhere, however, a 'rule of reason' is appropriate, and the agency should consider for how long it can reasonably predict the future and limit its analysis to this time period. Thus, if a regulation has no predetermined sunset provision, the agency will need to choose the endpoint of its analysis on the basis of a judgment about the foreseeable future."

For current purposes, the reasonably "foreseeable future" is considered to be the next 5 years. There are two primary reasons for considering the next 5 years the appropriate time period for evaluating the benefits and costs of this regulatory action rather than a longer (or shorter) time period. First, this regulatory action does not include a predetermined sunset provision. Second,

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<sup>21</sup> See p. 4 at [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/OMB/circulars/a004/a-4\\_FAQ.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/OMB/circulars/a004/a-4_FAQ.pdf)

based on the history of management in the snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic, regulations such as those considered in this amendment are often revisited within 5 years or so.

The analyses of the changes in economic benefits indicates an increase of \$50,479 in net economic benefits to the recreational sector, an increase of \$199,628 in net economic benefits to the commercial sector, and an increase in total net economic benefits of \$250,107 (2020 \$) in the first year of implementation. These net benefits decline in subsequent years largely due to the declining annual catch limit for greater amberjack. In discounted terms and over a 5-year time period using the analyses provided in this amendment, the total net present value of the change in net economic benefits is -\$25,555 using a 7% discount rate and -\$58,183 using a 3% discount rate (2020 \$).

The estimated non-discounted public costs resulting from the regulation are \$115,802 (2020 \$). The costs resulting from the amendment and the associated rulemaking process should not be discounted as they will be incurred prior to the effective date of the final rule. Based on the quantified economic effects, this regulatory action is expected to increase net economic benefits to the Nation initially but then decrease net economic benefits in subsequent years. Over a 5-year time period, the quantified change in net economic benefits is expected to be -\$141,357 using a 7% discount rate and -\$173,985 using a 3% discount rate (2020 \$).

## **B.7. Determination of Significant Regulatory Action**

Pursuant to E.O. 12866, a regulation is considered a “significant regulatory action” if it is likely to result in: 1) an annual effect of \$100 million or more or adversely affect in a material way the economy, a sector of the economy, productivity, competition, jobs, the environment, public health or safety, or State, local, or tribal governments or communities; 2) create a serious inconsistency or otherwise interfere with an action taken or planned by another agency; 3) materially alter the budgetary impact of entitlements, grants, user fees, or loan programs or the rights or obligations of recipients thereof; or 4) raise novel legal or policy issues arising out of legal mandates, the President’s priorities, or the principles set forth in this executive order. Based on the information provided above, these actions have been determined to not be economically significant for the purposes of E.O. 12866. In absolute terms, the expected total costs and benefits of this amendment are \$250,107 in the first year of implementation.

## Appendix C. Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis

### C.1. Introduction

The purpose of the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA) is to establish a principle of regulatory issuance that agencies shall endeavor, consistent with the objectives of the rule and of applicable statutes, to fit regulatory and informational requirements to the scale of businesses, organizations, and governmental jurisdictions subject to regulation. To achieve this principle, agencies are required to solicit and consider flexible regulatory proposals and to explain the rationale for their actions to assure such proposals are given serious consideration. The RFA does not contain any decision criteria; instead the purpose of the RFA is to inform the agency, as well as the public, of the expected economic impacts of various alternatives contained in the fishery management plan (FMP) or amendment (including framework management measures and other regulatory actions) and to ensure the agency considers alternatives that minimize the expected impacts while meeting the goals and objectives of the FMP and applicable statutes.

With certain exceptions, the RFA requires agencies to conduct an initial regulatory flexibility analysis (IRFA) for each proposed rule. The IRFA is designed to assess the impacts various regulatory alternatives would have on small entities, including small businesses, and to determine ways to minimize those impacts. An IRFA is primarily conducted to determine whether the proposed action would have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. The IRFA provides: 1) a description of the reasons why action by the agency is being considered; 2) a succinct statement of the objectives of, and legal basis for, the proposed rule; 3) a description and, where feasible, an estimate of the number of small entities to which the proposed rule will apply; 4) a description of the projected reporting, record-keeping, and other compliance requirements of the proposed rule, including an estimate of the classes of small entities which will be subject to the requirements of the report or record; 5) an identification, to the extent practicable, of all relevant federal rules, which may duplicate, overlap, or conflict with the proposed rule; 6) a description and estimate of the expected economic impacts on small entities; and 7) a description of the significant alternatives to the proposed rule and discussion of how the alternatives attempt to minimize economic impacts on small entities.

### C.2. Statement of the Need for, Objective of, and Legal Basis for the Proposed Action

The need for and objective of this proposed action are provided in Chapter 1. In summary, there is a need to ensure catch limits are based on the best scientific information available and to ensure overfishing does not occur in the South Atlantic greater amberjack fishery, while increasing social and economic benefits through sustainable and profitable harvest of South Atlantic greater amberjack, consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and its National Standards. There is also a need to make administrative efforts more efficient by removing recreational annual catch targets, which are not actively used in management, from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. The objective of this proposed action is to revise the catch limits for greater amberjack in the South Atlantic based on the results of the latest stock assessment; revise sector allocations, minimum size limits, the commercial trip limit, and the April spawning closure for greater amberjack; and remove

recreational annual catch targets for the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. The MSA provides the statutory basis for this proposed action.

### **C.3. Description and Estimate of the Number of Small Entities to Which the Proposed Action Would Apply**

This proposed action, if implemented, would apply to all federally-permitted commercial vessels, federally-permitted charter vessels and headboats (for-hire vessels), and recreational anglers that fish for or harvest greater amberjack in Federal waters of the South Atlantic. It would not directly apply to federally-permitted dealers. Any change in the supply of greater amberjack available for purchase by dealers as a result of the proposed action, and associated economic effects, would be an indirect effect of the proposed rule and would therefore fall outside the scope of the RFA. Although it would apply to for-hire vessels, it would not be expected to have any direct effects on these entities. For-hire vessels sell fishing services to recreational anglers. The proposed changes to the greater amberjack management measures would not directly alter the services sold by these vessels. Any change in demand for these fishing services, and associated economic effects, as a result of this proposed action would be a consequence of a change in anglers' behavior, secondary to any direct effect on anglers and, therefore, an indirect effect of the proposed action. Because the effects on for-hire vessels would be indirect, they fall outside the scope of the RFA. For-hire captains and crew are permitted to retain greater amberjack under the recreational bag limit; however, they are not permitted to sell these fish. As such, for-hire captains and crew are only affected as recreational anglers. The RFA does not consider recreational anglers to be small entities, so they are also outside the scope of this analysis (5 U.S.C. 603). Small entities include small businesses, small organizations, and small governmental jurisdictions (5 U.S.C. 601(6) and 601(3)-(5)). Recreational anglers are not businesses, organizations, or governmental jurisdictions. In summary, only the impacts on commercial vessels will be discussed.

As of August 26, 2021, there were 579 valid or renewable<sup>22</sup> South Atlantic Snapper Grouper unlimited permits and 112 valid or renewable 225-lb trip-limited permits. On average from 2015 through 2019, there were 242 federally-permitted commercial vessels with reported landings of greater amberjack in the South Atlantic. Their average annual vessel-level gross revenue from all species for 2015 through 2019 was \$68,449 (2020 dollars) and greater amberjack accounted for approximately 7% of this revenue. For commercial vessels that harvest greater amberjack in the South Atlantic, NMFS estimates that economic profits are approximately 4% of annual gross revenue, on average. The maximum annual revenue from all species reported by a single one of the vessels that harvested greater amberjack from 2015 through 2019 was approximately \$632,000 (2020 dollars).

For RFA purposes only, NMFS has established a small business size standard for businesses, including their affiliates, whose primary industry is commercial fishing (see 50 CFR § 200.2). A business primarily engaged in commercial fishing (NAICS code 11411) is classified as a small business if it is independently owned and operated, is not dominant in its field of operation

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<sup>22</sup> A renewable permit is an expired limited access permit that cannot be actively fished, but can be renewed for up to one year after expiration.

(including its affiliates), and has combined annual receipts not in excess of \$11 million for all its affiliated operations worldwide. All of the commercial fishing businesses directly regulated by this proposed action are believed to be small entities based on the NMFS size standard. No other small entities that would be directly affected by this proposed action have been identified.

#### **C.4. Description of the Projected Reporting, Record-Keeping and Other Compliance Requirements of the Proposed Action, Including an Estimate of the Classes of Small Entities Which Will Be Subject to the Requirement and the Type of Professional Skills Necessary for the Preparation of the Report or Records**

This proposed action would not establish any new reporting, record-keeping, or other compliance requirements.

#### **C.5. Identification of All Relevant Federal Rules, Which May Duplicate, Overlap, or Conflict with the Proposed Action**

No duplicative, overlapping, or conflicting federal rules have been identified.

#### **C.6. Significance of Economic Impacts on a Substantial Number of Small Entities**

##### **Substantial Number Criterion**

There are 691 federally permitted vessels eligible to commercially fish for or harvest greater amberjack in the South Atlantic. However, it is expected that those vessels that historically landed greater amberjack would be the most likely to be affected. From 2015 through 2019, there were 242 federally permitted commercial vessels, on average, that harvested and sold greater amberjack each year. Because all of these vessels are believed to be small entities, it is assumed that this action would affect a substantial number of small entities.

##### **Significant Economic Impacts**

The outcome of “significant economic impact” can be ascertained by examining two factors: disproportionality and profitability.

**Disproportionality:** Do the regulations place a substantial number of small entities at a significant competitive disadvantage to large entities?

All entities likely to be affected by this action are believed to be small entities and thus the issue of disproportionality does not arise.

**Profitability:** Do the regulations significantly reduce profits for a substantial number of small entities?

A detailed analysis of the economic effects associated with this proposed action can be found in Chapter 4. The following information summarizes the expected effects of this proposed action.

Because this action is not expected to be implemented until 2023, the effects discussion focuses on the 2023/2024 fishing year and subsequent years.

This proposed action would modify the acceptable biological catch (ABC), annual catch limit (ACL), and optimum yield (OY) for greater amberjack, based on the most recent recommendation from the Scientific and Statistical Committee. The ACL and OY would be set equal to the ABC or 3,233,000 lbs ww in the 2023/2024 fishing year, 2,818,000 lbs ww in the 2024/2025 fishing year, 2,699,000 lbs ww in the 2025/2026 fishing year, and 2,669,000 lbs ww in the 2026/2027 and subsequent fishing years. Based on the current sector allocation percentages, the proposed action would represent an increase in the commercial sub-ACL for greater amberjack of 514,374 lbs ww in the 2023/2024 fishing year, 345,635 lbs ww in the 2024/2025 fishing year, 297,250 lbs ww in the 2025/2026 fishing year, and 285,052 lbs ww in the 2026/2027 and subsequent fishing years. However, as discussed below, this proposed action would also modify the percentage of the total ACL that is allocated to the commercial sector and therefore economic effects to small entities are quantified as part of that discussion.

This proposed action would decrease the commercial sector allocation from 40.66% of the total greater amberjack ACL to 35%. This, in conjunction with the proposed changes to the ACL schedule, would result in a commercial sub-ACL for greater amberjack of 1,088,029 lbs gw in the 2023/2024 fishing year, 948,365 lbs gw in the 2024/2025 fishing year, 908,317 lbs gw in the 2025/2026 fishing year, and 898,221 lbs gw in the 2026/2027 and subsequent fishing years. Relative to the status quo commercial ACL of 769,388 lbs gw, this would result in an increase in the commercial catch limit of 318,641 lbs gw in the 2023/2024 fishing year, 178,977 lbs gw in the 2024/2025 fishing year, 138,929 lbs gw in the 2025/2026 fishing year, and 128,833 lbs gw in the 2026/2027 and subsequent fishing years. If these increases in the ACL are fully harvested each year, it would result in an estimated increase in aggregate ex-vessel revenue of \$570,367 (2020 dollars) in the 2023/2024 fishing year, \$320,370 in the 2024/2025 fishing year, \$248,683 in the 2025/2026 fishing year, and \$230,611 in the 2026/2027 and subsequent fishing years. The average annual net present value of these potential increases in ex-vessel revenue over a five year timeframe, using discount rates of 3% and 7%, would be approximately \$306,000 (2020 dollars) and \$290,000, respectively. Divided by the average annual number of commercial vessels that harvested greater amberjack during 2015 through 2019, it would be an increase of \$1,266 or \$1,199 per vessel per year (approximately 1.8% of average annual per vessel gross revenue). It is important to note, however, that based on recent 5-year average commercial greater amberjack landings (2015/2016 through 2019/2020 fishing years), which are less than the existing ACL, these benefits might not materialize unless commercial effort targeting greater amberjack increases. Also, individual vessels may experience varying levels of economic effects, depending on their fishing practices, operating characteristics, and profit maximization strategies.

This proposed action would also decrease the commercial minimum size limit (MSL) from 36 inches fork length to 34 inches fork length. In general, a lower MSL would be expected to increase overall harvest in the short-term, thereby increasing economic benefits received from such harvest. Due to a lack of sufficient data related to the size of discarded fish, these economic benefits cannot be quantified. NMFS expects that this proposed change to the MSL would facilitate additional commercial harvest of greater amberjack, increasing the likelihood that the economic benefits of the overall increases to the commercial ACL are achieved.

In addition, the proposed action would increase the September 1 through the end of February (Season 2) commercial trip limit for greater amberjack from 1,000 lbs gw or ww to 1,200 lbs gw or ww. The March 1 through August 31 (Season 1) commercial trip limit, which currently is 1,200 lbs gw or ww, would not change. The proposed increase of 200 lbs gw or ww to the Season 2 commercial trip limit would be expected to increase aggregate annual landings by 45,980 lbs gw worth an estimated \$82,304 (2020 dollars) in aggregate ex-vessel revenue (approximately \$340 per vessel). These expected increases in landings and ex-vessel revenue would not be additive to the overall potential economic effects described for the changes to the commercial ACL above, but rather they represent short-term expectations based on current conditions and recent landings history.

Finally, the proposed action would revise the April spawning closure for greater amberjack such that during April each year, no person may sell, purchase, harvest, or possess a greater amberjack from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and the harvest and possession limits are zero. This closure would apply to both the recreational and commercial sectors. Because the current April spawning closure already prohibits the sale or purchase of greater amberjack harvested from the South Atlantic EEZ, this proposed change would only affect recreational anglers (including any commercial vessel operators or crew that harvest greater amberjack under the possession limit during the existing spawning closure). Again, recreational anglers are outside the scope of the RFA.

In summary, this proposed action would not be expected to have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities.

### **C.7. Description of the Significant Alternatives to the Proposed Action and Discussion of How the Alternatives Attempt to Minimize Economic Impacts on Small Entities**

This proposed action, if implemented, would not be expected to have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. As a result, the issue of significant alternatives is not relevant.



## **Appendix D. Essential Fish Habitat and Move to Ecosystem Based Management**

### **D.1. EFH and EFH-HAPC Designations and Cooperative Habitat Policy Development and Protection**

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requires federal fishery management Councils and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to designate essential fish habitat (EFH) for species managed under federal fishery management plans (FMP). Federal regulations that implement the EFH program encourage fishery management Councils and NMFS also to designate subsets of EFH to highlight priority areas within EFH for conservation and management. These subsets of EFH are called EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (EFH-HAPCs or HAPCs) and are designated based on ecological importance, susceptibility to human-induced environmental degradation, susceptibility to stress from development, or rarity of the habitat type. Information supporting EFH and EFH-HAPC designations was updated (pursuant to the EFH Final Rule) in Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) II.

#### **D.1.1. South Atlantic Council EFH User Guide**

The [EFH Users Guide](#) developed during the FEP II development process is available through the FEP II Dashboard and provides a comprehensive list of the designations of EFH and EFH-HAPCs for all species managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and the clarifications identified during FEP II development. As noted above, additional detailed information supporting the EFH designations appears in FEP, FEP II, and in individual FMPs, and general information on the EFH provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and its implementing regulations (50 CFR 900 [Subparts J and K](#)). These sources should be reviewed for information on the components of EFH assessments, steps to EFH consultations, and other aspects of EFH program operation.

#### **D.1.2. South Atlantic Council EFH Policy and EFH Policy Statements Policy for Protection and Restoration of EFH South Atlantic Council Habitat and Environmental Protection Policy**

In recognizing that species are dependent on the quantity and quality of their essential habitats, it is the policy of the Council to protect, restore, and develop habitats upon which fisheries species depend; to increase the extent of their distribution and abundance; and to improve their productive capacity for the benefit of present and future generations. For purposes of this policy, “habitat” is defined as the physical, chemical, and biological parameters that are necessary for continued productivity of the species that is being managed. The objectives of the Council policy will be accomplished through the recommendation of no net loss or significant environmental degradation of existing habitat. A long-term objective is to support and promote a net-gain of fisheries habitat through the restoration and rehabilitation of the productive capacity of habitats that have been degraded, and the creation and development of productive habitats where increased fishery production is probable. The



Council will pursue these goals at state, Federal, and local levels. The Council shall assume an aggressive role in the protection and enhancement of habitats important to fishery species and shall actively enter Federal decision-making processes where proposed actions may otherwise compromise the productivity of fishery resources of concern to the Council.

### **D.1.3. South Atlantic Council EFH Policy Statements Considerations to Reduce or Eliminate the Impacts of Non-Fishing Activities on EFH**

In addition to implementing regulations to protect habitat from degradation due to fishing activities, the Council in cooperation with NMFS, actively comments on non-fishing projects or policies that may impact fish habitat. The Council established a Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Advisory Panel (AP) and adopted a comment and policy development process. Members of the AP serve as the Council's habitat contacts and professionals in the field and have guided the Council's development of the following Policy Statements:

- [EFH Policy Statement on South Atlantic Climate Variability and Fisheries \(December 2016\)](#)
- [EFH Policy Statement on South Atlantic Food Webs and Connectivity \(December 2016\)](#)
- [Protection and Restoration of EFH from Marine Aquaculture \(June 2014\)](#)
- [Protection and Enhancement of Marine Submerged Aquatic Vegetation \(June 2014\)](#)
- [Protection and Restoration of EFH from Beach Dredging and Filling, Beach Re-nourishment and Large Scale Coastal Engineering \(March 2015\)](#)
- [Protection and Restoration of EFH from Energy Exploration, Development, Transportation and Hydropower Re-Licensing \(December 2015\)](#)
- [Protection and Restoration of EFH from Alterations to Riverine, Estuarine and Nearshore Flows \(June 2014\)](#)
- [Policies for the Protection of South Atlantic Marine & Estuarine Ecosystems from Non-Native and Invasive Species \(June 2014\)](#)
- [Policy Considerations for Development of Artificial Reefs in the South Atlantic Region and Protection of Essential Fish Habitat \(September 2017\)](#)

## **D.2. Habitat Conservation and Fishery Ecosystem Plans**

The Council, views habitat conservation as the foundation in the move to Ecosystem Based Fishery Management (EBFM) in the region. The Council has been proactive in advancing habitat conservation through extensive gear restrictions in all Council FMPs and by directly managing habitat and fisheries affecting those habitats through two FMPs, the [FMP for Coral, Coral Reefs and Live/Hard Bottom Habitat of the South Atlantic Region](#) (Coral FMP) and the [FMP for the Sargassum Fishery of the South Atlantic Region](#). The FMP for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery in the Atlantic represents a proactive FMP which established fishery measures and identified EFH in advance of overfishing or habitat impacts from the fisheries.

Building on the long-term conservation approach, the Council facilitated the evolution of the Habitat Plan into the first FEP to provide a clear description and understanding of the fundamental physical, biological, and human/institutional context of ecosystems within which

fisheries are managed and identify information needed and how that information should be used in the context of FMPs. Developing a South Atlantic FEP required a greater understanding of the South Atlantic ecosystem, including both the complex relationships among humans, marine life, the environment and essential fish habitat and a more comprehensive understanding of the biological, social, and economic impacts of management necessary to initiate the transition from single species management to EBFM in the region. To support the move towards EBFM, the South Atlantic Council adopted broad goals: (1) maintaining or improving ecosystem structure and function; (2) maintaining or improving economic, social, and cultural benefits from resources; and (3) maintaining or improving biological, economic, and cultural diversity.

### **D.3. Ecosystem Approach to Conservation and Management of Deep-water Ecosystems**

Through [Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1](#), [Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 2](#), and [Coral Amendment 8](#), the South Atlantic Council established and expanded deep-water coral HAPCs (CHAPCs) and co-designated them as EFH-HAPCs to protect the largest continuous distribution (>23,000 square miles) of pristine deep-water coral ecosystems in the world from fishing and non-fishing activities.

### **D.4. FEP II Development**

The Council developed FEP II in cooperation with NMFS, as a mechanism to incorporate ecosystem principles, goals, and policies into the fishery management process, including consideration of potential indirect effects of fisheries on food web linkages when developing harvest strategies and management plans. South Atlantic Council policies developed through the process support data collection, model and supporting tool development, and implementation of FEP II. FEP II and the FEP II Implementation Plan provide a system to incorporate ecosystem considerations into the management process.

FEP II was developed employing writing and review teams established from the Council's Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management AP, and experts from state, federal, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia and other regional organizations and associations. Unlike the original Plan, FEP II is a living continually developing online information system presenting core sections and sections with links to documents or other online systems with detailed updated information on species, habitat, fisheries and research. A core part of the FEP II development process involved engaging the Council's Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management AP and regional experts in developing new sections and ecosystem-specific policy statements to address South Atlantic food webs and connectivity and South Atlantic climate variability and fisheries. In addition, standing essential fish habitat policy statements were updated and a new artificial reef habitat policy statement was approved. In combination, these statements advance habitat conservation and the move to EBFM in the region. They also serve as the basis for further policy development, consideration in habitat and fish stock assessments and future management of fisheries and habitat. They also support a more comprehensive view of conservation and management in the South Atlantic and identify long-term information needs, available models, tools, and capabilities that will advance EBFM in the region.

### **D.4.1.FEP II Dashboard (In Transition to New Habitat and Ecosystem Page)**

The FEP II Dashboard and associated online tools provided a clear description of the fundamental physical, biological, human, and institutional context of South Atlantic ecosystems within which fisheries are managed. The Council's new website (under development) will include a new Habitat and Ecosystem page where the FEP II Dashboard layout shown below will be refined and integrated.

- Introduction
- South Atlantic Ecosystem
- South Atlantic Habitats
- Managed Species
- Social and Economic
- Essential Fish Habitat
- SAFMC Managed Areas
- Research & Monitoring
- SAFMC Tools

## **D.5. NOAA EBFM Activities Supporting FEP II**

### **D.5.1.NOAA EBFM Policy and Road Map**

To support the move to EBFM, NMFS developed an agency-wide EBFM Policy and Road Map available through Ecosystem page (under revision) of the FEP II Dashboard that outlines a set of principles to guide actions and decisions over the long-term to: implement ecosystem-level planning; advance our understanding of ecosystem processes; prioritize vulnerabilities and risks to ecosystems and their components; explore and address trade-offs within an ecosystem; incorporate ecosystem considerations into management advice; and maintain resilient ecosystems.

### **D.5.2.FEP II Implementation Plan Structure and Framework**

The Implementation Plan is structured to translate approved policy statements of the Council into actionable items. The plan encompasses chapters beginning with an introduction to the policy statement, a link to the complete policy statement, and a table which translates policies and policy components into potential action items. The actions within the plan are recommendations for activities that could support the Council's FEP II policies and objectives.

### **D.5.3.FEP II Two Year Roadmap**

The FEP II Two Year Roadmap draws from the Implementation Plan and presents three to five priority actions for each of the nine approved policy statements of the Council. The Roadmap provides "Potential Partners" and other potential regional collaborators, a focused list of priority actions they could cooperate with the Council on to advance policies supporting the move to EBFM in the South Atlantic region.

#### **D.5.4. Monitoring/Revisions to FEP II Implementation Plan**

FEP II and this supporting Implementation Plan are considered active and living documents. The Implementation Plan will be reviewed and updated periodically. The South Atlantic Council's Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Committee will review, revise and refine those recommendations for South Atlantic Council consideration and approval for inclusion into the implementation plan.

### **D.6. Regional Habitat and Ecosystem Partners**

The Council, with the Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management AP as the foundation, collaborates with regional partners to create a comprehensive habitat and ecosystem network in the region to enhance habitat conservation and EBFM.

Detailed information and links to partners are highlighted online:

[https://ocean.floridamarine.org/safmc\\_dashboard/partners.html](https://ocean.floridamarine.org/safmc_dashboard/partners.html).

### **D.7. Regional Ecosystem Modeling in the South Atlantic**

#### **D.7.1. South Atlantic Ecopath with Ecosim Model**

The Council worked cooperatively with the University of British Columbia and the Sea Around Us project to develop a straw-man and preliminary food web models (Ecopath with Ecosim) to characterize the ecological relationships of South Atlantic species, including those managed by the South Atlantic Council. This effort helped the South Atlantic Council and cooperators identify available information and data gaps while providing insight into ecosystem function. More importantly, the model development process provided a vehicle to identify research necessary to better define populations, fisheries, and their interrelationships. While individual efforts were underway in the South Atlantic, only with significant investment of resources through other programs was a comprehensive regional model further developed.

The current South Atlantic Ecopath with Ecosim (EwE) model provides a more complete view of the system and supports potential future evaluations that may be possible with the model. With the model complete and tuned to the available data it can be used to address broad strategic issues and explore “what if” scenarios that could then be used to address tactical decision-making questions such as provide ecosystem context for single species management, address species assemblage questions, and address spatial questions using Ecospace.

A modeling team comprised of FWRI staff, Council staff and other technical experts as needed, will coordinate with members of the original Ecosystem Modeling Workgroup to maintain and further refine the South Atlantic model.

## D.8. Tools supporting Habitat Conservation and EBFM in the South Atlantic Region

The Council developed a Habitat Conservation and Ecosystem Management Section which provided access to the FEP II Digital Dashboard and associated tools which is under development with the new website. Florida's FWRI maintains and distributes GIS data, imagery, and documents relevant to habitat conservation and ecosystem-based fishery management in their jurisdiction. Web Services and spatial representations of EFH and other habitat related layers are accessible through the Council's [SAFMC Atlas](#), a platform for searching and visualizing GIS data relevant to the Council's mission and download of GIS layers and information on regional partners is available through the [SAFMC Digital Dashboard](#). The online systems provide access to the following Services:

- i. [South Atlantic Fisheries Webservice](#): Provides access to species distribution and spatial presentation of regional fishery independent data from the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (South Atlantic) SEAMAP-SA, the Marine Resources Monitoring, Assessment, and Prediction program (MARMAP), and NOAA Southeast Fishery-Independent Survey (SEFIS).
- ii. [South Atlantic EFH Webservice](#): Provides access to spatial representation of EFH and EFH-HAPCs for South Atlantic Council-managed species and Highly Migratory Species.
- iii. [South Atlantic Managed Areas Service](#): Provides access to spatial presentations of South Atlantic Council and other managed areas in the region.
- iv. [South Atlantic Artificial Reefs Web Application](#): Provides a regional view of artificial reefs locations, contents and imagery associated with programs in the southeastern U.S. overseen by individual states (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina).
- v. South Atlantic [ACCSP Web Map](#) and [Application](#): The web map displays Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) Statistical Areas representing catch and values of Council-managed species across time with the application displaying charts of landings and values for ACCSP Statistical Areas.

## D.9. Ecosystem-Based Action, Future Challenges and Needs

One of the greatest challenges to enhance habitat conservation and EBFM in the region is funding high priority research, including comprehensive benthic mapping and ecosystem model and management tool development. In addition, collecting detailed information on fishing fleet dynamics including defining fishing operation areas by species, species complex, and season, as well as catch relative to habitat is critical for assessment of fishery, community, and habitat impacts and for Council use in place-based management measures. Additional resources need to be dedicated to expanding regional coordination of modeling, mapping, characterization of species use of habitats, and full funding of regional fishery independent surveys (e.g., MARMAP, SEAMAP, and SEFIS) which are linking directly to addressing high priority management needs. The FEP II Implementation Plan includes Appendix A to highlight research and data needs excerpted from the [SEAMAP 5 Year Plan](#) because they represent short and long-term research and data needs that support EBFM and habitat conservation in the South Atlantic Region.

Development of ecosystem information systems to support Council management should build on existing tools (e.g., Regional Habitat and Ecosystem GIS and Arc Services) and provide resources to regional cooperating partners for expansion to address long-term Council needs. NOAA should support and build on the regional coordination efforts of the South Atlantic Council as it transitions to a broader management approach. Resources need to be provided to collect information necessary to update information supporting FEP II, which support refinement of EFH designations and spatial representations and future EBFM actions. These are the highest priority needs to support habitat conservation and EBFM, the completion of mapping of near-shore, mid-shelf, shelf edge, and deep-water habitats in the South Atlantic region and refinement in the characterization of species use of habitats

## Appendix E. Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

### Action 1. Revise the Greater Amberjack Acceptable Biological Catch, Total Annual Catch Limit, and Annual Optimum Yield

**Alternative 5.** Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack. For the 2022/2023 season through the 2024/2025 season, set the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield equal to the middle value of the updated acceptable biological catch projected for 2022/2027. For the 2025/2026 season through the 2026/2027 season, set the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield equal to the updated acceptable biological catch. The 2026/2027 total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

Fishing Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)
2022/2023	2,818,000
2023/2024	2,818,000
2024/2025	2,818,000
2025/2026	2,699,000
2026/2027+	2,669,000

**Discussion:** The Council noted that the total ACLs proposed in this alternative would not take advantage of potential increased fishing opportunities following the SEDAR 59 (2020) stock assessment indicating South Atlantic greater amberjack are not overfished and not experiencing overfishing. This alternative was removed to allow staff more time to analyze effects of other actions and alternatives considered in this amendment.

### Action 3. Increase the Recreational Minimum Size Limit for Greater Amberjack

**Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action).** The recreational minimum size limit is 28 inches fork length.

**Alternative 2.** Increase the recreational minimum size limit to 30 inches fork length.

**Alternative 3.** Increase the recreational minimum size limit to 32 inches fork length.

**Alternative 4.** Increase the recreational minimum size limit to 36 inches fork length.

**Discussion:** Based on the sexual maturity schedule from SEDAR 59 (2020), 89% of female greater amberjack are mature by 2 years old (25 inches fork length) and 99% are mature by 3 years old (29.1 inches fork length). Given the high percentage of maturity at the current recreational minimum size limit (28 inches fork length) and a lack of strong public desire to

increase the recreational size limit, the Council determined that further consideration of revising this limit was not needed at this time.



## Appendix F. Data Analyses

### F.1. Recreational Sector Analyses

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Snapper-Grouper Amendment 49 (Amendment 49) is considering changes to management regulations for the greater amberjack stock. Amendment 49 is considering changes to the recreational sector's annual catch limit (ACL) in Action 2, changing the recreational minimum size limit (removed from consideration and moved to Appendix E), and closing the recreational sector in April in Action 5.

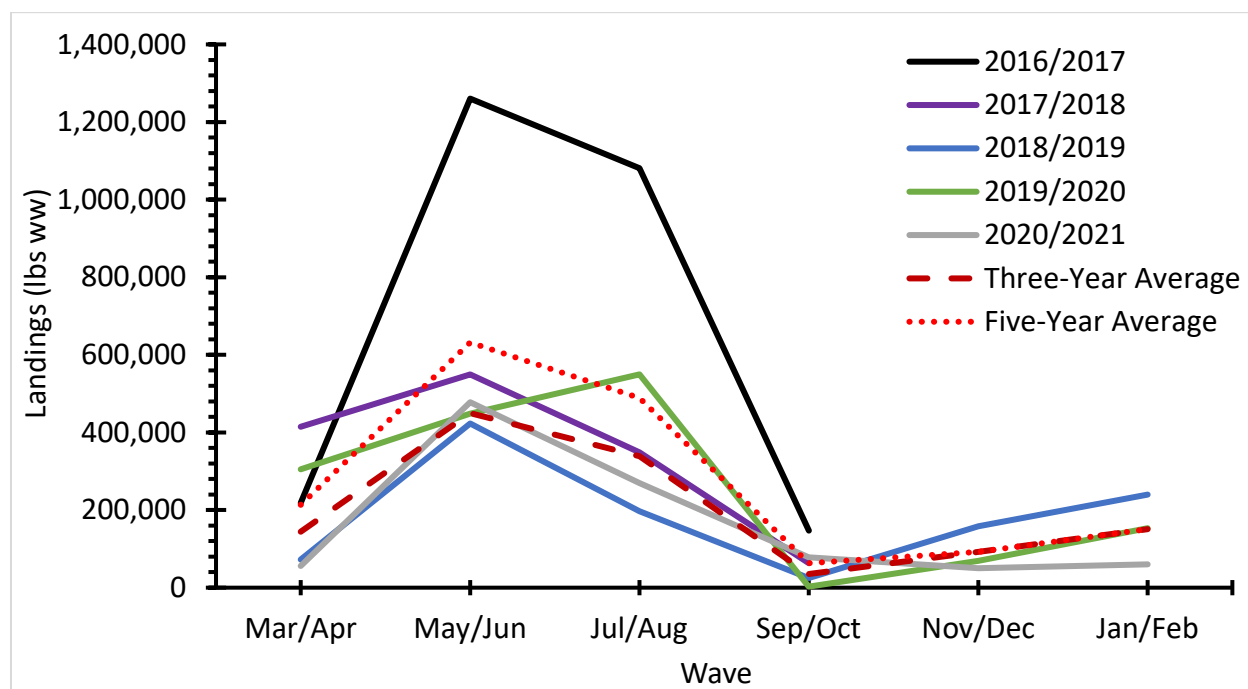
#### **Predicting Recreational Landings**

Recreational landings data for South Atlantic greater amberjack were obtained from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) on September 1, 2021. The current ACL is being tracked using Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) equivalent landings. However, this analysis uses Marine Recreational Informational Program (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES) data to match the same currency (MRIP-FES) as the most recent South Atlantic greater amberjack assessment (SEDAR 59). The data also contains landing from the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey (Headboat). Recreational landings are collected and organized in two-month increments called waves (e.g., January and February = wave 1, March and April = wave 2, etc.).

Future recreational landings were determined from reviewing recent recreational landings data. The greater amberjack recreational fishing year is from March 1 of one year then goes to February 28 in the following year. The most recent complete five years of data are from the fishing years of 2016/2017 to 2020/2021. These data were used to generate three potential future recreational landings scenarios: 1) three year average of the most recent years of complete data (2018/2019, 2019/2020, and 2020/2021), 2) five year average of the most recent years of complete data (2016/2017 through 2020/2021), and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data. The year with the maximum landings in the last five years is the 2016/2017 fishing year. Due to closures in the 2016/2017 fishing year (closed on November 30, 2016) and the 2017/2018 fishing year (closed on October 31, 2017) both landings for scenario 2 and also scenario 3 used the three-year average landings for the November/December and January/February time periods. Table F.1 and Figure F.1 displays the recreational landings used in this analysis.

**Table F.1.** South Atlantic greater amberjack recreational landings by two-month wave for the 2016/2017 to the 2020/2021 fishing years, and the three-year and five-year average. Landings are in pounds whole weight (ww). The fishing years of 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 are not for the full fishing year because these fishing years had recreational closures.

Year	Mar/Apr	May/Jun	Jul/Aug	Sep/Oct	Nov/Dec	Jan/Feb
2016/2017	218,494	1,260,300	1,081,108	146,990	13,598	52,687
2017/2018	414,724	549,491	348,614	63,001	557,744	4,932
2018/2019	72,375	423,071	197,117	24,854	157,905	239,948
2019/2020	305,184	448,312	549,661	2,645	69,054	153,546
2020/2021	55,621	477,888	269,632	78,105	50,159	59,924
3 Year average	144,393	449,757	338,803	35,201	92,373	151,139
5 year average	213,280	631,812	489,226	63,119	92,373	151,139



**Figure F.1.** South Atlantic greater amberjack recreational landings (lbs ww) by two-month wave for the 2016/2017 to the 2020/2021 fishing years, and the three-year and five-year average. The fishing years of 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 are not for the full fishing year because these fishing years had recreational closures.

Action 2 of Amendment 49 is considering a range of recreational ACLs with different ACLs for each Amendment alternative and each fishing year. To simplify the analysis, only the lowest, middle, and highest ACLs for each alternative of Action 2 was included in the analysis. Season lengths were projected by cumulatively summing the recreational landings for the three landings scenarios, and compare the results to the range of recreational ACL options in Action 2 of Amendment 49. Table F.2 provides the predicted closure dates for the recreational sector. The predicted closure dates span from May 5 to no closure needed. No closure dates were needed for landings scenario 1 because the three-year average of the recreational landings generated

landings below all of the recreational ACLs provided in Action 2. Landings scenario 2 resulted in only one closure date. Landings scenario 3 resulted in a range of closure dates.

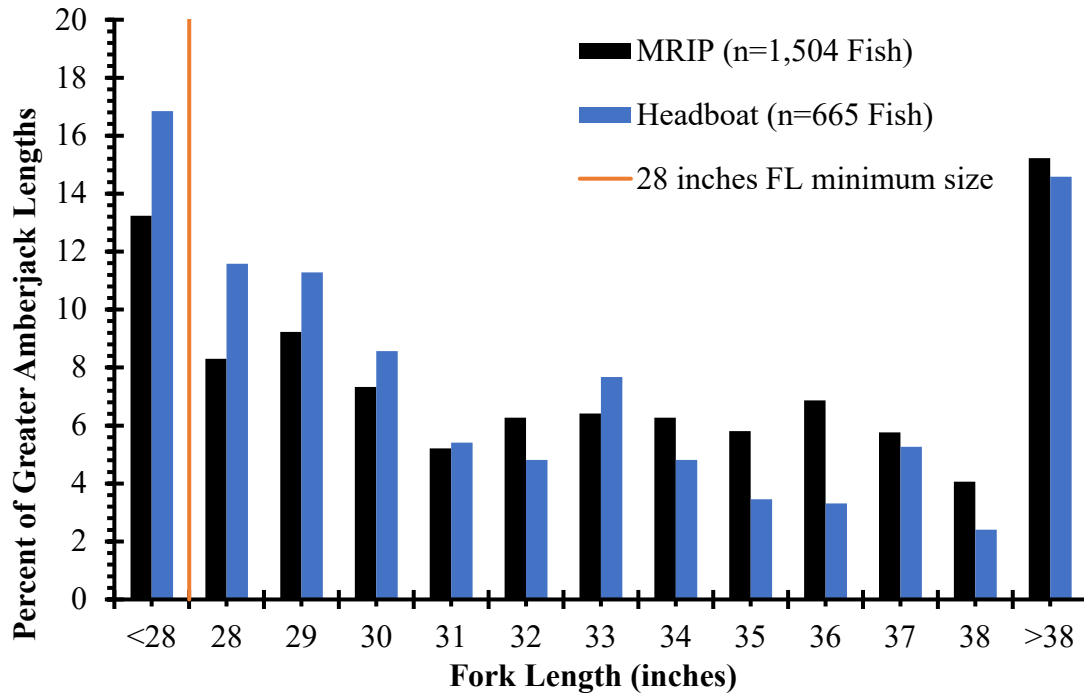
**Table F.2.** The projected closure dates for the greater amberjack recreational sector for a range of recreational ACLs in pounds ww from Action 2. The closure dates were generated from the three different landings scenarios of 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2018/2019 through 2020/2021), 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2016/2017 through 2020/2021), and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data.

Action 2 Alternative	Year	Recreational ACL	Scenario 1 Closure Date	Scenario 2 Closure Date	Scenario 3 Closure Date
1	2022/2023	2,599,092	None	None	17-Sep
1	2024/2025	1,672,201	None	None	12-Jul
1	2026/2027	1,583,785	None	6-Feb	7-Jul
2	2022/2023	3,073,008	None	None	None
2	2024/2025	1,977,109	None	None	29-Jul
2	2026/2027	1,872,570	None	None	23-Jul
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>2,847,000</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>19-Jan</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>1,831,700</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>21-Jul</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2026/2027</b>	<b>1,734,850</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>15-Jul</b>
4	2022/2023	2,409,000	None	None	29-Jul
4	2024/2025	1,549,900	None	3-Feb	17-May
4	2026/2027	1,467,950	None	12-Jan	12-May
5	2022/2023	2,190,000	None	None	22-Jun
5	2024/2025	1,409,000	None	24-Dec	9-May
5	2026/2027	1,334,500	None	24-Nov	5-May

#### **Impact from Increasing the Recreational Minimum Size Limit**

An action considering increase of the recreational minimum size limit was initially considered, but moved to the Alternatives Considered But Eliminated from Detailed Analysis (Appendix E) after analyses noted in this section had already been completed. These analyses are included for the record of the Council's considerations.

The current minimum size limit is 28 inches fork length, and the Council considered increasing the minimum size limit to 30, 32, and 36 inches fork length. Available lengths of South Atlantic greater amberjack harvested in the recreational sector in recent years (2015 through 2020) are available from MRIP and Headboat (Figure F.2). In August 2021, MRIP harvested fish lengths were downloaded from the website of [www.fisheries.noaa.gov](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov), and Headboat harvested fish lengths were provided from the SEFSC.



**Figure F.2.** Percent of south Atlantic greater amberjack fork lengths in the recreational sector in 1-inch fork length increments by dataset. The orange line represents the current recreational minimum size limit. Length data came from MRIP and Headboat harvested fish. All of the data came from 2015 through 2020.

The harvested lengths also had weight data for each fish. Percent reductions in harvest weight were calculated for the different proposed recreational minimum size limits as follows:

Percent reduction =  $((C - G) - B)/C$ , where:

$C$  = catch in pounds whole weight

$G$  = weight of fish that are greater than or equal to the minimum size limit being considered

$B$  = weight of fish smaller than the 28-inch minimum size limit

Percent reductions associated with minimum size limit were normalized to a 0% reduction at the commercial status quo of 28 inches fork length. Length data from 2015 to 2020 were used for the size limit analysis. Table F.3 provides the calculated percent reduction in landings.

**Table F.3.** Calculated percent reduction in recreational landings for recreational size limit alternatives considered using the recent recreational data (2015-2020). The results are separated by the different recreational datasets (MRIP and Headboat).

Alternative	Size Limit (Inches FL)	MRIP Reduction (%)	Headboat Reduction (%)
1	28	0	0
2	30	7.4	13.0
3	32	14.4	22.5
4	36	34.9	40.2

Since this South Atlantic analysis used two different datasets (MRIP and Headboat) the percent reductions were simplified by weighting the impact of the percent reductions by each datasets contribution to the total South Atlantic greater amberjack landings. Using the 2015 to 2020 landings data the contribution of the total landings by dataset are shown in Table F.4. The simplified weighted percent reductions are shown in Table F.5.

**Table F.4.** Percent contribution of the total South Atlantic greater amberjack recreational landings by each dataset. These estimates were generated from the 2015 to 2020 South Atlantic greater amberjack recreational landings.

Dataset	Percentage of Total Landings
MRIP	96.6%
Headboat	3.4%

**Table F.5.** Calculated percent reductions of the total South Atlantic greater amberjack landings for each of the recreational minimum size limit alternatives. The reductions by dataset from Table F.3 were weighted by the percent of total landings from Table F.4.

Alternative	Size Limit (Inches FL)	Weighted Percent Reduction (%)
1	28	0.0
2	30	7.6
3	32	14.7
4	36	35.1

The reduction in landings from increasing the recreational minimum length to 30, 32, and 36 inches fork length were applied to the three recreational landings scenarios. The reduction from increasing the minimum size limit resulted in longer seasons. Table F.5 provides the estimated closure dates from the increase in the minimum size limit. This resulted in closures from July 5 to having the recreational sector open a full 12 months.

**Table F.6.** The projected closure dates for greater amberjack for a range of recreational ACLs in pounds ww from Action 2 with three different landings scenarios combined with increased minimum size length of 30, 32, and 36 inches fork length from an action that considered changing the recreational minimum size limit. Closure dates for the **Alternative 1** minimum size limit of 28 inches are provided in Table F.2 since this is the current minimum size limit, and assumes no change to the minimum size limit. The three different recreational landings scenarios are 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2018/2019 through 2020/2021), 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2016/2017 through 2020/2021), and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data.

Action 2 Alternative	Minimum Size Limit	Year	Recreational ACL	Scenario 1 Closure Date	Scenario 2 Closure Date	Scenario 3 Closure Date
1	30	2022/2023	2,599,092	None	None	17-Feb
1	30	2024/2025	1,672,201	None	None	26-Jul
1	30	2026/2027	1,583,785	None	None	20-Jul
2	30	2022/2023	3,073,008	None	None	None
2	30	2024/2025	1,977,109	None	None	14-Aug
2	30	2026/2027	1,872,570	None	None	7-Aug
3	30	2022/2023	2,847,000	None	None	None
3	30	2024/2025	1,831,700	None	None	5-Aug
3	30	2026/2027	1,734,850	None	None	30-Jul
4	30	2022/2023	2,409,000	None	None	6-Nov
4	30	2024/2025	1,549,900	None	None	18-Jul
4	30	2026/2027	1,467,950	None	None	13-Jul
5	30	2022/2023	2,190,000	None	None	27-Aug
5	30	2024/2025	1,409,000	None	None	9-Jul
5	30	2026/2027	1,334,500	None	None	5-Jul
1	32	2022/2023	2,599,092	None	None	None
1	32	2024/2025	1,672,201	None	None	3-Aug
1	32	2026/2027	1,583,785	None	None	28-Jul
2	32	2022/2023	3,073,008	None	None	None
2	32	2024/2025	1,977,109	None	None	24-Aug
2	32	2026/2027	1,872,570	None	None	17-Aug
3	32	2022/2023	2,847,000	None	None	None
3	32	2024/2025	1,831,700	None	None	14-Aug
3	32	2026/2027	1,734,850	None	None	7-Aug
4	32	2022/2023	2,409,000	None	None	21-Feb
4	32	2024/2025	1,549,900	None	None	26-Jul
4	32	2026/2027	1,467,950	None	None	21-Jul
5	32	2022/2023	2,190,000	None	None	18-Oct
5	32	2024/2025	1,409,000	None	None	17-Jul
5	32	2026/2027	1,334,500	None	None	12-Jul
1	36	2022/2023	2,599,092	None	None	None
1	36	2024/2025	1,672,201	None	None	22-Oct
1	36	2026/2027	1,583,785	None	None	31-Aug

Alternative	Minimum Size Limit	Year	Recreational ACL	Scenario 1 Closure Date	Scenario 2 Closure Date	Scenario 3 Closure Date
2	36	2022/2023	3,073,008	None	None	None
2	36	2024/2025	1,977,109	None	None	None
2	36	2026/2027	1,872,570	None	None	None
3	36	2022/2023	2,847,000	None	None	None
3	36	2024/2025	1,831,700	None	None	20-Feb
3	36	2026/2027	1,734,850	None	None	19-Dec
4	36	2022/2023	2,409,000	None	None	None
4	36	2024/2025	1,549,900	None	None	28-Aug
4	36	2026/2027	1,467,950	None	None	21-Aug
5	36	2022/2023	2,190,000	None	None	None
5	36	2024/2025	1,409,000	None	None	15-Aug
5	36	2026/2027	1,334,500	None	None	9-Aug

#### **Impact from Closing the Recreational Sector in April**

Amendment 49 Action 5 considers closing the recreational sector by not allowing any harvest or possession of greater amberjack in the month of April. This April closure was analyzed by assuming the April recreational landings were zero. The recreational landings are collected in two-month waves and the March/April wave of landings were separated into each month by assuming uniform landings within the March/April wave, and dividing by the number of days each month contributed to the March/April wave. Following the three recreational landing scenarios the predicted April landings are provided in Table F.7. Assuming the April landings are zero the predicted closure dates are shown in Table F.8. The closure dates ranged from July 2 to having the recreational sector open a full 12 months.

**Table F.7.** The projected recreational landings in April for the three landings scenarios. The three different recreational landings scenarios are 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2018/2019 through 2020/2021), 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2016/2017 through 2020/2021), and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data. Landings are in pounds ww.

<b>Landings Scenario</b>	<b>Predicted April Landings</b>
3 Year average	71,013
5 year average	104,892
Max	107,456

**Table F.8.** The projected closure dates for greater amberjack for a range of recreational ACLs from Action 1 with three different landings scenarios and a closure of the recreational sector in April. The three different recreational landings scenarios are 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2018/2019 through 2020/2021), 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2016/2017 through 2020/2021), and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data.

<b>Action 2 Alternative</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Recreational ACL</b>	<b>Scenario 1 Closure Date</b>	<b>Scenario 2 Closure Date</b>	<b>Scenario 3 Closure Date</b>
1	2022/2023	2,599,092	None	None	31-Oct
1	2024/2025	1,672,201	None	None	18-Jul
1	2026/2027	1,583,785	None	None	13-Jul
2	2022/2023	3,073,008	None	None	None
2	2024/2025	1,977,109	None	None	4-Aug
2	2026/2027	1,872,570	None	None	29-Jul
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>2,847,000</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>1,831,700</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>27-Jul</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2026/2027</b>	<b>1,734,850</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>21-Jul</b>
4	2022/2023	2,409,000	None	None	5-Sep
4	2024/2025	1,549,900	None	None	14-Jul
4	2026/2027	1,467,950	None	None	9-Jul
5	2022/2023	2,190,000	None	None	20-Aug
5	2024/2025	1,409,000	None	None	6-Jul
5	2026/2027	1,334,500	None	None	2-Jul

**Combining the Increased Minimum Size Limit with the April closure**

Closure dates were projected from combining the reduction in landings from increasing the minimum size limit with the April closure for the three landings scenarios. This resulted in a range of closure dates from as early as July 8 to no closure (Table F.9).



**Table F.9.** The projected closure dates for greater amberjack for a range of recreational ACLs from Action 1 with three different landings scenarios combined with increased minimum size length of 30, 32, and 36 inches fork length from an action initially considered to change the recreational minimum size limit with the Action 5 April closure. The three different recreational landings scenarios are 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2018/2019 through 2020/2021), 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data (2016/2017 through 2020/2021), and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data.

Action 2 Alternative	Minimum Size Limit (in FL)	Year	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	Scenario 1 Closure Date	Scenario 2 Closure Date	Scenario 3 Closure Date
1	30	2022/2023	2,599,092	None	None	None
1	30	2024/2025	1,672,201	None	None	29-Jul
1	30	2026/2027	1,583,785	None	None	23-Jul
2	30	2022/2023	3,073,008	None	None	None
2	30	2024/2025	1,977,109	None	None	17-Aug
2	30	2026/2027	1,872,570	None	None	10-Aug
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>2,847,000</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>1,831,700</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>8-Aug</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2026/2027</b>	<b>1,734,850</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>2-Aug</b>
4	30	2022/2023	2,409,000	None	None	12-Dec
4	30	2024/2025	1,549,900	None	None	21-Jul
4	30	2026/2027	1,467,950	None	None	16-Jul
5	30	2022/2023	2,190,000	None	None	30-Aug
5	30	2024/2025	1,409,000	None	None	12-Jul
5	30	2026/2027	1,334,500	None	None	8-Jul
1	32	2022/2023	2,599,092	None	None	None
1	32	2024/2025	1,672,201	None	None	6-Aug
1	32	2026/2027	1,583,785	None	None	31-Jul
2	32	2022/2023	3,073,008	None	None	None
2	32	2024/2025	1,977,109	None	None	27-Aug
2	32	2026/2027	1,872,570	None	None	20-Aug
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>2,847,000</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>1,831,700</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>17-Aug</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>2026/2027</b>	<b>1,734,850</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>11-Aug</b>
4	32	2022/2023	2,409,000	None	None	None
4	32	2024/2025	1,549,900	None	None	29-Jul

Action 2 Alternative	Minimum Size Limit (in FL)	Year	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)	Scenario 1 Closure Date	Scenario 2 Closure Date	Scenario 3 Closure Date
4	32	2026/2027	1,467,950	None	None	24-Jul
5	32	2022/2023	2,190,000	None	None	15-Nov
5	32	2024/2025	1,409,000	None	None	20-Jul
5	32	2026/2027	1,334,500	None	None	15-Jul
1	36	2022/2023	2,599,092	None	None	None
1	36	2024/2025	1,672,201	None	None	21-Nov
1	36	2026/2027	1,583,785	None	None	18-Sep
2	36	2022/2023	3,073,008	None	None	None
2	36	2024/2025	1,977,109	None	None	None
2	36	2026/2027	1,872,570	None	None	None
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>2,847,000</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>1,831,700</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>2026/2027</b>	<b>1,734,850</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>15-Jan</b>
4	36	2022/2023	2,409,000	None	None	None
4	36	2024/2025	1,549,900	None	None	31-Aug
4	36	2026/2027	1,467,950	None	None	24-Aug
5	36	2022/2023	2,190,000	None	None	None
5	36	2024/2025	1,409,000	None	None	18-Aug
5	36	2026/2027	1,334,500	None	None	12-Aug

## F.2. Commercial Sector Analyses

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Snapper-Grouper Amendment 49 (Amendment 49) is considering changes to management regulations for the greater amberjack stock. Amendment 49 is considering changes to the commercial sector's Annual Catch Limit (ACL) in Action 2, minimum size limit in Action 3, increasing the commercial trip limit in Action 4, and allow commercial harvest of greater amberjack in April in Action 5. The South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial sector is separated into two fishing seasons: 1) March 1 through August 31 (Season 1) and 2) September 1 through February 28 (Season 2). This amendment analysis was written with all of the Season 1 information located together in the beginning of the report, and then all of the Season 2 information is located together at the end of the report.

### Season 1: March 1 through August 31

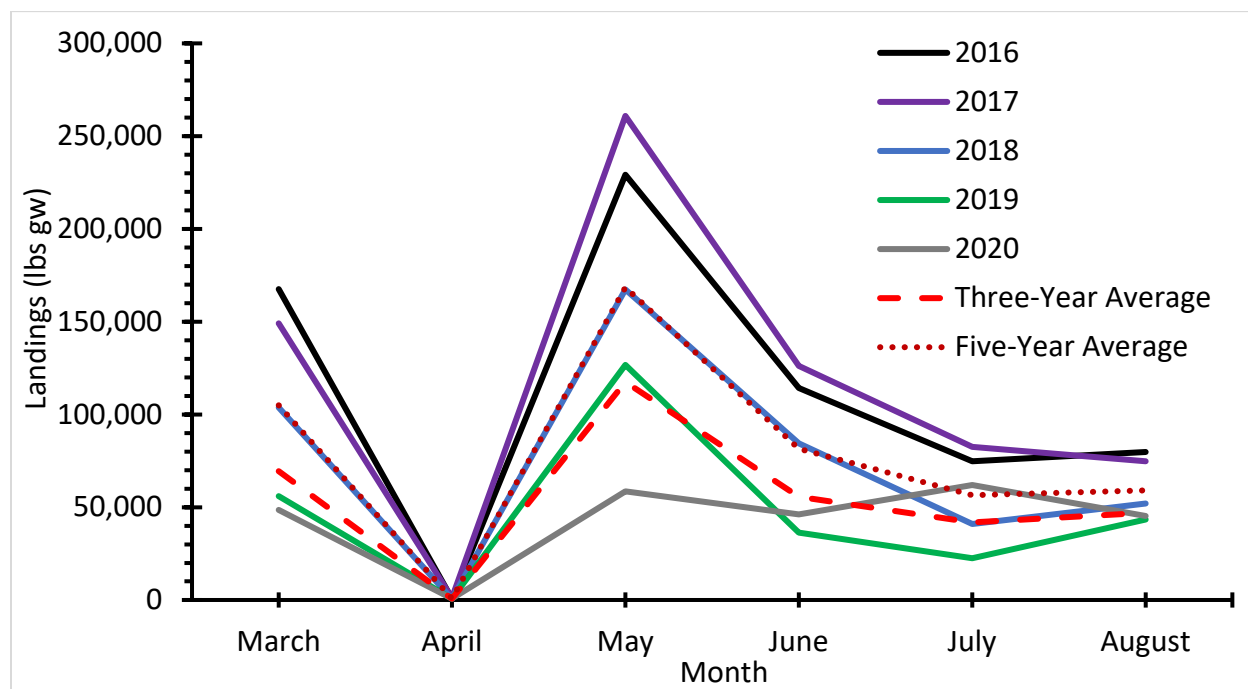
#### Predicting Commercial Landings

Commercial landings data for South Atlantic greater amberjack were obtained from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) on September 29, 2021. All of the South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings are in pounds gutted weight (gw). Future commercial

landings were determined from reviewing recent commercial landings data. The greater amberjack commercial Season 1 is from March 1 through August 31. The most recent five years of complete data are from the fishing years of 2016 through 2020. These data were used to generate three potential future commercial landings scenarios: 1) three year average of the most recent years of complete data (2018, 2019, and 2020), 2) five year average of the most recent years of complete data (2016 through 2020), and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data. The year with the maximum commercial landings in Season 1 in the last five years is 2017. The commercial landings in pounds gw in Table F.10, and Figure F.3 displays the Season 1 commercial landings used in this analysis.

**Table F.10.** South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings by month for Season 1 from 2016 to 2020, three-year average, and five-year average, in pounds gw. Season 1 is from March through August.

Year	March	April	May	June	July	August
2016	167,607	675	229,197	114,224	74,738	79,716
2017	149,077	204,985	260,893	126,080	82,499	74,743
2018	103,677	628	167,351	84,347	40,948	52,021
2019	55,903	651	126,707	36,247	22,474	43,455
2020	48,580	752	58,488	46,170	61,963	45,314
3 year average	69,387	93,451	117,515	55,588	41,795	46,930
5 year average	104,969	136,748	168,527	81,414	56,525	59,050



**Figure F.3.** South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings (lbs gw) by month for Season 1 from 2016 to 2020, three-year average, and five-year average. Season 1 is from March through August.

Action 2 of Amendment 49 considers a range of commercial ACLs for Season 1 with different ACLs for each alternative and year. Season length analysis was conducted for all three Action 2 alternatives. To simplify the analysis, only the preferred alternative (**Alternative 3** of Action 2) was analyzed for the other Actions relating to the commercial Season 1. Additionally, since **Alternative 1 (No Action)** provides a range of five different ACLs, only the lowest, middle, and highest ACLs were included in the analysis. Season lengths were projected by cumulatively summing the commercial landings for the three landings scenarios, and compare the results to the lowest, middle, and highest Action 2-**Alternative 1 (No Action)** commercial Season 1 ACL options. Predicted closure dates were determined when the landings reached the ACL (Table F.11). There were no closure dates needed for landings scenario 1 and 2 because these landings were below all of the **Alternative 1 (No Action)** Season 1 commercial ACLs provided in Action 2. Scenario 3 had predicted closure dates span from June 12 to no closure needed.

**Table F.11.** The projected closure dates for the greater amberjack Season 1 commercial sector for a range of commercial ACLs from Action 2. The closure dates were generated from the three different landings scenarios of 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data, 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data, and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data.

Action 2 Alternative	Year	Commercial ACL Season 1 (lbs gw)	Scenario 1 Closure Date	Scenario 2 Closure Date	Scenario 3 Closure Date
1	2022/2023	1,027,447	None	None	None
1	2024/2025	661,038	None	None	18-Aug
1	2026/2027	626,086	None	None	3-Aug
2	2022/2023	754,034	None	None	None
2	2024/2025	485,130	None	None	18-Jun
2	2026/2027	459,479	None	25-Aug	12-Jun
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>884,423</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>569,019</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>12-Jul</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2026/2027</b>	<b>538,933</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>1-Jul</b>
4	2022/2023	1,137,115	None	None	None
4	2024/2025	731,596	None	None	None
4	2026/2027	692,913	None	None	31-Aug
5	2022/2023	1,263,462	None	None	None
5	2024/2025	812,885	None	None	None
5	2026/2027	769,904	None	None	None

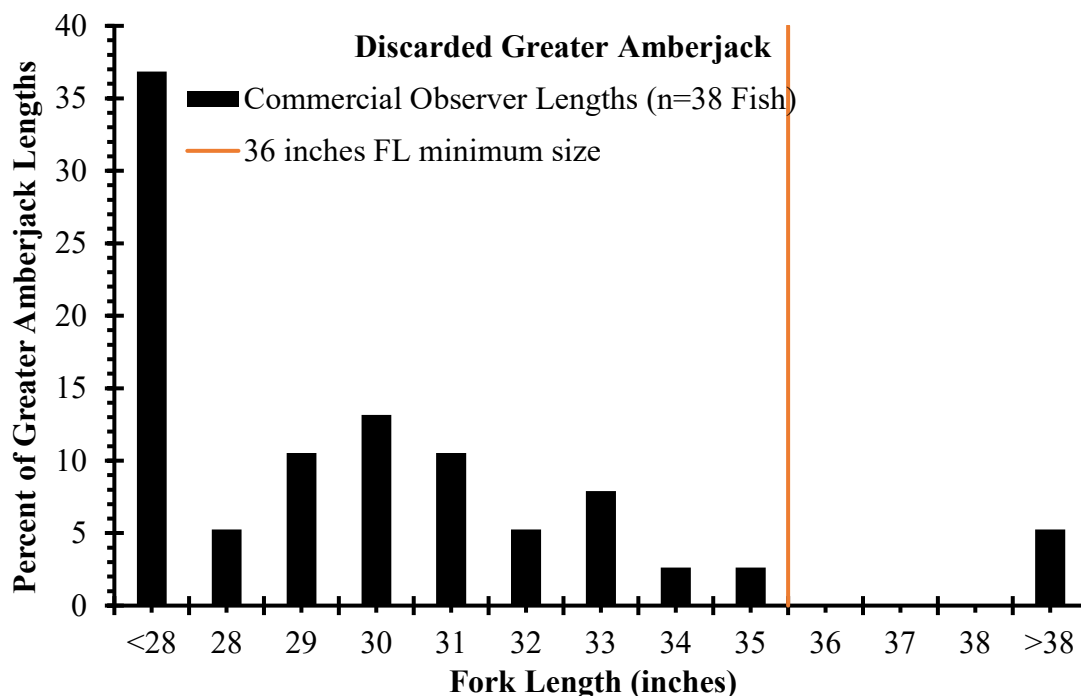
### Impact from Decreasing the Commercial Minimum Size Limit in Season 1

Action 3 of Amendment 49 considers a decrease to the commercial minimum size limit. The current commercial minimum size limit is 36 inches fork length, and Action 3 considers decreasing the commercial minimum size limit to 34, 32, 30, and 28 inches fork length. Harvest datasets were not useful for this analysis since it is illegal to harvest greater amberjack below the minimum size limit. Therefore, the current minimum size limit regulation results in dockside

commercial harvest surveys collecting very little length data for greater amberjack below the minimum size limit. However, observer data has length information for released fish, and observer data were provided from the SEFSC on October 12, 2021.

Reliable estimates of percent increases in harvest from decreasing the minimum size limit are not possible because of two factors: 1) low number of available data on discarded greater amberjack lengths, and, 2) not having a reliable estimate of the proportion of discards to the total South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial catch. The commercial observer program started in the South Atlantic region in 2008 with a voluntary program where captains could volunteer to have an observer on their boat. This changed in 2014 where observer coverage was made mandatory. However, the South Atlantic observer data program only sampled a small proportion of the commercial fleet and greater amberjack data are only available for the years of 2018, 2019, and 2020. Therefore, making an assumption on greater amberjack discards compared to the total commercial catch would likely be erroneous. Instead the lengths shown in Figure F.4 can likely only be used for qualitative analysis instead of quantitative analysis.

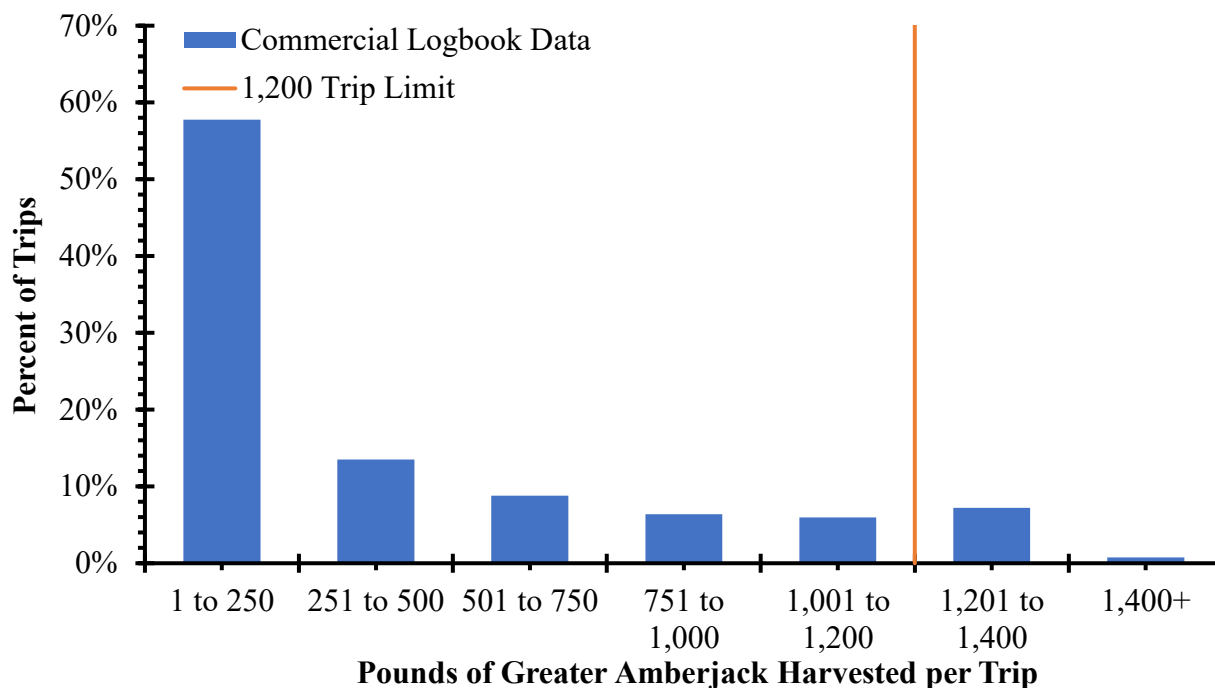
The commercial observer program produced lengths from 38 released greater amberjack in the South Atlantic region (Figure F.4). Due to the relatively small number of lengths available for discarded South Atlantic greater amberjack the data were not separated into Season 1 and Season 2.. In summary, length data on released greater amberjack is limited. Reducing the minimum size limit will allow harvest of smaller greater amberjack and will likely increase harvest.



**Figure F.4.** Percent of south Atlantic greater amberjack lengths from released fish in the commercial sector. The data were plotted in 1-inch length increments, and the length data are in fork length. The data came from the commercial observer program which had limited greater amberjack observer data. All of the data came from 2018 through 2020. The orange line represents the current commercial minimum size limit of 36 inches fork length.

### Impact from Increasing the Trip Limit for Season 1

Action 4 of Amendment 49 considers increasing the commercial trip limit in Season 1. Commercial logbook data provides the lbs harvested per trip, and commercial logbook data were provided from the SEFSC on May 2, 2021. The current trip limit is 1,200 lbs and Action 4 is considering increasing the Season 1 trip limit to 1,500; 2,000; and 2,500 lbs. The greater amberjack commercial trip limits are in both lbs ww or lbs gw. In this analysis the commercial logbook data were converted to ww to provide a more conservative analysis. Figure F.5 provides the Season 1 distribution of greater amberjack harvested per trip in the commercial sector from 2015 to 2020. There are about 8% of trips that exceeded the current South Atlantic greater amberjack 1,200 pound trip limit.



**Figure F.5.** Distribution of the South Atlantic greater amberjack commercially harvested per trip (lbs ww) for Season 1. Season 1 is from March 1 through August 31. Data comes from the commercial logbook dataset from 2016 to 2020 ( $n = 7,720$  trips), and the weight unit is pounds ww. The orange line represents the current commercial trip limit of 1,200 lbs ww.

The impact from increasing the trip limit in Season 1 was evaluated assuming that trips that met the current trip limit in recent years will also meet the new trip limit. This provides a maximum estimated harvest rate that may occur if the trip limit is increased. Not all trips meeting the current trip limit will likely meet newly proposed trip limits, but information is not available to determine exactly how many additional lbs of greater amberjack these trips would harvest once the trip limit is increased. Trips that met the current trip limit were defined as trips that landed 1,001 to 1,200 lbs. Therefore, the proposed trip limit of 1,500 lbs is being explored by adjusting any trips that had 1,001 to 1,200 lbs per trip, and adjusting them to meet the new trip limit of 1,500 lbs per trip. The range starts at 1,001 lbs instead of 1,200 lbs to account for any trips that were close to but under the current trip limit of 1,200 lbs. Trips that harvested below 1,001 lbs per trip were not modified. Trips with landings greater than the current trip limit of 1,200 lbs were not changed since these trips did not follow the current trip limit in the past, and will

probably not follow the new implemented trip limit in the future. This modified trip limit analysis was conducted using only Season 1 data (March through August) from 2016 to 2020. The analysis resulted in estimated percent increase in commercial landings from increasing the commercial trip limit, and the results are provided in Table F.12. The percent increase in landings estimated from increasing the trip limit were applied to the projected landings to generate predicted closure dates. Table F.13 provides the predicted closure dates from analyzing the different trip limit increases for the Action 2-**Preferred Alternative 3**. Most of the scenarios resulted in no closures, and the earliest closure was June 14.

**Table F.12.** Calculated percent increase in commercial landings for the different Amendment 49 Action 4 Season 1 trip limit alternatives using the recent commercial logbook data (2016-2020).

<b>Trip Limit</b>	<b>Percent Increase in Landings</b>
1,200	0.0
1,500	3.5
2,000	9.2
2,500	14.9

**Table F.13.** The projected closure dates for the greater amberjack commercial sector Season 1 for a range of commercial ACLs under trip limits considered in Action 4. The closure dates were generated from the three different landings scenarios of 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data, 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data, and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data. The landings were compared against the commercial ACLs for Action 2-**Preferred Alternative 3**.

<b>Action 4 Alternative</b>	<b>Trip Limit</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Commercial ACL Season 1 (lbs gw)</b>	<b>Scenario 1 Closure Date</b>	<b>Scenario 2 Closure Date</b>	<b>Scenario 3 Closure Date</b>
Alt 1 (No Action)	1,200	2022/2023	884,423	None	None	None
Alt 1 (No Action)	1,200	2024/2025	569,019	None	None	12-Jul
Alt 1 (No Action)	1,200	2026/2027	538,933	None	None	1-Jul
Sub-Alt 2a	1,500	2022/2023	884,423	None	None	None
Sub-Alt 2a	1,500	2024/2025	569,019	None	None	5-Jul
Sub-Alt 2a	1,500	2026/2027	538,933	None	None	27-Jun
Sub-Alt 2b	2,000	2022/2023	884,423	None	None	None
Sub-Alt 2b	2,000	2024/2025	569,019	None	None	27-Jun
Sub-Alt 2b	2,000	2026/2027	538,933	None	None	20-Jun
Sub-Alt 2c	2,500	2022/2023	884,423	None	None	None
Sub-Alt 2c	2,500	2024/2025	569,019	None	None	21-Jun
Sub-Alt 2c	2,500	2026/2027	538,933	None	30-Aug	14-Jun

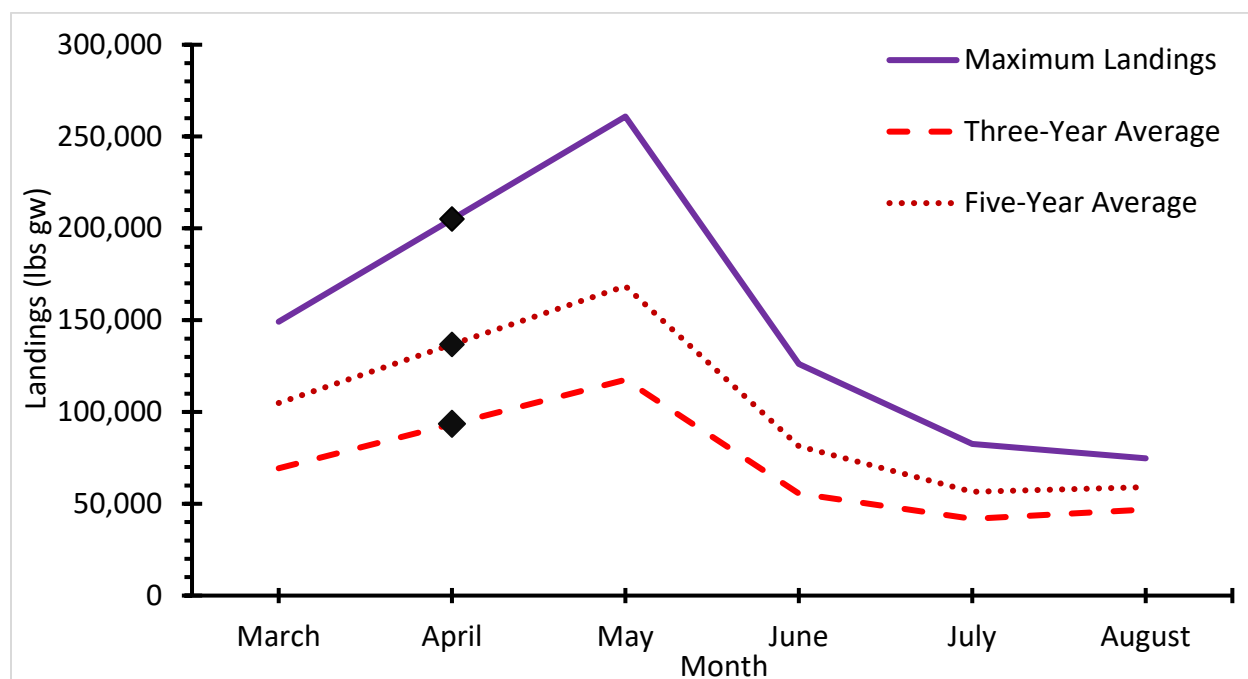
#### **Allow Commercial Harvest of Greater Amberjack in April**

Commercial harvest of greater amberjack in the month of April has been closed since it was implemented in 1999 by Amendment 9. Action 5 of Amendment 49 considers opening up the commercial sector to greater amberjack harvest in the month of April. Since the commercial sector has been closed in the month of April for more than twenty years, predicted April landings came from taking the average of the landings from the two closest months to April (March and May from 2016 to 2020). Table F.14 provide the results of the predicted April landings, and the predicted April landings are also shown in Figure F.6. Table F.15 estimates the closure dates from applying the predicted April landings to the predicted landings for the rest of the months in Season 1.



**Table F.14.** Predicted South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings for the month of April for the three different landings scenarios. The three different landings scenarios are 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data, 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data, and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data.

Landing Scenario	April Landings (lbs gw)
3 year average	93,451
5 year average	136,748
Max	204,985



**Figure F.6.** South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings (lbs gw) by month for Season 1 from 2016 to 2020, three-year average, and five-year average with predicted April landings. Predicted April landings are represented with a black diamond. Season 1 is from March through August.

**Table F.15.** The projected closure dates for the greater amberjack commercial sector Season 1 if the commercial sector was open to commercial harvest in April. The closure dates were generated from three different landings scenarios of 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data, 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data, and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data. The landings were compared against the commercial ACLs for Action 2-**Preferred Alternative 3**.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Commercial ACL Season 1 (lbs gw)</b>	<b>Scenario 1 Closure Date</b>	<b>Scenario 2 Closure Date</b>	<b>Scenario 3 Closure Date</b>
2022/2023	884,423	None	None	26-Aug
2024/2025	569,019	None	11-Aug	26-May
2026/2027	538,933	None	26-Jul	22-May

#### **Combination of the Season 1 Trip Limit Increases with the Commercial Sector Being Open in April**

Amendment 49 has the option to increase the commercial trip limit for Season 1 and also open April to commercial harvest of greater amberjack. Table F.16 provides predicted closures dates by combining the increased harvest from both the increased trip limits and opening the commercial sector in April. The closure dates range from May 14 to no closure.

**Table F.16.** The projected closure dates for the greater amberjack commercial sector Season 1 for the various trip limit increases and if the commercial sector was open to commercial harvest in April. The closure dates were generated from three different landings scenarios of 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data, 2) five-year average of the most recent years of complete data, and 3) the maximum landings in the last five years of complete data. The landings were compared against the ACLs for Action 2-Preferred Alternative 3.

Action 4 Alternative	Trip Limit	Year	Commercial ACL Season 1 (lbs gw)	Scenario 1 Closure Date	Scenario 2 Closure Date	Scenario 3 Closure Date
Alt 1 (No Action)	1,200	2022/2023	884,423	None	None	26-Aug
Alt 1 (No Action)	1,200	2024/2025	569,019	None	11-Aug	26-May
Alt 1 (No Action)	1,200	2026/2027	538,933	None	26-Jul	22-May
Sub-Alt 2a	1,500	2022/2023	884,423	None	None	13-Aug
Sub-Alt 2a	1,500	2024/2025	569,019	None	1-Aug	24-May
Sub-Alt 2a	1,500	2026/2027	538,933	None	16-Jul	20-May
Sub-Alt 2b	2,000	2022/2023	884,423	None	None	26-Jul
Sub-Alt 2b	2,000	2024/2025	569,019	None	17-Jul	20-May
Sub-Alt 2b	2,000	2026/2027	538,933	None	2-Jul	17-May
Sub-Alt 2c	2,500	2022/2023	884,423	None	None	11-Jul
Sub-Alt 2c	2,500	2024/2025	569,019	None	7/2/13	17-May
Sub-Alt 2c	2,500	2026/2027	538,933	None	22-Jun	14-May

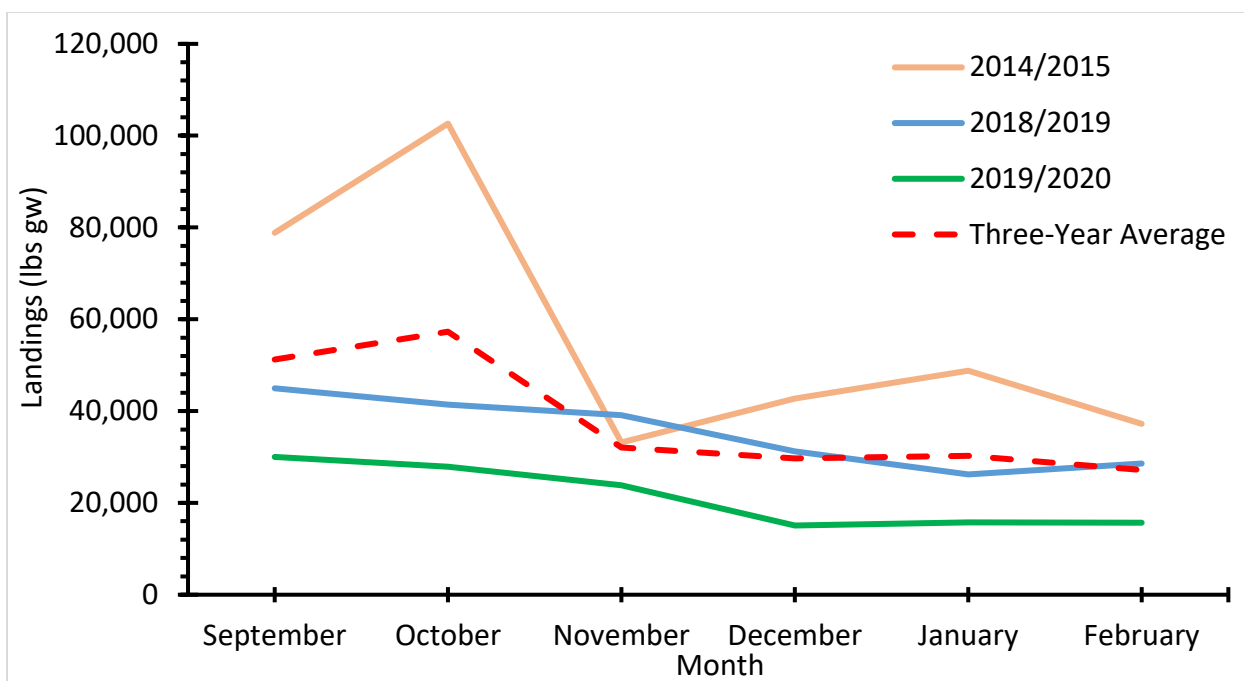
### **Season 2: September 1 through February 28**

#### **Predicting Commercial Landings**

Commercial landings data for South Atlantic greater amberjack were obtained from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) on September 29, 2021. Future commercial landings were determined from reviewing recent commercial landings data. The greater amberjack commercial Season 2 is September 1 through February 28. Therefore, Season 2 is split between two different years such as September 1, 2019 through February 28, 2020, and this example would generate the 2019/2020 season. Season 2 has had some closures in recent years. The Season 2 years of 2015/2016, 2016/2017, 2017/2018 all had closures that prevented a full six months of an open Season 2. The most recent three years of complete data are from the fishing seasons of 2014/2015, 2018/2019, and 2019/2020. These data were used to generate two potential future commercial landings scenarios: 1) three year average of the most recent years of complete data (2014/2015, 2018/2019, and 2019/2020), and, 2) the maximum landings in the last five years. The year with the maximum commercial landings in Season 2 in the last five years came from 2014/2015. Table F.17 and Figure F.7 displays the Season 2 commercial landings used in this analysis.

**Table F.17.** South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings (lbs gw) by month for Season 2 for recent years that did not have a closure, and the three-year average. The three year average came from the most recent years of complete data (2014/2015, 2018/2019, and 2019/2020). Season 2 is from September through February.

Year	September	October	November	December	January	February
2014/2015	78,817	102,624	33,172	42,725	48,806	37,245
2018/2019	44,968	41,420	39,110	31,204	26,208	28,613
2019/2020	30,015	27,851	23,853	15,078	15,743	15,667
3 Year Average	51,267	57,298	32,045	29,669	30,253	27,175



**Figure F.7.** South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial landings (lbs gw) by month for Season 2 for recent years that did not have a closure, and the three-year average. The three year average came from the most recent years of complete data (2014/2015, 2018/2019, and 2019/2020). Season 2 is from September through February.

Season lengths were projected by cumulatively summing the commercial landings for the two landings scenarios, and compare the results to the Action 2 Preferred Alternative. Season length analysis was conducted for all three Action 2 alternatives. However, to simplify the analysis only the preferred alternative (**Preferred Alternative 3** of Action 2) was analyzed for the other actions relating to the commercial Season 2. Additionally, since each alternative provides a range of five different ACLs, only the lowest, middle, and highest ACLs were included in the analysis. No closures were projected under ACLs from Action 2-**Preferred Alternative 3** (Table F.18).

**Table F.18.** The projected closure dates for the greater amberjack commercial sector Season 2 for different ACLs for Action 2. The closure dates were generated from the two different landings scenarios of 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data, and, 2) the maximum landings in the last five years.

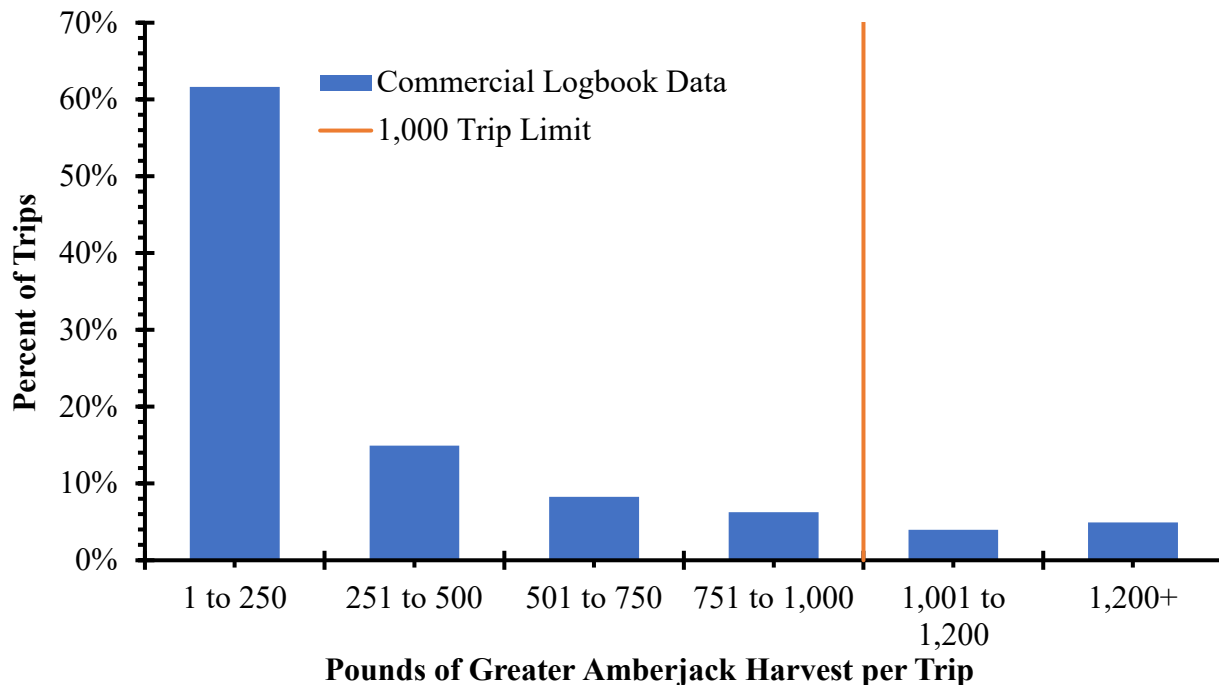
Alternative	Year	Commercial ACL Season 2 (lbs gw)	Scenario 1 Closure Date	Scenario 2 Closure Date
1	2022/2023	684,965	None	None
1	2024/2025	440,692	None	None
1	2026/2027	417,391	None	None
2	2022/2023	502,689	None	None
2	2024/2025	323,420	None	13-Feb
2	2026/2027	306,319	None	1-Feb
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>589,615</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>379,346</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>3 (Preferred)</b>	<b>2026/2027</b>	<b>359,288</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
4	2022/2023	758,077	None	None
4	2024/2025	487,731	None	None
4	2026/2027	461,942	None	None
5	2022/2023	842,308	None	None
5	2024/2025	541,923	None	None
5	2026/2027	513,269	None	None

### Impact from Decreasing the Commercial Minimum Size Limit in Season 2

Action 3 of Amendment 49 considers a decrease to the commercial minimum size limit. As discussed earlier in this report, reliable estimates of percent changes in harvest from decreasing the minimum size limit are not possible because of two factors: 1) low number of available data on discarded greater amberjack lengths, and, 2) not having a reliable estimate of the proportion of discards to the total South Atlantic greater amberjack commercial catch. Reducing the minimum size limit will allow harvest of smaller greater amberjack which will likely increase harvest.

### Impact from Increasing the Trip Limit for Season 2

Action 4 of Amendment 49 also considers increasing the commercial trip limit in Season 2. Commercial logbook data provides the lbs harvested per trip, and commercial logbook data were provided from the SEFSC on May 2, 2021. The current trip limit is 1,000 lbs and **Preferred Alternative 3** and its sub-alternatives for Action 4 consider increasing the Season 2 trip limit to 1,200; 1,500; 2,000; or 2,500 lbs. Figure F.8 provides the Season 2 distribution of greater amberjack harvested per trip in the commercial sector from 2015 to 2020. Approximately 9% of trips in recent years exceeded the current trip limit of 1,000 lbs.



**Figure F.8.** Distribution of the South Atlantic greater amberjack commercially harvested per trip (lbs ww) for Season 2. Season 2 is from September 1 through February 28. Data comes from the commercial logbook dataset from 2015 to 2020 (n = 3,075 trips), and the weight unit is lbs ww. The orange line represents the current commercial trip limit of 1,000 lbs ww.

The impact from increasing the trip limit in Season 2 was evaluated assuming that trips that met the current trip limit in recent years will also meet the new trip limit. This provides a maximum estimated harvest rate that may occur if the trip limit is increased. Not all trips meeting the current trip limit will likely meet newly proposed trip limits, but information is not available to determine exactly how many additional lbs of greater amberjack these trips would harvest once the trip limit is increased. Trips that met the current trip limit were defined as trips that landed 751 to 1,000 lbs. Therefore, the proposed trip limit of 1,200 lbs is being explored by adjusting any trips that had 751 to 1,000 lbs per trip, and adjusting them to meet the new trip limit of 1,200 lbs per trip. The range starts at 751 lbs instead of 1,000 lbs to account for any trips that were close but under the current trip limit. Trips that harvested below 751 lbs were not modified. Trips with landings greater than the current trip limit of 1,000 lbs were not changed since these trips did not follow the current trip limit in the past, and will probably not follow the implemented trip limit in the future. This modified trip limit analysis was only done using Season 2 data (September through February) from 2015 to 2020. The analysis resulted in estimated percent increase in commercial landings from increasing the commercial trip limit, and the results are provided in Table F.19. The percent increase in landings estimated from increasing the trip limit were applied to the projected landings to generate predicted closure dates. Table F.20 provides the predicted closure dates from the increase in the trip limit. Most of the scenarios resulted in no closures, and the closures that were predicted ranged from January 10 to February 24.

**Table F.19.** Calculated percent increase in commercial landings for the different Action 4 Season 2 trip limit alternatives using the recent commercial data (2015-2020).

<b>Trip Limit</b>	<b>Percent Increase in Landings</b>
1,000	0.0
1,200	5.9
1,500	12.3
2,000	22.0
2,500	31.8

**Table F.20.** The projected closure dates for the greater amberjack commercial sector Season 2 for a range of commercial ACLs from Action 4 alternatives that consider increasing the Season 2 trip limit. The closure dates were generated from the two different landings scenarios of 1) three-year average of the most recent years of complete data, and 2) the maximum landings in the last three years of complete data. The landings were compared against the commercial ACLs from Action 2-**Preferred Alternative 3**.

<b>Action 4 Alternative</b>	<b>Trip Limit (lbs)</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Commercial ACL Season 2 (lbs gw)</b>	<b>Scenario 1 Closure Date</b>	<b>Scenario 2 Closure Date</b>
Alt 1 (No Action)	1,000	2022/2023	589,615	None	None
Alt 1 (No Action)	1,000	2024/2025	379,346	None	None
Alt 1 (No Action)	1,000	2026/2027	359,288	None	None
<b>Sub-Alt 3a (Preferred)</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>589,615</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>Sub-Alt 3a (Preferred)</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>2024/2025</b>	<b>379,346</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>Sub-Alt 3a (Preferred)</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>2026/2027</b>	<b>359,288</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>None</b>
Sub-Alt 3b	1,500	2022/2023	589,615	None	None
Sub-Alt 3b	1,500	2024/2025	379,346	None	24-Feb
Sub-Alt 3b	1,500	2026/2027	359,288	None	11-Feb
Sub-Alt 3c	2,000	2022/2023	589,615	None	None
Sub-Alt 3c	2,000	2024/2025	379,346	None	4-Feb
Sub-Alt 3c	2,000	2026/2027	359,288	None	24-Feb
Sub-Alt 3d	2,500	2022/2023	589,615	None	None
Sub-Alt 3d	2,500	2024/2025	379,346	None	20-Jan
Sub-Alt 3d	2,500	2026/2027	359,288	None	10-Jan

## Appendix G. Bycatch Practicability Analysis

Amendment 49 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP) would modify management of South Atlantic greater amberjack. Actions include revising annual catch limits (ACL), sector allocations and management measures for the commercial and recreational sectors. Development of Amendment 49 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (Amendment 49) is a response to the most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic greater amberjack (SEDAR 59 2020).

National Standard 9 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act states that “Conservation and management measures shall, to the extent practicable, (A) minimize bycatch and (B) to the extent bycatch cannot be avoided, minimize the mortality of such bycatch.” The Magnuson-Stevens Act defines “bycatch”, in part, as fish which are harvested in a fishery, but which are not sold or kept for personal use, and includes economic discards and regulatory discards. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) outlines, at 50 C.F.R. §600.350(d) (3) (i), ten factors that should be considered in determining whether a management measure minimizes bycatch or bycatch mortality to the extent practicable.

1. Population effects for the bycatch species.
2. Ecological effects due to changes in the bycatch of that species (effects on other species in the ecosystem).
3. Changes in the bycatch of other species of fish and the resulting population and ecosystem effects.
4. Effects on marine mammals and birds.
5. Changes in fishing, processing, disposal, and marketing costs.
6. Changes in fishing practices and behavior of fishermen.
7. Changes in research, administration, and enforcement costs and management effectiveness.
8. Changes in the economic, social, or cultural value of fishing activities and non-consumptive uses of fishery resources.
9. Changes in the distribution of benefits and costs.
10. Social effects.

### **Bycatch Reporting Requirements and Methodology**

For the commercial sector, the vessel reporting requirement is achieved through logbooks. Fishermen with Commercial South Atlantic Unlimited Snapper Grouper or 225-lb Trip Limit Snapper Grouper Permits, who are selected by the Science and Research Director, are required to maintain and submit fishing records through the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) Commercial Logbook. Discard data are collected using the Supplemental Discard Logbook that is sent to a 20% stratified random sample of the active commercial permit holders in the fishery. In addition to the number of self-reported discards per trip and gear, the SEFSC Supplemental Discard Logbook attempts to quantify the reason why discarding occurs using four



codes.<sup>23</sup> Fishermen can specify multiple reasons for a species discarded on the same trip and gear.

- 1) Regulation – Not legal size: Animals that would have been sold, however local or federal size limits forbid it.
- 2) Regulation – Out of season: Animals that would have been sold, however the local or federal fishing season is closed.
- 3) Regulation – Other: Animals that would have been sold, however a local or federal regulation other than size or season, forbids it (Other than size or season; i.e., protected species, not properly permitted).
- 4) Market conditions: Animals that have no market value (rotten, damaged).

For the recreational sector, estimates of discards from private recreational and charter fishermen are collected through the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP)/Fishing Effort Survey (FES). As discussed earlier in Amendment 49, the MRIP/FES replaced the Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey. The Southeast Region Headboat Survey, which includes limited headboat observer sampling, collects discard information from headboat vessels. In addition, in January 2021, NMFS implemented the Southeast For-Hire Electronic Reporting Program, which implemented mandatory electronic reporting of for-hire vessel catch data for over 3,000 vessels in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic. The purpose of this program is to provide more accurate and reliable fisheries information about for-hire catch, effort, and discards.

## **G.1. Population Effects for the Bycatch Species**

### **G.1.1.Amount and Type of Bycatch and Discards**

#### **Commercial Sector**

The South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery is characterized by moderately high discards, especially of vermilion snapper, black sea bass, and red porgy (Table G.1 and Figure G.1). Most discards originate from handline/electric rig and trap gear, with some discards from trolling gear and relatively low discards from longline and diving gear. Trap/pot gear show high levels of discarded black sea bass, which is the targeted species of this gear type, but low levels of bycatch for other species. It is possible that trip-level reporting leads to the relatively high discard estimates from trolling gear; these may be sets using another gear type (i.e., handline/electric rig) on a trip declared as a trolling gear trip. The ratio of commercial landings to commercial discards is not compared because commercial landings are reported in pounds and discards are reported in numbers of fish.

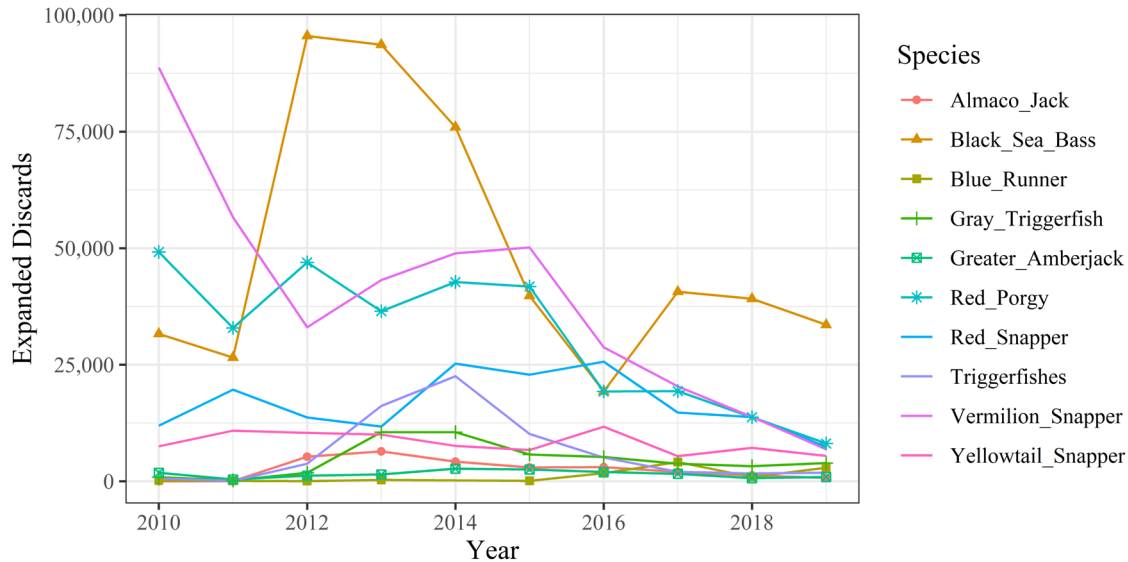
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<sup>23</sup> More information on the discard logbook is available here <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/about/southeast-fisheries-science-center>.

**Table G.1.** Top ten species with mean estimated South Atlantic commercial discards (number of fish) during snapper grouper trips (defined as trips with >50% of landings from snapper grouper stocks), sorted from largest to smallest, by gear, for the 2015-2019 period.

Stock	Diver	Stock	Handline / Electric	Stock	Longline	Stock	Trap / Pot	Stock	Troll
Gray Snapper	133	Vermilion Snapper	23,324	Red Grouper	176	Black Sea Bass	25,581	Black Sea Bass	1,114
Hogfish	57	Red Porgy	20,337	Snowy Grouper	157	Trigger-fishes	1,507	Grunts	66
Black Grouper	28	Red Snapper	16,805	Blueline Tilefish	32	Vermilion Snapper	662	King Mackerel	34
Ocean Triggerfish	10	Black Sea Bass	7,797	<b>Greater Amberjack</b>	<b>26</b>	Gray Triggerfish	407	White Grunt	24
Mutton Snapper	8	Yellowtail Snapper	7,278	Red Snapper	20	White Grunt	207	Gag	19
Red Grouper	5	Gray Triggerfish	3,966	Red Porgy	18	Grunts	161	Dolphin	16
Yellow Jack	2	Trigger-fishes	2,652	Trigger-fishes	5	Red Porgy	94	Black Grouper	13
Yellowtail Snapper	2	Almaco Jack	2,004	Golden Tilefish	2	Red Snapper	65	Rock Sea Bass	6
Groupers	1	Blue Runner	1,956	Amberjacks	1	Gag	23	Trigger-fishes	5
King Mackerel	1	<b>Greater Amberjack</b>	<b>1,510</b>	Blackfin Snapper	1	Red Grouper	6	<b>Greater Amberjack</b>	<b>3</b>

Source: SEFSC Coastal Logbook (accessed May 2020) and Discard Logbook (accessed May 2020). Note: Commercial gray triggerfish includes the "triggerfishes, unclassified" category.



**Figure G.1.** Expanded self-reported commercial discards (numbers of fish) for the top ten species discarded during snapper grouper trips (defined as trips with >50% of landings from snapper grouper stocks) from 2010-2019 for all gear types.

Source: SEFSC Coastal Logbook (accessed May 2020) and Discard Logbook (accessed May 2020).

Of the four discard codes, regulations (i.e., not legal size and out of season) was the most common reason selected for the most commonly discarded snapper grouper species based on self-reported discards (Table G.2). The minimum size limit appears to be the primary driver of commercial discards for black sea bass, gag, gray snapper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, and yellowtail snapper. Out of season appears to be the primary driver of discards for almaco jack, red porgy, red snapper, and vermilion snapper.

**Table G.2.** The percentage of unexpanded discards for each discard reason out of the total number of self-reported discards reported to the Supplemental Discard Logbook for the top ten snapper grouper species discarded in the South Atlantic from 2015 through 2019. Some percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Species	Not Legal Size	Out of Season	Other Regulations	Market Conditions
Almaco Jack	4%	72%	7%	17%
Black Sea Bass	99%	0%	0%	0%
Gag	78%	20%	0%	2%
Gray Snapper	91%	0%	0%	8%
Gray Triggerfish	59%	39%	1%	0%
<b>Greater Amberjack</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>1%</b>
Red Porgy	19%	78%	2%	0%
Red Snapper	2%	78%	20%	0%
Vermilion Snapper	43%	50%	7%	0%
Yellowtail Snapper	92%	6%	2%	0%

Sources: SEFSC Supplemental Commercial Discard Logbook (May 2020).

### **Recreational Sector**

From 2015 through 2019, the most discarded species on trips capturing a snapper grouper species was black sea bass for all three modes (Table G.3). Red snapper, tomtate, yellowtail snapper, and grunt species were in the top ten for all modes.

**Table G.3.** From 2015 through 2019, the top ten species with discards reported on trips capturing a snapper grouper species by recreational mode. Species are sorted by number of total discards for each mode from 2015-2019.

Mode	HEADBOAT		CHARTER		PRIVATE	
Rank	Species	Discards (N)	Species	Discards (N)	Species	Discards (N)
1	Black Sea Bass	2,362,007	Black Sea Bass	1,464,909	Black Sea Bass	40,129,026
2	Vermilion Snapper	461,562	Red Snapper	601,973	Gray Snapper	21,989,786
3	Tomtate	327,379	Yellowtail Snapper	529,770	Pinfish	10,632,466
4	White Grunt	294,025	Tomtate	472,005	Red Snapper	9,907,110
5	Yellowtail Snapper	278,821	Vermilion Snapper	416,724	Yellowtail Snapper	6,926,752
6	Red Snapper	258,627	Gray Snapper	275,171	Tomtate	6,619,263
7	Gray Triggerfish	183,024	Mutton Snapper	149,472	Hardhead Catfish	5,036,604
8	Blue Runner	121,476	Blue Runner	133,872	Grunt (family)	4,961,629
9	Grunts (unidentified)	99,496	Grunt (family)	128,757	Atlantic Croaker	4,675,997
10	Atlantic Sharpnose Shark	90,504	<b>Greater Amberjack</b>	<b>112,017</b>	Gray Triggerfish	3,828,858

Sources: MRIP-FES data from SEFSC Recreational ACL Dataset (September 2020); Headboat data from SEFSC Headboat Logbook CRNF files (expanded; July 2020).

Recreational discards of several snapper grouper species are higher than the landings for certain modes of fishing (Table G.4). Red snapper, black sea bass, red grouper, and tomtate discards are many times higher than their landings across all modes. Across most of the snapper grouper species, the magnitude of private mode discards is much higher compared to the headboat or charter modes. Greater amberjack recreational discards to landings ratios are 95% in the headboat component, 91% in the charter component, and 186% in the private recreational component.

**Table G.4.** South Atlantic snapper grouper headboat, charter, and private mean annual estimates of landings and discards (2015-2019). Headboat and MRIP (charter and private) landings and discards are in numbers of fish.

Mode	HEADBOAT			CHARTER			PRIVATE		
Species	Landings (N)	Discards (N)	Ratio (D:L)	Landings (N)	Discards (N)	Ratio (D:L)	Landings (N)	Discards (N)	Ratio (D:L)
Almaco Jack	8,345	1,683	20%	12,752	2,921	23%	70,012	237,235	339%
Black Sea Bass	48,095	472,401	982%	37,817	288,186	762%	484,547	7,953,343	1,641%
Gag	679	805	118%	2,387	2,257	95%	21,664	57,088	264%
Gray Triggerfish	39,606	36,605	92%	53,395	19,237	36%	306,482	765,772	250%
<b>Greater Amberjack</b>	<b>3,757</b>	<b>3,555</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>24,570</b>	<b>22,404</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>69,007</b>	<b>128,035</b>	<b>186%</b>
Mutton Snapper	15,939	15,516	97%	24,579	29,894	122%	208,691	576,812	276%
Red Grouper	2,577	8,675	337%	3,282	8,902	271%	53,718	142,866	266%
Red Porgy	12,095	12,765	106%	14,248	8,922	63%	109,050	83,622	77%
Red Snapper	2,461	51,725	2,102%	6,033	120,395	1,996%	211,833	1,981,423	935%
Scamp	1,554	1,044	67%	3,174	193	6%	2,775	1,458	53%
Snowy Grouper	501	4	1%	1,936	165	9%	2,536	599	24%
Tomtate	44,536	65,476	147%	13,456	94,401	702%	439,869	1,323,853	301%
Vermilion Snapper	128,029	92,312	72%	73,407	83,345	114%	435,534	661,292	152%
White Grunt	149,852	58,805	39%	26,450	8,944	34%	517,265	350,516	68%
Whitebone Porgy	5,083	1,720	34%	3,475	325	9%	25,948	3,740	14%
Yellowtail Snapper	134,139	55,764	42%	239,421	105,954	44%	1,002,876	1,385,351	138%

Sources: MRIP-FES data from SEFSC Recreational ACL Dataset (September 2020); Headboat data from SEFSC Headboat Logbook CRNF files (expanded; July 2020).

### G.1.2.Practicability of Management Measures in Directed Fisheries Relative to their Impact on Bycatch and Bycatch Mortality

#### **Expected Impacts on Bycatch for the Subject Amendment Actions**

Action 1 would revise the acceptable biological catch (ABC), total ACL, and annual optimum yield (OY) for greater amberjack. The Council selected **Alternative 2** as the preferred alternative, which proposes an ABC, total ACL, and annual OY that are equal to the ABC level recommended by the Council's SSC. **Preferred Alternative 2** would allow for more fish to be harvested and reduce the likelihood of in-season closures. Therefore, it is expected that there would be a decrease in bycatch because more fish can be kept rather than discarded, which is indirectly beneficial to the greater amberjack stock. Fishing effort or behavior is not expected to change for the overall snapper grouper fishery; thus, no changes in bycatch of co-occurring species are expected as a result of Action 1.

Action 2 would revise the sector allocations for greater amberjack and sector ACLs to reflect the updated ABC level recommended by the Council's SSC and chosen by the Council. The Council selected **Alternative 3** as the preferred alternative, which proposes an allocation of 35.00% of the greater amberjack total ACL to the commercial sector and 65.00% to the recreational sector. This allocation scenario modestly increases the recreational sector allocation and decreases the commercial sector allocation from the status quo. In general, reducing sector allocations results in less landings available to a sector for harvest and increases the likelihood of an in-season closure. Therefore, in-season closures could have adverse effects to the stock if during the closure, not all fish returned to the water survive. However, since it is estimated that South Atlantic greater amberjack have a low release mortality rate of 20% for both sectors (sensitivity range: 10-30%) (SEDAR 15 2008 and SEDAR 59 2020), should an in-season closure occur, any dead discards are expected to be minimal.

Action 3 would reduce the commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack. The Council selected **Alternative 3** as the preferred alternative. The regulation 'not legal size' was the most common reason selected for release of greater amberjack (Table G.2). Reducing the current 36-inch fork length (FL) commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack under **Preferred Alternative 3** would likely reduce discards compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Doing so is expected to increase commercial landings as more fish that would be discarded could be kept. Since greater amberjack has a low estimated release mortality (20%), a high percentage of released fish likely survive; therefore, any dead discards are expected to be minimal, potentially resulting in minimal adverse long-term population effects from any change in the numbers of discards. There is no anticipated change to fishing activity or behavior in the snapper grouper commercial sector and thus no changes in bycatch of co-occurring species are expected as a result of Action 3.

Action 4 would increase commercial trip limits for greater amberjack. The selected **Alternative 3, Sub-Alternative 3a** as the preferred alternative. In addition to the low release mortality rate of 20% estimated for greater amberjack in the South Atlantic (SEDAR 15 2008 and SEDAR 59 2020), increasing the Season 2 commercial trip limit could result in fewer discards of greater amberjack compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** because more fish could be kept. Reducing the discards would be beneficial to the greater amberjack stock.

Action 5 would revise the April spawning closure greater amberjack. The Council selected **Alternative 2** as the preferred alternative which would specify that during April each year, no person may sell, purchase, harvest, or possess a greater amberjack from the South Atlantic EEZ and the harvest and possession limits are zero. **Preferred Alternative 2** would result in additional, and positive, indirect biological effects if greater harvest restrictions are applied during the peak spawning month of April. Although regulatory discarding may slightly increase since a bag limit is not allowed and fish would need to be discarded rather than kept, greater amberjack have a low release mortality rate of 20% and the effects to the stock should be minimal. Therefore, **Preferred Alternative 2** would offer some protection to the stock and also indirectly provide the greatest biological benefits compared to the other considered alternatives in that it encompasses stricter management measures for both sectors during spawning season.

Action 6 would remove recreational annual catch targets (ACT) from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The Council selected **Alternative 2** as the preferred alternative, which would remove ACTs for species managed under the FMP. This action would not be expected to affect discards and/or bycatch, since the only consequence of reaching the ACT would be to continue to monitor the landings, which the Marine Recreational Information Program does continually.

**Past, Current, and Future Actions to Prevent Bycatch and Improve Monitoring of Harvest, Discards, and Discard Mortality**

Actions taken in the Snapper Grouper FMP related to management of greater amberjack, including actions that could reduce bycatch and bycatch mortality of greater amberjack and other snapper grouper species, are outlined in Section 1.8 of this amendment. Other past, current, and future actions that could prevent bycatch and/or improve monitoring of harvest, discards, and discard mortality are included below.

Amendment 16 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2009a) required the use of dehooking devices, which could help reduce bycatch mortality of snapper grouper species. Dehooking devices can allow fishermen to remove hooks with greater ease and more quickly without removing the fish from the water. If a fish does need to be removed from the water, de-hookers reduce handling time thus increasing survival (Cooke et al. 2001).

Amendment 17A to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2010) required circle hooks for snapper grouper species north of 28 degrees latitude, which has likely reduced bycatch mortality of some snapper grouper species.

The Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 2 (CE-BA 2; SAFMC 2011c) included actions that modified management of special management zones (SMZ) off South Carolina; revised sea turtle release gear requirements for the snapper grouper fishery that were established in Amendment 15B to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2008); and designated new essential fish habitat (EFH) and EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern in the South Atlantic. CE-BA 2 also included an action that limited harvest and possession of snapper grouper and coastal migratory pelagic (CMP) species to the bag limit in the special management zone (SMZ) off South Carolina. This action likely reduced bycatch around SMZs by restricting commercial harvest in the area, but has probably had limited effect on the magnitude of overall bycatch of snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic.

The Comprehensive ACL Amendment (SAFMC 2011b) implemented ACLs and AMs for species not undergoing overfishing in the FMPs for snapper grouper, dolphin and wahoo, golden crab, and *Sargassum*, in addition to other actions such as allocations and establishing annual catch targets for the recreational sector. ACLs and AMs have likely reduced bycatch of target species as well as incidentally caught species.

The Council's Headboat Electronic Reporting Amendment (SAFMC 2013) changed the reporting frequency by headboats from monthly to weekly, and required that reports be submitted electronically. The action is expected to provide more timely information on landings and discards. Improved information on landings would help ensure ACLs are not exceeded. Furthermore, more timely and accurate information would be expected to provide a better understanding of the composition and magnitude of catch and bycatch, enhance the quality of data provided for stock assessments, increase the quality of assessment output, and lead to better decisions regarding additional measures to reduce bycatch.

Amendment 36 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2016a) established spawning SMZs and is expected to reduce bycatch of many snapper grouper species, especially speckled hind and Warsaw grouper.

The Council developed a joint For-Hire Reporting Amendment with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council that requires all federally permitted charter vessels report landings information weekly to the SEFSC electronically (SAFMC and GMFMC 2017). Additionally, the Councils have also begun development of a joint amendment to require that all federally permitted commercial fishing vessels in the southeast also report their logbook landings information electronically. These future actions will help to improve estimates on the composition and magnitude of catch and bycatch of species affected by this amendment, as well as all other federally managed species in the southeast region.

Amendment 42 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2019a) modified sea turtle release gear regulations for the commercial snapper grouper fishery and modified the snapper grouper framework so the Council may more quickly modify sea turtle and other protected resources release gear and handling requirements in the future.

Regulatory Amendment 29 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2020a) required descending devices be on board all commercial, for-hire, and private recreational vessels while fishing for or possessing snapper grouper species; the use of non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing for snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear and natural baits north of 28° N latitude; and all hooks be non-stainless steel when fishing for snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear and natural baits throughout South Atlantic federal waters. The Council has also implemented an extensive outreach and public education program, which along with its citizen science initiative is promoting best fishing practices for all the species it manages.

Regulatory Amendment 31 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (included in the Comprehensive Recreational AMs Amendment) could include actions to revise recreational AMs to allow more flexibility in managing recreational fisheries.



Regulatory Amendment 35 to the Snapper Grouper FMP will address results of the latest stock assessment for the red snapper stock in the southeast, release mortality issues in the snapper grouper fishery, and modifications to red snapper catch levels.

Amendment 46 to the Snapper Grouper FMP proposes actions to focus on private recreational permit and reporting.

These past, current, and potential future actions will help to improve estimates on the composition and magnitude of catch and bycatch of federally managed species in the southeast region and minimize discard mortality. Additional information on fishery related actions from the past, present, and future considerations can be found in Chapter 6 (Cumulative Effects) of the amendment.

## **G.2. Ecological Effects Due to Changes in Bycatch**

Release mortality rates for the snapper grouper fishery are widely variable species to species and sector to sector, and are dependent on fishing mode (Table G.5). For instance, recreational discards of red snapper in the South Atlantic are a main driver in the overfishing determination for the stock (SEDAR 41 2017). However, discard mortality estimates for snapper grouper species are variable and highly uncertain. Generally, release mortality is highly correlated with depth for snapper grouper species, with highest mortality among fish captured in deep water (Campbell et al. 2014; Pulver 2017; Rudershausen et al. 2014; Stephen and Harris 2010; Wilson and Burns 1996). Greater amberjack are typically found in 60 to 240 feet of water and juveniles may occur in water less than 30 feet deep ([FWC](#)). It is estimated that South Atlantic greater amberjack have a low release mortality rate of 20% (sensitivity range: 10-30%) (SEDAR 15 2008 and SEDAR 59 2020), and any dead discards are expected to be minimal.

**Table G.5.** Release mortality rates of select recreationally and commercially important snapper-grouper species from recent stock assessments.

Species	Fishery	Release mortality	Data Source
Black Sea Bass	Recreational	13.7%	SEDAR 56 (2018)
Black Sea Bass	Commercial Trap/Pot (2007- present)	6.8%	SEDAR 56 (2018)
Black Sea Bass	Commercial Vertical Line	19%	SEDAR 56 (2018)
Gag	Recreational	25%	SEDAR 10 Update (2014)
Gag	Commercial	40%	SEDAR 10 Update (2014)
Gray Triggerfish	Recreational & Commercial	12.5%	SEDAR 41 (2016)
<b>Greater Amberjack</b>	<b>Recreational &amp; Commercial</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>SEDAR 59 (2020)</b>
Red Porgy	Recreational	41%	SEDAR 60 (2020)
Red Porgy	Commercial	53%	SEDAR 60 (2020)
Red Snapper	Recreational - Private	23%	SEDAR 73 (2021)
Red Snapper	Recreational - Charter & Headboat	22%	SEDAR 73 (2021)
Red Snapper	Commercial	32%	SEDAR 73 (2021)
Vermilion snapper	Recreational	38%	SEDAR 55 (2018)
Vermilion snapper	Commercial	41%	SEDAR 55 (2018)
Yellowtail snapper	Recreational	15%	SEDAR 64 (2020)
Yellowtail snapper	Commercial	12.5%	SEDAR 64 (2020)

It is likely that most mortality is a function of hooking and handling of the fish when the hook is being removed. Regulatory Amendment 29 to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2020a) required descending devices be on board all commercial, for-hire, and private recreational vessels while fishing for or possessing snapper grouper species; the use of non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing for snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear and natural baits north of 28° N latitude; and all hooks be non-stainless steel when fishing for snapper grouper species with hook-and-line gear and natural baits throughout South Atlantic federal waters. The Council also implemented an extensive outreach and public education program, which along with its citizen science initiative is promoting best fishing practices for all the species it manages. The goal of these regulations is to reduce discard mortality for snapper grouper species.

The actions contained in this amendment are not expected to result in substantial changes to bycatch in the snapper grouper fishery; thus, ecological effects due to changes in bycatch in this fishery are expected to be negligible. For more details on ecological effects, see Chapters 3 and 4 of this amendment.

### G.3. Changes in the Bycatch of Other Fish Species and Resulting Population and Ecosystem Effects

Amendment 49 is not expected to result in changes in bycatch of other fish species. The snapper grouper fishery is characterized by a high number of discards for all species and sectors (Tables G.1 and G.3). Both sectors likely target a wide range of species, including dolphin wahoo, snapper grouper, and coastal migratory pelagic species during each trip. This results in a varied amount and type of bycatch of species. The top three species caught with greater amberjack in the South Atlantic region are dolphin (mahi mahi), vermilion snapper, and king mackerel (Table G.6). Any closures or reductions in fishing effort of South Atlantic greater amberjack has the potential to reduce the bycatch of these three species. However, the actions in this amendment are not expected to alter overall fishing activity or behavior in the fishery; thus, no changes in bycatch of other species are expected.

**Table G.6.** The top ten species that are commonly caught on recreational trips that caught greater amberjack in the South Atlantic region. This came from MRIP recreational landings from 2015 to 2019.

Species
Dolphin (mahi mahi)
Vermilion Snapper
King Mackerel
Black Sea Bass
Gray Triggerfish
Alamco Jack
Bluefish
Little Tunny
Red Snapper
White Grunt

### G.4. Effects on Marine Mammals and Birds

#### **Marine Mammals**

Under Section 118 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), the NMFS must publish, at least annually, a List of Fisheries (LOF) that places all U.S. commercial fisheries into one of three categories based on the level of incidental serious injury and mortality of marine mammals that occurs in each fishery. The gear types used to catch greater amberjack are nets, spear, longline and hook-and-line. The longline and hook-and-line gear components of the snapper grouper fishery, which is primarily the gear used to catch greater amberjack, are determined to have remote likelihood of / no known interactions with marine mammals (Category III, LOF, 87 FR 23122; April 19, 2022).

### **Sea Birds**

The Bermuda petrel and roseate tern occur within the action area. Bermuda petrels are occasionally seen in the waters of the Gulf Stream off the coasts of North Carolina and South Carolina during the summer. Sightings are considered rare and only occurring in low numbers (Alsop 2001). Roseate terns occur widely along the Atlantic coast during the summer but in the southeast region, they are found mainly off the Florida Keys (unpublished US Fish and Wildlife Service data). Interaction with fisheries has not been reported as a concern for either of these species. Although, the Bermuda petrel and roseate tern occur within the action area, these species are not commonly found and neither has been described as associating with vessels or having had interactions with the snapper grouper fishery. Thus, the fishery is not likely to adversely affect the Bermuda petrel and the roseate tern.

## **G.5. Changes in Fishing, Processing, Disposal, and Marketing Costs**

The actions proposed in Amendment 49 are not expected to substantially alter fishing practices, processing, disposal, or marketing costs in the near or short term in relation to bycatch or discards in the snapper grouper fishery. As shown in the analyses in Chapter 4 of the preferred alternatives for actions potentially affecting catch, costs are not expected to change. Similarly, in the long term, it is more likely that current fishing, processing, disposal, and marketing costs would be maintained at or near their status quo levels, thus leading to no anticipated changes.

## **G.6. Changes in Fishing Practices and Behavior of Fishermen**

As discussed above, the actions proposed in Amendment 49 are not expected to change fishing practices or fishing behavior, and are likely to have little effect on the overall magnitude of discards. Also, any changes to fishing behavior and subsequent changes in the level of discards or discard mortality that may result from the actions in the amendment are expected to be small, and would not jeopardize the sustainability of any target or non-target species.

## **G.7. Changes in Research, Administration, and Enforcement Costs and Management Effectiveness**

### **Research**

Research and monitoring is ongoing to understand the effectiveness of implemented management measures and their effect on bycatch. The SEFSC is developing electronic logbooks, which could be used to enable fishery managers to obtain information on species composition, size distribution, geographic range, disposition, and depth of fishes that are released. Further, a joint Commercial Logbook Reporting Amendment is being developed by the Council and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, which would require electronic reporting of landings information by federally permitted commercial vessels to increase the timeliness and accuracy of landings and discard data. The For-Hire Reporting Amendment requirements should improve timeliness and quality of data for the charter and headboat components of the recreational sector (SAFMC and GMFMC 2017).

Cooperative research projects between science and industry are available each year in the form of grants from Marine Fisheries Initiative, Saltonstall-Kennedy program, and the Cooperative

Research Program. These programs can provide research funds for observer programs, as well as gear testing and testing of electronic devices. A condition of funding for these projects is that data are made available to the Councils and NMFS upon completion of a study.

#### **Administration**

The proposed actions are not expected to significantly impact administrative costs.

#### **Enforcement**

The proposed actions are not expected to significantly impact enforcement costs.

### **G.8. Changes in the Economic, Social, or Cultural Value of Fishing Activities and Non-Consumptive Uses of Fishery Resources**

Changes in economic, social, or cultural values are discussed in Chapter 4. None of the actions and alternatives in Amendment 49 are likely to change the current level of bycatch of target or non-target species in the South Atlantic, and thus are unlikely to change the social, economic, or cultural value of fishing activities and non-consumptive uses of the snapper grouper fishery.

### **G.9. Changes in the Distribution of Benefits and Costs**

The distribution of benefits and costs expected from the proposed actions in Amendment 49 are discussed in the economic and social effects analysis in Chapter 4. These effects are discussed in relation to the baseline economic and social conditions of the fishery and fishing communities outlined in Chapter 3 of the document. Additionally, the Regulatory Impact Review (Appendix B) and Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis (Appendix C) provide additional information on changes in the distribution of benefits and costs. Overall, this amendment is not expected to change bycatch in a way that would change the distribution of benefits and costs.

### **G.10. Social Effects**

The baseline social environment and social effects of the proposed actions are described in Chapters 3 and 4 of Amendment 49, respectively. In general, fishermen become frustrated as waste of the resource increases due to regulatory bycatch of target and non-target species. This often results in a distrust of science because regulations are intended to protect stocks and rebuild overfished stocks by reducing such bycatch. However, none of the actions and alternatives in Amendment 49 are likely to change the current level of bycatch of target or non-target species in the South Atlantic and thus are unlikely to result in the negative social effects described.

### **G.11. Conclusion**

This BPA evaluates the practicability of taking additional action to minimize bycatch and bycatch mortality using the ten factors provided at 50 C.F.R. § 600.350(d)(3)(i). In summary, the proposed actions in Amendment 49 are not likely to significantly contribute to or detract from the current level of bycatch in the snapper grouper fishery. The Council, NMFS, and the SEFSC have implemented, and plan to implement, numerous management measures and

reporting requirements that have improved, or are likely to improve the monitoring efforts of discards and discard mortality.

## Appendix H. Fishery Impact Statement

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires a Fishery Impact Statement (FIS) be prepared for all amendments to fishery management plans (FMP). The FIS contains an assessment of the expected and potential biological, economic, and social effects of the conservation and management measures on: 1) fishery participants and their communities; 2) participants in the fisheries conducted in adjacent areas under the authority of another Council; and 3) the safety of human life at sea. Detailed discussion of the expected effects for all proposed changes is provided in Chapters 1 and 2. The FIS provides a summary of these effects.

### **Actions Contained in Amendment 49 to the FMP for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 49)**

Amendment 49 would modify management of South Atlantic greater amberjack. Actions include revising the acceptable biological catch (ABC), annual catch limits (ACL), annual optimum yield (OY), sector allocations, and management measures for the commercial and recreational sectors. Additionally, Amendment 49 removes the recreational annual catch targets (ACT) from the Snapper Grouper FMP. The actions and their preferred alternatives are:

- **Action 1.** Revise the greater amberjack ABC, total ACL, and annual OY.
  - **Preferred Alternative 2.** Revise the ABC and set it equal to the most recent recommendation from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). Revise the total ACL and annual OY for greater amberjack and set them equal to the recommended ABC. The recommended ABC is inclusive of recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program's (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES). The 2026/2027 total ACL and annual OY would remain in place until modified.
- **Action 2.** Revise the greater amberjack sector allocations and sector ACLs.
  - **Preferred Alternative 2.** Allocate 65.00% of the revised total ACL for greater amberjack to the recreational sector and 35.00% of the revised total ACL for greater amberjack to the commercial sector.
- **Action 3.** Reduce the commercial minimum size limits for greater amberjack
  - **Preferred Alternative 2.** Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to 32 inches fork length.
- **Action 4.** Increase the Season 2 commercial trip limit for greater amberjack.
  - **Preferred Alternative 3.** Modify the September 1 through the end of February (Season 2) commercial trip limit for greater amberjack to be:
    - **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3a.** 1,200 pounds gutted or whole weight.
- **Action 5.** Revise the April spawning closure for greater amberjack.
  - **Preferred Alternative 2.** Specify during April each year, no person may sell, purchase, harvest, or possess a greater amberjack from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone and the harvest and possession limits are zero. This closure would apply to both the recreational and commercial sectors.
- **Action 6.** Remove recreational ACTs from the Snapper Grouper FMP.
  - **Preferred Alternative 2.** Remove recreational ACTs for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP.

### **Assessment of Biological Effects**

The preferred alternatives in Amendment 49 are designed to adjust harvest of greater amberjack to the new ACLs based on the most recent stock assessment for South Atlantic greater amberjack (SEDAR 59 2020). The proposed increase in the total ACL for greater amberjack is based on the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee's recommended ABC for greater amberjack in the South Atlantic region, and is considered best scientific information available. SEDAR 59 (2020) indicates that the greater amberjack ACL can be increased without having negative effects on the sustainability of the stock.

Greater amberjack are often harvested incidentally when fishing for other snapper grouper species. Substantial changes in fishing effort or behavior are not expected as a result of this amendment, thus the proposed actions would not be expected to result in any biological effects, positive or negative, on co-occurring species (BPA, Appendix G). The proposed actions would not change fishing methods for snapper grouper species in the U.S. exclusive economic zone, and therefore would perpetuate the existing level of risk for interactions between Endangered Species Act listed species and the fishery. Thus, there is likely to be no additional effects, positive or negative, to protected species from the actions.

### **Assessment of Economic Effects**

In general, ACLs that allow for more fish to be landed can result in increased positive economic effects if harvest increases without notable effects on the stock of a species. The ACL does not directly impact the fishery for a species unless harvest changes, fishing behavior changes, or the ACL is exceeded, thereby potentially triggering AMs such as harvest closures or other restrictive measure. In the case of greater amberjack, the revised total ACL in Action 2 would be constraining on harvest for the recreational sector but not for the commercial sector and is projected to reduce landings of greater amberjack as well as associated economic benefits for the recreational sector but increase landings of greater amberjack as well as associated economic benefits for the commercial sector. The net benefits of the action would be positive in the initial year of implementation but negative in subsequent years due to a decreasing total ACL over time. When examining sector allocations of the revised total ACL (Action 3), the revised sector allocations for greater amberjack would comparatively decrease net economic benefits for the commercial sector, increased net economic benefits for the recreational sector, and result in a net increase in total net economic benefits.

Reducing the commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack in Action 3 would increase harvest since smaller fish that were previously discarded due to the current 36-inch minimum size limit could be landed. This would provide positive direct economic effects for the commercial sector provided there are no long-term negative effects for the stock from the increased harvest. In general, the lower the size limit, the more that overall harvest will increase in the short-term, thereby increasing economic benefits incurred from such harvest. These economic benefits may accrue in the form of increased net revenue for commercial vessels, thus increasing producer surplus for the commercial fishery.

Commercial trip limits are generally not considered to be economically efficient because they require an increase in the number of trips and associated trip costs to land the same amount of fish. However, the negative economic effects of this inefficiency can be offset by price support resulting from the supply limitations and the lengthening of seasons. Higher trip limits selected



in Action 4 would allow for increased net operating revenue on trips where greater amberjack are landed.

In general, providing increased protection for spawning greater amberjack in Action 5 would be expected to result in improvements in stock abundance and biomass and create indirect, long-term, positive economic effects presumably through the availability of increased numbers of fish in the future. However, there can be some direct, short-term negative economic effects as fewer fish could be available to harvest until the biomass of harvestable fish increases due to the decrease in the amount of time the species is open to harvest. Implementing a spawning season closure and harvest prohibition for the recreational sector would be expected to reduce landings of greater amberjack in the short-term and, consequently, consumer surplus.

The purpose of ACTs is to help prevent a sector from exceeding its ACL due to management uncertainty. Exceeding an ACL would have direct negative economic effects on all sectors potentially due to a reduced stock size. If a species were closed too early for a sector based on the ACT, there would be direct negative economic effects as well because the sector was prohibited from harvesting fish. The ACTs covered by this Action 6 only apply to the recreational sector and are not currently tied to any AMs; therefore, there are no expected economic effects associated with their removal.

### **Assessment of the Social Effects**

The ACL (Action 1) for any stock does not directly affect resource users unless the ACL is met or exceeded, in which case AMs that restrict, or close harvest could negatively impact the commercial, for-hire, and private recreational sectors. While the negative effects are usually short-term, they may at times induce other indirect effects through changes in fishing behavior or business operations that could have long-term social effects, such as increased pressure on another species, or fishermen having to stop fishing altogether due to regulatory closures. Generally, the higher the ACL the greater the short-term social benefits that would be expected to accrue if harvest is sustainable.

Revising sector allocations (Action 2) for the recreational and commercial sectors can result in many different social effects as perceptions are formed. Social effects would also depend upon other actions in conjunction with this one. Therefore, the choice of an allocation would need to be assessed with other actions within this amendment to determine the overall social effects and whether short-term losses are offset by any long-term biological gains. Based on recent commercial and recreational landings, none of the proposed commercial or recreational ACLs are expected to be met, resulting in triggering of the AMs, with the exception of during the 2026/2027 fishing season.

There is a trade-off with reducing the minimum size limit (Action 3) in that an increase in the number of fish that can be kept may improve commercial trip profitability but may also increase the harvest rate and trigger AMs if landings reach the ACL sooner in the fishing year. Available discard data shows that just under 40% of discarded greater amberjack are less than 28-inches FL, with the vast majority being under the current size limit. As such, reducing the minimum size limit may result in positive social effects for greater amberjack fishermen by increasing the number of fish that can be retained, which may increase trip profitability.

In general, the potential social effects of a higher trip limit (Action 4) would depend on how fishermen are affected by either a higher trip limit and shorter season, or a lower trip limit and longer seasons. The increased trip limit proposed is anticipated to result in direct social benefits to commercial fishing business in the form of increased trip efficiency and indirect social benefits to fishing communities in the form of increased job opportunities and fish available to the market. Proposed increase in the commercial trip limit is not anticipated to result in an in-season closure.

The potential effects on coastal communities of modifying the greater amberjack spawning season closure sale and harvest limits (Action 5) would be a trade-off between the biological benefits of reduced harvest during the spawning season and resulting long term social benefits from a healthier stock and the social benefits of year-round access to fishing opportunities for greater amberjack improving trip profitability and fish available on the market. In general, more restrictive management during spawning seasons may be biologically beneficial to the stock and contribute to sustainable fishing opportunities in the future.

Recreational ACTs (Action 6) are currently not an active part of the management strategy for snapper grouper species and AMs are in place to ensure that ACLs are not exceeded. Therefore, the social effects of removing specified ACTs would be neutral compared to retaining ACTs.

#### **Assessment of Effects on Safety at Sea**

Amendment 49 is not expected to result in direct impacts to safety at sea.

## **Appendix I. Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan Goals and Objectives**

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act national standard guidelines require fishery management councils to establish objectives in each fishery management plan (FMP) and propose management measures that will achieve the objectives. In establishing the objectives, the councils should balance the biological needs of the fish stock(s) with human need, reconcile both present and future costs and benefits, integrate both private and public interests, and provide for a comprehensive approach to addressing problems within the fishery. Also, as the needs of a fishery change over time, fishery management councils are encouraged to regularly reassess the FMP objectives (50 C.F.R. § 600.305(b)).

Amendment 17A to the Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 2010) was the last amendment to list and modify the objectives in the Snapper Grouper FMP. In December 2012, the Council began a three-year long stakeholder-driven visioning process to identify long-term strategies for managing the snapper grouper fishery. This process involved evaluating the objectives in the Snapper Grouper FMP and revising them based on the current needs of the fishery. The 2016-2020 Vision Blueprint for the Snapper Grouper Fishery (Vision Blueprint) was approved by the Council at their December 2015 meeting and was intended to inform the management of the snapper grouper fishery through 2020. The Vision Blueprint serves as a “living document” to help guide future management, build on stakeholder input, and illustrate actions that could be developed through the amendment process to address the goals identified during the visioning process. Specifically, the Vision Blueprint is organized into four goal areas: (1) Science, (2) Management, (3) Communication, and (4) Governance. Each goal area has a set of objectives intended to drive management of the snapper grouper fishery (Table I.1). In addition, these goals and objectives have been reviewed and recommended for adoption in the Snapper Grouper FMP by the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel. By including them in Snapper Grouper Amendment 49, the Council intends to formally adopt them as the goals and objectives of the Snapper Grouper FMP.

**Table I.1.** Management objectives for the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Goal 1 (Science):</b> Management decisions for the snapper grouper fishery are based upon robust, defensible science that considers qualitative and quantitative data analyzed in a timely, clear, and transparent manner that builds stakeholder confidence.
<i>Objective 1</i>	Promote collection of quality data to support management plans and programs considered by the Council.
<i>Objective 2</i>	Encourage development of mechanisms to effectively engage and collaborate with stakeholders on cooperative research, data collection and analysis.
<i>Objective 3</i>	Improve knowledge about the social and economic elements of the snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic.
<i>Objective 4</i>	Support improved and expanded monitoring and reporting programs for the snapper grouper fishery.
<i>Objective 5</i>	Promote data collection and analysis to support ecosystem and habitat considerations for the snapper grouper fishery.
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Goal 2 (Management):</b> Adopt management strategies for the snapper grouper fishery that rebuild and maintain fishery resources, adapt to regional differences in the fishery, and consider the social and economic needs of fishing communities.
<i>Objective 1</i>	Develop management measures that consider sub-regional differences and issues within the fishery.
<i>Objective 2</i>	Develop innovative management measures that allow consistent access to the fishery for all sectors.
<i>Objective 3</i>	Ensure that management decisions help maximize social and economic opportunity for all sectors.
<i>Objective 4</i>	Develop management measures that reduce and mitigate discards.
<i>Objective 5</i>	Support management measures that incorporate ecosystem and habitat considerations for the snapper grouper fishery.
<i>Objective 6</i>	Develop management measures that support optimal sector allocations for the snapper grouper fishery.
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Goal 3 (Communication):</b> Employ interactive outreach strategies that encourage continuous participation and support two-way engagement between managers and snapper grouper fishery stakeholders while building a greater understanding of science and management.
<i>Objective 1</i>	Develop communication approaches that provide streamlined and timely information to increase awareness and engage stakeholders.
<i>Objective 2</i>	Ensure that Council communication encourages and supports engagement with a diverse audience of stakeholders.
<i>Objective 3</i>	Improve awareness and understanding of fishery science and research and how these inform management.
<i>Objective 4</i>	Improve awareness and understanding of how social and economic issues are linked to fisheries management measures.
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Goal 4 (Governance):</b> Commit to a transparent, balanced, and timely decision-making process that allows flexible yet well-defined protocols and strategies for managing the snapper grouper fishery.
<i>Objective 1</i>	Create an accountable and flexible decision-making process for development and evaluation of management measures.
<i>Objective 2</i>	Build capacity to streamline management efforts and better coordinate with management partners.
<i>Objective 3</i>	Improve communication with stakeholders to ensure the needs of the fishery are understood and considered throughout the Council process.

## Appendix J. Allocation Review Trigger Policy

In a letter to the NOAA Assistant Administrator dated July 16, 2019, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) responded to NOAA's Fisheries Allocation Review Policy (NMFS Policy Directive 01-119) and the associated Procedural Directive on allocation review triggers (NMFS Procedural Directive 01-119-01). The Policy established the responsibility for the Regional Fishery Management Councils to set allocation review triggers and consider three types of trigger criteria: indicator, public interest, and time. Councils were directed to establish triggers for consideration of allocation reviews by August 2019. The Council's response follows:

The Council has reviewed species allocations on numerous occasions in the past. However, these reviews may not have been formally documented in a fishery management plan amendment if a decision was made not to modify sector allocations. This new policy will ensure all species currently having sector allocations will be reviewed on a regular basis and will formalize the allocation review process so the Council's consideration of allocations will be documented.

The Council reviewed their current sector allocations and began discussions on the Policy and Procedural Directives and criteria for considering fishery allocation reviews at their December 2018 meeting. At their June 2019 meeting, the Council adopted two types of criteria for triggering consideration of an allocation review: indicator and time.

The Council chose several indicator-based criteria as triggers:

- Either sector exceeds its ACL or closes prior to the end of its fishing year three out of five consecutive years,
- Either sector under harvests its ACL or OY by at least 50% three out of five consecutive years,
- After a stock assessment is approved by the SSC and presented to the Council, and
- After the Council reviews a species Fishery Performance Report.

The Council chose a time-based trigger to ensure allocation reviews are regularly considered. Each species will have its sector allocations reviewed not less than every seven years. Table J.1 shows by species when the next sector allocation review will be considered by the Council should an indicator-based criterion not be triggered. Regardless of whether consideration of an allocation review is triggered by an indicator or time criterion once it occurs the next one will automatically be scheduled for consideration seven years later. For species which are jointly managed with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, the timing for consideration of allocation reviews was coordinated with that council.

A public interest-based criterion was not selected because the Council currently receives substantial and regular comment from the public through scoping and public hearing sessions, general public comment periods held at every Council meeting, the public comment form on the Council's website, and through other more informal channels. Thus, the Council decided the existing Council process provides sufficient opportunity for public input on allocation.

**Table J.1.** Next year for allocation reviews (as of 2019) for SAFMC managed species.

Assessed Species	Review Year	Jacks Complex	Review Year
Black grouper	2026	Almaco Jack	2025
Black sea bass	2023	Banded Rudderfish	2025
Blueline Tilefish	2020	Lesser Amberjack	2025
Gag	2022	<b>Snappers Complex</b>	<b>Review Year</b>
Golden tilefish	2021	Gray Snapper	2025
Gray Triggerfish	2023	Lane Snapper	2025
Greater amberjack	2021	Cubera Snapper	2025
GA-NC Hogfish	2023	<b>Grunts Complex</b>	<b>Review Year</b>
FLK/EFL Hogfish	2023	White Grunt	2024
Mutton Snapper	2023	Sailor's Choice	2024
Red grouper	2023	Tomtate	2024
Red porgy	2021	Margate	2024
Red snapper	2024	<b>Shallow-Water Groupers Complex</b>	<b>Review Year</b>
Snowy grouper	2021	Red Hind	2026
Vermilion snapper	2021	Rock Hind	2026
Wreckfish	2019	YellowmouthGrouper	2026
Yellowtail Snapper	2021	Yellowfin Grouper	2026
Atlantic Group King Mackerel	2021	Coney	2026
Atlantic Group Spanish Mackerel	2022	Graysby	2026
Gulf Group Cobia- FL East Coast Zone	2021	<b>Porgy Complex</b>	<b>Review Year</b>
<b>Ungrouped Unassessed Species</b>	<b>Review Year</b>	Jolthead Porgy	2027
Atlantic Spadefish	2022	Knobbed Porgy	2027
Bar Jack	2022	Saucereye Porgy	2027
Scamp	2022	Scup	2027
Speckled hind*	*	Whitebone Porgy	2027
Warsaw grouper*	*	<b>Dolphin/Wahoo</b>	<b>Review Year</b>
<b>Deepwater Complex</b>	<b>Review Year</b>	Dolphin	2019
Yellowedge Grouper	2024	Wahoo	2019
Silk Snapper	2024	-	-
Misty Grouper	2024	-	-
Sand Tilefish	2024	-	-
Queen Snapper	2024	-	-
Blackfin Snapper	2024	-	-

\*ACL=0 for this species. If ACL>0 in the future, allocations will be reviewed when the ACL is increased.

## Appendix K. Greater Amberjack Stock Projections

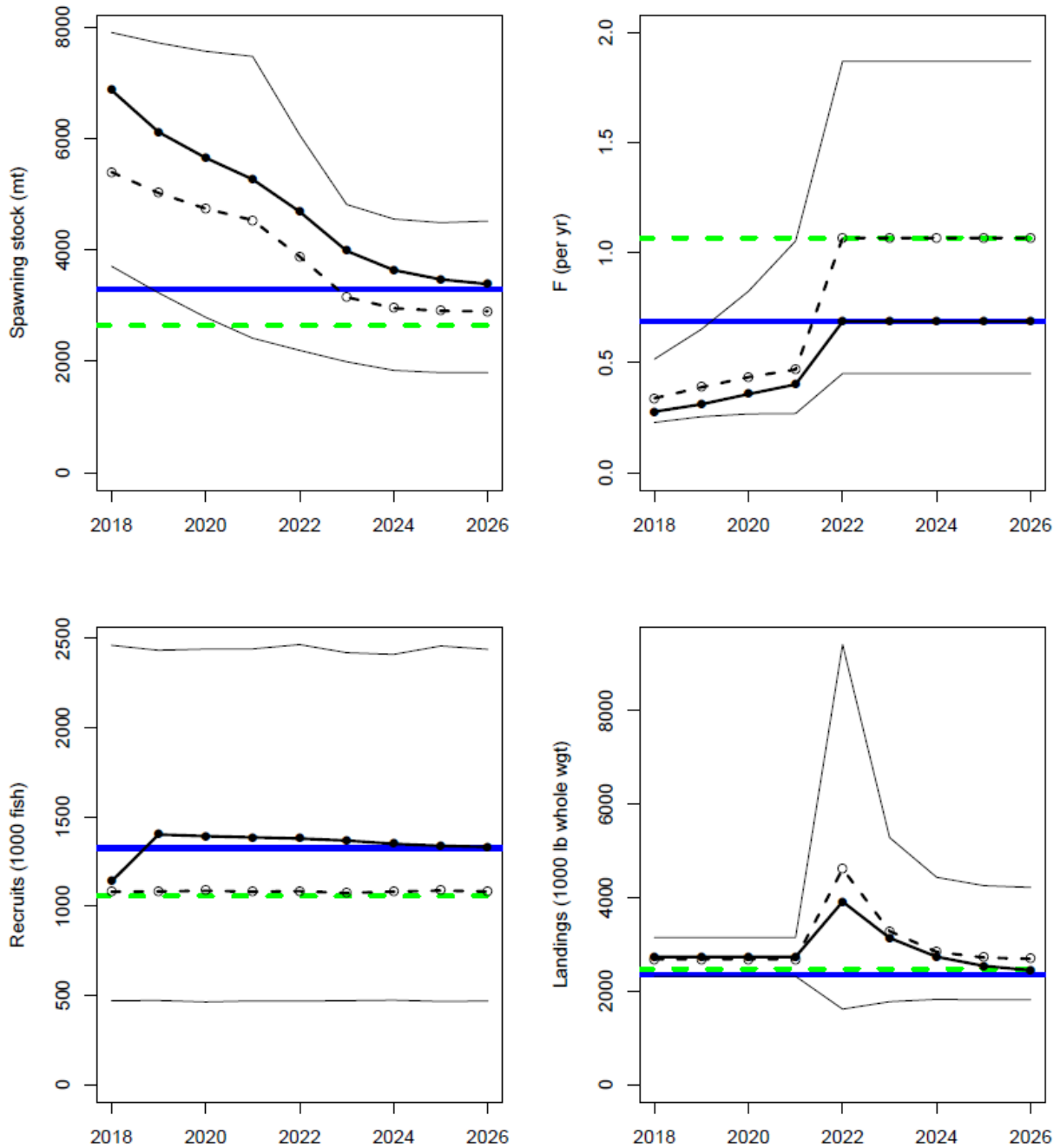
Recommended levels for the overfishing limit (OFL; Table K.1 and Figure K-1) and acceptable biological catch (ABC; Table K.2 and Figure K-2) for greater amberjack were updated consistent with recommendations previously made by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), based on the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) 59 stock assessment (2020). The SSC's previously recommended OFL and ABC were from the stochastic projection with fishing mortality rate (F) fixed at FMSY, starting with the first year of management. Additional projections were requested from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to change the first year of applied management from 2020 to 2022 and extend the projection period through 2026.

**Table K.1.** Projection results with fishing mortality rate fixed at  $F = F_{MSY}$  starting in 2022. R = number of age-1 recruits (in 1000s), F = fishing mortality rate (per year), S = spawning stock (mt), L = landings, and D = dead discards expressed in numbers (n, in 1000s) and in whole weight (w, in 1000 lb). The extension 'base' indicates expected values (deterministic) from the base run. The extension 'med' indicates median values from the stochastic projections.

year	R.base (1000)	R.med (1000)	F.base	F.med	S.base (mt)	S.med (mt)	L.base (1000)	L.med (1000)	L.base (1000 lb)	L.med (1000 lb)	D.base (1000)	D.med (1000)	D.base (1000 lb)	D.med (1000 lb)
2018	1139	1081	0.28	0.34	6869	5398	196	185	2733	2683	51	13	198	53
2019	1401	1083	0.31	0.39	6116	5022	190	191	2733	2683	70	16	271	63
2020	1392	1086	0.36	0.43	5654	4742	194	200	2733	2683	79	18	308	70
2021	1385	1081	0.4	0.47	5268	4533	202	207	2733	2683	88	19	342	77
2022	1379	1084	0.69	1.07	4688	3880	301	376	3913	4615	145	39	565	157
2023	1367	1074	0.69	1.07	3982	3153	255	293	3137	3283	144	39	560	155
2024	1349	1081	0.69	1.07	3638	2953	232	268	2735	2839	142	39	553	155
2025	1338	1087	0.69	1.07	3470	2905	222	262	2540	2719	141	39	548	157
2026	1331	1082	0.69	1.07	3386	2899	216	260	2445	2691	140	39	545	155

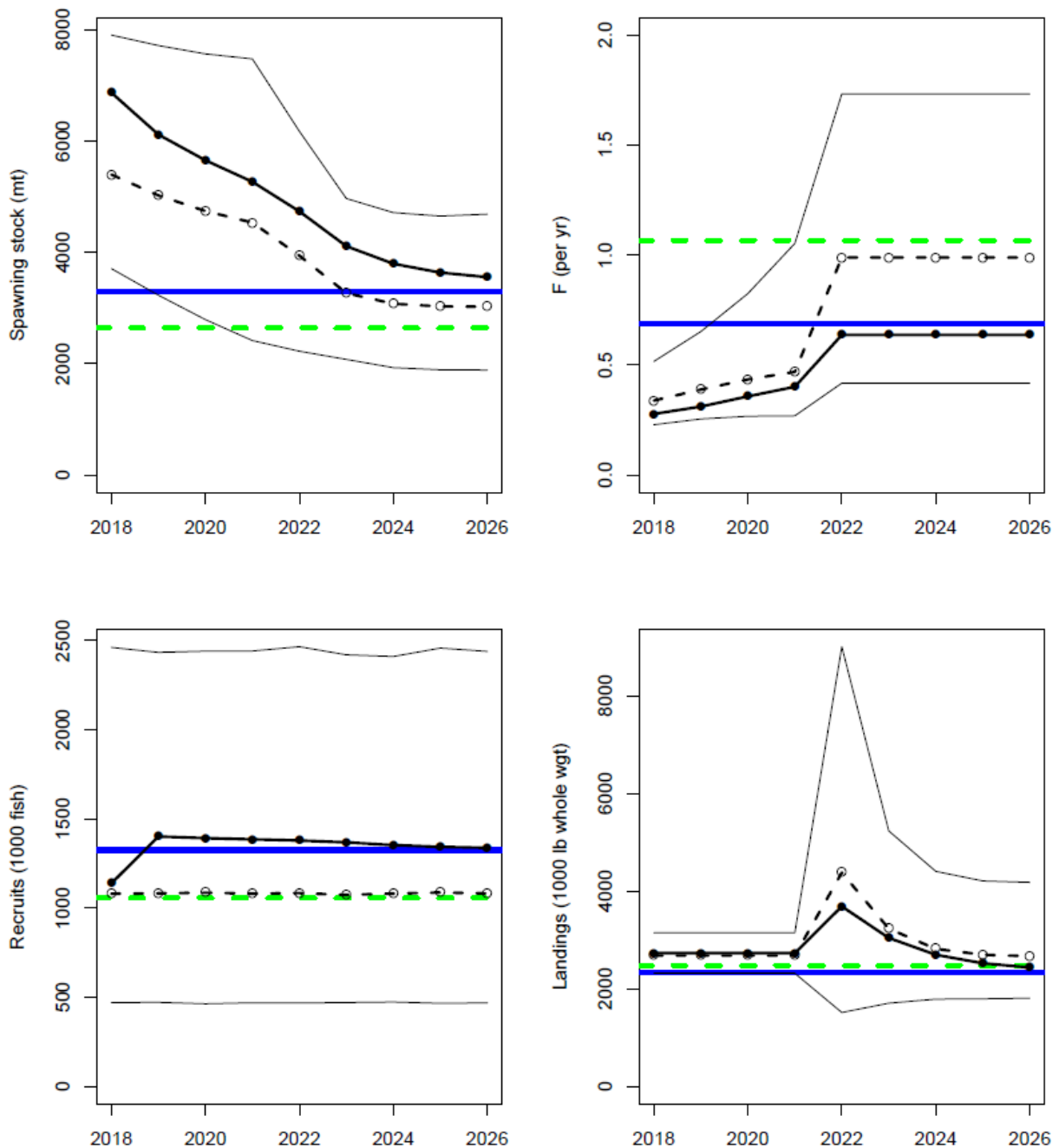
**Table K.2.** Projection results for  $P^*=0.45$  starting in 2022. R = number of age-1 recruits (in 1000s), F = fishing mortality rate (per year), S = spawning stock (mt), L = landings and D = dead discards expressed in numbers (n, in 1000s) and in whole weight (w, in 1000 lb). The extension 'base' indicates expected values (deterministic) from the base run. The extension 'med' indicates median values from the stochastic projections.

year	R.base (1000)	R.med (1000)	F.base	F.med	S.base (mt)	S.med (mt)	L.base (1000)	L.med (1000)	L.base (1000 lb)	L.med (1000 lb)	D.base (1000)	D.med (1000)	D.base (1000 lb)	D.med (1000 lb)
2018	1139	1081	0.28	0.34	6869	5398	196	185	2733	2683	51	13	198	53
2019	1401	1083	0.31	0.39	6116	5022	190	191	2733	2683	70	16	271	63
2020	1392	1086	0.36	0.43	5654	4742	194	200	2733	2683	79	18	308	70
2021	1385	1081	0.4	0.47	5268	4533	202	207	2733	2683	88	19	342	77
2022	1379	1084	0.64	0.99	4736	3941	283	356	3688	4380	135	37	527	146
2023	1368	1074	0.64	0.99	4110	3267	245	285	3043	3233	134	36	523	144
2024	1353	1081	0.64	0.99	3795	3075	226	261	2698	2818	133	36	516	144
2025	1343	1087	0.64	0.99	3636	3028	217	255	2524	2699	132	37	513	146
2026	1338	1082	0.64	0.99	3554	3023	212	254	2437	2669	131	36	511	144



**Figure K.1.** Projection results with fishing mortality rate at  $F = F_{MSY}$  starting in 2022. The interim years (2018-2021) use a mean of the 2014-2017 landings. In the top four panels, expected values (base run) represented by solid lines with solid circles, medians represented by dashed lines with open circles, and uncertainty represented by thin lines corresponding to 5<sup>th</sup> and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of replicate projections. Solid horizontal lines mark MSY-related quantities from the base run; dashed horizontal lines represent corresponding medians. Spawning stock (SSB) is at time of peak spawning.





**Figure K.2.** Projection results with  $P^*=0.45$  starting in 2022. The interim years (2018-2021) use a mean of the 2014-2017 landings. In the top four panels, expected values (base run) represented by solid lines with solid circles, medians represented by dashed lines with open circles, and uncertainty represented by thin lines corresponding to 5<sup>th</sup> and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles of replicate projections. Solid horizontal lines mark MSY-related quantities from the base run; dashed horizontal lines represent corresponding medians; SSB is at time of peak spawning.