

**SSC Report To The
Snapper Grouper Committee
June 2022 SAFMC Meeting**

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Report of SSC Meeting
April 26-28, 2022

SSC Review of Release Mortality Reduction Framework

Overall comments:

- *The SSC applauds the Council for pursuing regulatory action to reduce dead discards in the snapper grouper fishery.*
- *To significantly reduce dead discards, reducing encounters and effort is paramount.*
- *The SSC emphasized that F-rebuild is much lower than F-current and thus dramatic reductions in overall fishery effort to reduce discards will be required.*

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Overall comments (continued):

- *To reconsider catch levels, a robust analysis of how efficient each proposed regulation would be needs to be conducted within the short time frame of this amendment.*
- *Given the short amendment timeframe and limited data availability, it will be incredibly difficult to thoroughly quantify the potential impact of any of these management measures.*
- *A higher degree of uncertainty surrounding the potential impact of these management strategies and how they affect discard reductions may need to be accepted by the SSC to make initial progress.*

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Overall comments (continued):

- *In the short-term (for this regulatory amendment), the SSC recommends pursuing temporal/spatial reductions (possibly wave-based) in bottom fishing.*
 - *Seasonal differences among regions within the South Atlantic should be considered, if possible.*
 - *The bulk of recreational discards for Red Snapper are occurring off the East Coast of Florida; thus, spatial closures may be most effective in this area.*

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- **Overall comments (continued):**
- *Spatial reductions by depth may be less effective in the South Atlantic as compared to the West Coast, for example, where barotrauma complications account for majority of discard mortality.*
- *Effectiveness of gear restrictions/changes to reduce dead discards will be difficult to quantify within the short time frame of this amendment and should only be considered in the suite of longer-term solutions.*
- *Similarly, the option to develop a federal recreational permit to quantify effort and potentially limit the number of anglers would be useful, but will require a much longer timeframe for implementation.*

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- **Discuss uncertainty of proposed mechanisms for reducing discards. What data or analyses could improve efforts to quantify the impact of regulations directed at reducing releases and discard losses?**
 - *Angler/fisher behavioral response to new regulations is highly uncertain and may result in unintended consequences that may be counterproductive. The SSC recommends literature from other regions be examined to potentially inform how changes in management might result in changes in fisher behavior.*
 - *Compensatory effects of reducing discards may result in higher encounter rate and higher catch rates*

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- **Discuss uncertainty of proposed mechanisms for reducing discards. What data or analyses could improve efforts to quantify the impact of regulations directed at reducing releases and discard losses?**
- *We are concerned that discard information (for both commercial and recreational sectors) is largely unvalidated and may not be accurate for the snapper-grouper complex. Key issues of concern:*
 - *a) the majority of commercial discard information and all recreational discard information is self-reported*
 - *b) commercial logbooks only represent ~15% of trips*
 - *c) Logbook reports of 'zero discards' have increased from 30% to between 60-70% more recently in the commercial sector, which may indicate substantial underreporting of discards.*

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- **Would reducing the number of Red Snapper that are discarded dead provide an opportunity for increased harvest?**
 - *In the short-term, this is highly unlikely. F-rebuild is substantially lower than F-current. Thus, dramatic reductions in overall fishery effort and total discards will be required.*
 - *Options that go beyond the absolute minimum to stop overfishing from discards could allow more directed fishing and should be considered in the list of alternative management actions.*

