

Discussion Document:
Snapper Grouper Fishery of the
South Atlantic Amendment 38
Proposed
Abbreviated Framework
Amendment 3

Annual Catch Limit Adjustment for Blueline Tilefish

Background

At the March 2015 meeting, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) approved a request for emergency actions to extend regulations in Amendment 32 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP), once the amendment was approved, to the area that the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) considers is represented by the stock assessment (SEDAR 32). At the SSC's April 2015 meeting, the SSC determined that SEDAR 32 applied to the entire eastern seaboard and was the best scientific information available.

In September 2015, the SAFMC's Snapper Grouper Committee reviewed an Options Paper for a possible amendment, Amendment 38, to extend the snapper grouper fishery management unit north of the NC/VA border and adjust fishing levels for blueline tilefish to account for landings in the area north of the Council's jurisdiction. (The Council had considered extending the fishery management unit previously during development of Amendment 18 to the Snapper Grouper FMP, but did not take action at the time). The Council opted to not move forward with development of Amendment 38 pending the completion of studies on the stock structure of blueline tilefish and to allow time for the Mid Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) to develop a management strategy for blueline tilefish in their jurisdiction. Instead, actions to adjust fishing levels for blueline tilefish (based on the SSC's recommendations) and revise management measures were moved to Regulatory Amendment 25 (2016).

SEDAR 50 was conducted in 2017 as a joint assessment between the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SEDAR Lead) with the MAFMC addressing the stock assessment(s) for Atlantic blueline

tilefish. The SSC reviewed results of SEDAR 50 at their October 2017 meeting and provided catch level recommendations for blueline tilefish for the area south of Cape Hatteras, NC. Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff presented the SSC on the assessment results at the December 2017 meeting. As acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations that match the jurisdictional boundaries of the Mid- and South Atlantic Councils (boundary at the NC/VA state line) were needed to develop fishing levels and management measures, the SSC formed a workgroup whose task was to determine a suitable approach to obtaining an ABC that would be useable under the existing management structure.

The MAFMC's SSC reviewed results of the workgroup at their March 2018 meeting and the SAFMC SSC reviewed the results during their May 2018 meeting and provided guidance to the Council. In June 2018, the Snapper Grouper Committee reviewed SSC recommendations on setting an ABC for blueline tilefish and development of this amendment was delayed by other priorities.

The Council's SSC was scheduled to review the revision assessment for blueline tilefish during a webinar on January 25, 2019. However, due to the January 2019 government furlough, the webinar was rescheduled and took place February 25, 2019. Based on the review, the SSC decided not to use the revised assessment to update the ABC recommendation they made after SEDAR 50 (2017).

At their April 2019 meeting, the SSC reaffirmed their previous ABC recommendations from SEDAR 50 (2017) and the blueline tilefish ABC Workgroup. Therefore, the SSC recommended that progress could commence on Amendment 38 at the June 2019 Council meeting to consider options to implement a new ABC for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic. The revised ABC and ACL would be based on recommendations for the southern area developed as part of SEDAR 50 (2017) in combination with the approved Workgroup recommendations for the area north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.

Action in this amendment

Modify the ACL for South Atlantic Blueline Tilefish.

The SSC approved SEDAR 50 (2017) findings and for a new ABC for blueline tilefish south of Cape Hatteras. An ABC for the area from the Virginia border to Cape Hatteras was based on the joint SSC Workgroup recommendations. The Council is now able to discuss implementing an annual catch limit (ACL) for the entire stock in the South Atlantic jurisdiction. With commercial management measures for Blueline Tilefish being implemented through Vison Blueprint Commercial Regulatory Amendment 27 (Regulatory Amendment 27), and to expedite the process of updating the ACL in the South Atlantic, SERO and Council co-leads recommend the Council consider developing Abbreviated Framework Amendment 3 to the Snapper Grouper FMP rather than continuing development of Amendment 38. NOAA General Counsel would need to concur with this approach. During development of Abbreviated Framework Amendment 3, the National Marine Fisheries Service would determine if this action to change the blueline tilefish ACL in the South Atlantic falls into a Categorical Exclusion, or if an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement would be required for NEPA environmental review purposes.

As a note, Regulatory Amendment 27 to the Snapper Grouper FMP considers an action to reduce the commercial trip limit for blueline tilefish from 300 pounds gutted weight (lbs gw) to 100 lbs gw from January 1 through April 30.

Table 1. Proposed South Atlantic blueline tilefish OFL and ABC in lbs ww.

Year	OFL (South of Cape Hatteras, NC) (lbs ww)	ABC (South of Cape Hatteras, NC) (lbs ww)	OFL (North of Cape Hatteras, NC, to VA border) (lbs ww)	ABC (North of Cape Hatteras, NC, to VA border) (lbs ww)	Revised Total OFL (SAFMC jurisdiction) (lbs ww)	Revised Total ABC (SAFMC jurisdiction) (lbs ww)
2020	225,000	178,000	103,985	55,968	328,985	233,968
2021	225,000	178,000	103,985	55,968	328,985	233,968
2022 until modified	225,000	178,000	103,985	55,968	328,985	233,968

Table 2. (below) assumes that the Council will choose to set ACL=ABC for blueline tilefish and that the current sector allocations will remain the same (Commercial sector 50.7%/Recreational sector 49.3%).

Table 2. Proposed South Atlantic blueline tilefish ACLs for commercial and recreational sectors in lbs ww.

	Total ACL (SAFMC jurisdiction) (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL (lbs ww)	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)
Current ACL	174,798	87,521	87,277
Proposed ACL	233,968	117,148	116,820

Objectives for this meeting

- Review background information supporting Amendment 38 to modify the ACL for South Atlantic blueline tilefish.
- Determine whether to develop this amendment as Amendment 38 or Snapper Grouper Abbreviated Framework Amendment 3.

Expected amendment timing

June 2019	Council discusses establishing an updated South Atlantic blueline tilefish ACL based on SSC approved SEDAR 50 (2017) findings and new ABC for blueline tilefish south of Cape Hatteras, NC, in combination with the joint SSC Workgroup recommendations for an ABC in the area from the Virginia border to Cape Hatteras. Council votes to begin Abbreviated Framework Amendment 3 to establish a new South Atlantic blueline tilefish ACL.
September or December 2019	Council receives public comments and makes final changes to the action/alternatives.

December or March 2019

Council takes final action on Snapper Grouper Abbreviated Framework Amendment 3. (Note: Timing depends on determination of NEPA document, and 2018 landings will be final near or after September 2019, which could delay analyses and amendment timing).