

Vision Blueprint Commercial Regulatory Amendment 27

Decision Document

Background

During the March 2018 meeting, the Committee reviewed actions and alternatives and selected preferred alternatives for most actions, removed some from further consideration, and recommended the amendment be approved for public hearings. The Council directed staff to conduct hearings, which were held via webinar and listening stations on May 8-10, 2018. Written and online comments were accepted from April 24 through May 11. **Attachment 9a** contains written comments received during the comment period as well as those obtained via webinars, listening stations, and the online comment form. Comments submitted online after May 11 are available on the Council's website and were not included as part of **Attachment 9a**. The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) convened via webinar on May 7, 2018, at the Council's request, to discuss the methodology used in the analyses. The SSC recommended using the retrospective analyses presented by SERO staff to determine which of the two methods was most appropriate for each of the actions (1-5). Modifications to the amendment as a result of the SSC's recommendations have not been incorporated due to time constraints. The revised amendment will be available for Committee review at the September 2018 meeting.

Actions in this amendment

NOTE: The wording of actions/sub-actions below as approved in March 2018

- **Action 1:** Establish a commercial split season and modify the commercial trip limit for blueline tilefish
- **Action 2:** Establish a commercial split season for snowy grouper
- **Action 3:** Establish a commercial split season and modify the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack

- **Action 4:** Establish a commercial split season and modify the commercial trip limit for red porgy
- **Action 5:** Modify the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper
- **Action 6:** Establish a minimum size limit for almaco jack for the commercial sector
- **Action 7:** Establish a commercial trip limit for the Other Jacks Complex
- **Action 8:** Modify the seasonal prohibition on commercial harvest and possession of red grouper in the exclusive economic zone off South Carolina and North Carolina
- **Action 9:** Remove the commercial minimum size limits for certain deep-water species
- **Action 10:** Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in the exclusive economic zone off east Florida

Objectives for this meeting

- Consider public hearing comments and select preferred alternatives as appropriate
- Modify the amendment as needed
- Approve all actions

Expected amendment timing

June 2018	Review public comment and modify the amendment as necessary. Approve all actions.
September 2018	Review any changes from June and approve for formal review.

Purpose and need statement

Purpose for Actions

The purpose of this amendment is to address commercial stakeholder input to enable equitable access for fishermen participating in the snapper grouper fishery, and to minimize discards.

Need for Actions

The need for this amendment is to improve management of the commercial sector of the snapper grouper fishery to achieve optimum yield, while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse socio-economic effects for commercial fishermen in the South Atlantic Region.

Committee Action:

- CONSIDER PUBLIC COMMENT AND MAKE MODIFICATIONS TO THE P&N, AS APPROPRIATE
- OTHERS?

Proposed Actions and Alternatives

Action 1. Establish a commercial split season and modify the commercial trip limit for blueline tilefish

Action Alternatives:

Alternative 1 (No Action). The commercial fishing year for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone is from January 1 to December 31. The commercial trip limit is 300 pounds gutted weight.

Alternative 2. Specify two commercial fishing seasons for blueline tilefish. Allocate the blueline tilefish commercial annual catch limit into two quotas: 40% to the period January 1 through June 30, and 60% to the period July 1 through December 31. Any remaining quota from Season 1 would transfer to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 would not be carried forward.

Sub-alternative 2a. Season 1 trip limit equals 100 pounds gutted weight, Season 2 trip limit equals 300 pounds gutted weight.

Sub-alternative 2b. Season 1 trip limit equals 150 pounds gutted weight, Season 2 trip limit equals 300 pounds gutted weight.

Preferred Alternative 3. Retain the January 1 through December 31 commercial fishing year for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone. Modify the commercial trip limit for blueline tilefish:

Preferred Sub-alternative 3a. 100 pounds gutted weight from January 1 through April 30 and 300 pounds gutted weight from May 1 through December 31.

Sub-alternative 3b. 150 pounds gutted weight from January 1 through April 30 and 300 pounds gutted weight from May 1 through December 31.

Sub-alternative 3c. 100 pounds gutted weight from January 1 through June 30 and 300 pounds gutted weight from July 1 through December 31.

Discussion:

Analyses to predict the effects of proposed alternatives under Actions 1-5 on future commercial landings were conducted using two projection models: (1) based on the last three years of data (2014-2016; “Last 3”), and (2) a seasonal auto-regressive integrated moving average (SARIMA) model fit to landings data from 1997-2016. A detailed explanation of these methods, caveats, assumptions, and results of projections is in **Appendix J** of the draft amendment (**Attachment 9c**). Because both models were constructed with a terminal year of 2016, the recently available 2017 data were used to inform the best predictive model using a retrospective comparison of model predictions to 2017 data. Due to time constraints, however, results of the analyses and corresponding discussion in Chapter 4 of the draft document have not been updated and instead present results based only on the “Last 3” model.

For Action 1, the Last 3 and SARIMA model catch rates were extremely close, suggesting relatively robust estimates for closure dates for the various alternatives. **Table 1** shows predicted closure dates under the proposed alternatives for blueline tilefish.

Table 1. Projected mean and 95% lower and upper (L95, U95) confidence limits quota closure dates for blueline tilefish under different alternatives proposed for Action 1. Preferred alternative indicated in bold.

Alternative	Season	LAST 3			SARIMA		
		L95	MEAN	U95	L95	MEAN	U95
1: No Action	N/A	No closure	7-Jul	22-Apr	No closure	13-Jul	2-May
2a: 40% of ACL; 100 pounds	1		12-Jun	28-Mar		25-Jun	7-Apr
60% of ACL; 300 pounds	2		11-Aug	27-Jul		9-Aug	30-Jul
2b: 40% of ACL; 150 pounds	1		14-May	20-Mar		25-May	19-Mar
60% of ACL; 300 pounds	2		11-Aug	27-Jul		9-Aug	30-Jul
3a: 100 pounds Jan-Apr; 300 pounds May-Dec	N/A		30-Jul	16-Jun		27-Jul	14-Jun
3b: 150 pounds Jan-Apr; 300 pounds May-Dec	N/A		24-Jul	4-Jun		23-Jul	30-May
3c: 100 pounds Jan-Jun; 300 pounds July-Dec	N/A		8-Aug	6-Jul		8-Aug	8-Jul

Source: SERO

SSC/Advisory Panel Recommendations:

The SSC convened via webinar on May 7, 2018 to discuss the methodology used in the effects analyses for Actions 1-5. The SSC recommended using the SERO's proposed retrospective analysis to determine which of the two projection models provides the best predictive results for each of the actions. This Decision Document presents results based on the SSC's recommended approach for Actions 1-5.

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel provided no additional recommendations during their April 11-13, 2018 meeting.

Public Comments:

One commenter from Key West expressed opposition to commercial split season for deep-water species. He maintains the proposed changes do not work for fisheries in south Florida.

One commenter from Jupiter expressed support for all the proposed commercial split seasons. He stated it would be beneficial to have some snowy grouper available for local markets and restaurants in the summer.

Commenters suggested allowing a 50 to 100 lbs. bycatch limit year-round. It is important for this fishery to be open during the snowy grouper season as the two species are caught together.

Commenters from Florida and North Carolina reiterated that harvest of blueline tilefish needs to be aligned with that for snowy in order to address discards and make trips more profitable.

One commenter maintained that the fishery for blueline tilefish is different north and south of Cape Lookout and the data do not necessarily reflect this. He stated his support for the preferred alternative but cautioned that actions may be premature in light of pending assessment results for this species. He suggested a more thorough analysis of discard data by area.

A comment was submitted in support of the Council's preferred.

IPT Recommendations:

None

Committee Action:

- CONSIDER PUBLIC COMMENT AND MAKE MODIFICATIONS AS APPROPRIATE
- OTHERS?

Action 2. Establish a commercial split season for snowy grouper

Action Alternatives:

Alternative 1 (No Action). The commercial fishing year for snowy grouper in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone is from January 1 to December 31.

Alternative 2. Specify two commercial fishing seasons for snowy grouper. Allocate the snowy grouper commercial annual catch limit into two quotas: 60% to the period January 1 through June 30 and 40% to the period July 1 through December 31. Any remaining quota from Season 1 would transfer to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 would not be carried forward.

Preferred Alternative 3. Specify two commercial fishing seasons for snowy grouper. Allocate the snowy grouper commercial annual catch limit into two quotas: 70% to the period January 1 through June 30 and 30% to the period July 1 through December 31. Any remaining quota from Season 1 would transfer to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 would not be carried forward.

Discussion:

SARIMA interprets the much higher observed catch rates in 2016 and 2017 as a rapid acceleration in fishing pressure, whereas the Last 3 model prediction is more consistent with observations of recent fishing pressure and the increasing ACL.

Fits to 2017 observed data: Last 3 = 11% underestimate of observed 2017 catch rates; SARIMA = 147% overestimate. Hence, the SARIMA model overinterprets the recent trend and the Last 3 model predictions are recommended to inform management.

Caution should be exercised in interpreting the results given the much more conservative SARIMA model predictions and the broad confidence limits for many of the Last 3 model projections. **Table 2** shows predicted closure dates under the proposed alternatives for snowy grouper.

Table 2. Projected mean and 95% lower and upper (L95, U95) confidence limits quota closure dates for snowy grouper under different alternatives proposed for Action 2. Preferred alternative indicated in bold. Nc= No closure.

Alternative	Season	LAST 3*			SARIMA		
		L95	MEAN	U95	L95	MEAN	U95
1. (No Action)	N/A	No closure	21-Sep	1-Jul	7-Nov	19-Mar	14-Feb
2. 60% of ACL	1		21-Jun	8-May	Nc	18-Feb	27-Jan
40% of ACL	2		26-Sep	26-Sep	7-Nov	28-Jul	15-Jul
3. 70% of ACL	1		Nc	21-May	Nc	25-Feb	31-Jan
30% of ACL	2		21-Sep	14-Sep	7-Nov	21-Jul	11-Jul

Source: SERO

SSC/Advisory Panel Recommendations:

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel provided no additional recommendations during their April 11-13, 2018 meeting.

Public Comments:

One commenter from North Carolina supported no action on a split season for snowy grouper. He stated that as wholesaler/retailer, he relies on snowy grouper during the winter months while the shallow water species are closed. He suggested increasing the trip limit to 250-300lbs.

One commenter from North Carolina supported the Council's preferred.

One commenter from North Carolina was of the opinion that a 70/30 is was not appropriate. He suggested a 60/40 would be better based on where the fishery is now taking place and the size of the fish. He suggested that the Council look into the size of the fish being landed in certain areas.

A comment was submitted in support of the Council's preferred.

IPT Recommendations:

None

Committee Action:

- CONSIDER PUBLIC COMMENT AND MAKE MODIFICATIONS AS APPROPRIATE
- OTHERS?

Action 3. Establish a commercial split season and modify the commercial trip limit for greater amberjack

Action Alternatives:

Alternative 1 (No Action). The commercial fishing year for greater amberjack in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone is from March 1 to the end of February. During April each year, no person may sell or purchase 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. The commercial trip limit in March and from May through the end of February each fishing year is 1,200 pounds whole weight.

Preferred Alternative 2. Specify two commercial fishing seasons for greater amberjack. Allocate the commercial annual catch limit for greater amberjack into two quotas: 50% to the period March 1 through August 31 and 50% to the period September 1 through the end of February. Any remaining quota from Season 1 would transfer to Season 2. 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 and the harvest and possession limit is one per person per day or one per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive.

Sub-alternative 2a. Season 1 trip limit equals 1,200 pounds whole weight, Season 2 trip limit equals 1,000 pounds whole weight.

Sub-alternative 2b. Season 1 trip limit equals 1,000 pounds whole weight, Season 2 trip limit equals 800 pounds whole weight.

Preferred Sub-alternative 2c. Trip limit equals 1,000 pounds whole weight in both seasons.

Sub-alternative 2d. Trip limit equals 1,000 pounds whole weight in both seasons. A trip limit reduction to 500 pounds whole weight would occur in each season once 75% of the seasonal quota is met or projected to be met. A trip limit reduction would not occur in Season 2 unless 75% of the Season 2 quota is met or is projected to be met by January 31.

Alternative 3. Specify two commercial fishing seasons for greater amberjack. Allocate the commercial annual catch limit for greater amberjack into two quotas: 60% to the period March 1 through August 31 and 40% to the period September 1 through the end of February. Any remaining quota from Season 1 would transfer to Season 2. 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 and the harvest and possession limit is one per person per day or one per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive.

Sub-alternative 3a. Season 1 trip limit equals 1,200 pounds whole weight, Season 2 trip limit equals 1,000 pounds whole weight.

Sub-alternative 3b. Season 1 trip limit equals 1,000 pounds whole weight, Season 2 trip limit equals 800 pounds whole weight.

Sub-alternative 3c. Trip limit equals 1,000 pounds whole weight in both seasons.

Alternative 4. Retain the March through February fishing year. Reduce the greater amberjack commercial trip limit. 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. Reduce the greater amberjack commercial trip limit to:

Sub-alternative 4a. 1,000 pounds whole weight.

Sub-alternative 4b. 800 pounds whole weight.

Discussion:

SARIMA projects much higher future catch rates than the Last 3 model, due to higher catch rates in 2016 relative to prior years.

Fits to 2017 observed data: Last 3 = within 9% of observed; SARIMA = 32% overestimate. Last 3 model predictions are recommended to guide decision-making on this action. **Tables 3a** and **3b** show predicted closure dates under the proposed alternatives for greater amberjack.

Table 3a. Projected greater amberjack commercial closure dates under **Preferred Alternative 2**. Nc=no predicted closure. Preferred sub-alternative indicated in bold.

Alternative	Season	Last 3*			SARIMA		
		L95	MEAN	U95	L95	MEAN	U95
1: No Action	N/A	Nc	8-Nov	30-Sep		27-Jul	21-May
Alt 2: Commercial ACL split 50% Season 1 and 50% Season 2							
2a: 1,200 lbs	1	8-Jul	10-Jun	28-May	No closure	17-May	28-Mar
1,000 lbs	2	Nc	Nc	Nc		16-Dec	4-Oct
2b: 1,000 lbs	1	27-Jul	21-Jun	4-Jun		21-May	31-Mar
800 lbs	2	Nc	Nc	Nc		28-Dec	6-Oct
2c: 1,000 lbs	1	27-Jul	21-Jun	4-Jun		21-May	31-Mar
1,000 lbs	2	Nc	Nc	Nc		16-Dec	4-Oct
2d: 1,000 lbs to 500 lbs once 75% of quota met	1	10-Aug	5-Jul	16-Jun		27-May	3-May
1,000 lbs to 500 lbs unless 75% of quota met by 1/31	2	Nc	Nc	Nc		30-Dec	7-Oct

Source: SERO

Table 3b. Projected greater amberjack commercial closure dates under Alternatives 3 and 4. Nc=no predicted closure.

Alternative	Season	Last 3*			SARIMA		
		L95	MEAN	U95	L95	MEAN	U95
Alt 3: Commercial ACL split 60% Season 1 and 40% Season 2							
3a: 1,200 lbs	1	8-Jul	10-Jun	28-May	No closure	17-May	28-Mar
1,000 lbs	2	Nc	Nc	13-Jan		22-Nov	27-Sep
3b: 1,000 lbs	1	27-Jul	21-Jun	4-Jun		21-May	31-Mar
800 lbs	2	Nc	Nc	Nc		16-Dec	3-Oct
3c: 1,000 lbs	1	27-Jul	21-Jun	4-Jun		21-May	31-Mar
1,000 lbs	2	Nc	Nc	12-Jan		21-Nov	27-Sep
Alt 4: No commercial split season							
4a: 1,000 lbs	N/A	Nc	26-Dec	14-Oct	Nc	12-Aug	26-May
4b: 800 lbs	N/A	Nc	27-Feb	5-Nov	Nc	2-Sep	1-Jun

Source: SERO

SSC/Advisory Panel Recommendations:

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel provided no additional recommendations during their April 11-13, 2018 meeting.

Public Comments:

Two commenters from North Carolina expressed support for the Council's preferred. They stated the need for an amberjack fishery in the fall as that is when most of the large fish are close to shore.

One commenter from Florida suggested a 1,200 lb. trip limit with a step-down to 500 lbs (or even 300 lbs) when 75% of ACL is met. However, among the alternatives under consideration, he supports Sub-alternative 2a: Season 1 trip limit equals 1,200 pounds whole weight, Season 2 trip limit equals 1,000 pounds whole weight.

A comment was submitted in support of the Council's preferred.

IPT Recommendations:

Revisions to language of alternatives above (highlighted in yellow).

Committee Action:

- CONSIDER PUBLIC COMMENT AND MAKE MODIFICATIONS AS APPROPRIATE
- APPROVE IPT SUGGESTED EDITS
- DO NOT APPROVE IPT SUGGESTED EDITS (COMMITTEE TO SUGGEST MODIFICATIONS AND APPROVE)
- OTHERS?

Action 4. Establish a commercial split season and modify the commercial trip limit for red porgy

Action Alternatives:

Alternative 1 (No Action). The commercial fishing year for red porgy in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone is from January 1 to December 31. During January 1 through April 30 each year, no person may sell or purchase red porgy harvested from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone, and the harvest and possession limit is three per person per day or three per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive. From May 1 through December 31 each year, the **commercial** trip limit for red porgy is 120 fish.

Preferred Alternative 2. Specify two commercial fishing seasons for red porgy. Allocate the commercial red porgy annual catch limit into two quotas: 30% to the period January 1 through April 30 and 70% to the period May 1 through December 31. Any remaining quota from Season 1 would transfer to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 would not be carried forward. Remove the sale and purchase prohibition **and the possession limit of three per person per day or three per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive,** during January 1 to April 30 each year. Retain the commercial trip limit of 120 fish from May 1 through December 31 and specify a commercial trip limit from January 1 through April 30 of:

Sub-alternative 2a. 30 fish.

Sub-alternative 2b. 45 fish.

Preferred Sub-alternative 2c. 60 fish.

Alternative 3. Specify two commercial fishing seasons for red porgy. Allocate the commercial red porgy ACL into two quotas: 50% to the period January 1 through April 30 and 50% to the period May 1 through December 31. Any remaining quota from Season 1 would transfer to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 would not be carried forward. Remove the sale and purchase prohibition during January 1 to April 30 each year **and the possession limit of three per person per day or three per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive.** Retain the commercial trip limit of 120 fish from May 1 through December 31 and specify a commercial trip limit from January 1 through April 30 of:

Sub-alternative 3a. 30 fish.

Sub-alternative 3b. 45 fish.

Sub-alternative 3c. 60 fish.

Alternative 4. Remove the **sale and purchase prohibition and the possession limit of three per person per day or three per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive,** ~~and harvest and possession restrictions~~ for red porgy from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone during January 1 to April 30 each year. Specify a commercial trip limit of 120 fish from January 1 through December 31.

Discussion:

Commercial landings of red porgy from 2015 through 2017 have been below the commercial ACL. The landings in 2017 were slightly lower than those observed in 2016, reflecting the downward trend predicted by SARIMA.

Fits to 2017 observed data: SARIMA = within 1.6% of observed landings, Last 3 = 24% overestimate. Therefore, SARIMA predictions are recommended for this action. **Table 4** shows predicted closure dates under the proposed alternatives for red porgy.

Table 4. Projected mean and 95% lower and upper (L95, U95) confidence limits for quota closure dates for red porgy under different alternatives proposed for Action 4. NC=no closure. Preferred alternative indicated in bold. Nc=No closure.

Alternative	Season	Last 3			SARIMA*					
		L95	MEAN	U95	L95	MEAN	U95			
1 (No Action)	Jan-Dec	Nc	Nc	11-Nov	Nc	Nc	23-Jul			
Alt 2: Commercial ACL split 30% Jan-Apr and 70% May-Dec										
2a: 30 fish/120 fish	Jan-Apr	No closure	Nc	29-Apr	No closure	No closure	8-Mar			
	May-Dec		6-Nov	25-Aug			2-Jul			
2b: 45 fish/120 fish	Jan-Apr		Nc	3-Apr			20-Feb			
	May-Dec		2-Oct	25-Aug			2-Jul			
2c: 60 fish/120 fish	Jan-Apr		22-Apr	20-Mar			13-Feb			
	May-Dec		25-Sep	25-Aug			2-Jul			
Alt 3: Commercial ACL split 50% Jan-Apr and 50% May-Dec										
3a: 30 fish/120 fish	Jan-Apr		No closure	Nc			Nc	No closure	No closure	24-Apr
	May-Dec	6-Nov		24-Aug	15-Jun					
3b: 45 fish/120 fish	Jan-Apr	Nc		Nc	28-Mar					
	May-Dec	2-Oct		9-Aug	15-Jun					
3c: 60 fish/120 fish	Jan-Apr	Nc		Nc	13-Mar					
	May-Dec	19-Sep		29-Jul	15-Jun					
4: No split season; 120 fish year-round	Jan-Dec	24-Aug		6-Jul	18-Apr					

Source: SERO

SSC/Advisory Panel Recommendations:

At their April 11-13, 2018 meeting, the Snapper Grouper AP reiterated support for proposed measures to reduce discards of red porgy.

Public Comments:

One commenter supported a reduced red porgy trip limit during the spawning season instead of a total closure.

One commenter from North Carolina suggested 50-100 lbs. bycatch trip limit of red porgy during the Jan-Apr period, but no changes otherwise.

Two comments supported the Council's preferred.

IPT Recommendations:

- Editorial change noted above (highlighted in yellow).

Committee Action:

- APPROVE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS
- DO NOT APPROVE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS (COMMITTEE TO SUGGEST MODIFICATION AND APPROVE)
- CONSIDER PUBLIC COMMENT AND MAKE MODIFICATIONS AS APPROPRIATE
- OTHERS?

Action 5. Modify the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper

Action Alternatives:

Alternative 1 (No Action). The commercial fishing year for vermilion snapper in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone is from January 1 to December 31. The commercial annual catch limit is split into two quotas: 50% to the period January 1 through June 30 and 50% to the period July 1 through December 31. Any remaining quota from Season 1 transfers to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward. The commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone is 1,000 pounds gutted weight. For both seasons, when 75% of the vermilion snapper seasonal quota is met or is projected to be met, the trip limit is reduced to 500 pounds gutted weight.

Alternative 2. Retain the commercial trip limit and trip limit reduction in Season 1 (January 1 through June 30). For Season 2 (July 1 through December 31), modify the commercial trip limit to 750 pounds gutted weight and remove the trip limit reduction. Any remaining quota from Season 1 transfers to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

Alternative 3. Retain the commercial trip limit and trip limit reduction in Season 1 (January 1 through June 30). For Season 2 (July 1 through December 31), modify the commercial trip limit to 500 pounds gutted weight and remove the trip limit reduction. Any remaining quota from Season 1 transfers to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

Alternative 4. Modify the commercial trip limit for both seasons and remove trip-limit reductions:

Sub-alternative 4a. 1,000 pounds gutted weight

Sub-alternative 4b. 850 pounds gutted weight

Sub-alternative 4c. 700 pounds gutted weight

Discussion:

For January 1 to May 17, 2017 (Season 1), the SARIMA model prediction was a 26% overestimate, whereas the Last 3 model overestimated landings by 83%.

For July 1 to October 17, 2017 (Season 2), the SARIMA model overestimated landings by 39%, and the Last 3 model overestimated landings by 42%.

Based on this retrospective analysis, the SARIMA model predictions are recommended to guide management decision-making but it is noted that both models overestimated the 2017 landings, thus the predicted quota closure dates (**Tables 5a** and **5b**) may be conservative.

Table 5a. Projected mean and 95% lower and upper (L95, U95) confidence limits trip limit reduction and quota closure dates for vermillion snapper under different alternatives proposed for Action 5 for **Season 1 (January through June)**. Nc=No closure.

Trip Limit Reduced						
Alternative	Last 3			SARIMA*		
	L95	Mean	U95	L95	Mean	U95
1: 1,000 pounds with reduction	28-Mar	4-Mar	20-Feb	27-May	27-Feb	6-Feb
2: 1,000 pounds with reduction	28-Mar	4-Mar	20-Feb	27-May	27-Feb	6-Feb
3: 1,000 pounds with reduction	28-Mar	4-Mar	20-Feb	27-May	27-Feb	6-Feb
Fishery Closed						
1: 1,000 pounds with reduction	27-Apr	31-Mar	14-Mar	Nc	29-Apr	26-Feb
2: 1,000 pounds with reduction	27-Apr	31-Mar	14-Mar	Nc	29-Apr	26-Feb
3: 1,000 pounds with reduction	27-Apr	31-Mar	14-Mar	Nc	29-Apr	26-Feb
4a: 1,000 pounds, no reduction	19-Apr	24-Mar	7-Mar	23-Jun	14-Apr	19-Feb
4b: 850 pounds, no reduction	26-Apr	31-Mar	13-Mar	Nc	27-Apr	24-Feb
4c: 700 pounds, no reduction	5-May	7-Apr	21-Mar	Nc	6-May	7-Mar

Source: SERO

Table 5b. Projected mean and 95% lower and upper (L95, U95) confidence limits trip limit reduction and quota closure dates for vermillion snapper under different alternatives proposed for Action 5 for **Season 2 (July through December)**. Nc=No closure.

Trip Limit Reduced						
Alt	Last 3			SARIMA*		
	L95	Mean	U95	L95	Mean	U95
1: 1,000 pounds with reduction	18-Sep	25-Aug	13-Aug	4-Oct	22-Aug	4-Aug
Fishery Closed						
1: 1,000 pounds with reduction	25-Oct	17-Sep	31-Aug	Nc	16-Sep	23-Aug
2: 750 pounds, no reduction	1-Nov	20-Sep	1-Sep	Nc	19-Sep	25-Aug
3: 500 pounds, no reduction	18-Dec	14-Oct	19-Sep	Nc	12-Oct	11-Sep
4a: 1,000 pounds, no reduction	13-Oct	9-Sep	24-Aug	14-Nov	7-Sep	16-Aug
4b: 850 pounds, no reduction	23-Oct	14-Sep	28-Aug	28-Dec	13-Sep	20-Aug
4c: 700 pounds, no reduction	8-Nov	23-Sep	4-Sep	Nc	22-Sep	27-Aug

Source: SERO

SSC/Advisory Panel Recommendations:

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel provided no additional recommendations during their April 11-13, 2018 meeting.

Public Comments:

One commenter suggested that the Council consider adjusting the vermillion snapper trip limits, so it is no longer necessary to allocate 35,000 pounds of quota each year to projected post-closure dead discards.

One commenter from North Carolina expressed support for Sub-alternative 4c (700-pound trip limit for both seasons and remove trip-limit reductions) since it would increase the likelihood of a year-round fishery.

Three comments (two from North Carolina and 1 from Florida) offered that 700 pounds in both seasons with no trip limit reductions (Sub-alternative 4c) would work for commercial fishermen.

One commenter from Florida stated that traditional bandit boats would need the largest trip limit available. He indicated a reduction at a certain percentage of the ACL to a bycatch fishery would be good to consider.

IPT Recommendations:

Editorial changes noted above (highlighted in yellow).

Committee Action:

- ACCEPT THE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS
- DO NOT ACCEPT THE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS (COMMITTEE TO SUGGEST MODIFICATIONS AND APPROVE)
- CONSIDER PUBLIC COMMENT AND SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE
- OTHERS?

Action 6. Implement Establish a minimum size limit for almaco jack for the commercial sector

Action Alternatives:

Alternative 1 (No Action). There is no commercial minimum size limit specified for almaco jack.

Alternative 2. Specify Establish a minimum size limit for almaco jack for the commercial sector:

Preferred Sub-alternative 2a. 20 inches fork length

Sub-alternative 2b. 22 inches fork length

Sub-alternative 2c. 24 inches fork length

Sub-alternative 2d. 26 inches fork length

Discussion:

Almaco jack is included in the ‘Other Jacks Complex’ along with lesser amberjack and banded rudderfish. The commercial ACL for the Complex is 189,422 pounds (whole weight).

Under current conditions, using data from 2014 through 2016, 88.5% of almaco jack landed commercially (by weight) in the South Atlantic are above 20 inches and 66% of the catch is above 26 inches (**Table 6a**).

Table 6a. Percent of commercial catch (in pounds) comprised of almaco jack below and above each of the proposed minimum sizes limits, 2014-2016. Preferred indicated in bold.

Min Size	Pounds of Fish	
	% > min size	% < min size
20"	88.5%	11.5%
22"	82.6%	17.4%
24"	74.6%	25.4%
26"	65.8%	34.2%

Source: SAFMC

Table 6b shows the estimated closure dates and 95% confidence intervals (CI) for **Alternatives 1 (No Action)** and **Preferred Alternative 2**.

Table 6b. Estimated closure dates and estimated total landings with 95% confidence interval (CI) for the almaco jack minimum sizes limit alternatives. Preferred indicated in bold.

Alternatives	Closure Date	Total Landings	95% CI
1: No Size Limit	2-Jul	289,392	34,109
2a: 20 in	14-Jul	265,082	31,125
2b: 22 in	26-Jul	252,551	29,610
2c: 24 in	18-Aug	235,535	27,583
2d: 26 in	23-Sep	216,972	25,422

Source: SAFMC

SSC/Advisory Panel Recommendations:

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel provided no additional recommendations during their April 11-13, 2018 meeting.

Public Comments:

One commenter offered that putting a size limit on Almaco Jack would do nothing more than increase regulatory discards while reducing stock assessment data.

Two commenters from North Carolina expressed support for the council for preferred alternative. A 20-inch fish is approximately 5 pounds, which is optimal for restaurants or the retail market. Another comment from Florida also expressed support for the preferred.

A commenter from Florida did not think a minimum size limit on almaco jack was necessary.

One commenter from North Carolina did not support the proposed minimum size limit as larger fish, in his experience, are not as good to eat as the smaller individuals.

IPT Recommendations:

Editorial changes noted above (highlighted in yellow).

Committee Action:

- ACCEPT THE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS
- DO NOT ACCEPT THE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS (COMMITTEE TO SUGGEST MODIFICATIONS AND APPROVE)
- CONSIDER PUBLIC COMMENT AND MAKE MODIFICATIONS AS APPROPRIATE
- OTHERS?

Action 7. **Implement Establish** a commercial trip limit for the Other Jacks Complex

Action Alternatives:

Alternative 1 (No Action). There is no commercial trip limit for the Other Jacks Complex (lesser amberjack, almaco jack, and banded rudderfish).

Preferred Alternative 2. Establish a commercial trip limit for the Other Jacks Complex:

Preferred Sub-alternative 2a. 500 pounds gutted weight.

Sub-alternative 2b. 400 pounds gutted weight.

Sub-alternative 2c. 300 pounds gutted weight.

Discussion:

There have been in-season commercial closures (June to August) for the Other Jacks Complex since an ACL was implemented in 2012. The analyses presented here account for the specification of a minimum size limit for almaco jack under Action 6. **Table 7** contains predicted closure dates for the Other Jacks Complex for each of the trip limits under the proposed trip limit alternatives.

Table 7. Estimated closure dates for each trip limit sub-alternative under **Preferred Alternative 2** analyzed in combination with minimum size limits proposed under Action 6. Preferred alternatives indicated in bold.

Trip Limit Alt (Action 7)	Size Limit Alt (Action 6)	Closure Dates
2a (500 lbs)	1 (No size limit)	16-Aug
	2a (20 inches)	14-Sep
	2b (22 inches)	3-Oct
	2c (24 inches)	4-Nov
	2d (26 inches)	17-Dec
2b (400 lbs)	1 (No size limit)	9-Sep
	2a (20 inches)	11-Oct
	2b (22 inches)	1-Nov
	2c (24 inches)	6-Dec
	2d (26 inches)	No Closure
2c (300 lbs)	1 (No size limit)	28-Oct
	2a (20 inches)	2-Dec
	2b (22 inches)	20-Dec
	2c (24 inches)	No Closure
	2d (26 inches)	No Closure

Source: SAFMC

SSC/Advisory Panel Recommendations:

At their April 11-13, 2018 meeting, the Snapper Grouper AP offered the following:

- Need to revisit the sector allocation for banded rudderfish. Almaco jack should have its own ACL but the proposed trip limit for the Jack Complex should help slow down the harvest.

Public Comments:

Two comments from Florida expressed support for the Council's preferred.

Two commenters from North Carolina support the preferred alternative. In NC, fishermen catch large almaco jacks inshore in the fall inshore and have to throw back 300-500 pounds a day.

A commenter from North Carolina supports either the 500- or 300-pound trip limit.

IPT Recommendations:

Editorial changes noted above (highlighted in yellow).

Committee Action:

- ACCEPT THE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS
- DO NOT ACCEPT THE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS (COMMITTEE TO SUGGEST MODIFICATIONS AND APPROVE)
- CONSIDER PUBLIC COMMENT AND MAKE MODIFICATIONS AS APPROPRIATE
- OTHERS?

Action 8. Modify the seasonal prohibition on commercial harvest and possession and sale and purchase of red grouper in the Exclusive Economic Zone off South Carolina and North Carolina

Action Alternatives:

Alternative 1 (No Action). During January through April, no person may fish for, harvest, or possess in or from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone any shallow-water grouper (gag, black grouper, scamp, red grouper, yellowfin grouper, yellowmouth grouper, red hind, rock hind, graysby, or coney). Additionally, during January through April, no person may sell or purchase any shallow-water grouper harvested from or possessed in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.

Preferred Alternative 2. Maintain seasonal prohibition on sale and purchase of shallow-water groupers annually from January 1 to April 30 in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone. Prohibit sale and purchase of red grouper in the exclusive economic zone off North Carolina and South Carolina from:

Preferred Sub-alternative 2a. January – May (five months)

Sub-alternative 2b. February – May (four months)

Sub-alternative 2c. March – June (four months)

NEW PROPOSED REVISIONS: Preferred Alternative 2. During January through April, no person may fish for, harvest, or possess in or from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone any shallow-water grouper (gag, black grouper, scamp, red grouper, yellowfin grouper, yellowmouth grouper, red hind, rock hind, graysby, or coney). Additionally, during January through April, no person may sell or purchase any shallow-water grouper harvested from or possessed in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone. Off North Carolina and South Carolina, revise the timing of these restrictions only for red grouper as follows:

Preferred Sub-alternative 2a. January – May (five months).

Sub-alternative 2b. February – May (four months).

Sub-alternative 2c. March – June (four months).

Discussion:

The analysis required backfilling landings for the January-April closed time period and assumes no temporal redistribution of effort. **Figure 1** shows that the elimination of four months of fishing substantially reduced the annual landings of red grouper off North and South Carolina, and this decline has persisted through time.

Preferred Sub-alternative 2a (Jan-May closure) would eliminate an additional 12% of annual landings. **Sub-alternative 2b** (Feb-May closure) would eliminate an additional 7% of annual landings. **Sub-alternative 2c** (March-June closure) would eliminate an additional 17% of annual landings (**Table 8**).

Table 8. Total landings (pounds whole weight) and mean monthly percentage of commercially landed red grouper reported by dealers in South Carolina and North Carolina for the three years prior to the implementation of the January-April shallow-water grouper closure.

	2006	2007	2008	Mean	Percent red grouper
Jan	15,880	15,588	41,456	24,308	5%
Feb	11,320	12,131	38,306	20,586	4%
Mar	10,481	37,911	29,155	25,849	5%
Apr	14,237	39,846	43,194	32,426	6%
May	33,499	69,021	86,630	63,050	12%
Jun	36,301	85,124	99,013	73,479	14%
Jul	35,635	69,485	60,623	55,248	11%
Aug	44,558	85,159	73,510	67,742	13%
Sep	32,216	32,386	43,316	35,973	7%
Oct	29,058	49,730	53,222	44,003	9%
Nov	27,289	37,496	36,007	33,597	7%
Dec	24,203	50,253	28,080	34,179	7%

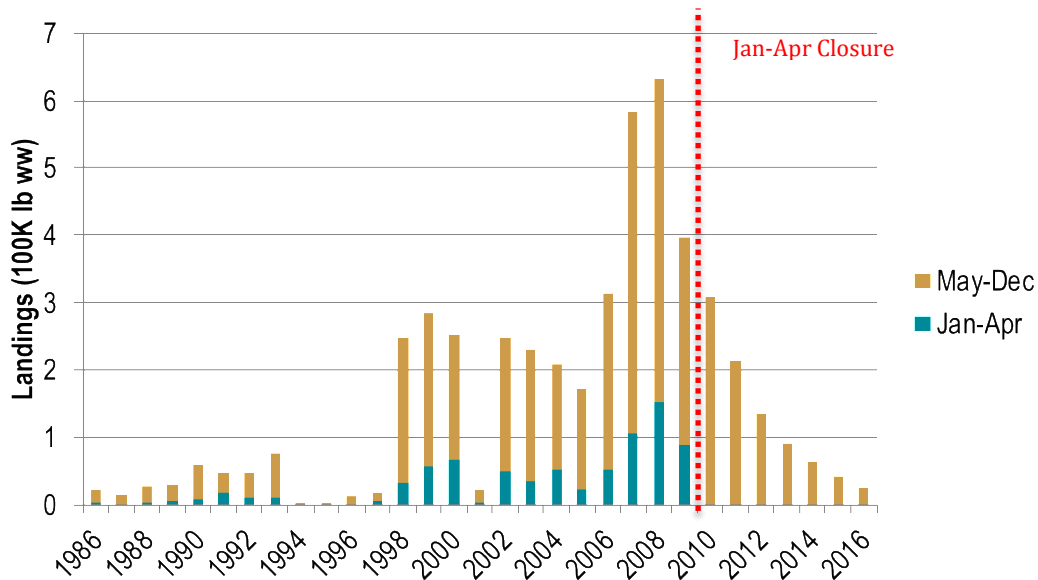


Figure 1. Commercial landings of red grouper (pounds whole weight) in North and South Carolina prior to and after the January through April seasonal closure implemented in 2009.

SSC/Advisory Panel Recommendations:

The Snapper Grouper AP approved the following motion during their April 11-13, 2018 meeting:

MOTION #1: RECOMMEND THAT THE COUNCIL CONSIDER A BYCATCH COMMERCIAL TRIP LIMIT FOR RED GROUPER
APPROVED BY AP (UNANIMOUS)

Public Comments:

One commenter from the Florida Keys maintains that the current shallow-water grouper closure is not working since fish are being harvested in South Florida while still in spawning condition. He claims grouper are spawning through June in the area where he fishes. He suggests allowing harvest January 1 for South Florida when grouper are not spawning in the area and command higher price on the market.

One commenter from North Carolina thinks Red Grouper should be managed as a by-catch fishery until the stock rebounds. He suggests no changes to the spawning season closure and a 100-pound trip limit. Extending the spawning closure for one species could result in increased regulatory discards as fishermen target legal grouper.

Two commenters in North Carolina stated support for the preferred and suggest a small trip limit (200 pounds) to help rebuild the fishery.

One commenter expressed concern about conflicting regulations in the Carolinas vs. Georgia/Florida. He suggested no changes to the seasonal closure and a 100-pound bycatch limit.

One comment from Florida was in support of the Council's preferred.

IPT Recommendations:

IPT member comment: This action would require revisions to multiple sections in the regulations. Would establishing a commercial trip limit of zero during certain months have the same desired effect and be more straightforward?

IPT member comment: Consider that there are three amendments under development (and one under review) that address red grouper. Also, an update to the red grouper assessment to incorporate MRIP calibrations is scheduled for later this year.

Editorial revisions noted above (highlighted in yellow).

Committee Action:

- APPROVE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS
- DO NOT APPROVE IPT'S SUGGESTED EDITS (COMMITTEE TO SUGGEST MODIFICATIONS AND APPROVE)
- CONSIDER PUBLIC COMMENT AND MAKE MODIFICATIONS AS APPROPRIATE
- OTHERS?

Action 9. Remove the commercial minimum size limit for certain deep-water species

Action Alternatives:

Alternative 1 (No Action). The commercial minimum size limit for queen snapper, silk snapper, and blackfin snapper in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone is 12 inches total length.

Preferred Alternative 2. Remove the 12-inch total length commercial minimum size limit for queen snapper, silk snapper, and blackfin snapper in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone.

Discussion:

The current commercial size limit of 12 inches total length (TL) for queen snapper, silk snapper, and blackfin snapper was established in 1998. While there are no discard mortality studies specific to the species in this action, other studies of commercially discarded red snapper have estimated discard mortality rates above 50% beyond 60 meters.

From 2014-2016, only two trips reported discards for silk snapper and no discards were reported for queen snapper or blackfin snapper. Expanding the observed discard rates to the fishery as a whole is non-informative due to low reported encounters in recent years. Available data suggest minimal changes in discard or harvest rates would be expected under **Preferred Alternative 2**.

SSC/Advisory Panel Recommendations:

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel provided no additional recommendations during their April 11-13, 2018 meeting.

Public Comments:

Members of the public who offered comment expressed support for this action.

IPT Recommendations:

None

Committee Action:

- CONSIDER PUBLIC COMMENT AND MAKE MODIFICATIONS AS APPROPRIATE
- OTHERS?

Action 10. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in the exclusive economic zone off east Florida

Action Alternatives:

Alternative 1 (No Action). The commercial minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in the exclusive economic zone off the east coast of Florida is 14 inches fork length.

Preferred Alternative 2. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for gray triggerfish in the exclusive economic zone off the east coast of Florida to 12 inches fork length.

Discussion:

From January 2014 to June 2015, the majority of the gray triggerfish harvested for the commercial sector in federal waters off east Florida were above the current minimum size limit of 14 inches FL. Lowering the minimum size limit to 12 inches FL (**Preferred Alternative 2**) would result in approximately 20% additional gray triggerfish available for harvest. This may cause the commercial ACL to be caught sooner and shorten the current commercial seasons (**Table 9**).

Table 9. Estimated percent increase in whole weight of commercial gray triggerfish landings in federal waters off east Florida at 1-inch intervals between 12-14 inches fork length (FL). The increases were generated with TIP data from January 2014 to June 2015 from a sample of 2,616 fish.

Minimum Size Limit (inches FL)	Percent Increase
12	19.7
13	12.5
14	0.0

Source: SERO

A decrease in the minimum size limit could have negative biological effects if larger fish produce more eggs. The length at which 50% of female gray triggerfish are mature has been estimated at 7 inches (SEDAR 41 2016). Based on length-age relationship equations (Von Bertalanffy) and egg production at age, a 12-inch gray triggerfish female produces about half the number of eggs as a 14-inch fish.

SSC/Advisory Panel Recommendations:

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel provided no additional recommendations during their April 11-13, 2018 meeting.

Public Comments:

One commenter from North Carolina supported no action.
One comment from Florida was in support of the Council's preferred.

IPT Recommendations:

None

Committee Action:

- CONSIDER PUBLIC COMMENT AND MAKE MODIFICATIONS AS APPROPRIATE
- OTHERS?

Committee Action:

- APPROVE ALL ACTIONS IN VISION BLUEPRINT REGULATORY AMENDMENT 27 TO CONSIDER FOR FINAL APPROVAL IN SEPTEMBER 2018
- DO NOT APPROVE ACTIONS IN VISION BLUEPRINT REGULATORY AMENDMENT 27 (COMMITTEE TO SUGGEST MODIFICATIONS AND APPROVE ADJUSTED TIMELINE)
- OTHERS?