

Amendment 43 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan of the South Atlantic Region

Scoping Document
(Red Snapper and Recreational Reporting)



The Amendment 43 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region would address overfishing of red snapper and recreational reporting.

January 2017

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

Award Number FNA15NMF4410010

What is Scoping?

Scoping is the first stage of the process to amend a fishery management plan after an issue has been identified (see steps in the process below). Scoping has two main purposes: (1) to inform you that the Council may propose new regulations or change existing ones and (2) to allow you the opportunity to comment on the issue or identify other issues that may need the Council's attention. You will have more opportunity to provide comments as the amendment is developed; however, scoping is the first and best opportunity to make suggestions for the Council to consider *before* an amendment is developed.



What Issues are being considered in Snapper Grouper Amendment 43?

There are four primary issues that the Council would like your input on:

- What is the best way to reduce discards of red snapper to stop overfishing (as required by law)?
- What management measures could improve the survival of discarded red snapper?
- If red snapper removals (landings and dead discards) are reduced significantly, limited harvest may be possible. What management measures would you like to see used to manage red snapper harvest if a limited red snapper season is allowed?
- How could estimates of catch, discards, and effort in the private recreational snapper grouper fishery be improved?

Background information

The most recent stock assessment for red snapper in the South Atlantic region (SEDAR 41 completed in 2016 with data through 2014) indicated the stock was overfished and overfishing was still occurring. The number of red snapper was at an all-time low in 1991 when the population was 318,000 fish (**Figure 1**). Since then the population has grown to over a million fish in the population (2014). The growth in the population is in part due to large recruitment classes in 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2014. To continue to rebuild the population biomass to a sustainable level and increase the chances of continued strong year classes in the future, these young fish need to be allowed to mature and grow. Although there is a very positive sign in the number of fish, currently the spawning stock biomass is less than 20% of the target size (**Figure 2**). The spawning stock biomass will end to increase before the stock is no longer considered overfished.

Definitions

Overfishing occurs when a stock or stock complex is caught at a rate that prevents the capacity of the stock to produce maximum sustainable yield (MSY) on a continuing basis.

Overfished is when a stock or stock complex falls below minimum stock size threshold.

Spawning stock biomass for red snapper is the total number of eggs produced annually.

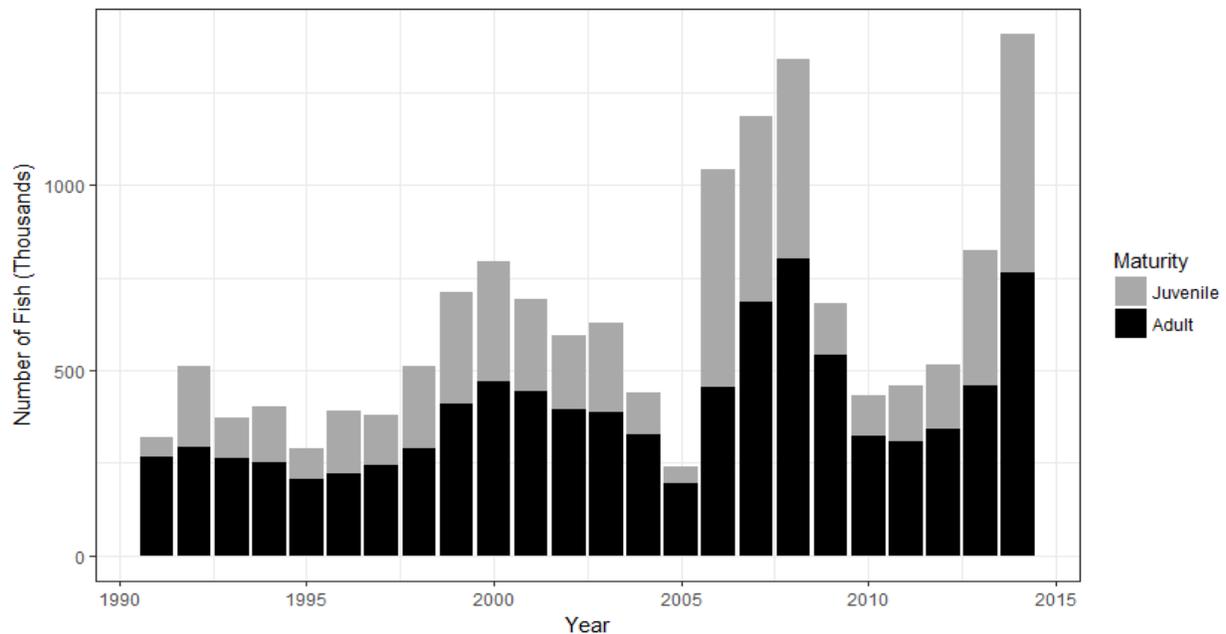


Figure 1. Number of juvenile and adult red snapper estimated to be in the population 1991 to 2015 (SEDAR 41). The red snapper population has increased from 318,000 fish in 1991 to greater than 1,177,000 fish in 2015.

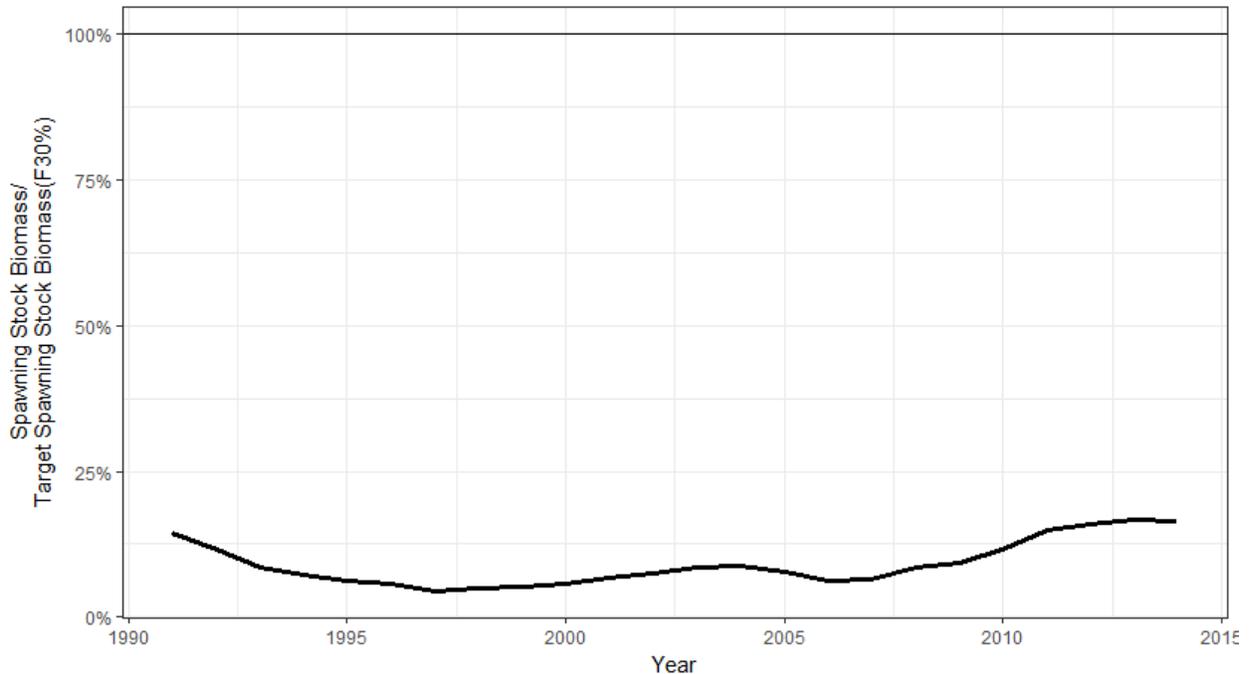


Figure 2. The ratio of annual spawning stock biomass to the reference point for spawning stock biomass. The reference point ($F_{30\%}$) is 30% of the unfished stock biomass. The ratio has increased from a low in 1997 (4.5%) to a high in 2013 (16.7%). The stock will no longer be overfished when the biomass reaches 30% of the unfished biomass level, which equates to a ratio of 100% on this chart.

The high recruitment is an encouraging sign as the population rebuilds from low levels in the 1980s-1990s. Unfortunately, the levels of recruitment are contributing to high levels of red snapper being caught by fishermen pursuing other species. Since harvest of red snapper in federal waters is currently prohibited, this results in a lot red snapper being discarded. The high numbers of discards combined with even a moderate release mortality rate (>25%) is causing overfishing. To end overfishing, as is required by federal law, red snapper total removals (landed catch plus the estimate of dead discards) must be reduced to less than 100,000 fish per year potentially as low as 20,000 fish. (Estimates of total removals from 2014 and 2015 were between 200,000 and 300,000 fish.) Therefore, the Council is considering measures to: (1) reduce the overall number of discards and (2) improve the survival of released red snapper and other snapper grouper species.

The Council would also like input on ways to improve reporting in the private recreational fishery. Although not included in this document, Amendment 43 will specify catch level recommendations for red snapper. The values for the catch level recommendations will be included in Public Hearing documents and drafts of amendments.

How Can the Number of Discarded Red Snapper be Reduced?

To prevent overfishing, managers must limit harvest (landed catch and dead discards) to the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC). The ABC is the total (numbers or weight) of fish that can be removed in a given year causing overfishing. In 2015, the estimated removals of red snapper (landed catch plus the estimate of dead discards) was greater than the ABC even though a season was not opened for red snapper that year. It was estimated that the number of red snapper discarded dead in 2015 was 273,879 fish whereas the ABC for that year was 114,000 fish. For the red snapper population to stop experiencing overfishing and meet its rebuilding goal, the number of dead discards must be reduced to less than 100,000. To allow any limited harvest of red snapper in federal waters in 2017, the number of dead discards must be less than 60,000. As mentioned previously, there are two components to ending overfishing of red snapper in the South Atlantic: (1) reducing the number of discarded red snapper and (2) improving survival of released red snapper.

Public Input

What are potential ways to reduce the number of discarded red snapper?

How Could Survival of Released Fish be Improved?

An estimate of red snapper discard mortality, the percent of discarded fish that are not expected to survive, was based on tag return estimates from different studies in the South Atlantic region and input from recreational and commercial fishermen. The estimate accounts for mortality that occurs immediately (floated off or eaten by other animals) or that may occur days later due to organ damage or impaired feeding. Several factors influence discard mortality including hook type, release type (descending device, vented, and/or surface), and depth. Estimates of discard mortality for red snapper are 28.5% for the recreational sector and 38% for the commercial sector. The discard mortality estimate for the commercial sector is higher than the recreational sector because commercial fishermen typically fish in slightly deeper water than recreational fishermen. The Council would like to hear your ideas on how to improve the survival of released red snapper and other snapper grouper species.

Public Input

What are management measures that could improve the survival of discarded red snapper?

Could there be Limited Harvest?

There is potential for limited red snapper harvest but the number of red snapper discards would first need to be reduced significantly. In 2015 over 500,000 red snapper were caught and released (of these, 273,879 did not survive). The number caught and released would need to be reduced to less than

250,000 fish for there to be some limited harvest allowed. If harvest were to be allowed in 2018, landings would likely be less than 30,000 fish for the commercial and recreational sectors combined.

Public Input

What management measures would you like to see used to manage red snapper harvest if a limited red snapper season is allowed?

How Could Catch, Discard, and Effort Estimates in the Private Recreational Fishery be Improved?

Currently, the estimate of landings, discards, and effort for the private recreational fishery comes from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). The Council is aware of the need to improve estimates of recreational landings, discards, and effort in the snapper grouper fishery and may consider changes to reporting requirements for private recreational fishermen. Headboat and commercial captains are already required to report catch and effort for each trip and the For-Hire Electronic Reporting Amendment (currently under review) proposes reporting requirements for charter boat trips. However, no such requirement exists for private recreational anglers. Many stakeholders have suggested that a reporting requirement be put in place for private recreational anglers in order to obtain more reliable estimates of recreational landings and discards.

Public Input

What are the best ways to improve the estimates of catch, discards, and effort in the private recreational snapper grouper fishery?

Proposed Timing

Process Steps	Dates
Scoping webinar hearings	January/February 2017
Review scoping comments and revise actions/alternatives	March 2017
Review effects analysis and approve for public hearings	June 2017
Public hearings	August 2017
Review public hearing comments and approve all actions/alternatives	September 2017
Final action to approve for Secretarial review	December 2017

How Do I Comment?

The Council requests that written comments be submitted using the online public comment form for each amendment available from the Public Hearings and Scoping Meetings page at <http://safmc.net/amendments-under-development/snapper-grouper-amendment-43/> .

Comments submitted using the online comment form are immediately posted to the Council's website and available for all Council members and the public to view.

Written comments must be received by 5:00 PM on **February 10, 2017**.

Comments by mail: Send comments to Gregg Waugh, Executive Director, SAFMC, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201, N. Charleston, SC 29405.

Comments by fax: 843/769-4520.

View presentations and access the public hearing and scoping documents from <http://safmc.net/amendments-under-development/snapper-grouper-amendment-43/> or contact the Council office at 843/571-4366 (toll free 866/SAFMC-10).

January/February 2017 Scoping and Public Hearings

All meetings begin at 6:00 p.m.

<p><u>January 12, 2017</u> – Scoping Webinar for Vision Blueprint Amendments only</p>	<p><u>January 17, 2017</u> – Question & Answer Webinar (Amendments 43 & 44)</p>
<p><u>January 18, 2017</u> – Listening Station (Am 44) Harvey Government Center 1200 Truman Ave.; 2nd floor Key West, FL 33040 Phone: 305-295-4385</p>	<p><u>January 19, 2017</u> – Listening Station (Am 44) Hyatt Place Marathon 1996 Overseas Hwy Marathon, FL 33050 Phone: 305-743-1234</p>
<p><u>January 23, 2017</u> Lexington Hotel & Conference Center 1515 Prudential Drive Jacksonville, FL 32207 Phone: 904-396-5100</p>	<p><u>January 24, 2017</u> Hilton Cocoa Beach Oceanfront 1550 North Atlantic Avenue Cocoa Beach, FL 32931 Phone: 321-799-0003</p>
<p><u>January 25, 2017</u> Flagler Place 201 SW Flagler Avenue Stuart, FL 34994 Phone: 772-985-3863</p>	<p><u>January 26, 2017</u> Hilton Key Largo 97000 Overseas Highway Key Largo, FL 33037 Phone: 305-852-5553</p>
<p><u>January 30, 2017</u> Murrells Inlet Community Center 4450 Murrells Inlet Road Murrells Inlet, SC 29576 Phone: 843-651-4152</p>	<p><u>January 31, 2017</u> Crowne Plaza 4831 Tanger Outlet Boulevard Charleston, SC 29418 Phone: 843-744-4422</p>
<p><u>February 1, 2017</u> Richmond Hill City Center 520 Cedar Street Richmond Hill, GA 31324 Phone: 912-445-0043</p>	<p><u>February 6, 2017</u> Hilton Wilmington Riverside 301 N. Water Street Wilmington, NC 28401 Phone: Phone: 910-763-5900</p>
<p><u>February 7, 2017</u> Hatteras Community Center 57689 NC Highway 12 Hatteras, NC 27943 Phone: 252-986-2161/252-986-2109</p>	<p><u>February 8, 2017</u> Doubletree by Hilton Atlantic Beach Oceanfront 2717 W. Fort Macon Road Atlantic Beach, NC 28512 Phone: 252-240-1155</p>