

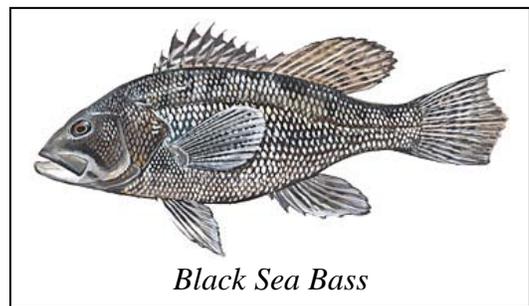
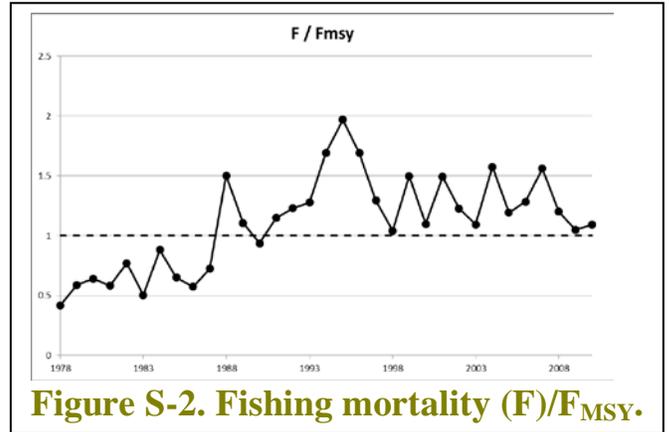
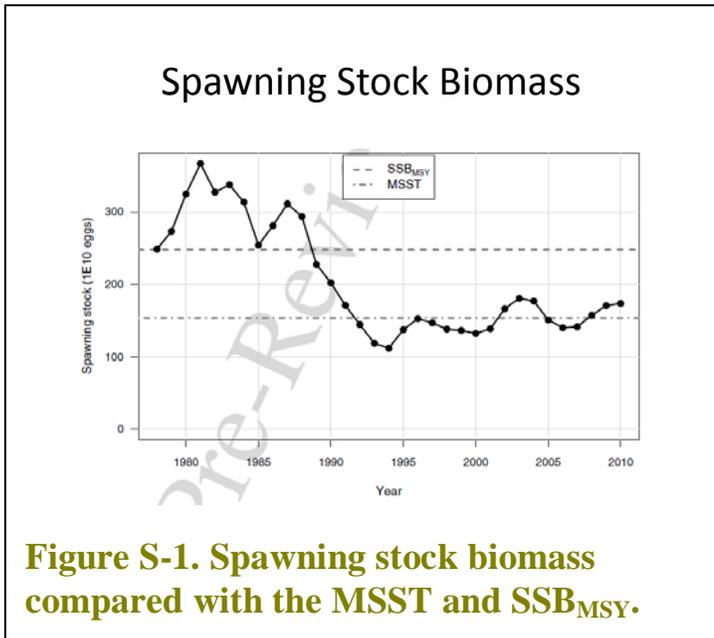
**PUBLIC HEARING
SUMMARY**
of
AMENDMENT 18A
to the Fishery Management Plan
for the Snapper Grouper Fishery
of the South Atlantic Region
(Black Sea Bass)

Why is the South Atlantic Council taking Action?

According to the most recent stock assessment black sea bass are no longer **overfished** (the populations is too small) because the current biomass is above the Minimum Stock Size Threshold (MSST) but still below the Spawning Stock Biomass at Maximum Sustainable Yield (SSB_{MSY}) (Figure S-1). This means the stock is still **rebuilding** and the biomass must be increased to the SSB_{MSY} level by the end of the June 1, 2015 – May 31, 2016 fishing year. Black sea bass are undergoing slight **overfishing** (fish are being removed from the population too quickly) (Figure S-2).

Amendment 13C to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 13C) (SAFMC 2006) included management measures to reduce harvest of black sea bass, and Amendment 15A to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 15A) included a rebuilding plan for black sea bass as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. A combination of a rebuilding stock and effort shifts into the fishery for black sea bass have caused the commercial quota to be met earlier and earlier each fishing season. Amendment 17B to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 17B) established strict accountability measures (AMs) for black sea bass that close the fishery when the commercial and recreational annual catch limits are met or projected to be met.

To prevent AMs from being triggered early each fishing season, and associated negative social and economic impacts, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) has determined action should be taken to reduce participation and effort in the black sea bass pot component of the snapper grouper fishery. Additionally, Amendment 18A to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 18A) would establish measures to improve data reporting in the commercial and for-hire sectors of the snapper grouper fishery, as well as modify the current system of commercial and recreational AMs for black sea bass.



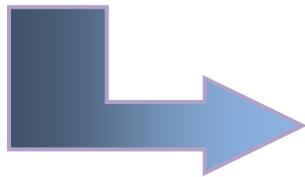
Purpose and Need of the Proposed Actions

The **purpose** of Amendment 18A is to limit participation and effort in the black sea bass pot fishery, limit bycatch in the black sea bass pot fishery, modify the current system of accountability measures, modify the current rebuilding strategy, consider a spawning season closure in addition to other management measures, and improve the accuracy, timing, and quantity of fisheries data, while minimizing, to the maximum extent practicable, adverse socioeconomic impacts. These actions will address issues that have arisen as a result of a more stringent regulatory regime in the South Atlantic region.

The **need** for action in Amendment 18A is to reduce overcapacity in the black sea bass portions of the snapper grouper fishery. Recent amendments to the Snapper Grouper FMP have imposed more restrictive harvest limitations on snapper grouper fishermen. In an effort to identify other species to target, a greater number of fishermen may target black sea bass. An increase in effort in the black sea bass component of the snapper grouper fishery would intensify the “race to fish” that already exists, which has resulted in a shortened season for the commercial and recreational sectors. Furthermore, the commercial quota for black sea bass was met in 2009 and 2010 before fishermen had a chance to fish during the portion of the year (November-February) that has historically been most productive. The South Atlantic Council is concerned an increasing effort on these species will deteriorate profits.

What Are the Proposed Actions?

There are 12 actions in Amendment 18A. Each *action* has a range of *alternatives*, including a “no action alternative” and a “preferred alternative”. The range of alternatives must include at least the no action (to do nothing) and preferred (the Council’s choice) alternatives.



The Council’s Preferred Alternatives are shown in yellow highlight and look for a black arrow.



Proposed Actions in Amendment 24

1. Modify Rebuilding Strategy, ABC, ACLs, and ACTs for Black Sea Bass
2. Limit Participation in the Black Sea Bass Pot Fishery Through an Endorsement Program
3. Establishment of an Appeals Process for Fishermen Excluded from the Black Sea Bass Pot Endorsement Program
4. Allow for Transferability of Black Sea Bass Pot Endorsements
5. Limit Effort in the Black Sea Bass Pot Fishery Each Permit Year
6. Implement Measures to Reduce Black Sea Bass Bycatch
7. Modify Accountability Measures for Black Sea Bass
8. Establish a Spawning Season Closure for Black Sea Bass
9. Establish a Commercial Trip Limit for Black Sea Bass
10. Modify Commercial and/or Recreational Black Sea Bass Size Limits
11. Improvements to Commercial Data Reporting
12. Improvements to For-Hire Data Reporting

Actions and Alternatives

Action 1. Modify Rebuilding Strategy, ABC, ACL's, and ACTs for Black Sea Bass

Action 1a. Modify Rebuilding Strategy and Set ABC for Black Sea Bass

Alternative 1 (No-Action). Retain rebuilding strategy for black sea bass that maintains a constant catch throughout the remaining years of the rebuilding timeframe. Currently, there is no ABC for black sea bass. Based on the current regulations in place the commercial ACL is 309,000 pounds gutted weight (gw) and the recreational ACL is 409,000 pounds gw for a combined ACL of 718,000 pounds gw.

Alternative 2. Establish a new constant catch rebuilding strategy with an ABC from the 2011 assessment and SSC review process

Alternative 3. Define a rebuilding strategy for black sea bass that maintains a constant fishing mortality rate throughout the remaining years of the rebuilding timeframe.

The Council is considering modifying the rebuilding strategy for black sea bass because under the current rebuilding strategy harvest is not allowed to increase as the stock biomass improves. This causes the rate of harvest to increase as the population rebuilds and leads to early closures when quotas are met early in the fishing season.

Sub-Alternative 3a. $F = 75\%F_{MSY}$

 **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3b.** $F = F_{rebuild}$ (by 2016)

Alternative 4. Define a rebuilding strategy for black sea bass that holds catch constant (847,000 pounds whole weight; recreational ACL = 409,000 lbs gw and commercial ACL = 309,000 lbs gw) in fishing years 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 and then changes to $F_{rebuild}$ fishing mortality rate throughout the remaining fishing seasons of the rebuilding timeframe. After the 2015/2016 fishing season the fishing mortality rate would be held constant until modified.

Table S-1. Black sea bass ABCs (lbs gutted weight) for Alternatives 2-4. Based on projections that assume 150% of ACL (commercial and recreational) met in June 2011-May 2012 fishing year.

Fishing Year	Alternative 2	Sub-Alternative 3a*	Sub-Alternative 3b*	Alternative 4**
2012/2013	973,729	746,610	746,610	718,000
2013/2014	973,729	881,356	881,356	718,000
2014/2015	973,729	1,023,729	1,023,729	1,023,729
2015/2016	973,729	1,134,746	1,134,746	1,134,746
2016/2017	973,729	1,215,254	1,215,254	1,215,254

*Fishing mortality rate (F) for Sub-Alternative 3a ($F=0.50$) is very similar to (F) for Sub-Alternative 3b. Landings under Sub-Alternative 3a would be slightly greater than Sub-Alternative 3b because F is slightly larger.

Rebuilding projection needed to determine actual values for 2013 to 2016 fishing years. Values provided are based on $F_{rebuild}$ that allows increased in harvest for 2012 fishing year. **Note on values in Table 4-1a. Alternative 2 is based on Table 3.23 from draft SEDAR 25 and Sub-Alternative 3b is based on Table 3.17 from draft SEDAR 25. Sub-Alternative 3a assumed to be same as Sub-Alternative 3b because F almost the same. Projection would need to be done for Alternative 4. Conversion factor of 1.18 used to convert whole weight values in assessment to gutted weight in Table 4-1b.

Impacts from Action 1a:

Biological Impacts

Alternative 1 (No Action) could result in unnecessary discards of black sea bass as biomass increases. However, release mortality of black sea bass is very low and actions were taken to reduce bycatch with increased mesh size in pots through Amendment 13C. Beneficial biological effects under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** include a more rapid rebuilding of the stock and increase in the average age and size structure compared to the other alternatives. **Alternative 2** would hold catch constant for the remaining years of the rebuilding plan and the ABC would not increase as the stock biomass increases. Based on preliminary results from SEDAR 25, the catch level could be increased from 718,000 lbs gw (~847,000 lbs ww) in the 2011/2012 fishing year to 1,058,475 lbs gw (1,249,000 lbs ww) in 2012 and then held steady through the remainder of the rebuilding period (2016). **Alternative 3** would hold F constant and allow catch of black sea bass to increase as biomass of the stock increases. The current estimate of F_{MSY} is $F = 0.698$. **Sub-Alternative 3a** would hold the fishing mortality rate at 75% of F_{MSY} , which is very close to the fishing mortality rate under **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3b**. **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3b** would allow the greatest amount of harvest possible, while still having a 50% chance of rebuilding by 2016. **Alternative 4** would use a modified approach for a black sea bass rebuilding strategy. Biological impacts of **Alternative 4** would be comparable to **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3b** since after the first two fishing seasons the allowable harvest would fall into line with what the allowable harvest would be under $F_{rebuild}$.

Socioeconomic Impacts

Alternative 1 (No Action) potentially is the greatest negative economic impact for commercial fishermen. As the stock recovers and there are a greater number of larger fish, the current commercial ACL is being caught more and more quickly. The commercial season that began on June 1, 2011, lasted only about 6 weeks. **Alternative 2**, which holds catch at a different constant level during the remainder of the rebuilding period, would have similar effects to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Under constant F rebuilding strategy (**Alternative 3**), ACLs would generally increase with a rebuilding stock. The advantage of this strategy is as more fish become available with increase stock size, more fish can be removed from the population. **Alternative 3** would not provide as much of a negative economic impact to commercial fishermen as would **Alternative 1 (No Action)** in that it would hold the fishing mortality rate (F) at a constant level for the remaining years of the rebuilding schedule. **Sub-Alternative 3a** is associated with less than 50 percent probability of rebuilding the stock within the rebuilding timeframe, and so may not be a viable alternative. **Preferred Sub-Alternative 3b** has greater than 50 percent probability of rebuilding the stock, but would provide for an ACL less than that of **Sub-Alternative 3a**. In the short-run, **Sub-Alternative 3a** may provide for a better economic scenario than **Sub-Alternative 3a**; the reverse may be expected over the long-run. **Alternative 4** has the potential to provide the greatest economic benefit to the fishermen as the commercial ACL could increase due to adjustments as the stock rebuilds.

Action 1b. Set an ACL for the Black Sea Bass Fishery

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not change the existing ACL for black sea bass.

 **Preferred Alternative 2.** Set ACL=ABC=OY. This results in sector ACLs based on the existing allocations. ACLs will not increase automatically in a subsequent year if the present year's projected catch has exceeded the total ACL.

Alternative 3. Set ACL = 90%ABC. This results in sector ACLs based on the existing allocations. ACLs will not increase automatically in a subsequent year if the present year's projected catch has exceeded the total ACL.

Alternative 4. Set ACL = 80%ABC. This results in sector ACLs based on the existing allocations. ACLs will not increase automatically in a subsequent year if the present year's projected catch has exceeded the total ACL.

Table S-2. Annually increasing ACLs (lbs gutted weight) based on Constant F rebuilding strategy (Action 1a, Preferred Alternative 3b). Note: ACLs will not increase automatically in a subsequent year if the present year's projected catch has exceeded the total ACL. Based on projections that assume 150% of ACL (commercial and recreational) met in June 2011-May 2012 fishing year.

Constant Fishing Mortality Rate Options ¹	Fishing Season*	Combined ACL	Com. ACL (43%) ²	Recreational ACL (57%)
Preferred Alternative 2. ACL=ABC=OY	2012/2013	746,610	321,042	425,568
	2013/2014	881,356	378,983	502,373
	2014/2015	1,023,729	440,203	583,525
	2015/2016	1,134,746	487,941	646,805
	2016/2017	1,215,254	522,559	692,695
Alternative 3. ACL=90%ABC	2012/2013	671,949	288,938	383,011
	2013/2014	793,220	341,085	452,136
	2014/2015	921,356	396,183	525,173
	2015/2016	1,021,271	439,147	582,125
	2016/2017	1,093,729	470,303	623,425
Alternative 4. ACL=80%ABC	2012/2013	597,288	256,834	340,454
	2013/2014	705,085	303,186	401,898
	2014/2015	818,983	352,163	466,820
	2015/2016	907,797	390,353	517,444
	2016/2017	972,203	418,047	554,156

Impacts from Action 1b.

Biological Impacts

Alternative 1 (No Action) would not change the existing ACL and OY for black sea bass. Based on a recommendation from the South Atlantic Council's SSC, Amendment 17B indicated that the ABC for overfished stocks is consistent with the value from the rebuilding plan. The Comprehensive ACL Amendment adopted this definition of ABC for overfished stocks into the ABC Control Rule. The ABC for black sea bass is 718,000 lbs gw, which is equivalent to the ACL. Currently, the ACL for black sea bass is equal to the ABC. **Alternative 2 (Preferred)-4** would set OY equal to the ACL. National Standard 1 (NS1) establishes the relationship between conservation and management measures, preventing overfishing, and achieving OY from each stock, stock complex or fishery. Under **Alternatives 2 (Preferred)-4**, the ACL and OY would be based on the ABC for black sea bass from SEDAR 25, which takes into consideration scientific uncertainty to ensure catches are maintained below a MSY/OFL level. **Preferred Alternative 2** is the least conservative option of all the alternatives under consideration in **Action 1b** by setting the ACL/OY equal to the ABC. The ACL would be divided into sector-specific ACLs based on the allocations of 43% commercial/57% recreational established in Amendment 13C to the FMP. **Preferred Alternative 2** would result in the greatest increase in overall allowable harvest over time while still allowing the stock to rebuild. **Preferred Alternative 2** would also provide no buffer between the ABC and the ACL. **Alternative 4** is the most risk adverse approach to setting a total ACL for black sea bass.

Socioeconomic Impacts

Since an ACL is a major constraint in the harvest or use of the black sea bass resource, **Preferred Alternative 2**, which provides for the highest ACL, would be expected to impose the least constrain on fishing activities. In principle, **Preferred Alternative 2** would allow the commercial and recreational fishing sectors to generate the largest short-term economic benefits from the use of the resource. Inasmuch as this alternative would still allow for the stock to rebuild within the rebuilding timeframe, benefits due this alternative may be expected to persist over time. Along similar reasoning, **Alternatives 3** and **4** would allow for lower economic benefits than **Preferred Alternative 2**, at least in the short term. Unless the stock rebuilds significantly faster under **Alternatives 3** or **4** so that ACLs could be substantially increased much sooner, long-term economic benefits derivable from these two alternatives would be lower than those from **Preferred Alternative 2**.

Action 1c. Set Annual Catch Targets (ACTs) for the Commercial Black Sea Bass Fishery.

 **Preferred Alternative 1 (No action).** Do not set an ACT for the commercial black sea bass fishery.

Alternative 2. Set the commercial ACT = 90% of the commercial sector ACL.

Alternative 3. Set the commercial ACT = 80% of the commercial sector ACL.

Table S-3. Values for Commercial ACT based on Preferred Alternative 2 in Action 1b. Based on projections that assume 150% of ACL (commercial and recreational) met in June 2011-May 2012 fishing year.

Fishing Year	Commercial ACL	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4
2012/2013	321,042	321,042	288,938	256,834
2013/2014	378,983	378,983	341,085	256,834
2014/2015	440,203	440,203	396,183	352,163
2015/2016	487,941	487,941	439,147	390,353
2016/2017	522,559	522,559	470,303	418,047

Impacts of Action 1c.

Biological Impacts

Preferred Alternative 1 (No Action) would not establish a commercial ACT. The South Atlantic Council concluded a commercial ACT for black sea bass was not needed because commercial sector landings are closely tracked in-season through a quota monitoring system that allows NMFS to project when the commercial ACL is going to be met so the fishery can be closed before the commercial ACL is exceeded. Therefore, a commercial ACT for black sea bass is not necessary for the successful management of the commercial sector for black sea bass, and could result in an unnecessary burden. Setting a commercial ACT at either 90% or 80% of the ACL (**Alternatives 2 and 3**, respectively), would establish a reference point that could be used as an indicator that the ACL could be reached or exceeded.

Socioeconomic Impacts

Preferred Alternative 1 would not impose a buffer through the ACT and is less restrictive than **Alternatives 2 or 3**. With **Alternatives 2 and 3**, a buffer would be imposed which would reduce the harvest threshold further from the ACL. Therefore there is an increasing possibility of negative short-term socioeconomic effects going from **Preferred Alternative 1** to **Alternative 3**. Some of those effects are similar to other thresholds being met and may involve switching to other species or discontinuing fishing altogether. Although these are common responses to closures, it is not known how fishermen may respond if closures are anticipated for several different species or groups. There could be a domino effect as one closure forces them to switch to another species which closes as thresholds are met with the added fishing pressure. However, under **Preferred Alternative 1** there may be long-term socioeconomic impacts due to an overage that would not result in an increase in the subsequent year's ACL for black sea bass.

Action 1d. Set Annual Catch Targets (ACTs) for the Recreational Black Sea Bass Fishery

Alternative 1. No action. Do not set an ACT for the recreational black sea bass fishery.

Alternative 2. Set the recreational ACT = 85% of the recreational sector ACL.

Alternative 3. Set the recreational ACT = 75% of the recreational sector ACL.

 **Preferred Alternative 4.** The ACT equals recreational ACL*(1-PSE) or recreational ACL*0.5, whichever is greater.

Table S-4. Values for Recreational ACT based on Preferred Alternative 2 in Action 1b. Based on projections that assume 150% of ACL (commercial and recreational) met in June 2011-May 2012 fishing year.

Fishing Year	Recreational ACL	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4
2012/2013	425,568	361,733	319,176	373,649
2013/2014	502,373	427,017	376,780	373,649
2014/2015	583,525	495,997	437,644	512,335
2015/2016	646,805	549,784	485,104	567,895
2016/2017	692,695	588,791	519,521	608,186

Impacts of Action 1d.

Biological Impacts

Alternatives 2-Preferred Alternative 4 would establish reduced harvest levels designed to hedge against an ACL overage by providing a buffer between the ACT and ACL to account for management uncertainty. **Alternative 2** would establish an ACT that is 85% of the recreational ACL, which would create a 15% buffer between the two harvest levels. The same applies to **Alternative 3**, which would establish an ACT at a more conservative level than **Alternative 2** (75% of the ACL). Under **Alternative 3** the buffer between the ACL and ACT would be greater than that under **Alternative 2**, and theoretically there would be more time to act to prevent the ACL from being exceeded. **Alternative 4 (Preferred)** would have the greatest biological benefit of the four alternatives by adjusting the ACL by 50% or one minus the Percent Standard Error (PSE) from the recreational fishery, whichever is greater. The lower the value of the PSE, the more reliable the landings data. By using PSE in **Preferred Alternative 4**, more precaution is taken in the estimate of the ACL with increasing variability and uncertainty in the landings data.

Socioeconomic Impacts

There is some expectation that ACTs used to trigger control measures would serve as cushions to effectively limit harvests and enable the stock to rebuild within the rebuilding timeframe. Long-term economic benefits would then ensue from a healthy stock. So long as long-term economic benefits outweigh short-term costs, the fishing industry and society in general would be better off. Realization of long-term economic benefits depends on a host of factors, including the type of management regime adopted. These factors render relatively uncertain the long-term economic outcome of ACTs, at least from the standpoint of magnitudes.

Action 2. Limit Participation in the Black Sea Bass Pot Fishery Through an Endorsement Program

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not limit participation in the black sea bass pot fishery with the establishment of an endorsement program.

Alternative 2. Limit endorsement and tag distribution to entities with a valid or renewable Unlimited Snapper Grouper Permit on the effective date of the final rule whose *average* annual black sea bass landings using black sea bass pot gear between 1/1/99 and 12/31/10 were at least:

Sub-Alternative 2a - 500 lbs whole weight. Exclude those with no reported commercial landings of black sea bass using black sea bass pot gear between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2010.

Sub-Alternative 2b - 1,000 lbs whole weight. Exclude those with no reported commercial landings of black sea bass using black sea bass pot gear between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2010.

Sub-Alternative 2c - 2,000 lbs whole weight. Exclude those with no reported commercial landings of black sea bass using black sea bass pot gear between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2010.

Sub-Alternative 2d - 5,000 lbs whole weight. Exclude those with no reported commercial landings of black sea bass using black sea bass pot gear between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2010.

Sub-Alternative 2e - 10,000 lbs whole weight. Exclude those with no reported commercial landings of black sea bass using black sea bass pot gear between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2010.

 **Preferred Sub-Alternative 2f** - 3,500 lb whole weight. Exclude those with no reported commercial landings of black sea bass using black sea bass pot gear between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2010.

Sub-Alternative 2g - 2,500 lbs whole weight. Exclude those with no reported commercial landings of black sea bass using black sea bass pot gear between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2010.

Alternative 3. No South Atlantic state shall have less than two entities that qualify for black sea bass pot endorsements, provided that no entity qualifies whose minimum average landings are:

Sub-Alternative 3a - 1,000 lbs whole weight

Sub-Alternative 3b - 2,000 lbs whole weight

Council's Decision:

Applicants must have a valid or renewable Unlimited Snapper Grouper Permit by the effective date of the final rule for Amendment 18A.

Council's Intent:

NMFS administratively prohibit transfers of Unlimited Snapper Grouper Permits for the necessary amount of time, not to exceed 45 days, until the new endorsements are required.

Table S-5. Number of fishermen with snapper grouper permits who fished pots with minimum black sea bass landings during 1/99 to 12/31/10. Excludes fishermen who did not have landings in 2008, 2009, or 2010.

Landings (ww)	Number of endorsements to be issued under Alternative 2 landings qualifiers
500 lbs	50
1,000 lbs	41
2,000 lbs	34
2,500 lbs	28
3,000 lbs	24
(Preferred) 3,500 lbs	21
5,000 lbs	18
10,000 lbs	9

Table S-6. Number of Unlimited Snapper Grouper Permits per state that Qualify for a Black Sea Bass Pot endorsement under Preferred Alternative 2f and Alternative 3 sub-alternatives Applied.

Alternative	State	Endorsements that would be issued
Preferred Sub-Alternative 2f. 3,500 lbs ww	North Carolina	11
	South Carolina	6
	Georgia	0
	Florida	4

Impacts from Action 2:

Biological Impacts

Any differences in biological impacts of the alternatives would be slight since the commercial sector would close when the commercial ACL is met or projected to be met, and all black sea bass pots would be removed from the water. Release mortality of black sea bass is very low (7% hook and line; 1% black sea bass pots); therefore, an extended closed season imposed by a large number of participants in the black sea bass pot sector is not likely to have a negative effect on the stock. The greater the number of endorsements issued, the earlier the commercial sector would close under the current commercial ACL.

Socioeconomic Impacts

Alternatives 2a-2g and **Alternative 3** would restrict participation in the black sea bass pot sector to those individuals who historically fished pots for black sea bass. As far fewer individuals fish pots than possess federal snapper grouper commercial permits, these alternatives could constrain participation in the black sea bass pot sector to a level that is more manageable and profitable.

Action 3: Establishment of an Appeals Process for Fishermen Excluded From the Black Sea bass Pot Endorsement Program

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not specify provisions for an appeals process associated with the black sea bass endorsement program.

 **Preferred Alternative 2.** A period of 90 days will be set aside to accept appeals to the black sea bass endorsement program starting on the effective date of the final rule. The Regional Administrator (RA) will review, evaluate, and render final decisions on appeals. Hardship arguments will not be considered. The RA will determine the outcome of appeals based on NMFS' logbooks. If NMFS' logbooks are not available, the RA may use state landings records. Appellants must submit NMFS' logbooks or state landings records to support their appeal.

Because some fishermen may feel their logbook landings histories may have been incorrectly calculated resulting in disqualification for an endorsement, NOAA Fisheries Service intends to establish an appeal process through which fishery participants may challenge their exclusion from the endorsement program.

Alternative 3. A period of 90 days will be set aside to accept appeals to the black sea bass endorsement program starting on the effective date of the final rule. The RA will review, evaluate, and render final decisions on appeals. Hardship arguments will not be considered. A special board composed of state directors/designees will review, evaluate, and make individual recommendations to the RA on appeals. Hardship arguments will not be considered. The special board and the RA will determine the outcome of appeals based on NMFS' logbooks. If NMFS' logbooks are not available, the RA may use state landings records. Appellants must submit NMFS' logbooks or state landings records to support their appeal.

Impacts from Action 3:

Biological Impacts

Though black sea bass pot effort could potentially increase above the expected number of qualifying vessels under Action 2 due to issuance of endorsements by appealing omission from the program, those impacts on the biological environment including target and non-target species, and critical habitat are not likely to be significant. Furthermore, any endorsements issued through the appeals process would not increase black sea bass pot effort over the status quo, and thus would not increase the risk of fishing gear interactions with protected species.

Socioeconomic Impacts

Because **Preferred Alternative 2** would establish an appeals process, **Preferred Alternative 2** would be expected to result in greater social benefits than **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. It is assumed that the process will adequately identify appropriate qualifiers and not simply result in an increase in fishermen with endorsements.

Action 4: Allow for Transferability of Black Sea Bass Endorsements

Alternative 1 (No Action). Black sea bass pot endorsements (and tags) would not be allowed to be transferred if such a system were implemented.

Alternative 2. Black sea bass pot endorsements can be transferred between any two individuals or entities that hold a valid or renewable Unlimited Snapper Grouper Permit. The endorsement and associated landings history of black sea bass can be transferred regardless of whether or not the Unlimited Snapper Grouper Permit is transferred.

Sub-Alternative 2a. Transferability allowed upon program implementation.

Sub-Alternative 2b. Transferability not allowed during the first 2 years of the program.

Sub-Alternative 2c. Transferability not allowed during the first 3 years of the program.

Sub-Alternative 2d. Transferability not allowed during the first 5 years of the program.

Alternative 3. Black sea bass pot endorsements can be transferred between any two individuals or entities that hold a valid or renewable Unlimited Snapper Grouper Permit. The endorsement and associated landings history of black sea bass will be transferred only if the Unlimited Snapper Grouper Permit is transferred.

Sub-Alternative 3a. Transferability allowed upon program implementation.

Sub-Alternative 3b. Transferability not allowed during the first 2 years of the program.

Sub-Alternative 3c. Transferability not allowed during the first 3 years of the program.

Sub-Alternative 3d. Transferability not allowed during the first 5 years of the program.

Impacts from Action 4:

Biological Impacts

Among **Alternatives 1-3**, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** could have the greatest biological benefit for the black sea bass stock if it results in decreased landings of black sea bass due to endorsements becoming inactive because of an inability to transfer those endorsements to active fishery participants. **Alternatives 2 and 3**, which would allow transferability of a black sea bass endorsement, would not be expected to negatively impact the black sea bass stock. The biological effects of **Alternatives 2 and 3** would be very similar as landings would be constrained by a quota. Therefore, the effects of **Alternatives 2 and 3** may be more economic and administrative than biological.

Socioeconomic Impacts

Generally, it can be argued that social and economic benefits would be maximized the fewer the constraints placed on the transfer of an asset. Unencumbered transfer allows the largest pool of recipients, which would be expected to result in the payment of the highest price for the asset.

Action 5: Limit Effort in the Black Sea Bass Pot Fishery Each Permit Year

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not annually limit the number of black sea bass pots deployed or pot tags issued to holders of snapper grouper commercial permits.

Alternative 2. Require that each black sea bass pot in the water or at sea on a vessel in the South Atlantic EEZ have an attached valid identification tag issued by NOAA Fisheries Service. Limit the black sea bass pot tags to 100 per vessel each permit year. NOAA Fisheries Service will issue new identification tags each fishing year that will replace the tags from the previous fishing year.

Alternative 3. Require that each black sea bass pot in the water or at sea on a vessel in the South Atlantic EEZ have an attached valid identification tag issued by NOAA Fisheries Service. Limit the black sea bass pot tags to 50 per vessel each permit year. NOAA Fisheries Service will issue new identification tags each fishing year that will replace the tags from the previous fishing year.

Alternative 4. Require that each black sea bass pot in the water or at sea on a vessel in the South Atlantic EEZ have an attached valid identification tag issued by NOAA Fisheries Service. Limit the black sea bass pot tags to 25 per vessel each permit year. NOAA Fisheries Service will issue new identification tags each fishing year that will replace the tags from the previous fishing year.

 **Preferred Alternative 5.** Require that each black sea bass pot in the water or at sea on a vessel in the South Atlantic EEZ have an attached valid identification tag issued by NOAA Fisheries Service. Limit the black sea bass pot tags to 35 per vessel each permit year. NOAA Fisheries Service will issue new identification tags each fishing year that will replace the tags from the previous fishing year.

Table S-7. Number of vessels with landings of snapper grouper with pots; number of vessels with landings of snapper grouper who requested tags. Mean, minimum, maximum, median number of tags requested for vessels that fished pots; and mean, minimum, maximum number of pots fished for vessels that requested tags.

Year	# of Vessels that fished pots	# of Vessels that fished pots with tags	Mean # tags requested	Min # tags requested	Max # tags requested	Median # of tags requested	Mean # pots fished	Min # pots fished	Max # Pots Fished
2003	53	49	54	6	200	50	45	1	200
2004	59	52	56	6	200	50	43	2	160
2005	53	47	50	6	160	40	47	1	120
2006	53	46	49	4	150	49	47	1	176
2007	54	51	53	10	200	50	48	1	180
2008	50	49	54	6	200	50	35	1	150
2009	62	62	55	8	200	45	37	1	150
2010	51	50	51	7	200	40	62	1	302
Average	54	51	53	7	189	47	45	1	180

Source: NMFS permits office and NMFS logbook database 5/12/11.

Impacts from Action 5:

Biological Impacts

Limiting the number of pots that may be fished by any one endorsement holder would address the South Atlantic Council's concerns regarding the possibility of fishermen leaving large numbers of pots fishing for multiple days due to vessel or weather problems, which could unnecessarily kill black sea bass. Fishing large numbers of pots also increases the chance that pots could be lost and "ghost fishing" could occur. Furthermore, fishing large numbers of pots increases the chance of entanglement of pot lines with right whales and other protected species. The lower the limit on number of pots is set the more biological beneficial results. **Alternative 1 (No Action)** is considered the least biologically beneficial of all the alternatives considered. **Alternative 4** would result in the least number of pots allowed and the greatest biological benefit.

Socioeconomic Impacts

In general, it is expected that the short-term economic benefits of **Alternatives 2-5** increases with the larger number of pots allowed per vessel. However, how the total number of pots in the fishery influences the catch per unit effort will ultimately determine the long-term economic impacts of these alternatives. It is possible that even a low number of pots per vessel could have negative economic impacts in the short and long-term if there are large numbers of vessels participating in the fishery. Assuming the catch per unit effort remains stable, **Alternative 2** would offer the greatest short-term economic benefits but probably the smallest long-term economic benefits since the total number of pots in the fishery is high. **Alternative 3** would have the next largest short-term economic benefits (and next smallest long-term economic benefits) followed by **Alternatives 2, 3, Preferred 5, and Alternative 4**.

Action 6. Implement Measures to Reduce Black Sea Bass Bycatch

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not implement additional regulations stipulating when black sea bass pots must be removed from the water. Currently, fishermen are required to remove all pots once the quota has been reached.

 **Preferred Alternative 2.** Black sea bass pots must be brought back to shore at the conclusion of each trip.

Alternative 3. Allow fishermen to leave pots in the water for no more than 72 hours.

Table S-8. Pots per trip fished (1/1/05-12/31/10).

	Average pots < 55	Average ≥ 55
No. of vessels	97	24
Average pots/trip	32	99

Source: NMFS logbook database 5-12-11.

Impacts from Action 6:

Biological Impacts

Currently, there are instances where large numbers of pots may be left fishing for multiple days due to vessel or weather problems, which could unnecessarily kill black sea bass. Fishing large numbers of pots also increases the chance that pots could be lost and “ghost fishing” could occur. Therefore, limitations on the length of time pots can be left at sea would reduce the adverse effects of continued fishing by lost gear. Boat propellers and storms are common causes for pots being lost. Fishermen may not be able to retrieve pots during periods of inclement weather or vessel repairs. The longer the pots are in the water, the greater the opportunity for lost pots and entanglement with protected species. The biological benefit of **Preferred Alternative 2** would be greater than **Alternative 3** because most trips last 1 day. Therefore, under **Preferred Alternative 2**, pots would be in the water for the least amount of time and would have the least amount of risk for ghost fishing or entanglement with protected species.

Socioeconomic Impacts

Preferred Alternative 2 would not explicitly limit soak time because the length of a fishing trip would not be limited. However, **Preferred Alternative 2** may functionally limit soak time if fishermen prefer not to stay at sea longer while their pots soak or force them to stay longer at sea to maintain customary soak times. Further, under **Preferred Alternative 2**, a vessel could not return to port without retrieving all pots, even if the expected soak time was short. Only **Alternative 3** would explicitly limit soak time. However, almost all black sea bass pot trips are less than three days, so **Alternative 3** would be expected to have little to no adverse social or economic effects. **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** would be expected to help reduce bycatch, resulting in increased long-term social and economic benefits for affected species, but would restrict fishing flexibility.

Action 7. Modify Accountability Measures for Black Sea Bass

Alternative 1 (No Action).

Commercial

If a commercial ACL is met or is projected to be met, all subsequent purchase and sale is prohibited and harvest and/or possession is limited to the bag limit for the species covered by that ACL.

Recreational

If black sea bass *is overfished* and the sector ACL is projected to be met, prohibit the harvest and retention of the species. Compare the recreational ACL with recreational landings over a range of years. For 2010, use only 2010 landings. For 2011, use the average landings of 2010 and 2011. For 2012 and beyond, use the most recent three-year running average. If the ACL is exceeded, independent of stock status, the Regional Administrator shall publish a notice to reduce the sector ACL in the following season by the amount of the overage.

Alternative 2. Remove the three-year running average provision used to determine recreational ACL overages. The recreational AM would be: If black sea bass *is overfished* and the sector ACL is projected to be met, prohibit the harvest and retention of the species. If the sector ACL is exceeded, independent of stock status, the Regional Administrator shall publish a notice to reduce the sector ACL in the following season by the amount of the overage.

Note: ACL increases specified under the rebuilding strategy are contingent upon the total commercial and recreational landings not exceeding the combined ACL.

The Council is proposing revisions to the system of recreational AMs put in place for black sea bass through Amendment 17B in order to eliminate the use of the three-year running average, which is not ideally suited for rebuilding stocks, while still accounting for data and management uncertainty.

Impacts of Action 7:

Biological Impacts

Alternative 1 (No Action) would not change the current system of AMs to employ more appropriate methods for determining ACL overages and modify the corrective actions taken if the ACL is projected to be met or exceeded. Because **Alternative 2** is the most biologically conservative of all options under consideration it is likely result in the highest level of biological benefit. **Alternative 2** retains the ability of the RA to prohibit recreational harvest in-season if the recreational ACL is projected to be met and if the stock is overfished. **Alternative 2** also retains the post-season provision that allows the RA to reduce the recreational ACL for the fishing season following an ACL overage, regardless of stock status. The primary modification to the system of recreational AMs for black sea bass under **Alternative 2** is the elimination of the use of the three year running average to determine ACL overages. Variability in recreational data is accounted for under **Alternative 2** because corrective post-season action would ensure that any recreational ACL overage, regardless of cause, is taken into consideration when establishing the ACL for the following season.

Socioeconomic Impacts

Modifying the current suite of AMs for black sea bass would prevent unnecessarily stringent harvest restrictions from being implemented when they are not actually needed to prevent overfishing. Therefore, **Alternative 2** is likely to result in socioeconomic benefits in terms of decreased risk of market disruptions due to seasonal closures, shortened seasons, or reduced ACLs.

Action 8. Establish a Spawning Season Closure for Black Sea Bass

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not implement a spawning season closure for black sea bass.

Alternative 2. Implement a March 1-April 30th spawning season closure for black sea bass; would apply to commercial and recreational sectors.

Alternative 3. Implement an April 1st-May 31st spawning season closure for black sea bass; would apply to commercial and recreational sectors.

Alternative 4. Implement a March 1st- May 31st spawning season closure for black sea bass; would apply to commercial and recreational sectors.

Alternative 5. Implement a May 1st- May 31st spawning season closure for black sea bass; would apply to commercial and recreational sectors.

Choosing a spawning season closure that coincides with right whale calving season could help prevent black sea bass gear interactions with protected species.

Table S-9. Percentage of monthly landings for black sea bass during 2006-2009 fishing years.

Month	MRFSS	HB	Comm	Total
6	15%	15%	6%	11%
7	11%	15%	5%	9%
8	11%	11%	6%	9%
9	4%	7%	5%	5%
10	4%	6%	7%	5%
11	10%	4%	13%	10%
12	10%	4%	16%	11%
1	4%	3%	14%	7%
2	4%	3%	12%	7%
3	8%	8%	8%	8%
4	8%	12%	5%	7%
5	13%	12%	3%	9%

March-May peak spawning season for black sea bass

Data for the January-May 2010 portion of the 2009 are estimated as the average of the 4 preceding years for MRFSS and Headboat (HB) and assumed to be 0 for the commercial sector because the quota was met on December 20, 2010.

Impacts of Action 8:

Biological Impacts

A spawning season closure could provide black sea bass with more spawning opportunities, which could contribute to recruitment success of a new year-class, help rebuild the stock more quickly, and result in a more stable and sustainable resource. **Alternatives 2-5** would establish various combinations of the peak spawning months reported. **Alternative 2** would establish a March 1-April 30 spawning season closure. This alternative would encompass a larger portion of the March-May peak spawning season for black sea bass than **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4**. Furthermore, **Alternative 2** would likely have a greater biological benefit for black sea bass off Florida and Georgia than sub-alternatives that would close black sea bass later during the spawning season if spawning occurs earlier in the more southern latitudes. **Alternative 5** would be expected to have the least amount of biological benefit for black sea bass off Florida and Georgia if there is a seasonal progression in spawning from south to north.

Socioeconomic Impacts

An annual spawning season closure would be less disruptive to markets and would allow fishermen to plan ahead for the reoccurring closure, which may be perceived as a social and economic benefit. **Alternative 4** would result in the largest loss in dockside revenues while **Alternative 5** results in the smallest loss. While the spawning season closures in **Alternatives 2** and **3** are of the same approximate length, **Alternative 2** has a lower loss associated with it due to the lower amount of black sea bass harvested in March compared to May.

Action 9. Establish a Commercial Trip Limit for Black Sea Bass

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not establish a commercial trip limit for black sea bass.

Alternative 2. Establish a 500 pounds gw (590 pounds ww) trip limit.

Alternative 3. Establish a 750 pounds gw (885 pounds ww) trip limit.

Alternative 4. Establish a 1,000 pounds gw (1,180 pounds ww) trip limit.

 **Preferred Alternative 5.** Establish a 1,250 pounds gw (1,475 pounds ww) trip limit.

Alternative 6. Establish a 1,000 pounds gw (1,180 pounds ww) trip limit; reduce to 500 pounds gutted weight (590 pounds ww) when 75% of the commercial ACL (quota) is met.

Alternative 7. Establish a 2,000 pounds gw (2,360 pounds ww) trip limit.

Alternative 8. Establish a 2,500 pounds gw (2,950 pounds ww) trip limit.

Alternative 9. Establish a 250 pounds gw (295 ww) trip limit.

A commercial trip limit could prevent early commercial closures in future fishing seasons.

Table S-10. Average catch per trip (pounds gutted weight) and percentage of landings from pots during fishing years (June – May) for 2006-2010. Other category is 99% hook and line gear. NMFS logbook data (05/12/11).

Year	All Gear	Pots	Other	% Pot Landings
2006	214	554	31	90.62%
2007	165	501	25	89.15%
2008	198	621	28	89.81%
2009	188	643	31	87.83%
2010	307	954	57	86.79%

Table S-11. Number of trips by gear for black sea bass taken during June-December 2008-2010. Other category is 99% hook and line gear. NMFS logbook data (05/12/11).

Month	2008			2009			2010		
	All gear	Pots	Other	All Gear	Pots	Other	All Gear	Pots	Other
6	197	17	180	274	46	228	310	105	205
7	198	24	174	229	37	192	283	68	215
8	179	22	157	244	47	197	288	61	227
9	88	11	77	241	74	167	255	56	199
10	138	34	104	200	65	135	25	11	14
11	194	58	136	210	73	137	5	0	5
12	172	71	101	108	47	61	101	63	38
Total	1,166	237	929	1,506	389	1,117	1,267	364	903

Table S-12. Trip limit, number of trips, amount of pounds (gutted weight), and percent reduction in harvest provided by a trip limit during June 2010 - May 2011 fishing year. Includes 21 permits that qualified for endorsements under Action 2 and vessels that caught black sea bass with hook and line gear.

Trip Limit	2010			
	# Trips	% Trips	Pounds over trip	
0	1,090	100.00%	257,936	100.00%
17	685	79.21%	243,384	94.36%
34	541	67.30%	233,044	90.35%
51	454	61.46%	224,640	87.09%
68	401	57.98%	217,466	84.31%
85	378	55.28%	210,846	81.74%
97	359	52.13%	206,144	79.92%
127	322	50.34%	196,013	75.99%
148	307	48.88%	189,388	73.42%
169	295	46.07%	182,993	70.95%
212	272	44.16%	171,060	66.32%
254	250	38.20%	160,065	62.06%
339	213	32.13%	140,361	54.42%
424	185	27.19%	123,653	47.94%
508	156	22.70%	109,265	42.36%
593	127	19.10%	97,247	37.70%
678	114	15.39%	87,106	33.77%
763	100	13.15%	77,991	30.24%
847	88	11.24%	70,045	27.16%
932	79	8.99%	62,879	24.38%
1,017	75	7.53%	56,372	21.86%
1,102	70	5.96%	50,264	19.49%
1,186	67	4.94%	44,426	17.22%
1,271	56	3.82%	39,296	15.23%
1,356	52	2.81%	34,704	13.45%
1,441	45	2.25%	30,584	11.86%
1,525	40	2.13%	26,992	10.46%
1,610	35	1.80%	23,735	9.20%
1,695	34	1.01%	20,769	8.05%
1,907	27	0.67%	14,359	5.57%
2,119	19	0.45%	9,194	3.56%
2,331	17	0.45%	5,502	2.13%
2,542	8	0.11%	2,755	1.07%
2,754	3	0.11%	1,789	0.69%
2,966	3	0.00%	1,153	0.45%

Impacts of Action 9:

Biological Impacts

The lower the trip limit the longer the commercial sector would be able to fish into the season if no spawning season closure is chosen. However, if the rebuilding strategy indicates an increased commercial ACL is appropriate, implementing a trip limit may not be necessary to extend fishing opportunities further into the fishing season. The higher the trip limit the more likely the commercial sector is to reach their ACL early in the season and cause regulatory discards to rise as black sea bass are caught while fishermen target other species still open to fishing.

Socioeconomic Impacts

In general, for boats that bring in relatively larger landings per trip, ex-vessel revenue losses are expected to occur. If a boat with historically larger landings adheres to the trip limit and does not increase the number of trips made, landings by these vessels will decrease compared to current landings as will ex-vessel revenues. Boats that bring in smaller landings per trip may or may not be impacted by the trip limits proposed. Boats that have not historically landed the proposed trip limits will not experience ex-vessel revenue losses. Others will likely reach the proposed trip limits and either experience revenue losses or make additional trips to increase landings. While additional trips will increase ex-vessel revenues, they will also increase costs and decrease net revenues (or profits). While some vessels may be able to increase their trips and net revenues, others will not be able to do so because they are too far from the fishing grounds to make additional trips worthwhile or costs are high enough to deter additional trips.

Action 10. Modify Commercial and/or Recreational Black Sea Bass Size Limits

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not modify the current size limits of 12 inches total length (TL) for the recreational sector and 10 inches TL for the commercial sector.

Alternative 2. Modify the recreational size limit.

Sub-Alternative 2a. Increase the recreational size limit from 12” TL to 13” TL.

Alternative 3. Modify the commercial size limit.

Sub-Alternative 3a. Increase the commercial size limit from 10” TL to 11” TL.

Sub-Alternative 3b. Increase the commercial size limit from 10” TL to 12” TL.

Sub-Alternative 3c. Increase the commercial size limit from 10” TL to 11” TL in year 1 and then to 12” TL in year 2 onwards.

Table S-13. Preliminary estimate of reduction in harvest of black sea bass for **headboat** sector associated with increased size limit. Based on data from 2009-2010 (n = 7,302).

Release Mortality	Estimated Harvest Reductions
	13 Inch (Sub-Alternative 2a)
0%	22.6
7%	20.9

Table S-14. Preliminary estimate of reduction in harvest of black sea bass for **MRFSS** associated with increased size limit. Based on data from 2009-2010 (n = 3,272).

Release Mortality	Estimated Harvest Reductions
	13 Inch (Sub-Alternative 2a)
0%	20.3
7%	18.8

Table S-15. Preliminary estimate of reduction in harvest of black sea bass for **commercial** sector associated with increased size limit. Based on data from 2009-2011 (n = 8,767).

Release Mortality	Estimated Harvest Reductions	
	11 Inch (Sub-Alternative 3a)	12 Inch (Sub-Alternative 3b and 3c)
0%	9.4	32.4
1%	9.3	32.1

Impacts of Action 10:

Biological

Increasing the minimum size limit would further restrict the rate at which black sea bass could be harvested throughout the season and potentially lengthen the amount of time recreational fishermen would have to fish during the fishing season. Conversely, increasing the size limit could increase regulatory discards in both sectors which may contribute to an increase in bycatch mortality.

Socioeconomic

Increasing the black sea bass size limits is expected to result in greater profitability overall since larger fish would demand a higher price on the market. However, if on a per trip basis, fewer fish are able to be retained the quality of each trip may decrease. Decreasing the size limit would alternately increase per-trip yield, but may result in lower whole fish prices at market.

Action 11. Improvements to Commercial Data Reporting

Note: More than one preferred may be chosen.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Retain existing data reporting systems for the commercial sector.

Note: Refer to Table 4-13 in Amendment 18A for a complete list of current data reporting requirements.

Under this alternative, as implemented by Amendment 15B to the Snapper Grouper FMP, a private recreational vessel that fishes in the EEZ, if selected by NOAA Fisheries Service, is required to maintain and submit fishing records; requires a vessel that fishes in the EEZ, if selected by NOAA Fisheries Service, to carry an observer and install an electronic logbook (ELB) and/or video monitoring equipment provided by NOAA Fisheries Service.

Alternative 2. Require all vessels with a Federal snapper grouper commercial permit to have an electronic logbook tied to the vessel's GPS onboard the vessel.

(Note: Alternative 2 would require 100% of vessels to have an electronic logbook; whereas, current data reporting programs only require electronic logbooks if selected.)

 **Preferred Alternative 3.** Provide the option for fishermen to submit their logbook entries electronically via an electronic version of the logbook made available online.

Alternative 4. Require that commercial landings and catch/effort data be submitted in accordance with ACCSP standards, using the SAFIS system.

(Note: Alternative 4 would require that 100% of dealers and fishermen report electronically using the SAFIS system.)

Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (**SAFIS**) is a real-time, web-based reporting system for commercial landings on the Atlantic coast. It is comprised of three applications:

- Electronic Dealer Reports (eDR) - A forms based application collecting information from the dealers (landings, condition and price).
- Electronic Trip Reports (eTRIPS) - A Web-based application collecting data from fisherman (catch and effort) including gear used, fishing areas, and catch disposition.
- SAFIS Management System (SMS) - A Web-based application providing administrative tools to SAFIS administrators for management of user accounts, participants, permits etc.

Impacts of Action 11:

Biological Impacts

There are no direct biological impacts from establishing a standardized reporting methodology to estimate bycatch. However, indirect impacts resulting from **Alternatives 2-4** would 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; provide better estimates of interactions with protected species; better limit commercial catches to the commercial ACL; and lead to better decisions regarding additional measures that might be needed to reduce bycatch. Management measures that affect gear and effort for a target species can influence fishing mortality in other species. Therefore, enhanced catch and bycatch monitoring would provide better data that could be used in multi-species assessments.

Socioeconomic Impacts

In general, an increase in the quantity and/or quality of data increases long-term economic benefits through improvements to management of the stocks. Electronic logbooks (**Alternative 2**), in particular, are seen as a low cost alternative to video monitoring and observers. While paper logbook submittal is already required, **Preferred Alternative 3** would provide fishermen the option to submit their logbooks online. While **Preferred Alternative 3** would likely be the least expensive alternative for fishermen, **Alternative 4** would vary by individual.

Action 12. Improvements to For-Hire Data Reporting

Note: More than one preferred alternative may be chosen.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Retain existing data reporting systems for the for-hire sector.

Note: Refer to Table 4-13 in Amendment 18A for a complete list of current data reporting requirements.

 **Preferred Alternative 2.** Require *selected* vessels with a Federal For-Hire Permit to report electronically; NOAA Fisheries Service is authorized to require weekly or daily reporting as required.

Alternative 3. Require vessels operating with a Federal For-Hire permit to maintain a logbook for discard characteristics (e.g., size and reason for discarding), *if selected*.

Alternative 4. Require that for-hire landings and catch/effort data be submitted in accordance with the ACCSP standards, using the SAFIS system.

Impacts of Action 12:

Biological Impacts

Alternatives 2 and 3 identify options for monitoring catch and effort, which are more specific than what was specified in Amendment 15B to the Snapper Grouper FMP. There are no direct biological impacts from establishing a standardized reporting methodology. However, indirect impacts resulting from **Alternatives 2 and 3** would 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; provide better estimates of interactions with protected species; better limit recreational catches to the recreational ACLs; and lead to better decisions regarding additional measures that might be needed to reduce bycatch.

Alternative 2 would require all vessels with a Federal for-hire permit to report landings electronically if selected. Amendment 15B to the Snapper Grouper FMP also implemented an action that requires commercial, for-hire, and private vessels to install an ELB and/or video monitoring equipment provided by NMFS, if selected. Therefore, **Alternative 2** only differs from what was implemented through Amendment 15B to the Snapper Grouper FMP by not specifying the type of electronic equipment that would be used to report landings.

Alternative 3 would differ from the status quo **Alternative 1** by also requiring logbooks for the charter portion of the for-hire fishery. As landings from charterboats often dominate catches in the for-hire sector, **Alternatives 3** would provide a better understanding of the composition and magnitude of catch and bycatch, leading to better data for stock assessment and better decisions regarding measures needed manage fish resources and reduce bycatch. **Alternative 4** would require for-hire trip reports to be submitted in accordance with the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) standards using the Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (SAFIS) system. **Alternative 4** would require selected vessels to report electronically (computer

or fax) through the SAFIS and require weekly or daily reporting when it is anticipated a quota was going to be met. Beneficial biological impacts would be provided by **Alternative 4** as data are provided more quickly from the fishermen and dealers to NMFS and fishery managers. In addition to monitoring quotas in a more timely fashion than under the current quota monitoring system, the SAFIS has the potential to improve the quality of data and stock assessments.

Socioeconomic Impacts

Potentially affected by the various alternatives are 1,690 vessels with for-hire permits and 224 vessels with both commercial and for-hire permits. About 92% of these vessels have homeports in the four states under the jurisdiction of the South Atlantic Council. The rest are located in the Gulf States or other States on the east coast. Most of these vessels (about 66%) are located in Florida. It is worth recalling that only a sample of these vessels would be directly affected by **Alternative 2** or **Alternative 3** in any one year. **Alternative 4**, on the other hand, would affect practically all these vessels. For **Alternative 2**, the incremental cost of electronic reporting, especially the weekly frequency option, would likely be minimal and would accrue only to a subset of headboats selected to report. On the other hand, the incremental cost to charterboats would likely be higher for those selected to report as there are currently no logbook reporting requirements on charterboats. **Alternative 3** would require selected for-hire vessels to maintain a logbook for discard characteristics. Understandably, this alternative cannot be considered as a stand-alone alternative in the sense of replacing **Alternative 1** because of the more limited information covered in this alternative. As a supplement to either **Alternative 1** or **Alternative 2**, **Alternative 3** can provide the necessary information regarding incidental mortality of stocks due to the operations of for-hire vessels. On the other hand, this alternative could impose some real cost burden on charterboats, although the incremental cost may not be that much when taken relative to the reporting requirement under **Alternative 2**.

Alternative 4 is similar to **Alternative 2** in terms of the extent and quality of data that would be generated. The requirement under this alternative, however, would apply to all for-hire vessels and not just a subset of these vessels as in **Alternative 2**. Thus, the quality of data would likely be higher under **Alternative 4** than under **Alternative 1** or **Alternative 2**. Alternatively, **Alternative 4** would likely incur higher costs than either **Alternative 1** or **Alternative 2**. The higher the frequency of data reporting, the higher would be the compliance and administration costs. Related to administration in general and administration cost in particular, it is to be noted that under **Alternative 4** the SAFIS system would have to be expanded to cover reporting by the for-hire sector. In addition, some administrative controls would have to be instituted so that the data collection objectives of ACCSP, NOAA Fisheries Service, and the South Atlantic Council would be met. These controls could potentially involve requiring strict adherence to SAFIS system reporting as a condition for renewals of federal for-hire permits.

PUBLIC HEARING DATES & LOCATIONS

All hearings are from 4 pm – 7 pm except Charleston and Raleigh

<p><u>Monday, November 14, 2011</u> Avista Resort 300 N. Ocean Blvd. North Myrtle Beach, SC 29582 (843) 249-2521</p> <p>Hampton Inn & Suites Savannah/Midtown 20 Johnston Street Savannah, GA 31405 (912) 721-3700</p>	<p><u>Wednesday, November 16, 2011</u> Radisson Resort at the Port 8701 Astronaut Boulevard Cape Canaveral, FL 32920 (321) 784-0000</p>
<p><u>Tuesday, November 15, 2011 –</u> Charleston Marriott Hotel* 170 Lockwood Blvd. Charleston, SC 29403 (843) 723-3000 *Hearing from 5:30 – 7:30 pm</p> <p>Jacksonville Marriott 4670 Salisbury Rd. Jacksonville, FL 32256 (904) 296-2222</p>	<p><u>Thursday, November 17, 2011</u> Key Largo Bay Marriott 103800 Overseas Highway Key Largo, FL 33037 (305) 453-0000</p>
	<p><u>Tuesday, December 6, 2011</u> Holiday Inn Brownstone* 1707 Hillsborough Street Raleigh, NC 27605 (919) 828-0811 *Hearing begins at 5:30 pm</p>

Written Comments:

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

E-mail:
SGAmend18APHcomment@safmc.net

What's Next?

- Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (10/5/11-10/6/11) in Charleston, SC; final review of Amendment 20A
- Scientific & Statistical Committee (11/8/11 - 11/10/11) in Charleston, SC; final review of Amendment 20A
- Public Hearings from SC thru FL (11/14/11-11/17/11)
- Comments due by 5 p.m. on Monday, November 21, 2011
- Public Hearing during Council meeting (12/6/11) in Raleigh, NC
- Snapper Grouper Committee & Council review hearing comments and approve all actions (12/7/11-12/9/11) in Raleigh, NC
- Council (12/8/11-12/9/11) in Raleigh – Final Approval
- Send to Secretary of Commerce by December 15, 2011
- Public Comment on proposed rule
- Public Comment on amendment to Secretary of Commerce