Amendment 49

Catch Level Adjustments and Allocations for Greater Amberjack and Snapper Grouper Recreational Annual Catch Targets

Decision Document

December 2021

Background

The most recent assessment of the South Atlantic greater amberjack stock followed a standard approach with data through 2018 (SEDAR 59 2020) and used revised estimates for recreational catch from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) based on the Fishing Effort Survey (FES). The assessment indicated that the South Atlantic Greater Amberjack stock is not overfished nor undergoing overfishing (**Figure 1**). The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed SEDAR 59 (2020) during their April 2020 meeting and found that the assessment represented the best scientific information available. The Council received the results of the assessment and the SSC's recommendations for the Overfishing Limit (OFL) and Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) at their June 2020 meeting and directed staff to begin work on a plan amendment to adjust catch level adjustments based on SSC recommendations and SEDAR 59 (2020), and address sector allocations.

An application providing an overview of the fishery, including management history, landings, and assessment information, has been developed and can be found here: https://data.safmc.net/SA_FisheryDataGreaterAmberjack/.

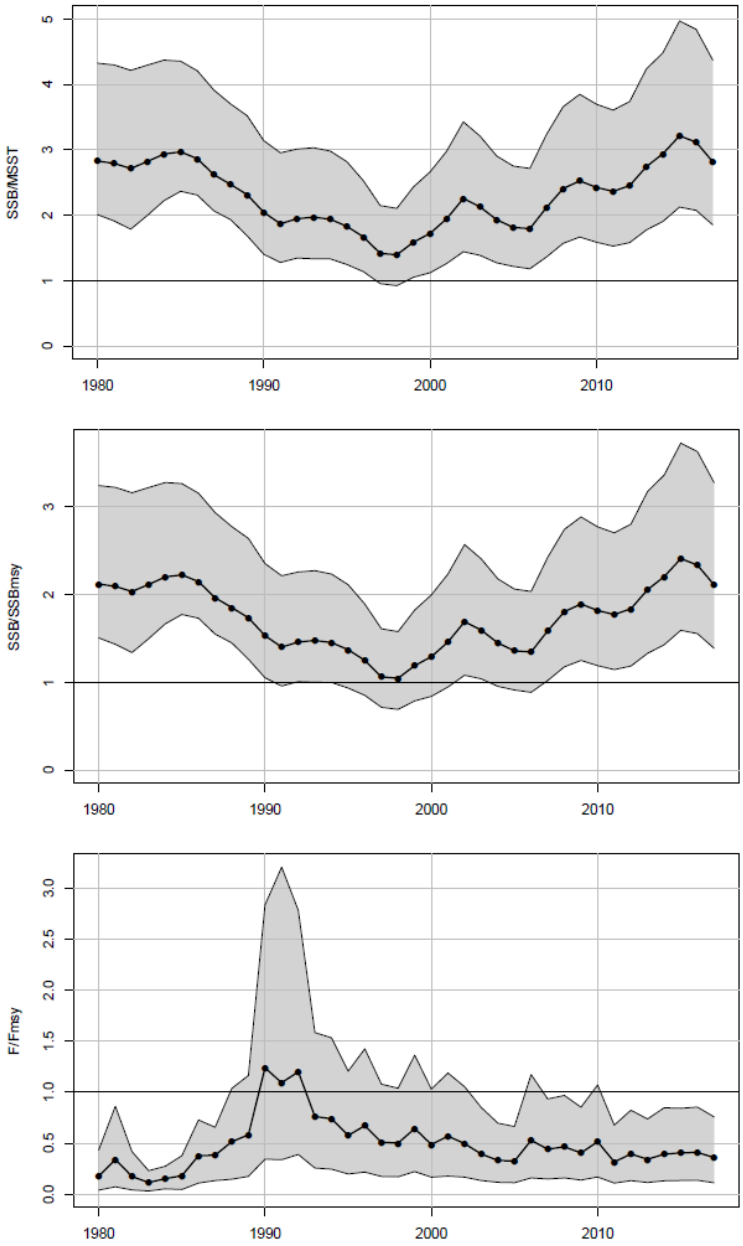

Figure 1. Estimated time series of spawning sock biomass (SSB) and fishing mortality (F) relative to benchmarks. Solid line indicates estimates from base run of the Beaufort Assessment Model; gray error bands indicate 5th and 95th percentiles of the ensemble modeling. Top panel: SSB relative to the minimum stock size threshold (MSST); if less than 1, stock is overfished. Middle panel: SSB relative to SSB_{MSY}; if less than 1, stock is overfished. Bottom panel: F relative to F_{MSY}; if > 1 stock is undergoing overfishing. *Source: SEDAR 59 (2020).*

In 2012, the Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit (ACL) Amendment established ACLs for many species managed through the Council's fishery management plans (FMP). This amendment also established recreational Annual Catch Targets (ACT), values lower than the ACL that establish a precautionary buffer accounting for uncertainty in the recreational catch estimates. While ACTs were developed and established as part of the management process (thus, they must be changed through plan amendments as the ACL changes), these values were not used in developing regulations and were not included in codified regulatory text. Given their lack of regulatory use, in March 2021, the Council's Snapper Grouper Committee directed staff to include an action in Amendment 49 that would consider removal of recreational ACTs throughout the FMP.

Objectives for this meeting

- Review additional actions and alternatives and provide guidance on necessary changes, additions, or deletions.
- Select preferred alternatives as necessary.
- Consider approval for public hearings and timing of when hearings would occur.

Actions in this amendment

Action 1. Revise the greater amberjack total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield
Action 2. Revise the greater amberjack sector allocations and sector annual catch limits
Action 3. Increase the recreational minimum size limit for greater amberjack
Action 4. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack
Action 5. Increase the Season 2 commercial trip limit for greater amberjack
Action 6. Revise the April spawning closure for greater amberjack
Action 7. Remove recreational annual catch targets from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan

Amendment timing

December 2020	Review options paper and provide guidance to staff
March 2021	Review draft actions and alternatives and approve for scoping
Apr 14 & 15, 2021	Conduct scoping hearings
September 2021	Review scoping comments, review preliminary analyses, and provide guidance to staff
December 2021	**Review modifications to the amendment, select preferred alternatives, and approve for public hearings**
Jan-Feb 2022	Conduct public hearings
March 2022	Review public comment and approve all actions
June 2022	Review final draft amendment and consider approval for formal review
Late 2022-Early 2023	Regulations effective

Draft Purpose and Need

Purpose: The *purpose* of this plan amendment is to revise the annual optimum yield and annual catch limits for greater amberjack in the South Atlantic based on the results of the latest stock assessment; revise sector allocations, minimum size limits, the commercial trip limit, and the April spawning closure for greater amberjack; and consider removal of recreational annual catch targets ~~not actively being used in the management of species under~~ for the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

Need: The *need* for this plan amendment is to adjust catch levels based on the best scientific information available, modify sector allocations to address revised recreational landings estimates in the South Atlantic, adjust management measures to allow for efficient use of the greater amberjack stock, and reduce administrative burden of setting recreational annual catch targets that are not actively used in management, while minimizing to the extent practicable, adverse socioeconomic effects and achieve optimum yield on a continuing basis, as per the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Committee Action:

REVIEW UPDATED PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENTS, MODIFY AS NEEDED, AND APPROVE.

Recommended Acceptable Biological Catch and Overfishing Limit for Greater Amberjack

The SSC reviewed the greater amberjack stock assessment (SEDAR 59 2020) at their April 2020 meeting. The SSC found that the assessment addressed the terms of reference appropriately, was conducted using the best scientific information available, was adequate for determining stock status and supporting fishing level recommendations and addressed uncertainty consistent with expectations and available information. The SSC recommended revising the overfishing limit (OFL) based on projections under a fishing mortality rate that would produce maximum sustainable yield ($F = F_{MSY}$) and applied the acceptable biological catch (ABC) control rule to recommend the ABC for greater amberjack. These recommendations were updated to apply to additional projections from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) that applied management from 2022 through 2026 (**Table 1**). Discards were projected as separate values from the landings shown in **Table 1**.

When developing options for annual catch limits, years for annual ABCs were considered to apply to the start of the non-calendar fishing year used for greater amberjack (March-February). For example, the 2022 ABC from **Table 1** would be used to define the ACL for the March 2022-February 2023 fishing year.

Table 1. South Atlantic greater amberjack overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations, in pounds whole weight (lbs ww), based on projections from SEDAR 59 (2020). The assessment and these projections use recreational data calibrated to the Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP FES).

Year	OFL (lbs ww)	ABC (lbs ww)
2022	4,615,000	4,380,000
2023	3,283,000	3,233,000
2024	2,839,000	2,818,000
2025	2,719,000	2,699,000
2026	2,691,000	2,669,000

Proposed Actions

FOR ALL ACTIONS: QUALITATIVE EFFECTS ARE SUMMARIZED BELOW AND DESCRIBED IN THE DECEMBER 2021 DRAFT AMENDMENT. THESE WILL BE UPDATED TO INCLUDE MORE QUANTITATIVE ANALYSES, WHERE APPROPRIATE, PRIOR TO RELEASE OF THE PUBLIC HEARING DOCUMENT.

Action 1. Revise the greater amberjack total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield

Alternative 1 (No Action). The total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack are equal to the acceptable biological catch. The current combined commercial and recreational annual catch limit and annual optimum yield are 1,968,001 pounds whole weight.

Preferred Alternative 2. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack and set equal to the updated acceptable biological catch. The 2026/2027 total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

Fishing Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)
2022/2023	4,380,000
2023/2024	3,233,000
2024/2025	2,818,000
2025/2026	2,699,000
2026/2027+	2,669,000

Alternative 3. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack and set equal to 90% of the updated acceptable biological catch. The 2026/2027 total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

Fishing Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)
2022/2023	3,942,000
2023/2024	2,909,700
2024/2025	2,536,200
2025/2026	2,429,100
2026/2027+	2,402,100

Alternative 4. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack and set equal to 80% of the updated acceptable biological catch. The 2026/2027 total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

Fishing Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)
2022/2023	3,504,000
2023/2024	2,586,400
2024/2025	2,254,400

2025/2026	2,159,200
2026/2027+	2,135,200

Alternative 5. Revise the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield for greater amberjack. For the 2022/2023 season through the 2024/2025 season, set the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield equal to the middle value of the updated acceptable biological catch projected for 2022/2027. For the 2025/2026 season through the 2026/2027 season, set the total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield equal to the updated acceptable biological catch. The 2026/2027 total annual catch limit and annual optimum yield would remain in place until modified.

Fishing Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)
2022/2023	2,818,000
2023/2024	2,818,000
2024/2025	2,818,000
2025/2026	2,699,000
2026/2027+	2,669,000

Discussion:

- The current ABC (**Alternative 1**) was established through the Comprehensive ACL Amendment (Amendment 25 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (FMP) 2011) and was calculated using Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) recreational data. SEDAR 59 replaced MRFSS data with MRIP FES data, and MRIP will use the FES methodology to make future recreational estimates. **Preferred Alternative 2** through **Alternative 5** are based on updated ABCs, estimated using MRIP FES data.
- The Council has specified that the annual optimum yield (OY), annual catch limit (ACL), and acceptable biological catch (ABC) are equal for most snapper grouper species, including greater amberjack (Comprehensive ACL Amendment 2011). OY expressed on an annual basis, as proposed in **Alternatives 1-5**, is not necessarily equal to the long-term OY but is consistent with achieving the long-term OY.
- The commercial and recreational fishing seasons are from March 1 through the end of February. The commercial season is split into two seasons, March through August and September through February (Regulatory Amendment 27, 2019).
- **Alternative 1 (No Action)** is not a viable alternative since it would not be based on BSIA.

Summary of Biological Effects:

- When totaling the annual ACL from 2022/2023 through 2026/2027, **Alternative 4** has the lowest cumulative ACL which is expected to have the greatest biological benefits to the stock, followed by **Alternative 5**, **Alternative 3**, and **Preferred Alternative 2**.
- South Atlantic greater amberjack have a lower release mortality rate of 20% (sensitivity range: 10-30%) (SEDAR 15 2008 and SEDAR 59 2020).

Summary of Economic Effects:

- The potential revised total ACLs for greater amberjack when initially implemented in **Preferred Alternative 2** through **Alternative 5** are all higher than the average observed landings in recent years.
- **Preferred Alternative 2** would have the have the highest potential net economic benefits, followed by **Alternative 3**, **Alternative 4**, and **Alternative 5.**

Summary of Social Effects:

- In general, a higher ACL would lower the chance of triggering a recreational AM and result in the lowest level of negative effects on the recreational sector.
- **Preferred Alternative 2** would be the most beneficial for fishermen, followed by **Alternative 3**, **Alternative 4**, and **Alternative 5**.

Committee Action:

- REVIEW RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES, APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE INCLUSION OF ADDITIONAL ALTERNATIVE 5 FOR CONSIDERATION, AND MODIFY ALTERNATIVES AS NECESSARY.
- CONFIRM PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

Action 2. Revise the greater amberjack sector allocations and sector annual catch limits

Note: The revised total ACL in Alternatives 1 (No Action) through 3 reflects the Council's current Preferred Alternative 2 for Action 1: ABC=ACL=OY with implementation in 2022.

Alternative 1 (No Action). Retain the current commercial sector and recreational sector allocations as 40.66% and 59.34%, respectively, of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack. Apply these percentages to the revised total annual catch limit. The percentages are based on applying the formula of sector annual catch limit = ((mean landings 2006-2008)*0.5)) + ((mean landings 1986-2008)*0.5) to the landings dataset used in the Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment (Amendment 25 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region) that included recreational estimates from the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey.

Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)
2022/2023	4,380,000	1,712,412	1,027,447	684,965	2,599,092
2023/2024	3,233,000	1,263,979	758,387	505,591	1,918,462
2024/2025	2,818,000	1,101,730	661,038	440,692	1,672,201
2025/2026	2,699,000	1,055,205	633,123	422,082	1,601,587
2026/2027+	2,669,000	1,043,476	626,086	417,391	1,583,785

*The total annual catch limit (ACL) is allocated in pounds whole weight (lbs ww) to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gutted weight (lbs gw) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

**Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

Alternative 2. Allocate 29.84% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the commercial sector and 70.16% of the revised total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the recreational sector. This allocation is based on applying the formula of sector annual catch limit = ((mean landings 2006-2008)*0.5)) + ((mean landings 1986-2008)*0.5) to a revised dataset that is inclusive of Marine Recreational Information Program Fishery Effort Survey estimates.

Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)
2022/2023	4,380,000	1,256,723	754,034	502,689	3,073,008
2023/2024	3,233,000	927,622	556,573	371,049	2,268,273
2024/2025	2,818,000	808,549	485,130	323,420	1,977,109
2025/2026	2,699,000	774,405	464,643	309,762	1,893,618
2026/2027+	2,669,000	765,798	459,479	306,319	1,872,570

*The total annual catch limit (ACL) is allocated in pounds whole weight (lb ww) to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gutted weight (lb gw) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

**Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

Alternative 3. Allocate 35.00% of the total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the commercial sector and 65.00% of the total annual catch limit for greater amberjack to the recreational sector. This allocation is based on these percentages being approximate midpoints between Alternative 1 and Alternative 2. These percentages are also approximate (rounded to the nearest whole percentage) averages of annual percentages of total landings for each sector from 2010-2019.

Year	Total ACL (lbs ww)	Commercial ACL* (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 1 Quota (lbs gw)	Commercial Season 2 Quota** (lbs gw)	Recreational ACL (lbs ww)
2022/2023	4,380,000	1,474,038	884,423	589,615	2,847,000
2023/2024	3,233,000	1,088,029	652,817	435,212	2,101,450
2024/2025	2,818,000	948,365	569,019	379,346	1,831,700
2025/2026	2,699,000	908,317	544,990	363,327	1,754,350
2026/2027+	2,669,000	898,221	538,933	359,288	1,734,850

*The total annual catch limit (ACL) is allocated in pounds whole weight (lbs ww) to the commercial and recreational sectors. The commercial allocation is then converted to pounds gutted weight (lbs gw) for regulatory use in the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.

**Any remaining quota from commercial Season 1 (March-August) transfers to Season 2 (September-February). Remaining quota from Season 2 is not carried forward.

Discussion:

- Allocations are being reviewed because the recreational landings stream changed in the new assessment. Recreational estimates are now based on the Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP FES).
- Sector allocations for greater amberjack were implemented through the Comprehensive ACL Amendment (Amendment 25 to the Snapper Grouper FMP) (SAFMC 2011). The allocation percentages were determined using a formula that used short-term and long-term landings histories for each sector: Sector Allocation Percentage = ((mean sector landings 2006-2008)*0.5 + (mean sector landings 1986-2008)*0.5) / ((mean total landings 2006-2008)*0.5 + (mean total landings 1986-2008)*0.5).
  - The recreational landings estimates used in the previous application of the allocation formula to greater amberjack were based on the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS), which has since been updated to the MRIP FES.
  - **Alternative 1 (No Action)** was developed from application of the allocation formula to landings that included MRFSS data for the recreational sector.
  - **Alternative 2** was developed by applying the allocation formula to landings that included MRIP FES data for the recreational sector.
- **Alternative 3** was developed as an approximate midpoint to **Alternatives 1 (No Action)** and **2** and is approximately equal to averages of annual sector landings percentages for the last 10 years of data (2010-2019; 35.28% for commercial and 64.72% for recreational).
- Commercial season lengths were projected under each of the commercial ACL options. No closures were predicted for any of the commercial ACL options examined (**Table 1**).

- The commercial split season was first implemented just before the 2020-21 fishing year on February 26, 2020, through Regulatory Amendment 27 to the Snapper Grouper FMP. Data for the 2020-21 fishing year has not yet been finalized.
    - The commercial split season was put in place to help extend the commercial fishing season throughout the year (excluding the April spawning closure).
    - Rationale for this measure in Regulatory Amendment 27 included re-directed effort toward greater amberjack after the yellowtail snapper commercial ACL has been reached and differences in the timing of greater amberjack availability in different areas of the region.
- Recreational season lengths were projected under each of the recreational ACL options. The predicted closure dates span from September 20 to no closure needed (**Table 2**).
- **Alternative 1 (No Action)** is not a viable alternative since it would not be based on BSIA.

Table 1. Projected closure dates of greater amberjack by fishing year with 95% confidence intervals (CI). These projections assume the total annual catch limits from Action 1-**Preferred Alternative 2,** and include the initial (2022-23) and terminal (2026-27) projected fishing years for Action 2.

Fishing Year	Alternative	Commercial Allocation	Commercial ACL (lbs gw)	Closure Date	Season Length (95% CI)
2022/2023	1 (No Action)	40.66%	1,712,412	No Closure	No Closure
2026/2027	1 (No Action)	40.66%	1,043,476	No Closure	No Closure
2022/2023	2	29.84%	1,256,723	No Closure	No Closure
2026/2027	2	29.84%	765,798	No Closure	Sept 24 - No Closure
2022/2023	3	35.00%	1,407,038	No Closure	No Closure
2026/2027	3	35.00%	898,221	No Closure	Dec 13 - No Closure

Table 2. The projected recreational closure dates for greater amberjack by fishing year and different allocation options using either a three or five-year average of recent landings with 95% confidence interval (CI). These projections assume the total ACLs from Action 1**-Preferred Alternative 2** and include the initial (2022-23) and terminal (2026-27) projected fishing years for Action 2.

Fishing Year	Alternative	Recreational Allocation	ACL (lbs ww)	Projection Method	Closure Date	Season Length (95% CI)
2022/2023	1 (No Action)	59.34%	2,599,092	3-year	No Closure	No Closure
2026/2027	1 (No Action)	59.34%	1,583,785	3-year	No Closure	Sep 7 - No Closure
2022/2023	1 (No Action)	59.34%	2,599,092	5-year	No Closure	Dec 16 - No Closure
2026/2027	1 (No Action)	59.34%	1,583,785	5-year	20-Sep	Jul 16 - No Closure
2022/2023	2	70.15%	3,072,570	3-year	No Closure	No Closure
2026/2027	2	70.15%	1,872,304	3-year	No Closure	Jan 8 - No Closure
2022/2023	2	70.15%	3,072,570	5-year	No Closure	No Closure
2026/2027	2	70.15%	1,872,304	5-year	30-Jan	Aug 4 - No Closure
2022/2023	3	65.00%	2,847,000	3-year	No Closure	No Closure
2026/2027	3	65.00%	1,734,850	3-year	No Closure	Dec 6 - No Closure
2022/2023	3	65.00%	2,847,000	5-year	No Closure	Jan 29 - No Closure
2026/2027	3	65.00%	1,734,850	5-year	16-Dec	Jul 26 - No Closure

Summary of Biological Effects:

- Biological effects are not expected to be substantially different among **Alternative 1 (No Action)** and **Alternatives 2** and **3**, since the allocation percentages would be similar and do not change the total ACL specified in Action 1.
- **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would allocate the highest percentage to the commercial sector (and lowest percentage to the recreational sector), followed by **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 2**.

Summary of Economic Effects:

- A larger difference between the sector ACL and observed landings would allow for higher potential landings and reduce the likelihood of restrictive AMs being triggered that would lead to short-term negative economic effects.

- From a short-term economic perspective, **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would have the highest potential economic benefit for the commercial sector, followed by **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 2**.
- From a short-term economic perspective, **Alternative 2** would have the highest potential economic benefit for the recreational sector, followed by **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Summary of Social Effects:

- Projections for Action 1 – **Preferred Alternative 2** (**Table 1**) indicate that the commercial ACL for greater amberjack would not be reached under the any of the alternatives proposed in Action 2.
- Based on projected date of closure and earlier closures having greater negative social impacts, **Alternative 2** is expected to have the least negative social impact on the recreational fishery (**Table 2**), followed by **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Committee Action:

- REVIEW RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 2 AND MODIFY AS NECESSARY.
- SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

Action 3. Increase the recreational minimum size limit for greater amberjack

Alternative 1 (No Action). The recreational minimum size limit is 28 inches fork length.

Alternative 2. Increase the recreational minimum size limit to 32 inches fork length.

Alternative 3. Increase the recreational minimum size limit to 36 inches fork length.

Discussion:

- Size limits for the commercial and recreational fisheries (Amendment 4, 1991):
  - Commercial: 36-inch fork length minimum size limit.
  - Recreational: 28-inch fork length minimum size limit.

Summary of Biological Effects:

- An increased recreational minimum size limit is expected to reduce fishing mortality from recreational landings due to more fish being released as undersized. SEDAR 59 (2020) estimated release mortality for both sectors to be 20%.
- Biological effects to the stock from **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** could be beneficial relative to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Summary of Economic Effects:

- In general, the higher the size limit, the more that overall harvest will decrease in the short-term, thereby decreasing net economic benefits incurred from such harvest.
- The highest recreational economic benefits would occur under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, followed by **Alternative 2**, and **Alternative 3**.

Summary of Social Effects:

- There is a social trade-off with increasing the recreational minimum size limit (**Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3**):
  - A decrease in the harvest rate from a larger minimum size limit can decrease recreational trip satisfaction (negative social effect).
  - A decrease in the harvest rate from a larger minimum size limit can also decrease the chance of landings reaching the ACL and triggering accountability measures (AM) earlier in the season (positive social effect).

Committee Action:

- REVIEW RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 3 AND MODIFY AS NECESSARY.
- SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

Action 4. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack

Alternative 1 (No Action). The commercial minimum size limit is 36 inches fork length.

Alternative 2. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to 32 inches fork length.

Alternative 3. Reduce the commercial minimum size limit to 28 inches fork length.

Discussion:

- Size limits for the commercial and recreational fisheries (Amendment 4, 1991):
  - Commercial: 36-inch fork length minimum size limit.
  - Recreational: 28-inch fork length minimum size limit.
- Consideration of a reduced commercial minimum size limit was recommended during public scoping and from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) at their April 2021 meeting.
  - Rationale for consideration include:
    - Increased equity between the sectors.
    - Longer times needed to bring larger fish onboard. Longer boarding times reduce trip efficiency, increase risk of injury to the fish (which would be release if below the minimum size limit), and may serve as an attractant for sharks, potentially leading to depredation.
    - Increased risk of injury to fishermen and fish when trying to bring larger greater amberjack onboard. Injuries to the fish can impact release survival.
    - Smaller greater amberjack are more commercially desirable.
    - The stock assessment indicates that the greater amberjack biomass is above the biomass that would achieve maximum sustainable yield. Thus, the population could possibly sustain harvest of smaller fish.

Summary of Biological Effects:

- Reducing the current 36-inch FL commercial minimum size limit for greater amberjack under **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** could be expected to reduce commercial discards and release mortality.
- Reducing the commercial minimum size limit could also increase the commercial harvest rate. However, overall harvest and fishing mortality would still be limited by the commercial ACL.

Summary of Economic Effects:

- In general, the lower the size limit, the more that overall harvest will increase, thereby increasing economic benefits incurred from such harvest.
- The highest commercial economic benefits would occur under **Alternative 3**, followed by **Alternative 2**, and **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Summary of Social Effects:

- There is a social trade-off with reducing the commercial minimum size limit (**Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3**):
    - An increase in the harvest rate from a smaller minimum size limit can increase commercial trip profitability (positive social effect).
    - An increase in the harvest rate from a smaller minimum size limit can also increase the chance of landings reaching the ACL and triggering AMs earlier in the season (negative social effect).

Committee Action:

- REVIEW RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 4 AND MODIFY AS NECESSARY.
- SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

Action 5. Increase the Season 2 commercial trip limit for greater amberjack

Alternative 1 (No Action). The September 1 through the end of February (Season 2) commercial trip limit is 1,000 pounds gutted or whole weight for greater amberjack.

Alternative 2. Increase the September 1 through the end of February (Season 2) commercial trip limit to 1,200 pounds gutted or whole weight for greater amberjack.

Discussion:

- The commercial ACL is allocated into two quotas: 60% to the period March 1 through August 31 (Season 1) and 40% to the period September 1 through the end of February (Season 2) (Regulatory Amendment 27 2019). Any remaining quota from Season 1 transfers to Season 2. Any remaining quota from Season 2 is not 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.
    - The Season 1 commercial trip limit is 1,200 pounds, and the Season 2 commercial trip limit is 1,000 pounds.
- Prior to Regulatory Amendment 27, the commercial trip limit was 1,200 pounds year-round. Rationale for changing the trip limit (along with implementation of the commercial split season):
    - [The approved split season and seasonal trip limits] "would strike a balance between improved access to the greater amberjack resource for fishermen throughout the region and economic profitability. Fishermen in Florida target greater amberjack early in the fishing year, when they can also fish for other jacks species; whereas, in the fall, greater amberjack schools are found off North Carolina. Hence, allocating a smaller portion of the ACL at a higher trip limit early in the year and a larger portion of the ACL at a lower trip limit during the latter part of the year ensures access and profitability to fishermen throughout the region and allows for the entire ACL to be harvested."

Summary of Biological Effects:

- Under either alternative, overall harvest and fishing mortality would still be constrained by the commercial ACL and seasonal quotas.
- An increase in the commercial trip limit under **Alternative 2** could be expected to result in an increased harvest rate compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.
- An increased harvest rate due to an increased trip limit (**Alternative 2**) could be expected to increase overall harvest and fishing mortality, based on the two most recent years of landings (2018/2019 and 2019/2020) being below the commercial ACL and the intended effect of the commercial split season to reduce the harvest rate, beginning with the 2020/2021 fishing season.
- Therefore, biological benefits to the stock would be highest under **Alternative 1 (No Action)** followed by **Alternative 2**.

Summary of Economic Effects:

- The revised commercial sector ACL for greater amberjack is not expected to be fully harvested under most ACLs considered by Action 2 (**Table 1**).
- Therefore, the total net economic effects are expected to be higher for a greater Season 2 commercial trip limit under **Alternative 2,** in comparison to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Summary of Social Effects:

- **Alternative 2** would be expected to provide social benefits of greater landings and increased trip efficiency.
- Projections indicate that the commercial ACLs for greater amberjack (Action 2) would not be reached under the any of the alternatives proposed in Action 2; thus, there is likely a low probability of negative social effects from a commercial closure.

Committee Action:

- REVIEW RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 5 AND MODIFY AS NECESSARY.
- SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

Action 6. Revise the April spawning closure for greater amberjack

Alternative 1 (No Action). 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.

Alternative 2. Specify during April each year, no person may sell or purchase, harvest or possess a greater amberjack from the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone and the harvest and possession limit is zero.

Discussion:

- During April, each year, possession of greater amberjack on commercial or for-hire (charter and headboat) vessels is limited to one per person per day or one per person per trip, whichever is more restrictive. This limit is the same as the recreational bag limit; however, commercial and recreational vessels are still subject to their respective sector-specific minimum size limit (36 inches fork length for commercial; 28 inches fork length for recreational).
- Also during April, commercial sale or purchase of greater amberjack from the South Atlantic region is prohibited.
- **Alternative 2** would expand the April spawning closure, such that all harvest and possession of greater amberjack (including both recreational and commercial sectors) would be prohibited in April.
- Consideration of expanding the spawning closure to prohibit all harvest of greater amberjack in April was recommended by the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) at their April 2021 meeting.
    - Rationale for consideration include:
        - Increased equity between the sectors.
        - Additional biological/reproductive benefit to the stock from reduced harvest during spawning.

Summary of Biological Effects:

- Under either alternative, additional protection is afforded to the stock in April, during the peak spawning.
- While both alternatives offer some protection to the stock, overall, **Alternative 2** would indirectly provide the greatest biological benefit to the greater amberjack stock compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, due to reduced fishing mortality from harvest.

Summary of Economic Effects:

- **Alternative 2** is expected to result in reduced harvest and reduced economic benefits for the recreational sector, compared to **Alternative 1**.

- Differences in economic effects on the commercial sector between **Alternative 1** and **Alternative 2** are expected to be minimal due to the current prohibition on commercial sale in April.

Summary of Social Effects:

- Assuming that closing harvest during spawning ensures sustainable harvest of greater amberjack, long-term benefits to fishing communities in the form of consistent access to the resource would be highest under **Alternative 2**.
- Short-term negative effects on fishing communities due to restrictions in fishing opportunities would be lowest under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**. Such negative effects would have a greater impact on the recreational sector than the commercial sector due to current regulations that already prohibit commercial sale and reduce allowable commercial harvest.

Committee Action:

- REVIEW RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 6 AND MODIFY AS NECESSARY.
- SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

Action 7. Remove recreational annual catch targets from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan

Alternative 1 (No Action). Retain recreational annual catch targets for species managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

Alternative 2. Remove recreational annual catch targets for species managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

Discussion:

- Recreational annual catch targets (ACTs) established through the Comprehensive ACL Amendment have been in place since 2012, are not codified, and are not used for management purposes. **Alternative 2** would remove the need for ACTs to be evaluated and changed when changes are made to the recreational ACL.
- Some recreational ACTs are applied to individual species, while others are applied to species complexes. **Alternative 2** would remove ACTs from both individual species and complexes.

Summary of Effects:

- There are no expected biological, economic, or social effects associated with removal of the ACTs as they are not connected to any AMs or other management functions (**Alternative 2**).
- Under **Alternative 1**, recreational ACTs must be specified whenever recreational ACLs change. However, because the recreational ACT alternatives as they are presented here do not trigger any corrective or preventative action, no additional in-season monitoring is required regardless of where the recreational ACT level is set. Therefore, administrative burden is expected to be reduced in a small amount under **Alternative 2**, compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)**.

Committee Action:

- REVIEW RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES UNDER ACTION 7 AND MODIFY AS NECESSARY.
- SELECT PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE.

- CONSIDER APPROVAL FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS.
    - PROVIDE GUIDANCE WHETHER VIA WEBINAR IN JANUARY OR FEBRUARY OR DURING THE MARCH 2022 COUNCIL MEETING