

Vermilion Snapper Commercial Trip Limit

Council Discussion Document

September 2021

Background

In 2020, NOAA Fisheries enacted a temporary rule for emergency action (85 FR 57982) that increased the commercial trip limit for vermilion snapper in the South Atlantic region from 1,000 pounds gutted weight (lb gw) to 1,500 lbs gw from September 17, 2020, through March 16, 2021. This change was made to address economic losses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic such as declines in and disruptions to markets and for-hire trips, restricted access to ports, closures of harbors and boat ramps, and disruptions to obtaining fishing supplies.

Current management outside of the temporary rule for vermilion snapper includes a commercial split season with 50% of the commercial annual catch limit (ACL) allocated to January-June and 50% allocated to July-December. Unused ACL from the January-June season carries over to the July-December season. The commercial trip limit is 1,000 pounds gutted weight (gw) throughout both seasons.

The report in **Appendix 1** was provided in July 2020 as rationale for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's request for the temporary rule. This report predicted vermilion snapper commercial season lengths for 2020 and 2021 under two scenarios: a 1,500-pound gw trip limit in effect for 180 days and a 1,500-pound trip limit throughout 2021. These predictions were based on 2017-2019 catch rates. The scenario that occurred, a 1,500-pound gw trip limit in effect for 180 days, was predicted to lead to commercial closures in April for the January-June 2021 season and November for the July-December 2021 season.

Landings for vermilion snapper in 2020 were 825,955 pounds whole weight (lbs ww) and comprised 82.18% of the 2020 commercial annual catch limit (ACL) (1,005,040 lbs ww) (*Source: Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Quota Monitoring Program, 8/24/2021*).

Preliminary commercial landings as of August 24, 2021, are 322,228 lbs ww, which is 33.66% of the 2021 commercial ACL (957,440 lbs ww). Preliminary 2021 commercial landings from

January through June are 268,265 lbs ww, 56.0% of the portion of the commercial ACL allocated to this fishing season (478,720 lb ww). Preliminary 2021 commercial landings from July to date are 53,963 lbs ww, 11.3% of the portion of the commercial ACL allocated to this fishing season (478,720 lbs ww), not including unharvested ACL from January-June that is carried over to July-December.

Table 1 shows historical commercial landings and ACLs through 2020. No seasonal closures have occurred since 2017. Beginning in 2020, the commercial trip limit was no longer reduced when landings reached 75% of the seasonal quota, thus the trip limit is 1,000 lbs gw throughout the season (outside of the time the temporary rule was in effect).

Table 1. Commercial landings and annual catch limits for vermilion snapper from 2004-2020. *Source: Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Quota Monitoring Program, 8/24/21*

| Vermilion Snapper | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|---------|-------------------|---------|----------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|-----------|--------|------------------|
| Year | Fishing Year | Units | Seasonal Landings | Quota* | Quota % | Trip Limit Reduction | Closure Date | Total Landings | ACL | ACL % | Data Source |
| 2020 | Jan 1- Jun 30 | ww | 333,855 | 502,520 | 66.44 | | | 825,955 | 1,005,040 | 82.18 | ACL_FILES_040521 |
| | Jul 1- Dec 31 | | 492,100 | 502,520 | 97.93 | | | | | | |
| 2019 | Jan 1- Jun 30 | | 513,279 | 536,860 | 95.61 | 05/06/19 | | 1,020,202 | 1,073,720 | 95.02 | |
| | Jul 1- Dec 31 | | 506,923 | 536,860 | 94.42 | 11/11/19 | | | | | |
| 2018 | Jan 1- Jun 30 | | 387,758 | 431,460 | 89.87 | 04/26/18 | | 846,472 | 862,920 | 98.09 | |
| | Jul 1- Dec 31 | | 458,714 | 467,574 | 98.11 | 10/26/2018** | | | | | |
| 2017 | Jan 1- Jun 30 | | 404,291 | 431,460 | 93.70 | 03/22/17 | 5/17/17 | 861,792 | 862,920 | 99.87 | |
| | Jul 1- Dec 31 | | 457,501 | 452,134 | 101.19 | 10/02/17 | 10/17/17 | | | | |
| 2016 | Jan 1- Jun 30 | | 437,178 | 431,460 | 101.33 | 03/02/16 | 3/29/16 | 863,463 | 862,920 | 100.06 | |
| | Jul 1- Dec 31 | | 426,285 | 432,305 | 98.61 | 08/28/16 | 10/11/16; Re-opened 12/14/16-12/15/16 | | | | |
| 2015 | Jan 1- Jun 30 | | 458,097 | 438,260 | 104.53 | 03/02/15 | 4/15/15 | 939,834 | 876,520 | 107.22 | |
| | Jul 1- Dec 31 | | 481,737 | 438,260 | 109.92 | 09/10/15 | 9/22/15 | | | | |
| 2014 | Jan 1- Jun 30 | 500,115 | 446,080 | 112.11 | 03/11/14 | 4/19/14 | 985,276 | 892,160 | 110.44 | | |
| | Jul 1- Dec 31 | 485,161 | 446,080 | 108.76 | 08/23/14 | 9/12/14 | | | | | |
| 2013 | Jan 1- Jun 30 | 318,474 | 466,480 | 68.27 | | 2/13/13 | 1,020,012 | 932,960 | 109.33 | | |
| | Jul 1- Dec 31 | 701,538 | 613,278 | 114.39 | 10/16/13 | 12/2/13 | | | | | |
| 2012 | Jan 1- Jun 30 | 407,585 | 315,523 | 129.18 | | 2/29/12 | 908,661 | 618,046 | 147.02 | | |
| | Jul 1- Dec 31 | 501,076 | 302,523 | 165.63 | | 9/28/12 | | | | | |
| 2011 | Jan 1- Jun 30 | 332,895 | 315,523 | 105.51 | | 3/10/11; Re-opened 5/1/11-5/8/11 | 926,901 | 618,046 | 149.97 | | |
| | Jul 1- Dec 31 | 594,006 | 302,523 | 196.35 | | 9/30/11 | | | | | |
| 2010 | Jan 1- Jun 30 | 356,823 | 315,523 | 113.09 | | 3/9/10 | 876,891 | 618,046 | 141.88 | | |
| | Jul 1- Dec 31 | 520,068 | 302,523 | 171.91 | | 10/6/10 | | | | | |
| 2009 | Jan 1- Jun 30 | 421,831 | 315,523 | 133.69 | | | 827,996 | 618,046 | 133.97 | | |
| | Jul 1- Dec 31 | 406,166 | 302,523 | 134.26 | | 9/18/09 | | | | | |
| 2008 | January 1 - December 31 | | | | | | 1,100,809 | 1,100,000 | 100.1 | | |
| 2007 | | | | | | | 983,910 | 1,100,000 | 89.4 | | |
| 2006 | | | | | | | 768,191 | 1,100,000 | 69.8 | | |
| 2005 | | | | | | | 1,019,557 | None | | | |
| 2004 | | | | | | | 1,008,714 | None | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |

* As stated in the federal regulations, any unused portions of the quota from the January 1 through June 30 season will be added to the July 1 to December 31 quota. The new quota is used to project trip limit reductions and closures.

**As of 11/27/2018, there were 36,114 lbs ww unused from the January 1 through June 30 season, and were added to the July 1 through December 31 quota of 431,460 lbs ww, for a total of 467,574 lbs ww.

Advisory Panel Recommendations

At the March 2021 South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting, the Council's Snapper Grouper Committee requested input from the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel (AP) on whether a long-term change to the vermilion snapper commercial trip limit should be considered. The AP met in April 2021 and provided the following comments:

- Distances traveled to fishing grounds can be 40-60 miles in some areas (e.g., off the Carolinas). A larger trip limit could make trips more efficient.
- Closures to red grouper and potential closures to red porgy and snowy grouper make vermilion snapper more important. The most critical time to have the season open is in May and June.
 - If the Council considers increasing the trip limit to 1,500 pounds, they should consider re-establishing the stepdown. Possibly consider a 1,000 pound limit at 50% of the seasonal quota and a 500 pound limit at 75% of the seasonal quota.
- The AP asked about information that would indicate how many boats benefitted from the increased trip limit.

Committee Action:

REVIEW ADVISORY PANEL COMMENTS AND DISCUSS WHETHER FURTHER MANAGEMENT ACTION IS NEEDED.

Appendix 1.

South Atlantic Vermilion Snapper

Vermilion Snapper Commercial Trip Limit Analysis
LAPP/DM Branch; July 13, 2020

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) manages vermilion snapper from federal waters at the Virginia/North Carolina border through the Atlantic side of the Florida Keys under the Snapper-Grouper Fishery Management Plan (FMP). In 2013, Amendment 18 to the Snapper-Grouper FMP modified the commercial trip limit by reducing it from 1,500 pounds gutted weight (lbs gw) to 1,000 lb gw per trip and further reduced the trip limit to 500 lb gw once 75% of the commercial annual catch limit (ACL) was landed. In 2019, Abbreviated Framework 2 to the FMP set the ACL through 2023 (**Table 2**). In 2020, Regulatory Amendment 27 to the Snapper-Grouper FMP removed the commercial trip limit reduction when 75% of the seasonal quota was met, but retained the 1,000 lb gw commercial trip limit for both fishing seasons. The commercial sector has had in-season ACL closures every year between 2009 and 2017. Because landings have been considerably lower in 2020 compared to previous years, the SAFMC is considering taking action through an emergency rule to increase the commercial trip limit for either 180 days beginning in September 2020 or through the 2021 calendar year. This analysis investigates when the commercial sector will be expected to close if an emergency rule action is taken.

Table 2. The current South Atlantic vermilion snapper ACLs [annual catch limits]. [The Total ACL is for both the recreational and commercial sectors in pounds whole weight (lbs ww). The commercial ACL is shown in lbs ww and pounds gutted weight (lbs gw). The commercial ACL is split between two seasons, with half allocated to January-June and half allocated to July-December. Any unused quota from the first season is carried forward to the second. Unused quota from the second season is not carried forward.]

| | Total ACL (lbs ww) | Commercial ACL (lbs ww) | Commercial ACL (lbs gw) |
|------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2020 | 1,478,000 | 1,005,040 | 905,441 |
| 2021 | 1,408,000 | 957,440 | 862,559 |
| 2022 | 1,362,000 | 926,160 | 834,378 |
| 2023 | 1,336,000 | 908,480 | 818,450 |

Final commercial landings for 2007-2009 and 2015-2019 were provided from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) on July 7, 2020, and preliminary 2020 commercial landings were provided on July 2, 2020. Because the commercial sector reached each split-season ACL every year between 2009 and 2017, the months of Mar-Jun and Sept-Dec were typically closed to vermilion snapper. To predict 2017 landings during months that were closed, a mean ratio was first developed that compares each month that is typically closed to a month that is typically open using years when the fishery was open. For this analysis, estimates of predicted landings are based on the mean ratios of Mar – Jun landings to February landings from 2007-2009, and on the mean ratios of Sept – Dec landings to July landings from 2006-2008. These years were used because they were the last three completely open fishing years for vermilion snapper stocks for

those months. The ratios estimated ranged between 106 and 222% of February landings for Mar–Jun, and between 86 and 122% of August landings for Sept - Dec. For example, the February to March mean ratio was 172% and applied to the 2017 mean landings in February, which were 93,3418 lb whole weight (ww) resulted in projected landings of 161,007 lbs ww for April. Landings in the Mar-Jun and Sept-Dec period are projected to be relatively high as this analytical approach does not account for the potential redistribution of peak effort to January and July following the ACL closures. Also, landings in 2006-2009 were higher as there was no commercial trip limits during that time. Thus, it is likely the projected landings presented in **Figure 1** are an upper bound for what might be caught.

This analysis accounts for the increase in landings that would result from the increased commercial trip limits being proposed. This expected increase was estimated by comparing the average 2017-2019 monthly South Atlantic vermilion snapper commercial logbook data with and without a 1,500 lb gw maximum trip limit by setting all trips that landed over 900 lb gw to 1,500 lb gw (**Table 3**). Trips above 900 lb gw were chosen because they were trips that were close to meeting the current trip limit. These expected changes in landings were then applied to both 2019 monthly landings, since these represent the most recent landings, and to the average 2017-2019 monthly landings in order to generate a range of expected split-season trip reduction and closure dates. Additionally, this analysis assumes that landings for the remainder of the 2020 fishing year will continue at the reduced rate that was seen at the beginning of the year, which was found to be 47.3% of 2019 landings. **If the commercial landings of vermilion snapper continue as expected, then the proposed commercial trip limit increases will result in no season closures in 2020, but may result in split-season closures in 2021 as described in Table 4.**

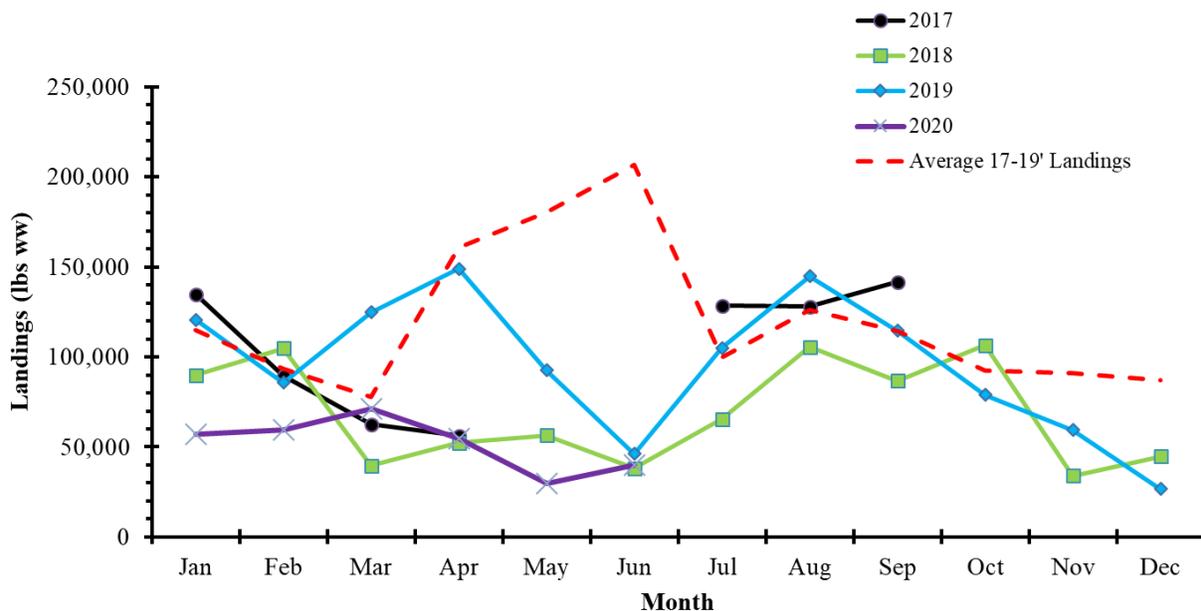


Figure 1. South Atlantic vermilion snapper monthly commercial landings (lb ww) for 2017-2019, and projected future landings. March through April landings and September through December landings were estimated using ratios that compare those months to February and August landings, respectively. *Source: SEFSC Commercial ACL Dataset (July 7, 2020).*

Table 3. Projected percent change in landings for the proposed 1,500 lb gw commercial trip limit based on South Atlantic vermilion snapper commercial logbook data. The two-month average percent change was applied to March through June landings, and the three-month average was applied to October through December landings.

| Trip Limit (lb gw) | Jan | Feb | Two-Month Average | Jul | Aug | Sep | Three-Month Average |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|---------------------|
| 1,500 | 25.2% | 25.6% | 23.6% | 19.0% | 22.2% | 24.6% | 21.9% |

Table 4. The projected split-season season closure dates for South Atlantic vermilion snapper for the 2020 and 2021 ACL with each proposed commercial trip limit. The total annual landings are included if no closure was projected. Otherwise, the projected closure date is provided for both the January through June and July through December seasons.

| Action Alternatives | 2020 (ACL: 1,005,040 lb ww) | | 2021 (ACL: 957,440 lb ww) | |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| | 2017-2019 Avg Ratio | 2019 Ratio | 2017-2019 Avg Ratio | 2019 Ratio |
| No Action | No closure (539,594 lb ww/486,121 lb gw) | No closure (571,655 lb ww/515,005 lb gw) | Jan - Jun: 6-May Jul - Dec: 16-Nov | Jan - Jun: 30-Apr Jul - Dec: 15-Nov |
| 180 Day Increased Trip Limit | No closure (572,200 lb ww/515,495 lb gw) | No closure (604,186 lb ww/544,312 lb gw) | Jan - Jun: 26-Apr Jul - Dec: 16-Nov | Jan - Jun: 20-Apr Jul - Dec: 15-Nov |
| Increased Trip Limit Through 2021 | No closure (572,200 lb ww/515,495 lb gw) | No closure (604,186 lb ww/544,312 lb gw) | Jan - Jun: 19-Apr Jul - Dec: 18-Oct | Jan - Jun: 11-Apr Jul - Dec: 11-Oct |