

**Reef Fish Committee  
Action Guide and Next Steps for Tab B**

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**Agenda Item IV:**     **FINAL ACTION** – Abbreviated Framework Action: Management Measures to Reduce Reef Fish Release Mortality

**Action:**             Presentation, discussion, and recommendations for final action

**Council Input and Next Steps:** The Direct Enhancement of Snapper Conservation and the Economy through Novel Devices (DESCEND) Act implemented a temporary regulatory requirement for commercial and recreational fishermen to possess a venting tool or descending device that is rigged and ready for use when fishing for reef fish in the Gulf exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The DESCEND Act is set to expire January 2026. At that point, all requirements for venting tools and descending devices in the federal reef fish fishery would cease to exist. Council staff will review the proposed action and public comments received. SERO staff will review how the proposed regulations will be represented in the codified text. The Committee should review the proposed action and make recommendations to the Council as appropriate. If the Committee finds the proposed regulations to be necessary and appropriate, the Committee can recommend that the Council consider taking final action to transmit the proposed regulations to the Secretary of Commerce for implementation.

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**Agenda Item V:**     Public Hearing Draft – Reef Fish Amendment 62: Modifications to Gulf Red Grouper Management Measures

**Action:**             Document, discussion, and recommendations

**Council Input and Next Steps:** Council staff will present a public hearing draft of Reef Fish Amendment 62, which considers management modifications for red grouper based on the results of the most recent stock assessment (SEDAR 88). This stock assessment found red grouper to be healthy, and as a result, the SSC recommended modifications to catch limits and stock status determination criteria. The document proposes actions that consider modifying status determination criteria, catch limits, and sector allocations. It also considers removing the 20-fathom recreational seasonal closure for shallow-water grouper. The Committee should review the information presented, ask questions, and review the current preferred alternatives. Council staff will plan to host a virtual public hearing via webinar. Consideration of final action on this document will be planned for the January 2026 Council meeting.

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**Agenda Item VI:**     Presentation: Reef Fish Amendment 63: Modifications to Gulf Red Grouper IFQ Program

**Action:**             Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

**Council input and next steps:** Staff will give a presentation on Reef Fish Amendment 63. This regulatory action addresses management measures necessary to develop a pilot program to set aside a portion of the red grouper commercial quota to be distributed to eligible participants in the grouper/tilefish individual fishing quota (IFQ) program. The presentation includes options considering alternative set aside amounts, criteria for qualifying for set aside allocation, restrictions on transferability, and methods for distributing set aside allocation. The Committee should review the information and options presented, suggest revisions and recommend next steps as warranted.

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**Agenda Item VII:** Presentation: Delegation of Management of Federal For-Hire Vessels to the Gulf States for Red Snapper

**Action:** Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

**Council Input and Next Steps:** Staff will give a presentation on the delegation of management of the red snapper federal for-hire component. Staff will discuss the main decision points and options the Committee could consider while developing the delegation procedures. Decision points to discuss include the identification of Gulf states intending to assume the management of their portion of the red snapper federal for-hire component, sector separation and the allocation of the red snapper federal for-hire ACL between the Gulf states. The Committee should discuss the information presented, suggest revisions and recommend next steps as needed.

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**Agenda Item VIII:** Draft – Reef Fish Amendment 58A: Shallow-water Grouper Complex Management Considerations

**Action:** Document, discussion, and recommendations

**Council Input and Next Steps:** Council staff will present a draft of Reef Fish Amendment 58A, which proposes dissolving the current shallow-water grouper complex structure into two new management categories: the scamp complex (scamp and yellowmouth grouper) and the black grouper complex (black grouper and yellowfin grouper). With the creation of these two new complexes, management considerations such as catch levels, stock determination criteria, share distribution, sector allocation, accountability measures, and other management issues will need to be addressed.

Action 1.2. considers alternatives to modify the distribution of shares for the new share categories. The no action alternative would distribute proportionally based on existing ownership of Other SWG shares. The action alternatives would incorporate Other SWG landings history for individual IFQ participants as part of the criteria to distribute shares. However, analysis of the number of permit holders affected by these alternatives is unavailable given unexpected delays from the government shutdown. To broadly discuss the action, Council staff will provide a presentation reviewing how IFQ shares would be redistributed (Action 1.2) and discuss the required timeline to further consider this action. The Committee should consider if Action 1.2, should be removed to avoid delay in completion of this document.

Council staff will also present new alternatives for considering a Black Grouper Complex recreational accountability measure (Action 3). The Committee should consider approving this document for public hearings and if approved, Council staff will host a virtual public hearing via webinar. The Committee should recommend public hearing locations, if desired. If approved for public hearings at this meeting, the document will be scheduled for final action at the January 2026 Council meeting.

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**Agenda Item IX:** Draft Options – Reef Fish Amendment 55 / Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 – Modifications to Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper Management Measures

**Action:** Presentation, discussion, and recommendations

**Council Input and Next Steps:** Reef Fish Amendment 55 / Snapper Grouper Amendment 44 is a joint amendment to consider modifications to southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper management between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils (Councils). Recently, new stock assessments have been completed for southeastern U.S. mutton snapper (SEDAR 79) and yellowtail snapper (SEDAR 96). Both of these stock assessments estimated their respective species to be healthy (i.e., not overfished or undergoing overfishing) as of 2023, with northward range expansion evident in both stocks in the Gulf. This amendment considers modification of the respective stock catch limits, jurisdictional apportionment of the respective stock ABCs and setting of regional ACLs, and South Atlantic sector allocations for both species within the South Atlantic Council’s jurisdiction. The Gulf Council does not use sector allocations for these species, and as such, the sector allocation actions in practice apply only to the South Atlantic Council. The Councils will pass this document back and forth to agree upon the same preferred alternatives before taking mutual final action, which is currently planned for June 2026. The Committee should review the proposed actions and alternatives and recommend modifications to the Councils as appropriate. Staff will plan to bring the Gulf Council’s recommendations to the South Atlantic Council for consideration at its December 2025 meeting, with the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils reviewing a public hearing draft of the document at their January 2026 and March 2026 meetings, respectively.

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**Agenda Item X:** Review of Reef Fish and IFQ Program Landings, and State Program Landings for Red Snapper and Greater Amberjack

**Action:** Presentations and discussion

**Council input and next steps:** SERO staff will review the status of reef fish and IFQ program landings relative to catch limits, which is provided for the Committee’s information only. Council representatives from the five Gulf States will also review their 2025 private angling fishing seasons for red snapper and offer projections for the 2026 fishing season as appropriate. The states will also characterize available data for effort, observed mean lengths and weights for red snapper. In addition, the five Gulf states will also present their state survey-generated

landings, effort, lengths and weights for greater amberjack, as available. These data are part of an ongoing report to the Council that requires no action by the Committee. Committee members should consider the information presented and ask questions as appropriate.

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**Agenda Item XI:** Other Business

**Action:** Additional items that can be brought up for discussion

**Council Input and Next Steps:** Additional items may be brought up for discussion by Committee members during the adoption of the agenda, time permitting. If the Committee wishes to pursue action, then action can be scheduled at a future Council meeting.

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