Tab B, No. 5b
05/22/2026

Modifications to Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper Management Measures

Draft Amendment 55
to the Fishery Management Plan for the
Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf
and
Draft Amendment 44
to the Fishery Management Plan for the
Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region

June 2026

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

ABC	acceptable biological catch
ACL	annual catch limit
ACT	annual catch target
AM	accountability measures
APAIS	Access Point Angler Intercept Survey
BMSY	stock biomass level capable of producing an equilibrium yield of MSY
CHTS	Coastal Household Telephone Survey
Council	Gulf Council
Councils	Gulf and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	economic impact statement
FES	Fishing Effort Survey
FMP	Fishery Management Plan
GMFMC	Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
GRFS	Gulf Reef Fish Survey
Gulf	Gulf of America (Formerly Gulf of Mexico)
IRFA	initial regulatory flexibility analysis
MFMT	maximum fishing mortality threshold
MRFSS	Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey
MRIP	Marine Recreational Information Program
MSST	minimum stock size threshold
MSY	maximum sustainable yield
Magnuson-Stevens Act	Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
OFL	overfishing limit
OST	Office of Science and Technology
OY	optimum yield
RFA	Regulatory Flexibility Analysis
RIR	Regulatory Impact Review
Reef Fish FMP	Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf
SDC	status determination criteria
SEDAR	Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review
SEFSC	Southeast Fisheries Science Center
SEIS	Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
SERO	Southeast Regional Office
SPR	spawning potential ratio
SRFS	Florida State Reef Fish Survey
SRHS	Southeast Region Headboat Survey
SSB	spawning stock biomass

SSC	Scientific and Statistical Committee
South Atlantic Council	South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
TL	total length
USCG	United States Coast Guard
mp	million pounds
ww	whole weight

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The southeastern U.S. stocks of mutton snapper (*Lutjanus analis*) and yellowtail snapper (*Ocyurus chrysurus*) are respectively considered to be single unit stocks in the Gulf of America (Gulf) and South Atlantic regions. While mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper are managed separately by the Gulf Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council; collectively, "the Councils"), determining the jurisdictional apportionment of the stock acceptable biological catch levels (ABC) requires the Councils to work collectively. The actions in Amendment 55 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf (Reef Fish FMP) and Amendment 44 to the FMP for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper FMP) would update catch levels and modify the jurisdictional allocation of mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper in the Gulf and South Atlantic regions. This is a joint amendment to each Council's FMP and must be approved by both Councils. Actions include revising the stock overfishing limits (OFLs), stock ABCs, jurisdictional apportionment of the ABCs and annual catch limits (ACL) between the Gulf and South Atlantic, as well as the South Atlantic's sector allocations and sector ACLs. The stock OFLs and ABCs are based on the new Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) 79 (2024) and SEDAR 96 (2025) stock assessments for mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper, respectively. These stock assessments were deemed consistent with the best scientific information available by both Councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSC). While the Councils must agree on the recommended jurisdictional apportionment, they can independently recommend the conservation and management measures for their respective jurisdictions. Sector allocations and sector specific ACLs are not used for either species in the Gulf Council's jurisdiction; thus, no further discussion of Gulf sector allocations or ACLs for these species will be made in this document. The jurisdictions for each Council are shown in Figure 1.1.1 and 1.1.2. In the Gulf, Florida and Texas state-waters boundaries extend out 9 nautical miles; Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana state-waters boundaries extend out 3 nautical miles.

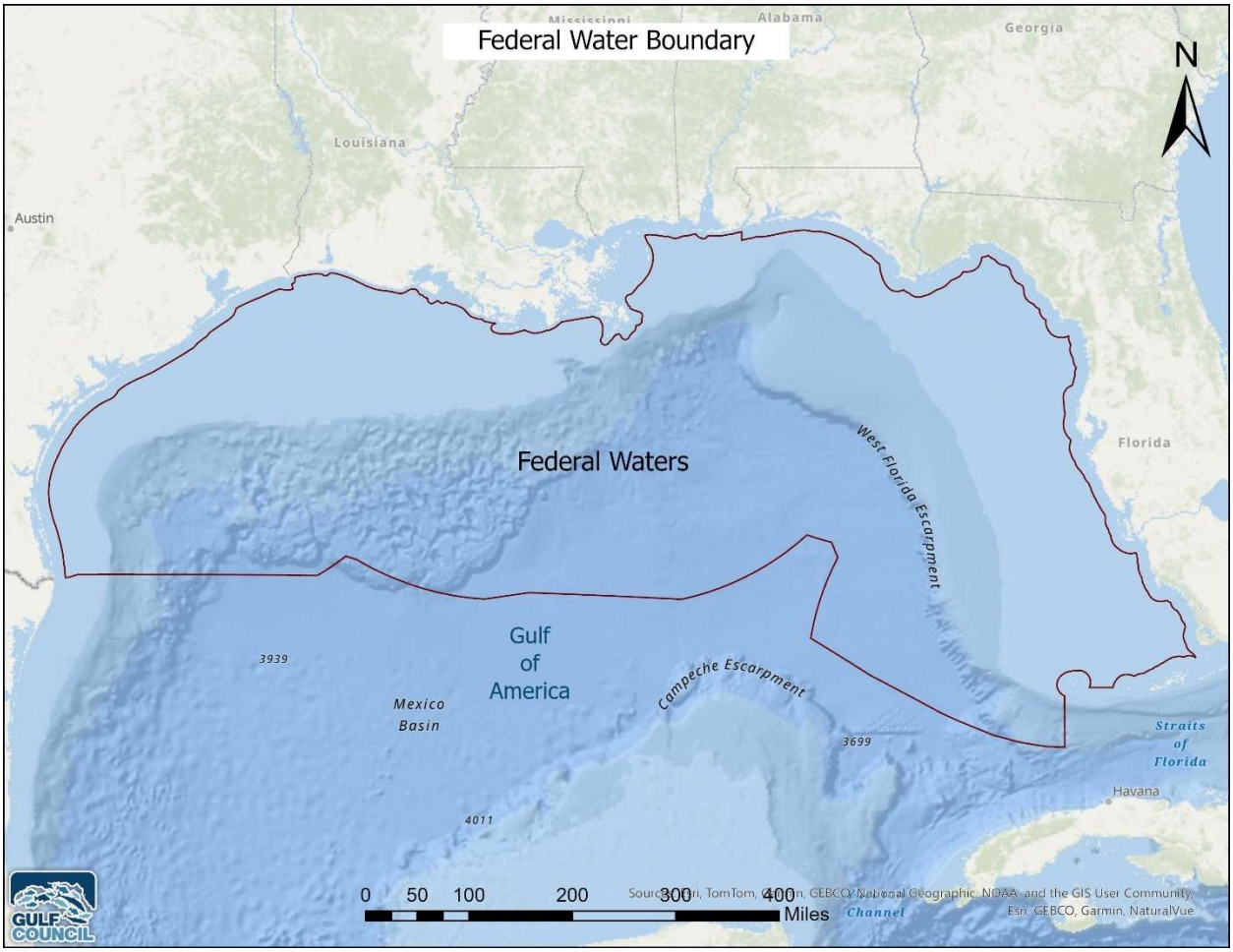

Figure 1.1.1. Jurisdictional boundaries of the Gulf Council.

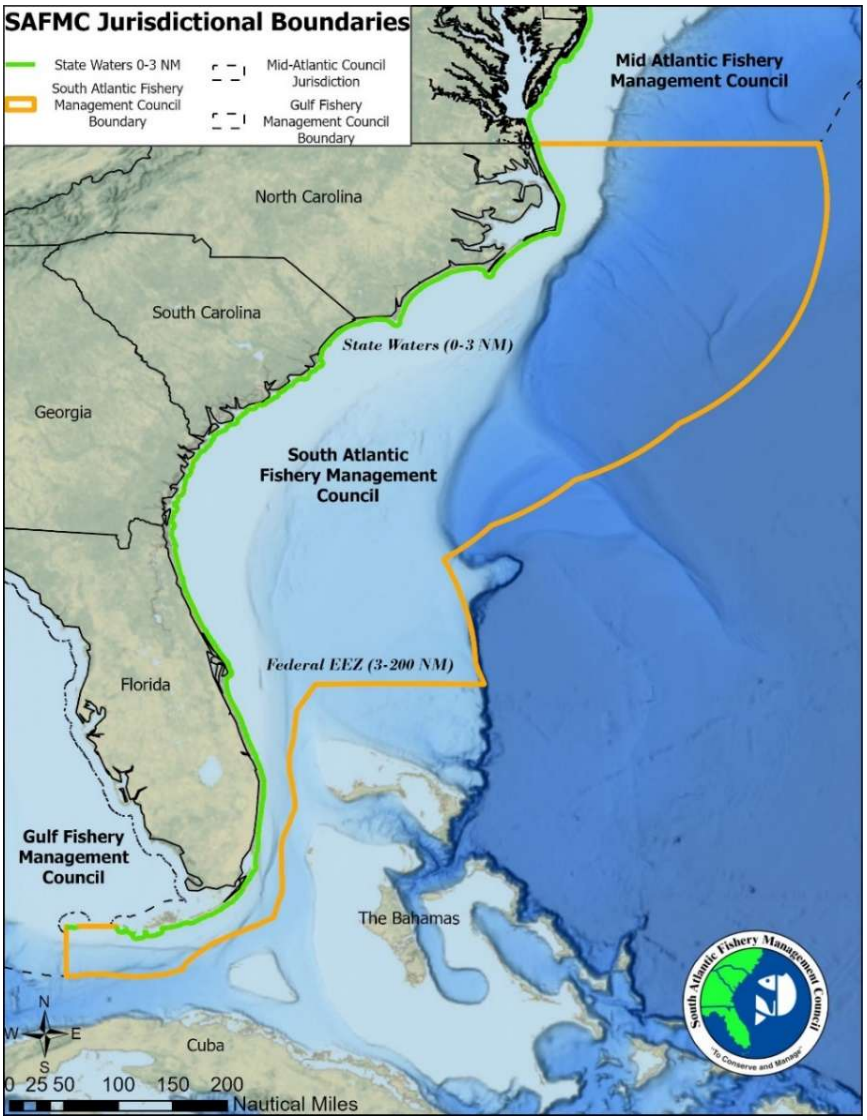

Figure 1.1.2. Jurisdictional boundaries of the South Atlantic Council.

In February 2025, the Councils' SSCs met to review new stock assessments for both mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper (see Sections 1.3 and 1.4 below). These stock assessments used recreational private vessel landings estimates from Florida's State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS) and found the respective stocks to be healthy as of 2023. After reviewing the stock assessments, the SSCs recommended updated catch advice for both species. In response, the Councils decided to update the jurisdictional allocation, regional catch levels, and South Atlantic sector allocations to reflect the health of the stocks, and the use of the new survey.

Current Management and Landings

The majority of commercial and recreational landings of mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper from federal waters are in Florida. Recreational landings in this area, especially in the Florida Keys are monitored by various methods as described below (Figure 1.1.3 and Table 1.1.1).

Recreational landings estimates for both mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper are now inclusive of SRFS data, which produces more precise landings estimates than the previously used federal Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) for private recreational vessels. MRIP is still used to inform recreational shore mode landings, and MRIP's For-Hire Telephone Survey informs charter for-hire landings. The Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) is used to estimate headboat landings throughout the region and partition between the Gulf and South Atlantic near to the Councils' jurisdictional boundary. The SRFS- and MRIP-informed catch estimates differ in how landings data in southwest Florida (i.e., Area D in the Western Keys [Figure 1.1.3.]) are attributed. Under the SRFS program, Areas D and E are split to provide additional geographic resolution and the private vessel landings in Area D are attributed to the Gulf and landings in area E are attributed to the South Atlantic (Figure 1.1.3). Under MRIP, Area D is combined with Area E and these private vessel landings have historically been attributed to the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction. Likewise, the federal charter for-hire landings in Area D are combined with Area E and are attributed to the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction. To attribute these charter for-hire landings more appropriately to a Council's jurisdiction, for the purposes of this amendment, the ratio of SRFS private vessel landings for the most recent four years of data (2021 – 2024) will be used to assign those historical charter for-hire landings for Areas D and E through 2024 (Table 1.1.1). This will allow for greater data resolution when determining jurisdictional apportionment and allocations between the Gulf and South Atlantic Council jurisdictions. A four-year reference period was chosen because it begins with the first year of full implementation of SRFS (2021) and goes through the most recent year of finalized recreational landings data (2024). MRIP shore mode landings in Areas D and E will continue to be attributed to the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction since the overwhelming majority of those landings occur in South Atlantic waters (greater than 90%). Headboat landings in Area D (SRHS) have historically been attributed to the Gulf, and this practice continues. Table 1.1.2 describes which data would be attributed to which Council by survey for this amendment.

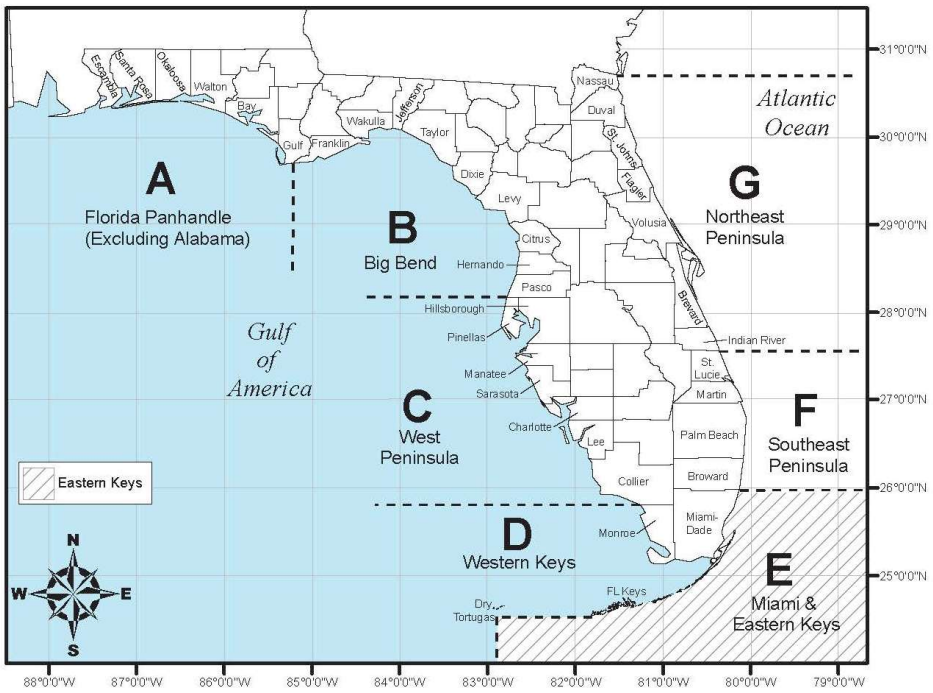

Figure 1.1.3. Map of survey areas used by Florida's SRFS program used to survey the offshore private recreational component of mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper catch and effort.

Table 1.1.1. A description of the ratio of SRFS private vessel landings for the most recent four years of data (2021 – 2024) for southeastern US mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper. These ratios will be used to assign MRIP charter for-hire landings through 2024 for Areas D and E (Figure 1.1.3).

Species	Gulf	South Atlantic
Mutton snapper	16.731%	83.269%
Yellowtail snapper	6.393%	93.607%

Table 1.1.2. A description of how the recreational landings from southwest Florida (i.e., Area D) are attributed to the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils.

Mode	Survey	Council
Offshore private vessel	SRFS	Gulf
Federal charter for-hire	MRIP	Gulf
Headboat	SRHS	Gulf
Shore	MRIP	South Atlantic

1.2 Purpose and Need

The purpose of these fishery management plan amendments is to revise the southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper stock overfishing limit, and stock acceptable biological catch, based on the results of the SEDAR 79 and SEDAR 96 stock assessments, respectively.

The amendments would also revise the jurisdictional apportionment between the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils, the regional annual catch limits, and the South Atlantic sector allocations.

The need for these fishery management plan amendments is to update existing catch limits, jurisdictional apportionments of the ABC for mutton and yellowtail snapper, and South Atlantic sector allocations for southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper to be consistent with the best scientific information available, and achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

1.3 Mutton Snapper

Stock Assessment

SEDAR 79 (2024) is the most recent stock assessment of southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and estimated the stock to be healthy (not overfished or undergoing overfishing) using data through 2023. The assessment used SRFS in place of MRIP survey data for estimating mutton snapper catch and effort from private recreational fishing vessels. Results of the assessment including current stock status determination criteria (SDC) are shown in Table 1.3.1.

Table 1.3.1. Summary of benchmarks and reference points used in the SEDAR 79 assessment for mutton snapper. Spawning stock biomass (SSB) is in metric tons (male and female combined SSB), whereas F is a harvest rate (total biomass killed all ages / total biomass age 1+). An SPR proxy of 30% is presented. Values highlighted in **green** indicate the stock is neither overfished, nor undergoing overfishing. F=fishing mortality; MSY=maximum sustainable yield); MFMT=maximum fishing mortality threshold; MSST=minimum stock size threshold.

Criteria	Definition	Value
$F_{MSYProxy}$	Equilibrium F to achieve 30% SPR, per year	0.149
MFMT	$F_{MSYProxy}$, per year	0.149
$F_{Current}$	Geometric mean of $F_{2021\text{-}2023}$, per year	0.08
$F_{Current}$/MFMT	Current overfishing status	**0.537**
$SSB_{MSYProxy}$	Equilibrium SSB at $F_{30\%SPR}$, in metric tons	3,352
MSST	0.75 * $SSB_{30\%SPR}$, in metric tons	2,514
$SSB_{Current}$	SSB in 2023, in metric tons	5,403
$SSB_{Current}/SSB_{MSYProxy}$	Stock status based on $SSB_{30\%SPR}$	1.62
$SSB_{Current}$/MSST	Stock status based on MSST	**2.15**

The Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs met in February 2025 to review the SEDAR 79 stock assessment and yield projections. The South Atlantic Council's SDC for mutton snapper was used, as shown in the "Definitions" column of Table 1.3.1. In addition, the South Atlantic Council defines optimum yield (OY) for mutton snapper as the yield corresponding to the stock ACL, which for mutton snapper, would also be equal to the ABC. The SSCs issued two joint consensus statements at the conclusion of their review of SEDAR 79. First, the SSCs agreed to use an alternative approach to determine the ABC from the previous stock assessment, because of differences in how the uncertainty in the OFL was characterized. Second, the SSCs used the

geometric mean of the most recent five years of recruitment (2019 – 2023) for informing OFL and ABC projections. The OFL is set at $F_{30\%SPR}$, and the ABC is set at 75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$, for the years 2026 – 2028, as derived from the provided projections for 2024 – 2028. The resulting mutton snapper stock OFLs and ABCs for 2026 – 2028 are shown in Table 1.3.2, with the years 2024 – 2026 of the projections italicized and grayed out to show that those years will have passed before management changes can be implemented. For reference, the current OFL and ABC are shown in the legacy federal Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) units in Table 1.3.3.

Table 1.3.2. OFL and ABC values for mutton snapper recommended by the SSCs, inclusive of SRFS data for recreational private vessels, based on the results of SEDAR 79 (2024) and using an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at $F_{30\%SPR}$. Catch limits are in pounds (lb) whole weight (ww).

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	**ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)**
2024	*3,280,143*	*2,498,073*
2025	*3,384,760*	*2,662,320*
2026	*3,363,706*	*2,725,359*
2027	3,313,030	2,752,377
2028+	3,270,355	2,772,615

Table 1.3.3. Current OFL and ABC values for mutton snapper, inclusive of MRFSS and using an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at $F_{30\%SPR}$. Catch limits are in lb ww. These values are not directly comparable to those in Table 1.3.2.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	**ABC (P* = 0.375)**
2025+	850,077	798,300

Current Regulations

As mentioned, mutton snapper is managed separately by the Councils with some different management measures occurring in each jurisdiction. For example, while the South Atlantic Council uses sector allocations and commercial trip limits for mutton snapper, the Gulf Council does not. A summary of mutton snapper management measures, except catch limits, are shown in Table 1.3.4.

Table 1.3.4. Current management measures for mutton snapper by Council jurisdiction.

Species	Region	Jurisdictional Apportionment of ABC	Fishing Year	Daily Bag Limit	Trip Limit	Min Size Limit	Sector Allocations
Mutton Snapper	Gulf	18%	Jan 1 - Dec 31	5 per person within 10-snapper aggregate	None	18" total length (TL) both sectors	None
	South Atlantic	82%	Jan 1 - Dec 31	5 per person within 10-snapper aggregate	Jan 1 - Mar 31: 500 lb ww Apr 1 - Jun 30: 5 per person per day or 5 per person per trip Jul1 - Dec 31: 500 lb ww	18" TL both sectors	17.02% Com 82.98% Rec

Landings

Mutton snapper landings from 1986 through 2024 have varied with most occurring in the South Atlantic (Table 1.3.5 and Figure 1.3.1). Within each jurisdiction, sector landings have differed with the majority of landings in the Gulf attributed to the commercial sector, whereas a majority of the landings in the South Atlantic are attributed to the recreational sector (Table 1.3.5).

Table 1.3.5. Southeastern U.S. mutton snapper landings from 1986 – 2024. Comm = commercial. Rec = recreational. Data are in lb ww. Recreational landings are inclusive of SRFS for recreational private vessels and MRIP-FES for recreational shore landings.

Year	Gulf Comm	SA Comm	Gulf Rec	SA Rec	Gulf Total	SA Total	Stock Total
1986	79,090	325,481	97,465	530,414	176,555	855,895	1,032,450
1987	113,850	431,265	38,348	409,569	152,198	840,834	993,032
1988	123,352	301,892	98,432	601,566	221,784	903,458	1,125,242
1989	127,183	344,987	32,778	379,687	159,961	724,674	884,634
1990	109,628	300,972	211,694	223,667	321,322	524,639	845,961
1991	101,717	348,100	46,784	470,782	148,501	818,882	967,383
1992	97,475	299,531	51,337	444,010	148,812	743,541	892,354
1993	110,154	327,633	36,752	523,133	146,906	850,766	997,672
1994	81,432	272,464	12,602	258,588	94,034	531,052	625,085
1995	98,006	183,450	35,246	369,773	133,252	553,223	686,476
1996	94,674	196,466	29,249	222,644	123,923	419,110	543,033
1997	65,176	227,287	28,113	186,202	93,289	413,489	506,778
1998	72,697	283,211	42,363	272,393	115,060	555,604	670,663
1999	82,954	170,082	29,643	319,678	112,597	489,760	602,357
2000	67,468	137,192	6,932	309,810	74,400	447,002	521,401
2001	74,231	158,553	5,597	218,390	79,828	376,943	456,771

2002	75,014	158,384	13,620	356,172	88,634	514,556	603,190
2003	96,215	173,912	16,025	328,799	112,240	502,711	614,951
2004	197,326	152,329	10,650	268,853	207,976	421,182	629,158
2005	142,318	90,180	4,129	278,304	146,447	368,484	514,931
2006	133,512	155,181	43,624	560,423	177,136	715,604	892,740
2007	78,842	142,830	46,648	616,847	125,490	759,677	885,167
2008	51,001	107,069	83,087	976,930	134,088	1,083,999	1,218,087
2009	41,657	79,835	19,725	324,355	61,382	404,190	465,572
2010	51,337	77,014	12,628	364,366	63,965	441,380	505,345
2011	90,299	68,814	6,758	127,353	97,057	196,167	293,223
2012	82,402	84,759	47,034	371,345	129,436	456,104	585,540
2013	111,406	77,028	38,126	456,426	149,532	533,454	682,986
2014	129,383	98,584	16,558	505,425	145,941	604,009	749,950
2015	123,255	101,668	15,158	499,826	138,413	601,494	739,907
2016	78,146	72,172	20,447	623,888	98,593	696,060	794,653
2017	125,738	66,064	19,828	402,433	145,566	468,497	614,062
2018	138,752	84,307	23,295	373,152	162,047	457,459	619,506
2019	59,200	77,763	13,621	368,213	72,821	445,976	518,798
2020	62,474	79,820	69,555	499,895	132,029	579,715	711,744
2021	59,191	65,660	32,072	716,901	91,263	782,561	873,824
2022	66,544	64,111	25,461	482,595	92,005	546,706	638,711
2023	98,225	71,709	40,641	638,235	138,866	709,944	848,810
2024	86,575	52,764	58,133	720,679	144,708	773,443	918,151

Source: Commercial data are from a March 2026 data request to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center. Recreational data are from March 2026 data requests from the SRHS, SRFS, and MRIP.

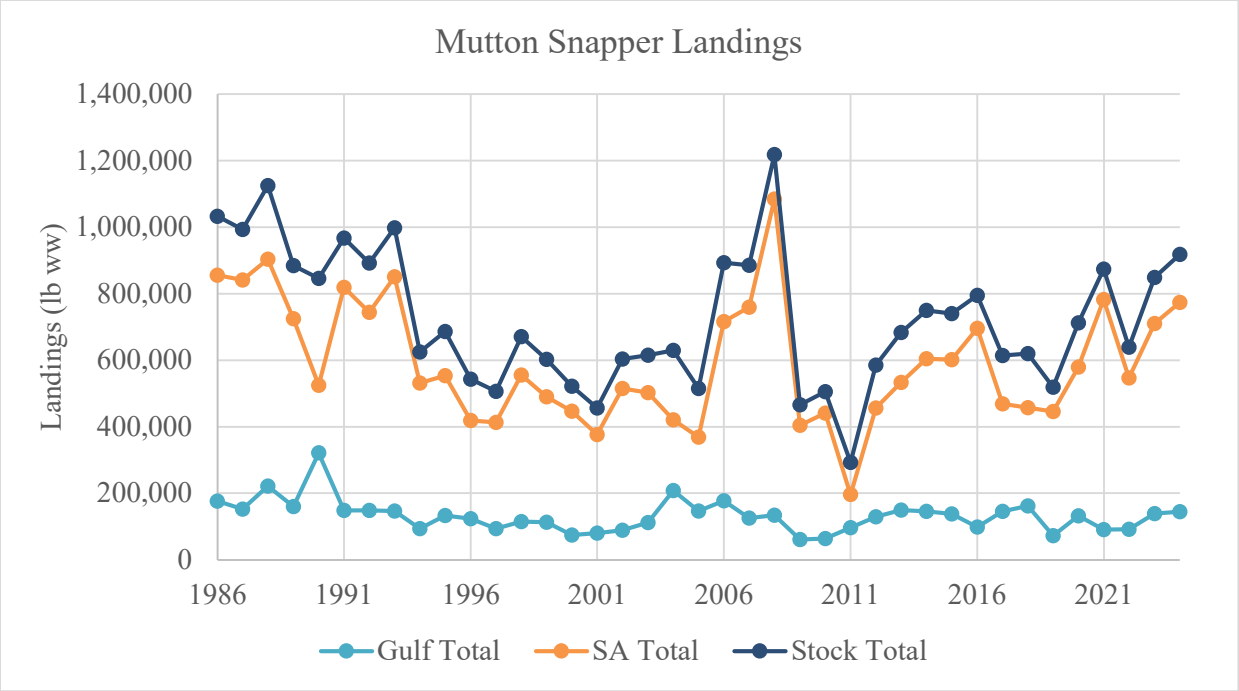

Figure 1.3.1. Southeastern U.S. mutton snapper landings from 1986 – 2024.
Source: Table 1.3.5.

1.4 Yellowtail Snapper

Stock Assessment

SEDAR 96 (2025) is the most recent stock assessment of southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper and estimated the stock to be healthy (not overfished or undergoing overfishing) using data through 2023. The assessment was inclusive of private recreational vessel landings estimates from SRFS (as also used in SEDAR 79 [2024]). Results of the yellowtail snapper stock assessment including current stock status determination criteria are shown in Table 1.4.1.

Table 1.4.1. Summary of benchmarks and reference points used in the SEDAR 96 assessment for yellowtail snapper. SSB is in metric tons (male and female combined SSB), whereas F is a harvest rate (total biomass killed all ages / total biomass age 1+). An SPR proxy of 30% is presented. Values highlighted in **green** indicate the stock is neither overfished, nor undergoing overfishing.

Criteria	Definition	Value
$F_{MSYProxy}$	Equilibrium F to achieve 30% SPR, per year	0.398
MFMT	$F_{MSYProxy,}$ per year	0.398
$F_{Current}$	Geometric mean of $F_{2021\text{-}2023,}$ per year	0.263
$F_{Current}$/MFMT	Current overfishing status	**0.661**
$SSB_{MSYProxy}$	Equilibrium SSB at $F_{30\%SPR,}$ in metric tons	1,817
MSST	0.75 * $SSB_{30\%SPR,}$ in metric tons	1,362
$SSB_{Current}$	SSB in 2023, in metric tons	2,518
$SSB_{Current}/SSB_{MSYProxy}$	Stock status based on $SSB_{30\%SPR}$	1.386
$SSB_{Current}$/MSST	Stock status based on MSST	**1.845**

The Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs met in February 2025 to review the SEDAR 96 stock assessment and yield projections. The South Atlantic Council defines OY for yellowtail snapper as the yield corresponding to the stock ACL, which for yellowtail snapper, would also be equal to the ABC. The SSCs issued two joint consensus statements at the conclusion of their review of SEDAR 96. First, the SSCs agreed to use an alternative approach from the South Atlantic Council's P* approach in its ABC Control Rule for yellowtail snapper, because of differences in how the uncertainty in the OFL was characterized. Second, the SSCs used the arithmetic mean of the most recent five years of recruitment (2019-2023) for informing OFL and ABC projections. The OFL is set at $F_{30\%SPR}$, and the ABC is set at 75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$, for the years 2026 – 2028, as derived from the provided projections for 2024 – 2028. The resulting yellowtail snapper stock OFLs and ABCs for 2026 – 2028 are shown in Table 1.4.2, with the years 2024 – 2026 of the projections italicized and grayed out to show that those years will have passed before management changes can be implemented. For reference, the current OFL and ABC are shown in the legacy federal MRFSS units in Table 1.4.3.

Table 1.4.2. OFL and ABC values for yellowtail snapper recommended by the SSCs, inclusive of SRFS units for recreational private vessels, based on the results of SEDAR 96 (2025) and using an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at $F_{30\%SPR}$. Catch limits are in lb ww.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)
2024	*5,076,490*	*3,955,300*
2025	*4,767,230*	*3,973,088*
2026	*4,495,187*	*3,925,031*
2027	4,364,600	3,913,426
2028+	4,307,856	3,918,634

Table 1.4.3. Current OFL and ABC values for yellowtail snapper, in MRFSS units and using an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at $F_{30\%SPR}$. Catch limits are in lb ww. These values are not directly comparable to those in Table 1.4.2.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (P* = 0.375)
2025+	4,510,000	4,050,000

Current Regulations

As mentioned, yellowtail snapper is managed separately by the Councils with some different management measures occurring in each jurisdiction. For example, while the South Atlantic Council uses sector allocations for yellowtail snapper, the Gulf Council does not. A summary of yellowtail snapper management measures, except catch limits, are shown in Table 1.4.4.

Table 1.4.4. Current management measures for yellowtail snapper by Council jurisdiction.

Species	Region	Jurisdictional Apportionment of ABC	Fishing Year	Daily Bag Limit	Trip Limit	Min Size Limit	Sector Allocations
Yellowtail Snapper	**Gulf**	**25%**	Aug 1 - Jul 31	10 fish per person within 10-snapper aggregate	none	12" TL both sectors	None
	South Atlantic	**75%**	Aug 1 - Jul 31	10 fish per person within 10-snapper aggregate	none	12" TL both sectors	52.56% Com 47.44% Rec

Landings

Yellowtail snapper landings have varied from 1992 through 2024, with most occurring in the South Atlantic (Table 1.4.5 and Figure 1.4.1). Landings prior to 1992 are highly uncertain and subject to a very low frequency of dockside intercepts (SEDAR 96 2025). Within each jurisdiction, sector landings have differed with the majority of landings in the Gulf occurring by the commercial sector, but landings from both sectors being similar in the South Atlantic (Table 1.4.5).

Table 1.4.5. Southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper landings from 1992 – 2024. Comm = commercial. Rec = recreational. Data are in lb ww. Recreational landings are inclusive of SRFS for recreational private vessels and MRIP-FES for recreational shore landings.

Year	Gulf Comm	SA Comm	Gulf Rec	SA Rec	Gulf Total	SA Total	Stock Total
1992	186,285	1,630,890	179,968	1,134,783	366,253	2,765,673	3,131,926
1993	240,496	2,111,379	118,869	1,875,055	359,365	3,986,434	4,345,799
1994	255,995	1,907,487	83,063	1,369,322	339,058	3,276,809	3,615,867
1995	444,609	1,395,779	79,928	1,469,725	524,537	2,865,504	3,390,041
1996	485,884	968,758	52,865	934,412	538,749	1,903,170	2,441,919
1997	221,334	1,451,911	50,246	867,038	271,580	2,318,949	2,590,529
1998	340,070	1,184,746	47,803	815,725	387,873	2,000,471	2,388,345
1999	598,963	1,246,942	74,094	588,532	673,057	1,835,474	2,508,530
2000	357,030	1,234,971	25,123	572,003	382,153	1,806,974	2,189,127
2001	173,518	1,247,286	35,491	491,779	209,009	1,739,065	1,948,074
2002	286,472	1,124,280	47,834	697,121	334,306	1,821,401	2,155,707
2003	444,233	963,000	76,917	1,141,809	521,150	2,104,809	2,625,960
2004	471,274	1,009,274	89,446	1,144,999	560,720	2,154,273	2,714,993
2005	528,277	796,134	43,065	587,864	571,342	1,383,998	1,955,340
2006	524,561	711,811	120,478	1,142,283	645,039	1,854,094	2,499,133
2007	302,648	675,952	79,217	1,317,197	381,865	1,993,149	2,375,014
2008	332,936	1,037,783	119,292	1,824,381	452,228	2,862,164	3,314,393
2009	685,747	1,273,409	47,456	672,523	733,203	1,945,932	2,679,134
2010	364,699	1,297,785	46,207	755,103	410,906	2,052,888	2,463,794
2011	430,470	1,426,900	76,365	689,990	506,835	2,116,890	2,623,725
2012	395,974	1,678,561	44,907	848,936	440,881	2,527,497	2,968,378
2013	394,156	1,668,131	66,675	1,227,572	460,831	2,895,703	3,356,534
2014	466,969	1,544,093	59,093	1,668,607	526,062	3,212,700	3,738,762
2015	504,193	1,652,524	89,347	1,155,340	593,540	2,807,864	3,401,404
2016	317,794	1,943,368	65,233	1,253,097	383,027	3,196,465	3,579,492
2017	687,627	2,093,931	344,835	1,137,730	1,032,462	3,231,661	4,264,123
2018	532,942	1,421,476	87,018	1,154,395	619,960	2,575,871	3,195,831
2019	490,868	1,679,344	93,244	680,541	584,112	2,359,885	2,943,997
2020	218,733	1,177,277	100,181	1,100,888	318,914	2,278,165	2,597,079
2021	248,446	1,387,338	175,792	1,263,395	424,238	2,650,733	3,074,971
2022	304,302	1,474,795	301,012	1,259,034	605,314	2,733,829	3,339,143
2023	224,792	1,230,663	176,028	788,225	400,820	2,018,888	2,419,709
2024	233,400	1,212,436	176,865	799,580	410,265	2,012,016	2,422,280

Source: Commercial data are from a March 2026 data request to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center. Recreational data are from March 2026 data requests from the SRHS, SRFS, and MRIP.

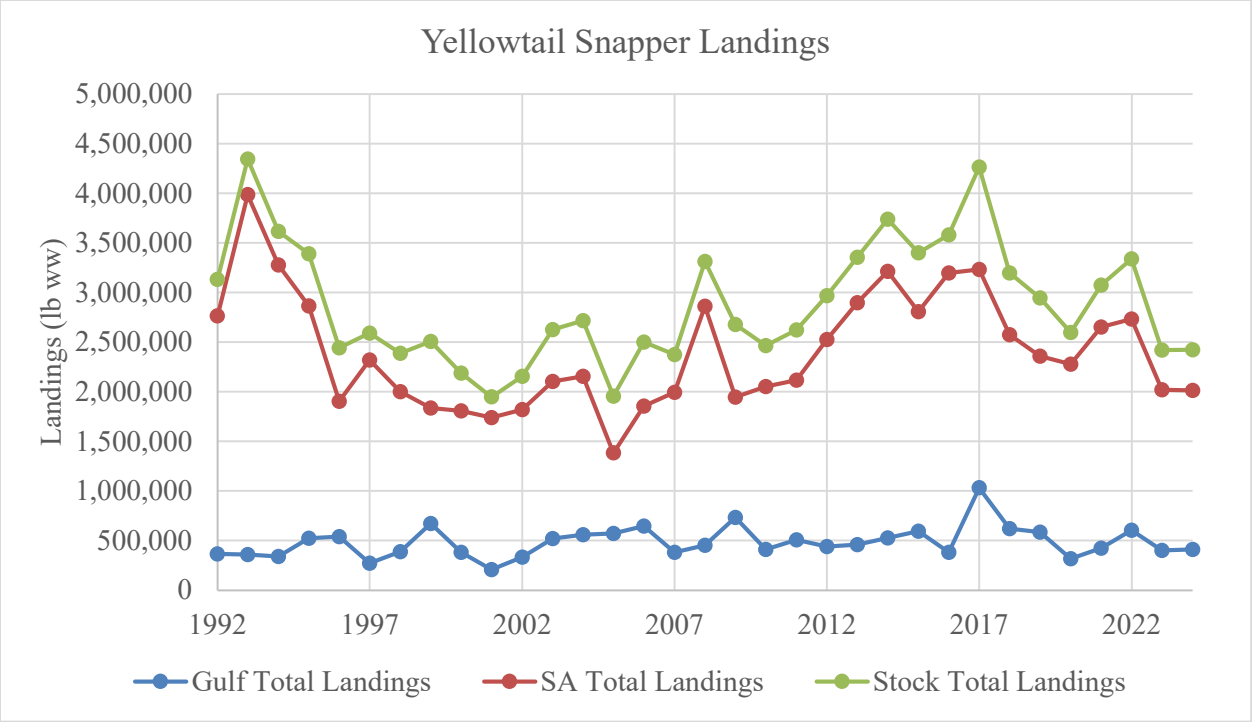

Figure 1.4.1. Southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper landings from 1992 – 2024.
Source: Table 1.4.5.

CHAPTER 2. MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

2.1 Action 1: Modification of Southeastern U.S. Mutton Snapper Overfishing Limit (OFL), Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Jurisdictional Apportionment, and Regional Annual Catch Limits (ACLs)

Alternative 1: No Action. Maintain the current OFL, ABC, jurisdictional apportionment of the ABC, and regional ACLs for southeastern U.S. mutton snapper. The jurisdictional apportionment of the mutton snapper stock ABC by region is based on the formula established in the Generic ACL/Accountability Measures (AM) Amendment and Comprehensive ACL Amendment (weighting 50% to the average catch history from 1990-2008 + 50% to the average catch history from 2006-2008), whereby 82% of the stock ABC is apportioned to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council), and 18% is apportioned to the Gulf Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council). The apportionment for mutton snapper was derived, in part, using data generated from the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS). Each region's stock ACL equals its apportionment of the stock ABC. Catch limits are shown below in pounds (lb) whole weight (ww).

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	**ABC (P* = 0.375)**	**Gulf Apportionment and ABC (Gulf ACL) (18%)**	**South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (82%)**
2025+	850,077	798,300	143,694	654,606

Note: *Alternative 1 is inclusive of MRFSS. The SEDAR 79 (2024) stock assessment used the State of Florida's State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS) for recreational private vessel landings, the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) for headboat landings. Because the SEDAR 79 stock assessment, and the SSCs' catch limit recommendations from that assessment, are considered to be consistent with the best scientific information available, Alternative 1 is not a viable alternative.*

Alternative 2: Modify the OFL and ABC and retain the current jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC for southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and establish regional ACLs based on the recommendations of the Councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSCs) for 2027 – 2028 and subsequent years. Each region's ACL will be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC. For mutton snapper, 82% of the stock ABC is apportioned to the South Atlantic Council,

and 18% is apportioned to the Gulf Council. Catch limits shown below are in pounds (lb) whole weight (ww) and rounded to the nearest whole pound.[1]

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)	Gulf Apportionment of ABC (ACL) (18%)	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (82%)
2027	3,313,030	2,752,377	495,428	2,256,949
2028+	3,270,355	2,772,615	499,071	2,273,544

Alternative 3: Modify the OFL and ABC and the jurisdictional apportionment of the mutton snapper ABC and the regional ACLs using the average of historic and recent landings, and the following reference period, based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2027 – 2028 and subsequent years. Each region's ACL will be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC. Monitoring of landings for mutton snapper will be inclusive of SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings. Catch limits shown below are in lb ww and rounded to the nearest whole pound.

Option 3a: Use 50% of the average landings from 2004 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023. This method apportions 16% of the stock ABC to the Gulf Council, and 84% to the South Atlantic Council.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)	Gulf Apportionment and ABC/ACL (16%)	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (84%)
2027	3,313,030	2,752,377	440,380	2,311,997
2028+	3,270,355	2,772,615	443,618	2,328,997

Option 3b: Use 50% of the average landings from 2014 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023. This method apportions 15% of the stock ABC to the Gulf Council, and 85% to the South Atlantic Council.

[1] For **Alternatives 2 & 3** in Action 1, monitoring of the landings for mutton snapper will be inclusive of SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)	Gulf Apportionment and ABC/ACL (15%)	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (85%)
2027	3,313,030	2,752,377	412,857	2,339,520
2028+	3,270,355	2,772,615	415,892	2,356,723

Discussion:

The SEDAR 79 (2024) stock assessment of southeastern U.S. mutton snapper estimated the stock to be not overfished or experiencing overfishing as of 2023. The Councils' SSCs reviewed the stock assessment in February 2025, and recommended updated OFL and ABC values. Mutton snapper is a single stock throughout its range and is managed by the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, with the stock ABC being apportioned between the Councils. The SEDAR 79 stock assessment used SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings, and is consistent with the best scientific information available. Because the current jurisdictional apportionment of the mutton snapper stock ABC is inclusive of recreational estimates from MRFSS, the Councils are considering options to update this jurisdictional apportionment, and their regional ACLs for mutton snapper. This is due in part to MRFSS no longer being considered consistent with BSIA.

Alternative 1 would maintain the current OFL, ABC, jurisdictional apportionment of the ABC, and regional ACLs for southeastern U.S. mutton snapper. In 2012, NMFS implemented comprehensive amendments to the Councils' fishery management plans to set ACLs for numerous stocks (GMFMC 2011, SAFMC 2012). In these amendments, the jurisdictional apportionment of the mutton snapper stock ABC by region was based on weighting 50% to the average catch history from 1990-2008 + 50% to the average catch history from 2006-2008. The result was a jurisdictional apportionment of 82% of the mutton snapper stock ABC to the South Atlantic Council, and 18% apportioned to the Gulf Council. Each region's stock ACL equals its apportionment of the stock ABC. Setting the ACL equal to the ABC is common for both Councils when a stock is healthy across its range and overruns of the stock ACL or ABC are uncommon. The apportionment and catch limits described in **Alternative 1** used MRFSS recreational estimates, which are no longer considered consistent with the best scientific information available for mutton snapper (see Appendix B). Further, the Councils' SSCs have made revised OFL and ABC recommendations (see Table 1.3.2) based on the SEDAR 79 (2024) stock assessment of mutton snapper, the results of which are considered to be consistent with the best scientific information available. Because **Alternative 1** is inconsistent with this updated scientific advice, is not a viable alternative.

Alternative 2 would retain the current jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC for mutton snapper and establish regional ACLs based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2027 – 2028 and subsequent years. Like **Alternative 1**, **Alternative 2** would apportion 82% of the mutton snapper stock ABC to the South Atlantic Council, and 18% to the Gulf Council. However, consistent with the data used in SEDAR 79 to generate the SSCs' updated catch advice, landings and quota monitoring for mutton snapper will be inclusive of SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings,

and SRHS for headboat landings. Specifically, for MRIP charter for-hire landings from Areas D and E (Figure 1.1.3), ACL monitoring will be subject to applying the ratios listed in Table 1.1.1 for determining which landings are attributed to which Council. So, in practice, while **Alternative 2** uses the same percentages as those established in 2012 under **Alternative 1**, **Alternative 2** will use the updated landings monitoring method and catch advice from the Councils' SSCs. Each Council's regional ACL would continue to be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC since the mutton snapper stock is healthy and catch limit overruns are uncommon.

Alternative 3 would modify the jurisdictional apportionment of the mutton snapper ABC and the regional ACLs using the average of historic and recent landings. This method provides options for two reference periods of landings, and then weights equally at 50% each the average landings from the entire reference period, and then 50% from the most recent three years of the same reference period. **Alternative 3** would establish this modified jurisdictional apportionment and the regional ACLs based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2027 – 2028 and subsequent years. Like **Alternative 2**, **Alternative 3** would monitor landings and set catch limits inclusive of SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings. And again, for MRIP charter for-hire landings from Areas D and E (Figure 1.1.3), quota monitoring will be subject to applying the ratios listed in Table 1.1.1 for determining which landings are attributed to which Council.

Alternative 3 offers two options for reference periods: 2004 – 2023 (**Option 3a**), and 2014 – 2023 (**Option 3b**). Applying the average of historic and recent landings approach to the 20-year reference period in **Option 3a** (50% of the average landings from 2004 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023) results in 16% of the mutton snapper stock ABC being apportioned to the Gulf Council, and 84% to the South Atlantic Council. Using the 10-year reference period in **Option 3b** (50% of the average landings from 2014 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023) results in 15% of the mutton snapper stock ABC being apportioned to the Gulf Council, and 85% to the South Atlantic Council. Despite including twice as many years of landings history as **Option 3a**, **Option 3b** results in a nearly identical jurisdictional apportionment of the ABC between the Councils. Each region's ACL would be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC, since the mutton snapper stock is healthy and catch limit overruns are uncommon. By using the most recent three years in each half of the historic and recent landings approach (**Options 3a** and **3b**), the most recent trends in the fishery are most influential in determining the outcome of the apportionment. This is in contrast to **Alternative 2**, which uses a percentage that was informed by a much older reference period (50% to the average catch history from 1990-2008 + 50% to the average catch history from 2006-2008). Thus, while **Alternative 2** may provide consistency in methodology for determining the jurisdictional apportionment, the options in **Alternative 3** are more likely to capture recent changes in fishery dynamics and be more representative of future mutton snapper landings. For that same reason, **Option 3b** may also be more likely to capture the recent changes as a more recent time series is considered. Comparing the proposed catch limits in **Alternative 2** and the options in **Alternative 3** against the historical landings for mutton snapper by Council over the last three years (Table 1.3.5) suggests that neither alternative would be expected to result in fishery closures due to a Council's apportionment of the mutton snapper stock ACL being exceeded (see also Appendix D).

2.2 Action 2: Modification of Southeastern U.S. Yellowtail Snapper, OFL, ABC, Jurisdictional Apportionment and Regional ACLs

Alternative 1: No Action. Maintain the current OFL, ABC, jurisdictional apportionment of the ABC, and regional ACLs for southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper. The jurisdictional apportionment of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC by region is based on the formula established in the Generic ACL/AM Amendment and Comprehensive ACL Amendment (weighting 50% to the average catch history from 1993-2008 + 50% to the average catch history from 2006-2008), whereby 75% of the stock ABC is apportioned to the South Atlantic Council, and 25% is apportioned to the Gulf Council. The apportionment for yellowtail snapper was inclusive of MRFSS. The South Atlantic Council's regional ACL equals its apportionment of the stock ABC. The Gulf Council's regional ACL is reduced by 11% from its jurisdictional apportionment of the ABC using the Gulf Council's ACL/ACT Control Rule. Catch limits are shown below in lb ww.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (P* = 0.375)	Gulf Apportionment and ABC (25%)	Gulf ACL (89% of Gulf ABC)	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (75%)
2025+	4,510,000	4,050,000	1,012,000	901,125	3,037,500

Note: *Alternative 1 is inclusive of MRFSS. The SEDAR 96 (2025) stock assessment uses SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings. Because the SEDAR 96 stock assessment, and the SSCs' catch limit recommendations from that assessment, are consistent with the best scientific information available, Alternative 1 is not a viable alternative.*

Alternative 2: Modify the OFL and ABC and retain the current jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC for southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper and establish regional ACLs based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2026 – 2028 and subsequent years. The South Atlantic Council's regional ACL will be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC. For yellowtail snapper, 75% of the stock ABC is apportioned to the South Atlantic Council, and 25% is apportioned to the Gulf Council. Catch limits shown below are in lb ww and rounded to the nearest whole pound.[2]

> **Option 2a:** The Gulf regional ACL will be reduced 11% from the Gulf jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC, consistent with the buffer established in the Gulf Generic ACL/Accountability Measures Amendment in 2012.

[2] For **Alternatives 2 – 4** in Action 2, monitoring of landings for yellowtail snapper will be inclusive of SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings.

Option 2b: The Gulf regional ACL will be set equal to the Gulf jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)	Gulf Apportionment and ABC/ACL (2b) (25%)	Gulf ACL @ 89% of Gulf ABC (2a)	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (75%)
2026	4,495,187	3,925,031	981,258	873,320	2,943,773
2027	4,364,600	3,913,426	978,357	870,738	2,935,070
2028+	4,307,856	3,918,634	979,659	871,897	2,938,976

Alternative 3: Modify the OFL and ABC and the jurisdictional apportionment of the yellowtail snapper ABC and the regional ACLs using the average of historic and recent landings, based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2026 – 2028 and subsequent years. Use 50% of the average landings from 2004 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023. This method apportions 17% of the stock ABC to the Gulf Council, and 83% to the South Atlantic Council. The South Atlantic Council's regional ACL will be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC. Catch limits shown below are in lb ww and rounded to the nearest whole pound.

Option 3a: The Gulf regional ACL will be reduced 11% from the Gulf jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC, consistent with the buffer established in the Gulf Generic ACL/Accountability Measures Amendment in 2012.

Option 3b: The Gulf regional ACL will be set equal to the Gulf jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)	Gulf Apportionment and ABC/ACL (3b) (17%)	Gulf ACL @ 89% of Gulf ABC (3a)	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (83%)
2026	4,495,187	3,925,031	667,255	593,857	3,297,026
2027	4,364,600	3,913,426	665,282	592,101	3,287,278
2028+	4,307,856	3,918,634	666,168	592,890	3,291,653

Alternative 4: Modify the OFL and ABC and the jurisdictional apportionment of the yellowtail snapper ABC and the regional ACLs using the average of historic and recent landings, based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2026 – 2028 and subsequent years. Use 50% of the average landings from 2014 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023. This method apportions 17% of the stock ABC to the Gulf Council, and 83% to the South Atlantic Council. The South Atlantic Council's regional ACL will be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC. Catch limits shown below are in lb ww and rounded to the nearest whole pound.

Option 4a: The Gulf regional ACL will be reduced 11% from the Gulf jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC, consistent with the buffer established in the Gulf Generic ACL/Accountability Measures Amendment in 2012.

Option 4b: The Gulf regional ACL will be set equal to the Gulf jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)	Gulf Apportionment and ABC/ACL (4b) (17%)	Gulf ACL @ 89% of Gulf ABC (4a)	South Atlantic Apportionment and ABC/ACL (83%)
2026	4,495,187	3,925,031	667,255	593,857	3,297,026
2027	4,364,600	3,913,426	665,282	592,101	3,287,278
2028+	4,307,856	3,918,634	666,168	592,890	3,291,653

Discussion:

The SEDAR 96 (2025) stock assessment of southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper estimated the stock to be not overfished or experiencing overfishing as of 2023. The Councils' SSCs reviewed the stock assessment in February 2025, and recommended updated OFL and ABC values. Yellowtail snapper is a single stock throughout its range and is managed by the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, with the stock ABC being apportioned between the Councils. The SEDAR 96 stock assessment used SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP units for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS units for headboat landings, and is consistent with the best scientific information available. Because the current jurisdictional apportionment of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC is inclusive of recreational estimates from MRFSS, the Councils are considering options to update this jurisdictional apportionment and their regional ACLs for yellowtail snapper. Additionally, the Gulf regional ACL for yellowtail snapper is set 11% below its apportionment of the yellowtail snapper ABC. This buffer was created to account for management uncertainty in the Gulf Council's Generic ACL/AM Amendment (GMFMC 2011). This action contains options to reconsider that buffer.

Alternative 1 would maintain the current OFL, ABC, jurisdictional apportionment of the ABC, and regional ACLs for southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper. Like for mutton snapper in Action 1, in 2012, NMFS implemented the Councils' jurisdictional apportionment of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC by region based on weighting 50% to the average catch history from 1993-2008 + 50% to the average catch history from 2006-2008. The result was a jurisdictional apportionment of 75% of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC to the South Atlantic Council, and 25% apportioned to the Gulf Council. The South Atlantic Council's stock ACL is set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC. Also, in 2012 (GMFMC 2011), the Gulf Council used its ACL/ACT Control Rule to reduce its regional ACL by 11% relative to its apportionment of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC. The Gulf Council performed this same measure for several stocks along with yellowtail snapper that were popularly targeted, but at the time did not have defined ACLs prior to 2012. Setting the ACL equal to the ABC is common for both Councils when a stock is healthy across its range and overruns of the stock ACL are uncommon. Also,

like mutton snapper, the apportionment and catch limits described in **Alternative 1** were inclusive of MRFSS, which is no longer considered consistent with the best scientific information available for yellowtail snapper (see Appendix B). Further, the Councils' SSCs have made revised OFL and ABC recommendations (see Table 1.4.2) based on the SEDAR 96 (2025) stock assessment of yellowtail snapper, the results of which are considered to be consistent with the best scientific information available. Because **Alternative 1** is inconsistent with this updated scientific advice, is not a viable alternative.

Of note, the fishing season in the Gulf and South Atlantic for yellowtail snapper begins on August 1 and closes on July 31 of the following year (GMFMC 2016, SAFMC 2016). Thus, the current catch limits under **Alternative 1** apply to that fishing year. For **Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3**, in order to apply the current fishing year to the SSC-proposed catch limits from Table 1.4.2, the stock OFL and stock ABC for yellowtail snapper for 2026 will apply to the 2026/2027 fishing year; the OFL and ABC for 2027 to the 2027/2028 fishing year; and the OFL and ABC for 2028 to the 2028/2029 fishing year and subsequent fishing years (Table 2.2.1). The 2026 catch limits are linked to the 2026-2027 fishing year. This method uses the inherent estimation of SSB and productivity in the same projection year in which the fishing year begins, which would invariably be more conservative for the portion of the following year before the fishing year concludes. Alternatively, using the 2027 catch limit for the 2026-2027 fishing year would overestimate productivity and SSB in the year in which the fishing year starts (2026) compared to the projection year (2027). While the latter scenario is unlikely to result in overfishing for yellowtail, in principle and under tighter circumstances, it could.

Table 2.2.1. SSCs recommended OFL and ABC calendar year values for yellowtail snapper, based on the results of SEDAR 96 (2025) and using an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at $F_{30\%SPR}$. Catch limits are in lb ww and are shown as applicable to the current yellowtail snapper fishing year regulations.

	OFL ($F_{30\%SPR}$)	**ABC (75% of $F_{30\%SPR}$)**
2026/2027	4,495,187	3,925,031
2027/2028	4,364,600	3,913,426
2028/2029+	4,307,856	3,918,634

Alternative 2 would retain the current jurisdictional apportionment of the stock ABC for yellowtail snapper and establish regional ACLs based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2026 – 2028 and subsequent years. Like **Alternative 1**, **Alternative 2** would apportion 75% of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC to the South Atlantic Council, and 25% to the Gulf Council. However, consistent with the data used in SEDAR 96 to generate the SSCs' updated catch advice, landings and quota monitoring for yellowtail snapper will use SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings. Specifically, for MRIP charter for-hire landings from Areas D and E (Figure 1.1.3), quota monitoring will be subject to applying the ratios listed in Table 1.1.1 for determining which landings are attributed to which Council. So, in practice, while **Alternative 2** uses the same percentages as those established in 2012 under **Alternative 1**, **Alternative 2** will use the updated landings monitoring method and catch advice from the

Councils' SSCs. This jurisdictional apportionment may no longer be accurate to reflect current fishery dynamics since it is informed by the same reference period of years as **Alternative 1**. The South Atlantic Council's regional ACL will continue to be set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC, since the stock is healthy and catch limit overruns are uncommon. As stated under **Alternative 1**, the Gulf Council typically adopts a similar approach when a stock is healthy and catch limit overruns are uncommon. Here in **Alternative 2**, two options for modifying the Gulf regional ACL relative to the Gulf Council's apportionment of the stock ABC are presented. **Option 2a** would retain the current 11% buffer between the Gulf Council's apportionment of the stock ABC and the Gulf regional ACL, which was established under the Generic ACL/AM Amendment (GMFMC 2011). Of note, if the current Gulf landings for 2020/2021 through 2023/2024, and the results of the SEDAR 96 (2025) stock assessment, are applied to the Gulf ACL/ACT Control Rule for yellowtail snapper, the buffer between the Gulf ACL and Gulf ACT would decrease to 8%. An option for an 8% buffer is not presented here (or elsewhere in Action 2) due to the Gulf Council's established practice of not using an ACT when a stock is considered healthy and seasonal closures are not anticipated. **Option 2b**, in recognition of the health of the yellowtail snapper stock per the SEDAR 96 stock assessment, would set the Gulf regional ACL equal to the Gulf Council's apportionment of the stock ABC for yellowtail snapper.

Alternative 3 and **Alternative 4** would modify the jurisdictional apportionment of the yellowtail snapper ABC and the regional ACLs using the average of historic and recent landings and would establish this modified jurisdictional apportionment and the regional ACLs based on the recommendations of the Councils' SSCs for 2026 – 2028 and subsequent years. Both **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4** would monitor landings and set catch limits using SRFS for recreational private vessel landings, MRIP for federal for-hire and recreational shore landings, and SRHS for headboat landings, and would retain the South Atlantic Council's regional ACL being set equal to its apportionment of the stock ABC. And again, for MRIP charter for-hire landings from Areas D and E (Figure 1.1.3), quota monitoring will be subject to applying the ratios listed in Table 1.1.1 for determining which landings are attributed to which Council. Also, like **Alternative 2**, two options for modifying the Gulf regional ACL relative to the Gulf Council's apportionment of the stock ABC are presented in both **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4**. **Option 3a** in **Alternative 3** and **Option 4a** in **Alternative 4** would retain the current 11% buffer between the Gulf Council's apportionment of the stock ABC and the Gulf regional ACL, which was established under the Generic ACL/AM Amendment (GMFMC 2011). **Option 3b** in **Alternative 3** and **Option 4b** in **Alternative 4** would, in recognition of the health of the yellowtail snapper stock per the SEDAR 96 stock assessment, set the Gulf regional ACL equal to the Gulf Council's apportionment of the stock ABC for yellowtail snapper.

For determining the jurisdictional apportionment, **Alternative 3** applies the average of historic and recent landings approach to a 20-year reference period by using 50% of the average landings from 2004 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023). This method results in 17% of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC being apportioned to the Gulf Council, and 83% to the South Atlantic Council. **Alternative 4** applies the average of historic and recent landings approach to a 10-year reference period by using 50% of the average landings from 2014 – 2023 and 50% of the average landings from 2021 – 2023). This method also results in 17% of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC being apportioned to the Gulf Council, and 83% to the South

Atlantic Council. Using the average of historic and recent landings approach focuses on the most recent trends in the fishery when determining the outcome of the apportionment. This is in contrast to **Alternative 2**, which uses a percentage that was informed by a much older reference period (50% to the average catch history from 1993-2008 + 50% to the average catch history from 2006-2008). Thus, while **Alternative 2** may provide consistency in methodology for determining the jurisdictional apportionment, **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4** are more likely to capture recent changes in fishery dynamics and be more representative of future yellowtail snapper landings. Normally, **Alternative 4** would be more likely than **Alternative 3** to capture the recent changes as a more recent time series is considered. However, in this case, both **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4** result in the same jurisdictional apportionment between the Councils for yellowtail snapper and are therefore identical with regard to effects.

Comparing the proposed catch limits in **Alternative 2** and the options in **Alternative 3** and **Alternative 4** against the historical landings for yellowtail snapper by Council over the last three years (Table 1.4.5, Appendix D) suggests that none of these alternatives will result in fishery closures for the South Atlantic Council due to its apportionment of the yellowtail snapper stock ACL being exceeded. However, for **Option 3a** in **Alternative 3** and **Option 4a** in **Alternative 4**, the proposed Gulf-specific ACT buffered 11% below the Gulf ACL is less than the highest estimated landings from the last three years (2022, in 2022 – 2024, Table 1.4.5), which may indicate Gulf vulnerability to a seasonal closure. Alternatively, for **Option 3b** in **Alternative 3** and **Option 4b** in **Alternative 4**, the proposed Gulf-specific ACL is approximately 10% above the highest estimated landings from the last three years (2022, in 2022 – 2024), which may indicate somewhat less vulnerability to a seasonal closure than **Option 3a** and **Option 4a**.

2.3 Action 3: Modification of Southeastern U.S. Mutton Snapper Sector Allocations in the South Atlantic

Alternative 1: No Action. Retain the current commercial and recreational sector allocations as 17.02% and 82.98%, respectively, of the current South Atlantic total annual catch limit for mutton snapper.

Alternative 2. Allocate 17.02% of the revised total annual catch limit for mutton snapper to the commercial sector and 82.98% of the revised total annual catch limit for mutton snapper to the recreational sector.

Alternative 3. Allocate 12.71% of the revised total annual catch limit for mutton snapper to the commercial sector and 87.29% of the revised total annual catch limit for mutton snapper to the recreational sector.

Alternative 4. Allocate 11.45% of the revised total annual catch limit for mutton snapper to the commercial sector and 88.55% of the revised total annual catch limit for mutton snapper to the recreational sector.

Alternative 5. Allocate 9.29% of the revised total annual catch limit for mutton snapper to the commercial sector in year one, 9.69% in year two, and 9.98% in year three and thereafter. Allocate 90.71% of the revised total annual catch limit for mutton snapper to the recreational sector in year one, 90.31% in year two, and 90.02% in year three and thereafter.

Alternative 6. Allocate 9.85% of the revised total annual catch limit for mutton snapper to the commercial sector in year one, 10.24% in year two, and 10.53% in year three and thereafter. Allocate 90.15% of the revised total annual catch limit for mutton snapper to the recreational sector in year one, 89.76% in year two, and 89.47% in year three and thereafter.

Alternative	Commercial Percentage	Recreational Percentage
Alternative 1 (No Action)	17.02%	82.98%
Alternative 2	17.02%	82.98%
Alternative 3	12.71%	87.29%
Alternative 4	11.45%	88.55%
Alternative 5	9.29% (yr 1) 9.69% (yr 2) 9.98% (yr 3)	90.71% (yr 1) 90.31% (yr 2) 90.02% (yr 3)
Alternative 6	9.85% (yr 1) 10.24% (yr 2) 10.53% (yr 3+)	90.15% (yr 1) 89.76% (yr 2) 89.47% (yr 3+)

Discussion:

The current sector allocations for mutton snapper in the South Atlantic (**Alternative 1, No Action)** were calculated by weighing 50% of the average catch history from 1990-2008 + 50% of the average catch history from 2006-2008. The commercial ACL is expressed in lb ww, whereas the recreational ACL is expressed in numbers of fish. To calculate the recreational ACL, the total and commercial ACLs were redetermined in numbers of fish using the average weight of a commercially caught mutton snapper (7.68 lb ww). Then, the recreational ACL in numbers of fish was calculated by subtracting the commercial allocation in numbers of fish from the total ACL in numbers of fish (SAFMC 2017).

Alternative 2 would retain the current allocation percentages for each sector but apply them to the revised South Atlantic total ACL determined in Action 1. **Alternatives 3** and **4** would update the current allocation formula using average landings from either 2004 through 2023 (**Alternative 3**) or 2014 through 2023 (**Alternative 4),** and 2021 through 2023. **Alternatives 5** and **6** would use the methods outlined in the Split Reduction Method developed in Snapper Grouper Amendment 53 (SAFMC 2023). This method would allocate the total ACL proportional to each sector's usage based on either the most recent 3- (**Alternative 5)** or 5-years (**Alternative 6**) of landings for the first year. In subsequent years, any change in the total ACL in lb ww is divided between the sectors evenly and the recreational ACL will be converted to numbers of fish. This process will repeat each year until 2028, after which the sector ACLs and allocation percentages will remain in place until modified.

While **Alternative 2** carries forward the status quo sector allocations from **Alternative 1**, it does little to account for recent changes in fishery dynamics. **Alternatives 3** through **6** all use more recent landings data, and thereby more directly consider recent changes to fishery dynamics within the South Atlantic region. These four alternatives all result in an allocation shift from the commercial sector to the recreational sector, with the greatest shift occurring under **Alternative 5**. However, the differences between **Alternative 5** and **Alternative 6** are arguably narrow, as they are all less than one percent.

2.4 Action 4: Modification of Southeastern U.S. Yellowtail Snapper Sector Allocations in the South Atlantic

Alternative 1: No Action. Retain the current commercial and recreational sector allocations as 52.56% and 47.44%, respectively, of the current South Atlantic total annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper.

Alternative 2. Allocate 52.56% of the revised total annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper to the commercial sector and 47.44% of the revised total annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper to the recreational sector.

Alternative 3. Allocate 55.46% of the revised total annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper to the commercial sector and 47.44% of the revised total annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper to the recreational sector.

Alternative 4. Allocate 56.52% of the revised total annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper to the commercial sector and 43.48% of the revised total annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper to the recreational sector.

Alternative 5. Allocate 55.28% of the revised total annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper to the commercial sector in year one, 55.30% in year two, and 55.29% in year three and thereafter. Allocate 44.72% of the revised total annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper to the recreational sector in year one, 44.70% in year two, and 44.71% in year three and thereafter.

Alternative 6. Allocate 55.44% of the revised total annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper to the commercial sector in year one, 55.45% in year two, and 55.45% in year three and thereafter. Allocate 44.56% of the revised total annual catch limit for yellowtail snapper to the recreational sector in year one, 44.55% in year two, and 44.55% in year three and thereafter.

Alternative	Commercial Percentage	Recreational Percentage
Alternative 1 (No Action)	52.56%	47.44%
Alternative 2	52.56%	47.44%
Alternative 3	55.46%	44.54%
Alternative 4	56.52%	43.48%
Alternative 5	55.28% (yr 1) 55.30% (yr 2) 55.29% (yr 3+)	44.72% (yr 1) 44.70% (yr 2) 44.71% (yr 3+)
Alternative 6	55.44% (yr 1) 55.45% (yr 2) 55.45% (yr 3+)	44.56% (yr 1) 44.55% (yr 2) 44.55% (yr 3+)

Discussion:

The current yellowtail snapper South Atlantic sector allocations (**Alternative 1 No Action)** were calculated by weighing 50% of the average catch history from 1990-2008 + 50% of the average catch history from 2006-2008. **Alternative 2** would retain the current allocation percentages for each sector but apply them to the revised South Atlantic total ACL determined in Action 2. **Alternative 3** and **4** would update the current allocation formula using average landings from either 2004 through 2023 (**Alternative 3**) or 2014 through 2023 (**Alternative 4)** and 2021 through 2023. **Alternatives 5** and **6** would use the methods outlined in the Split Reduction Method developed in Snapper Grouper Amendment 53 (SAFMC 2023). This method would allocate the total ACL proportional to each sector's usage based on either the most recent 3- (**Alternative 5)** or 5-years (**Alternative 6**) of landings for the first year. In subsequent years, any change in the total ACL in lb ww is divided between the sectors evenly. This process will repeat each year until 2028 when the sector ACLs and allocation percentages will remain in place until modified.

Like in Action 3 for mutton snapper, **Alternative 2** carries forward the status quo sector allocations from **Alternative 1** and does little to account for recent changes in fishery dynamics. **Alternatives 3** through **6** all use more recent landings data, and thereby more directly consider recent changes to fishery dynamics for South Atlantic yellowtail snapper. These four alternatives all result in an allocation shift from the recreational sector to the commercial sector of between approximately 3 – 4%, with the greatest shift occurring under **Alternative 4**. The differences between **Alternative 3, Alternative 5** and **Alternative 6** are negligible, despite arriving at their respective values through different mathematical methods.

CHAPTER 3. LIST OF AGENCIES, ORGANIZATIONS, AND PERSONS CONSULTED

1. National Marine Fisheries Service:
   - Southeast Fisheries Science Center
   - Southeast Regional Office
     i. Protected Resources
     ii. Habitat Conservation
     iii. Sustainable Fisheries

2. NOAA General Counsel
3. U.S. Coast Guard
4. Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources/Marine Resources Division
5. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
6. Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
7. Mississippi Department of Marine Resources
8. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
9. North Carolina Department of Marine Fisheries
10. South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
11. Georgia Department of Natural Resources

CHAPTER 4. LIST OF PREPARERS

PREPARERS

Name	Expertise	Responsibility	Agency
Ryan Rindone	Fishery Biologist	Co-Lead – Amendment development, physical, biological, ecological, social, and administrative analyses	Gulf Council
Allie Iberle	Fishery Biologist	Co-Lead – Amendment development, physical, biological, ecological, social, and administrative analyses	South Atlantic Council
Kelli O'Donnell	Fishery Biologist	Co-Lead – Amendment development, physical, biological, ecological, and administrative analyses	SERO
Nikhil Mehta	Fishery Biologist	Co-Lead – Amendment development, physical, biological, ecological, and administrative analyses	SERO
Matt Freeman	Economist	Economic analyses	Gulf Council
David Records	Economist	Economic analyses	SERO
John Hadley	Economist	Economic analyses	South Atlantic Council
Christina Curtis	Anthropologist	Social analyses	South Atlantic Council
Annie Suitor	Anthropologist	Social analyses	Gulf Council
Adam Stemle	Economist	Economic analyses	SERO
Christina Package-Ward	Anthropologist	Social analyses	SERO
Mike Larkin	Fishery Biologist	Data analyses	SERO

REVIEWERS

Name	Expertise	Responsibility	Agency
Mara Levy	Attorney	Legal review	NOAA GC
Anne Kersting	Attorney	Legal review	NOAA GC
Scott Sandorf	Technical writer and editor	Regulatory writer	SERO
Scott Crosson	Economist	Review	SEFSC
Brent Stoffle	Social Scientist	Review	SEFSC
Jennifer Lee	Protected Resources	Review	SERO
Frank Helies	Fishery Biologist	Review	SERO
Rick DeVictor	Fishery Biologist	Review	SERO
John Froeschke	Fishery Biologist	Review	Gulf Council
Carrie Simmons	Fishery Biologist	Review	Gulf Council
Myra Brouwer	Fishery Biologist	Review	South Atlantic Council
John Carmichael	Fishery Biologist	Review	South Atlantic Council

NOAA GC = National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration General Counsel; SEFSC = Southeast Fisheries Science Center; SERO = Southeast Regional Office of the National Marine Fisheries Service

CHAPTER 5. REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A. HISTORY OF MANAGEMENT

This section focuses specifically on management modifications affecting southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper catch limits, sector allocations, and retention limits. A complete history of management for the Reef Fish FMP is available on the Gulf Council's website.[3] A complete history of management for the Snapper Grouper FMP is available on the South Atlantic Council's website.[4]

Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper – Gulf

Original Reef Fish FMP (GMFMC 1983), including environmental impact statement (EIS), regulatory impact review (RIR), and regulatory flexibility analysis (RFA) and implemented in November 1984, implemented regulations designed to rebuild declining reef fish stocks, included: (1) prohibitions on the use of fish traps, roller trawls, and powerhead-equipped spear guns within an inshore stressed area; (2) a minimum size limit of 13 inches total length (TL) for red snapper with the exceptions that for-hire boats were exempted until 1987 and each angler could keep 5 undersized fish; and, (3) data reporting requirements. It also established a calendar fishing year for managed reef fish species.

Amendment 1 to the Reef Fish FMP (GMFMC 1989), including an environmental assessment (EA), RIR, and IRFA, and implemented in May 1990, set objectives to stabilize long-term population levels of all reef fish species by establishing a survival rate of biomass into the stock of spawning age fish to achieve at least 20% spawning stock biomass per recruit by January 1, 2000. It allowed a 2-day possession limit for charter vessels and head boats on trips that extend beyond 24 hours, provided the vessel has two licensed operators aboard as required by the U.S. Coast Guard, and each passenger can provide a receipt to verify the length of the trip; established a longline and buoy gear boundary at the 50-fathom depth contour west of Cape San Blas, Florida, and the 20-fathom depth contour east of Cape San Blas, inshore of which the directed harvest of reef fish with longline gear and buoy gear was prohibited, and the retention of reef fish captured incidentally in other longline operations (e.g., sharks) was limited to the recreational daily bag limit; limited trawl vessels to the recreational size and daily bag limits of reef fish; established fish trap permits (up to 100 fish traps per permit holder); and established a commercial reef fish vessel permit. It also established a 12-inch total length (TL) minimum size limit on mutton and yellowtail snapper.

Amendment 31 to the Reef Fish FMP (GMFMC 2009), including a final SEIS, RIR and IRFA, implemented May 2010, prohibited the use of bottom longline gear shoreward of a line approximating the 35-fathom contour from June through August; established a longline endorsement; and restricted the total number of hooks onboard each reef fish bottom longline vessel to 1,000, of which only 750 may be rigged for fishing.

[3] https://gulfcouncil.org/fishery-management/implemented-amendments/reef-fish/
[4] https://safmc.net/fishery-management-plans/snapper-grouper/

Generic ACL/AM Amendment (GMFMC 2011), including a final SEIS, RIR and IRFA, implemented January 2012, addressed a requirement in the Reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act of 2006 to establish ACLs and AMs for federally managed species. This amendment also established a stock ACL of 725,000 lb gutted weight and ACT of 645,000 lb gutted weight for yellowtail snapper for the Gulf. However, the ACT was never used for management purposes. This amendment also established jurisdictional allocation between the South Atlantic and Gulf.

A **Framework Action to the Reef Fish FMP (GMFMC 2012)**, including EA, RIR and IRFA, implemented September 2013, increases the Gulf of Mexico yellowtail snapper annual catch limit from 725,000 lb round weight to 901,125 lb round weight, and removes the requirement to have onboard and use venting tools when releasing reef fish.

A **Framework Action to the Reef Fish FMP (GMFMC 2016)**, including EA, RIR and IRFA, implemented March 2017, changes the commercial and recreational yellowtail snapper fishing year so that it opens on August 1 and runs through July 31, each year. The framework action also modifies the circle hook requirement so that the use of circle hooks is not required while commercial fishing with natural bait for yellowtail snapper south of Cape Sable (the line extending due west from 25°09' N. latitude off the west coast of Monroe County, Florida, to the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils' shared boundary).

Amendment 44 to the Reef Fish FMP (GMFMC 2017) including EA, RIR and IRFA, implemented December 2017, standardized the MSST for certain reef fish species. The MSST is used to determine whether a stock is overfished; if the biomass of the stock falls below the threshold, then the stock is overfished. The MSST for several reef fish species was set equal to 50% of the biomass at MSY. This amendment was approved on December 21, 2017.

A **Framework Action to the Reef Fish FMP (GMFMC 2017)**, including EA, RIR and IRFA, implemented July 2018, removes the annual catch target (ACT) for mutton snapper and decreases the annual catch limit (ACL) to 134,424 pounds for 2018 and 139,392 pounds for 2019. The amendment also sets the recreational mutton snapper bag limit at 5-snapper per day within the 10-snapper aggregate bag limit and increases the commercial and recreational minimum size limit to 18 inches.

Amendment 48 to the Reef Fish FMP (GMFMC 2021) including EA, RIR and IRFA, implemented June 2022, modifies status determination criteria for reef fish species with undefined criteria. For stocks assessed across the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils' jurisdictions (goliath grouper, mutton snapper, yellowtail snapper, and black grouper), sets MSST using existing definitions of MSST defined by the South Atlantic Council. Set the MSST = $0.75*B_{MSY}$ for the remaining species. Also specifies an MSY proxy and MFMT consistent with definitions used for these species by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper – South Atlantic

Snapper Grouper FMP (SAFMC 1983)
The Snapper Grouper FMP included provisions to prevent growth overfishing in thirteen species in the snapper grouper complex and established a procedure for preventing overfishing in other

species; established minimum size limits for red snapper, yellowtail snapper, red grouper, Nassau grouper, and black sea bass; established a 4-inch trawl mesh size to achieve a 12-inch total length minimum size limit for vermilion snapper; and included additional harvest and gear limitations.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 4 (SAFMC 1992)
This amendment established a 12-inch total length minimum for yellowtail snapper in the South Atlantic.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 8 (SAFMC 1997)
This amendment established initial eligibility for two limited entry snapper grouper permits: a non-transferable permit with a 225-pound trip limit and transferrable unlimited landings permit in the South Atlantic.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 9 (SAFMC 1998)
Snapper grouper Amendment 9 established a recreational 20-fish snapper aggregate inclusive of all snappers that did not currently have a bag limit for the South Atlantic region.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 11 (SAFMC 1998)
Amendment 11 defined MSY for snapper grouper species, including yellowtail snapper, as a proxy of 30% static spawning potential ratio (SPR), the OY as 40% static SPR and the OFL as the fishing mortality rate (F) in excess of the fishing mortality rate at 30% static SPR, which is the snapper grouper MSY proxy.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 17A (SAFMC 2010)
This amendment required the use of non-stainless steel, and non-offset circle hooks, when fishing for or possessing snapper grouper species with hook and line gear north of 28º N Latitude. The circle hook requirement was not required below 28º N Latitude to exclude the yellowtail fishery, which is unable to use circle hooks.

Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment (SAFMC 2011)
This amendment established ACL Control Rule, ABC levels, ACLs, sector and jurisdictional allocations, recreational ACTs, and accountability measures for species not undergoing overfishing, including mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 15 (SAFMC 2013)
This amendment revised the total South Atlantic ACL and set it equal to the South Atlantic ABC based on the 2012 Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) stock assessment. Regulatory Amendment 15 also updated both the commercial and recreational sector allocations for the South Atlantic region.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 21 (SAFMC 2014)
Regulatory Amendment 21 modified the minimum stock size threshold (MSST) for select species (including yellowtail snapper) to 75% of spawning stock biomass at maximum sustainable yield (SSB_{MSY}) for the South Atlantic portion of the stock.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 25 (SAFMC 2016)
This amendment modified both the commercial and recreational yellowtail snapper fishing season from a calendar year to August 1 – July 31 in the South Atlantic.

Snapper Grouper Amendment 41 (SAFMC ?)
Amendment 41 specified the following for mutton snapper: MSY, MSST, ACL and OY, recreational ACT, increased the minimum size to 18 inches TL, designated spawning months for regulatory purposes, modified the recreational bag limit to 5 fish per person per day, and modified the commercial trip limit to 5 fish per person per day during the spawning months.

APPENDIX B. RECREATIONAL DATA COLLECTION PROGRAMS

Federal Data Collection Programs

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) created the MRFSS in 1979. In the Gulf, MRFSS collected recreational catch and effort data, including DWG species, beginning in 1981. MRFSS included both offsite telephone surveys and onsite interviews at marinas and other points where recreational anglers fish. In 2008, MRIP replaced MRFSS to meet increasing demand for more precise, accurate, and timely recreational catch estimates. Until 2013, recreational catch, effort, and participation were estimated through a suite of independent but complementary surveys: telephone surveys of households and for-hire vessel operators that collected information about recreational fishing activity and an angler intercept survey that collected information about the fish that were caught.

MRIP Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) began incorporating a new survey design in 2013. This new design addressed concerns regarding the validity of the survey approach, specifically that trips recorded during a given time period are representative of trips for a full day, by extending the time period dockside samplers stayed at an assigned location (Foster et al. 2018). The more complete temporal coverage with the new survey design provides for consistent increases or decreases in APAIS angler catch rate statistics, which are used in stock assessments and management, for at least some species (NMFS 2019).

To assess fishing effort in the for-hire component, MRIP samplers contact charter vessel operators (a weekly sample of 10% of the fleet) by telephone to conduct the For-Hire Telephone Survey (FHTS) for fishing effort. Charter vessel operators are required to report all trips taken during selected weeks (effort only) whenever they are selected to participate in this portion of the MRIP survey. The FHTS has a stratified design, with for-hire vessels as sampling units, and is stratified by state, sub-state region (applicable to Florida only), vessel type (charter or headboat [as defined by the USCG]), and sample week within the two-month wave.

MRIP transitioned from the legacy Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) to a new mail survey (Fishing Effort Survey; FES) in 2015, and in 2018, MRIP-FES replaced MRIP-CHTS for the private angler mode. Both survey methods collect data needed to estimate marine recreational fishing effort (number of fishing trips) by shore and private/rental boat anglers on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. MRIP-CHTS used random-digit dialing of homes in coastal counties to contact anglers. The new mail-based FES uses angler license and registration information as one way to identify and contact anglers (supplemented with data from the U.S. Postal Service, which includes virtually all U.S. households). Because FES and CHTS are so different, NMFS conducted side-by-side testing of the two methods and found that, in general, total recreational fishing effort estimates generated from the FES are higher — and in some cases substantially higher — than the CHTS estimates (NMFS 2019). This is because the FES is designed to measure fishing activity more accurately than the CHTS, albeit while recognizing a greater degree of uncertainty in those landings estimates. This increase in estimated effort is not because there was a sudden rise in fishing effort, but rather because FES better targets actual

fishery participants through the directed mail survey. Likewise, the increase in uncertainty about the effort estimates reflects uncertainty that was also present in CHTS but went unaccounted due to biases that were identified as FES was developed. NMFS developed a calibration model to allow historic effort estimates using MRIP-CHTS to be compared to new estimates from MRIP-FES.

State of Florida's Supplemental Effort Survey

In 2017, the State of Florida formally created the Gulf Reef Fish Survey to monitor private angling landings and discards of select reef fish species harvested in state and federal waters in the Gulf. In 2020, that survey was expanded statewide and renamed the State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS), and additional species were added. SRFS was created to be compatible with MRIP-CHTS; however, calibrated historical landings for SRFS are somewhat larger for the recreational sector than that estimated by MRIP-CHTS, but much lower than estimated by MRIP-FES. SRFS reports landings and discards monthly in numbers, with a conversion to weight based on that used by MRIP. SRFS uses a combination of dockside intercepts from SRFS and APAIS to estimate catch-per-unit-effort from private recreational vessels. In order to obtain complete estimates of recreational catch for stock assessment, SRFS private recreational landings and discard estimates have to be combined with recreational shore and charter for-hire catch informed by MRIP-FES, as well as headboat catch informed by the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS). Thus, when "SRFS" is referred to further in this document with respect to SEDAR 72, it encompasses all of these sources of data combined. SRFS/GRFS (Gulf Reef Fish Survey) has been running in some capacity since 2015, and full capacity since 2017.

2023 MRIP-FES Pilot Study and 2024 Comprehensive Study

At the August 2023 Council meeting, the NMFS Office of Science and Technology (OST) discussed the release of a pilot study (NMFS 2023[5]), which evaluated potential respondents' bias (e.g., recall error) in the mail portion of the recreational FES survey used to estimate effort. The 2023 pilot study evaluated this bias for a portion of the year across several states, and preliminary results suggest the order of the questions in the survey led to overestimation of fishing effort by MRIP-FES. As a result of this, NMFS OST conducted a more comprehensive pilot study which began in 2024 and is expected to end data collection in 2025. NMFS OST plans to produce a public report with key findings and estimate comparisons in summer 2025 and determine if a new design will be implemented in 2026, pending study results and peer review. In mid-2026, NMFS OST is expecting to produce calibrated historical effort estimates to reflect the findings of the updated survey design for use in future stock assessments and fisheries management. Prior to when data calibration is finalized in spring 2026, any expectation about results would be speculative. After the updated survey data are finalized, it will then be available for evaluation by data users (e.g., the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Southeast Regional Office, and the Council).

[5] https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/recreational-fishing-data/fishing-effort-survey-research-and-improvements

APPENDIX C. SOUTH ATLANTIC ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT AND ECOSYSTEM BASED FISHERY MANAGEMENT

1.1 EFH and EFH-HAPC Designations and Cooperative Habitat Policy Development

Summary
The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) requires federal fishery management councils and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to designate essential fish habitat (EFH) for species managed under federal fishery management plans (FMP). Federal regulations that implement the EFH program encourage fishery management councils and NMFS to designate subsets of EFH to highlight priority areas for conservation and management. These subsets of EFH are called EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (EFH-HAPCs or HAPCs) and are designated based on ecological importance, susceptibility to human-induced environmental degradation, susceptibility to stress from development, or rarity of the habitat type.

Information supporting EFH and EFH-HAPC designations was updated (pursuant to the EFH Final Rule) in Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) II (SAFMC 2018). Additional detailed information supporting the EFH designations appears in FEP I (SAFMC 2009a), individual FMPs, general information on the EFH provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and its implementing regulations (50 CFR 900 Subparts J and K), and the EFH User Guide (SAFMC 2024).

In addition to implementing regulations to protect habitat from degradation due to fishing activities, the Council cooperates with NMFS to comment on non-fishing projects or policies that may impact EFH. The Council established a Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel (AP) and adopted a comment and policy development process that was recently revised in the Habitat Blueprint (SAFMC 2023). Members of the AP serve as the Council's habitat contacts and professionals in the field and have guided the Council's development of the policy statements. To access these policy statements, refer to the habitat website: https://safmc.net/fishery-management-plans/habitat/

Habitat Conservation
The Council has been proactive in advancing habitat conservation through extensive fishing gear restrictions in all Council FMPs and by directly managing habitat and fisheries affecting those habitats through two FMPs: the FMP for Coral, Coral Reefs and Live/Hard Bottom Habitat of the South Atlantic Region (Coral FMP; SAFMC 1984) and the FMP for the Sargassum Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (SAFMC 2003).

Ecosystem Approach to Conservation and Management of Deep-water Ecosystems
Building on the long-term conservation approach, the Council facilitated the evolution of the Habitat Plan into FEP (SAFMC 2009a) and FEP II (SAFMC 2018) to assemble information on the physical, biological, and human/institutional context of ecosystems within which fisheries are

managed. These two documents were intended to initiate the transition from single species management to Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management (EBFM) in the region. To support this, the South Atlantic Council adopted broad goals: (1) maintaining or improving ecosystem structure and function; (2) maintaining or improving economic, social, and cultural benefits from resources; and (3) maintaining or improving biological and cultural diversity.

Through Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1 (CE-BA 1; SAFMC 2009b), Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 2 (SAFMC 2011), and Coral Amendment 8 (SAFMC 2013), the South Atlantic Council established and expanded deep-water coral HAPCs (CHAPCs) and co-designated them as EFH-HAPCs.

1.2 EFH for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP

EFH for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP includes coral reefs, live/hard bottom, submerged aquatic vegetation, artificial reefs and medium to high profile outcroppings on and around the shelf break zone from shore to at least 183 meters (m) (but to at least 610 m for wreckfish) where the annual water temperature range is sufficiently warm to maintain adult populations of members of this largely tropical complex. EFH includes the spawning area in the water column above the adult habitat and the additional pelagic environment, including *Sargassum*, required for larval survival and growth, up to and including settlement. In addition, the Gulf Stream is EFH because it provides a mechanism to disperse snapper grouper species larvae.

For specific life stages of estuarine dependent and nearshore snapper grouper species, EFH includes areas inshore of the 31 m contour, such as attached macroalgae; submerged rooted vascular plants (seagrasses); estuarine emergent vegetated wetlands (saltmarshes, brackish marsh); tidal creeks; estuarine scrub/shrub (mangrove fringe); oyster reefs and shell banks; unconsolidated bottom (soft sediments); artificial reefs; and coral reefs and live/hard bottom.

1.3 HAPC for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP

EFH-HAPC for species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP include medium to high profile offshore hard bottoms where spawning normally occurs; localities of known or likely periodic spawning aggregations; nearshore hard bottom areas; The Point, The Ten Fathom Ledge, and Big Rock (North Carolina); The Charleston Bump (South Carolina); mangrove habitat; seagrass habitat; oyster/shell habitat; all coastal inlets; all state-designated nursery habitats of particular importance to snapper grouper (e.g., Primary and Secondary Nursery Areas designated in North Carolina); pelagic and benthic Sargassum; Hoyt Hills for wreckfish; the Oculina Bank HAPC; all hermatypic coral habitats and reefs; manganese outcroppings on the Blake Plateau; and Council-designated Special Management Zones (SMZ).Areas that meet the criteria for EFH-HAPCs include habitats required during each life stage (including egg, larval, post-larval, juvenile, and adult stages).

EFH-HAPCs for Golden Tilefish includes irregular bottom comprised of troughs and terraces inter-mingled with sand, mud, or shell hash bottom. Mud-clay bottoms in depths of 150-300m are HAPC. Golden tilefish are generally found in 80-540 m, but most commonly found in 200 m depths. EFH-

HAPC for Blueline Tilefish includes irregular bottom habitats along the shelf edge in 45-65 m depth; shelf break; or upper slope along the 100-fathom contour (150-225 m); hard bottom habitats characterized as rock overhangs, rock outcrops, manganese-phosphorite rock slab formations, or rocky reefs in the South Atlantic Bight; and the Georgetown Hole (Charleston Lumps) off Georgetown, South Carolina.

EFH-HAPCs for the Snapper Grouper complex include the following deep-water marine protected areas (MPA) as designated in Amendment 14 to the Snapper Grouper FMP: Snowy Grouper Wreck MPA, Northern South Carolina MPA, Edisto MPA, Charleston Deep Artificial Reef MPA, Georgia MPA, North Florida MPA, St. Lucie Hump MPA, and East Hump MPA.

The Council established the Special management Zone (SMZ) designation process in 1983 in the Snapper Grouper FMP, and SMZs have been designated in federal waters off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida since that time. The purpose of the original SMZ designation process, and the subsequent specification of SMZs, was to protect snapper grouper populations at the relatively small, permitted artificial reef sites and "create fishing opportunities that would not otherwise exist." Thus, the SMZ designation process was centered on protecting the relatively small habitats, which are known to attract desirable snapper grouper species.

In CE-BA 1 (SAFMC 2009b), the Council determined that SMZs met the criteria to be EFH-HAPCs for species included in the Snapper Grouper FMP. Since CE-BA 1 (SAFMC 2009b), the Council has designated additional SMZs in the Snapper Grouper FMP including Spawning SMZs. The SMZ and EFH-HAPC designations serve similar purposes in identifying and protecting valuable and unique habitat for the benefit of fish populations, which are important to both fish and fishers. Therefore, the Council determined that a designated SMZ meets the criteria for an EFH-HAPC designation, and the Council intends that all SMZs designated under the Snapper Grouper FMP also be designated as EFH-HAPCs under the Snapper Grouper FMP.

References:

GMFMC (Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 1984. FMP for Coral, Coral Reefs of the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic (Coral FMP). Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council 4107 W Spruce St #200, Tampa, FL 33607 and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

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SAFMC. 2009a. Fishery Ecosystem Plan I of the South Atlantic Region. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

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SAFMC. 2023. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Habitat Program Evaluation and Blueprint. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

SAFMC. 2024. Users Guide to Essential Fish Habitat Designations by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Ste 201, North Charleston, SC 29405.

APPENDIX D. FISHERY CLOSURE ANALYSES

The Gulf and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (Councils) are exploring changes to the overfishing limit (OFL), acceptable biological catch (ABC), and annual catch limits (ACLs) for Southeastern US mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper, respectively, in Amendment 55 to the Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf (Reef Fish Amendment 55) and Amendment 44 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Snapper Grouper Amendment 44), together (Reef Fish 55/Snapper Grouper 44). The amendments consider different apportionments between the Gulf and South Atlantic regions and modify the OFL and ABC for each species. Reef Fish 55/Snapper Grouper 44 also determines the ACLs using different averages of historic and recent landings.

D-1. Southeastern U.S. Mutton Snapper Gulf Season Prediction Analysis

A summary of the cumulative landings of the five most recent fishing years of complete Gulf of America (Gulf) mutton snapper landings (Figure D.1.1) are compared against the ACLs being considered for the Gulf region. The Gulf region has a stock ACL where the commercial and recreational landings are combined and then compared against an ACL. The recent annual Gulf mutton snapper landings are below the Gulf ACLs being considered except under Alternative 1. However, the ACL in Alternative 1 is based on the legacy Marine Recreational Fishing Statistics Survey recreational estimates, which are no longer considered consistent with the best scientific information available for mutton snapper. Further, the Councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees have made revised OFL and ABC recommendations based on the SEDAR 79 (2024) stock assessment of mutton snapper, the results of which are considered to be consistent with the best scientific information available. Because Alternative 1 is inconsistent with this updated scientific advice, is not a viable alternative. Therefore, it is likely that future Gulf mutton snapper landings will not exceed the ACLs being considered for the Gulf in Reef Fish 55/Snapper Grouper 44.

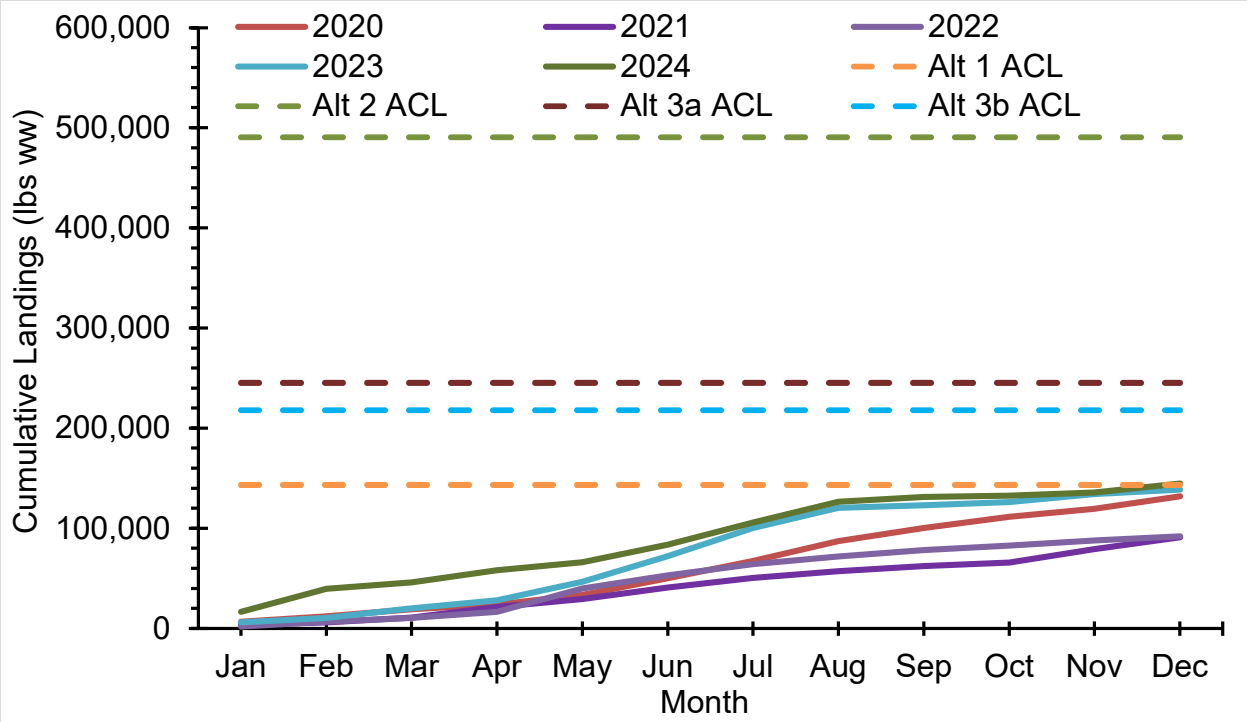

Figure D.1.1. Gulf mutton snapper commercial and recreational cumulative landings by month for the years of 2020 through 2024. The dashed lines are the Gulf ACLs being considered in Reef Fish 55/Snapper Grouper 44 in Action 2.

D-2. Southeastern U.S. Mutton Snapper South Atlantic Recreational Season Prediction Analysis

A summary of the cumulative landings of the five most recent fishing years of complete South Atlantic mutton snapper recreational landings (Figure D.2.1) are compared against the recreational ACLs being considered for the South Atlantic region. The recent annual South Atlantic mutton snapper landings are below the South Atlantic recreational ACLs being considered except under Alternative 1. However, the recreational ACL in Alternative 1 is based on the legacy Marine Recreational Fishing Statistics Survey recreational estimates, which are no longer considered consistent with the best scientific information available for mutton snapper. Therefore, it's likely that future South Atlantic mutton snapper recreational landings will not exceed the recreational ACLs being considered for the South Atlantic region in Reef Fish 55/Snapper Grouper 44.

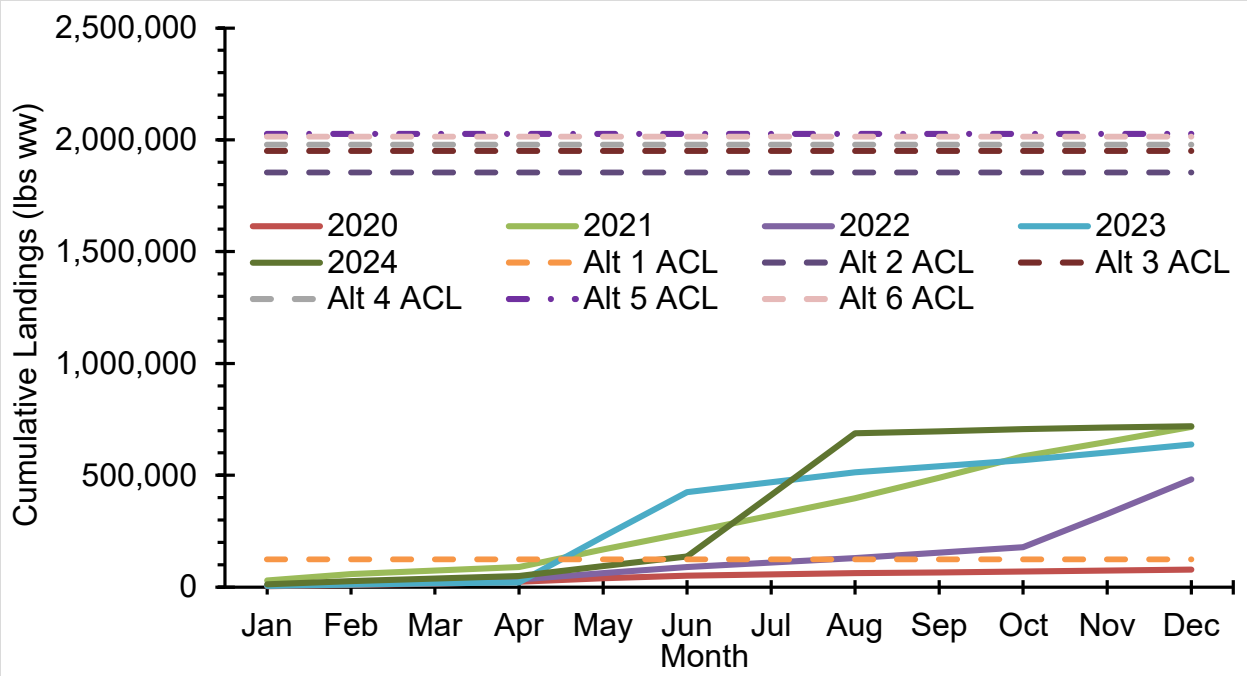

Figure D.2.1. South Atlantic mutton snapper cumulative recreational landings by month for the years of 2020 through 2024. The dashed lines are the Action 3 South Atlantic recreational ACLs being considered in Reef Fish 55/Snapper Grouper 44.

D-3. Southeastern U.S. Mutton Snapper South Atlantic Commercial Season Prediction Analysis

A summary of the cumulative landings of the five most recent fishing years of complete South Atlantic mutton snapper commercial landings (Figure D.3.1) are compared against the commercial ACLs being considered for the South Atlantic region. The recent annual South Atlantic mutton snapper commercial landings are below the South Atlantic commercial ACLs being considered. Therefore, it's likely that future South Atlantic mutton snapper commercial landings will not exceed the commercial ACLs being considered for the South Atlantic region in Reef Fish 55/Snapper Grouper 44.

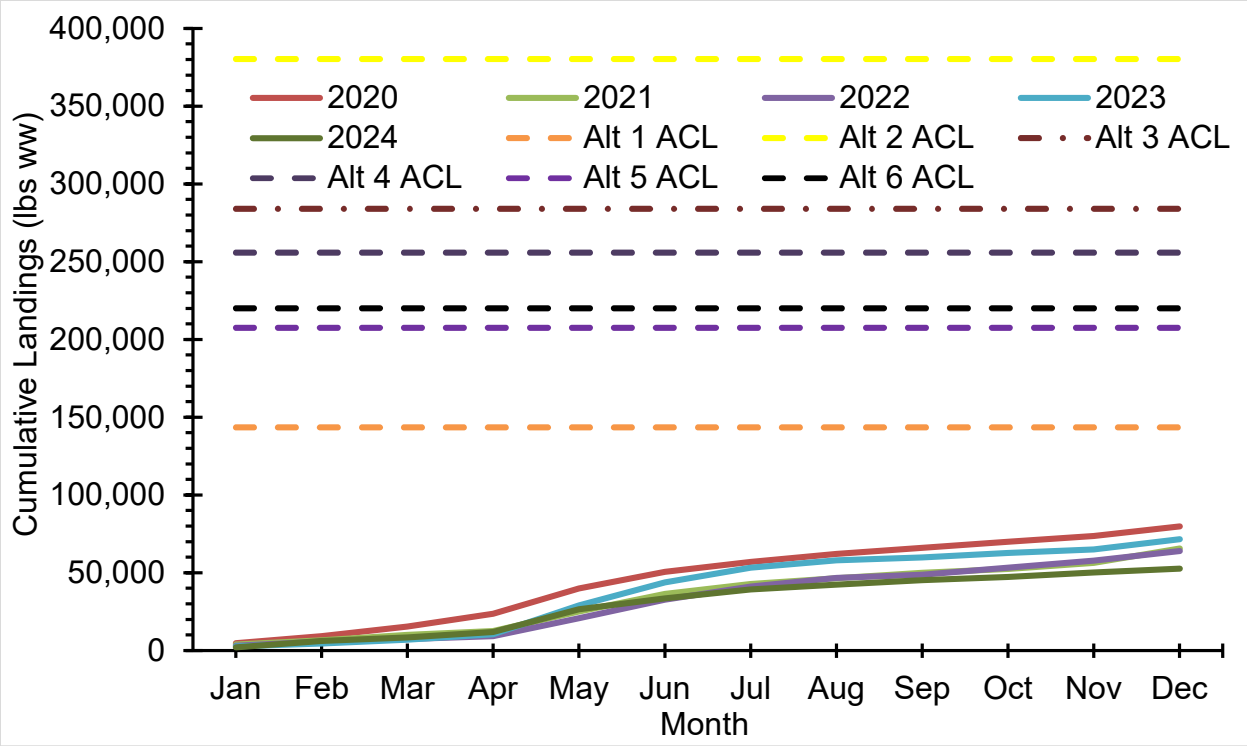

Figure D.3.1. South Atlantic mutton snapper cumulative commercial landings by month for the years of 2020 through 2024. The dashed lines are the Action 3 South Atlantic commercial ACLs being considered in Reef Fish 55/Snapper Grouper 44.

D-4. Southeastern U.S. Yellowtail Snapper Gulf Season Prediction Analysis

The Gulf apportionment of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC and ACL is monitored by combining the commercial and recreational landings. The current Gulf ACL is set 11% below the Gulf apportionment of the stock ABC (Alternative 1 in Action 2). The fishing season for this stock is from August 1 through July 31. A summary of the cumulative landings of the five most recent fishing years of complete landings from 2019/2020 through 2023/2024 is shown in Figure D.4.1. All of the recent fishing year landings are below the Gulf ACLs being considered the document, regardless of whether the buffer between the Gulf apportionment of the stock ABC and the Gulf ACL is retained or removed. Therefore, it is likely that future Gulf yellowtail snapper landings will be below the ACLs being considered for the Gulf in Reef Fish 55/Snapper Grouper 44.

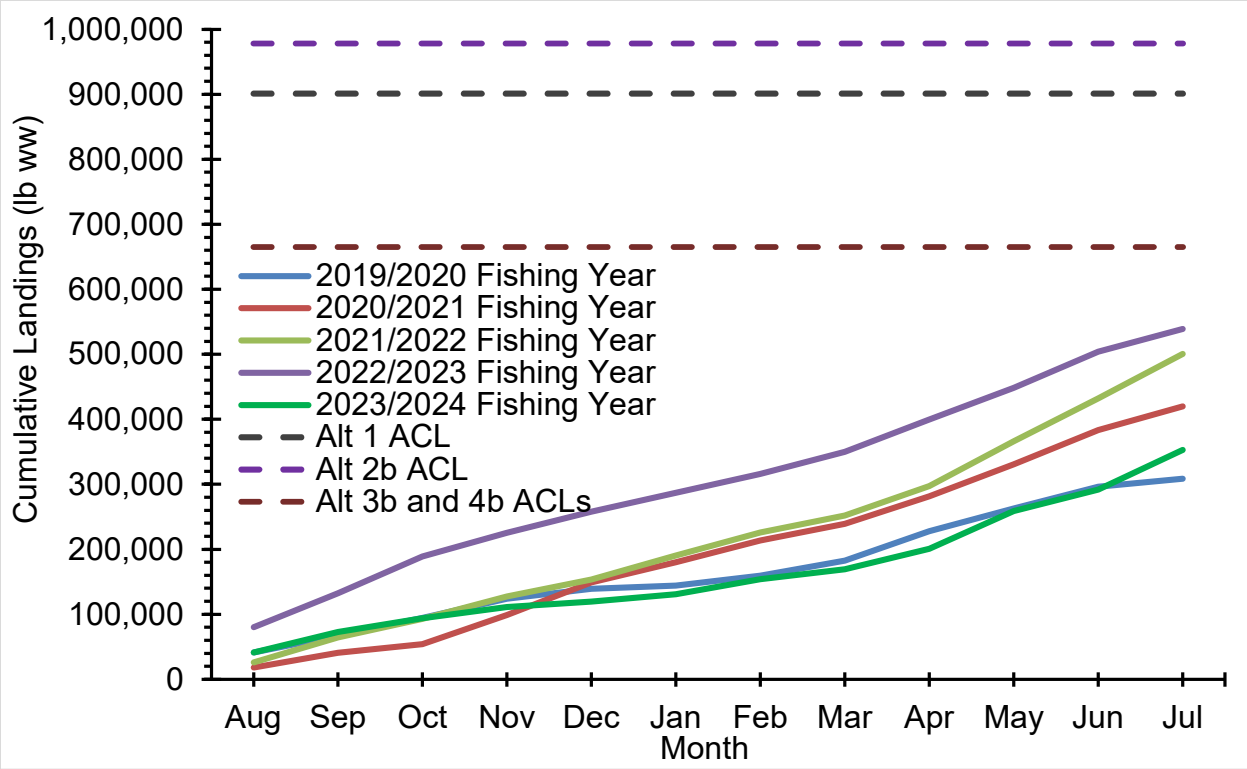

Figure D.4.1. Gulf yellowtail snapper commercial and recreational cumulative landings by month for the fishing years of 2019/2020 through 2023/2024. The dashed lines are the Gulf ACLs being considered in Reef Fish 55/Snapper Grouper 44 in Action 2. Alternative 1 retains a buffer between the Gulf apportionment of the stock ABC and the Gulf ACL. Option b in Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 show the Gulf ACL if the buffer is removed.

D-5. Southeastern U.S. Yellowtail Snapper South Atlantic Recreational Season Prediction Analysis

The South Atlantic apportionment of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC and ACL is monitored by separate commercial and recreational landings. This analysis focuses on the recreational sector. The fishing season for the recreational sector is from August 1 through July 31. A summary of the cumulative landings of the four most recent fishing years of complete landings from 2020/2021 through 2023/2024 is shown in Figure D.5.1. All of the recent fishing year recreational landings are below the South Atlantic ACLs being considered. Therefore, it is likely that future South Atlantic yellowtail snapper recreational landings will be below the ACLs being considered for the Gulf in Reef Fish 55/Snapper Grouper 44.

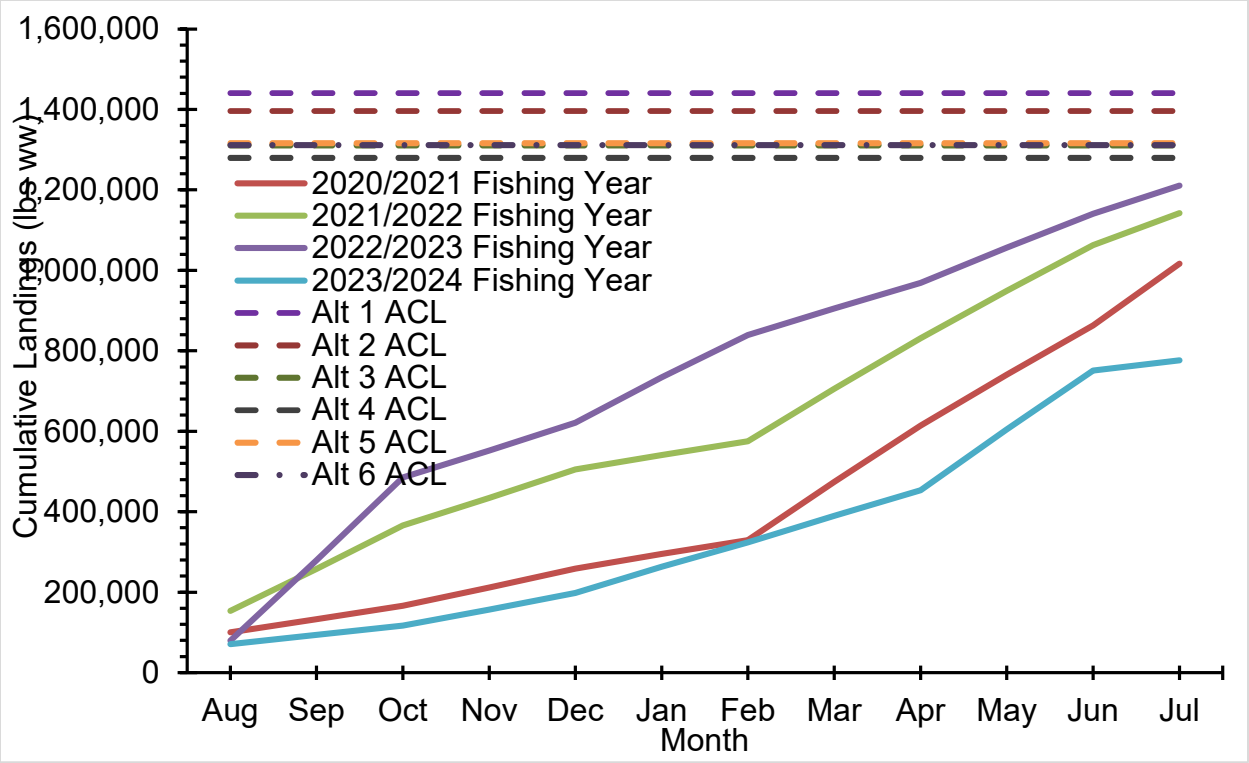

Figure D.5.1. South Atlantic yellowtail snapper recreational cumulative landings by month for the fishing years of 2020/2021 through 2023/2024. The dashed lines are the South Atlantic ACLs being considered in Reef Fish 55/Snapper Grouper 44 in Action 4.

D-6. Southeastern U.S. Yellowtail Snapper South Atlantic Commercial Season Prediction Analysis

The South Atlantic apportionment of the yellowtail snapper stock ABC and ACL is monitored by separate commercial and recreational landings. This analysis focuses on the commercial sector. The fishing season for the commercial sector is from August 1 through July 31. A summary of the cumulative landings of the four most recent fishing years of complete commercial landings from 2020/2021 through 2023/2024 is shown in Figure D.6.1. All of the recent fishing year commercial landings are below the South Atlantic ACLs being considered. Therefore, it is likely that future South Atlantic yellowtail snapper commercial landings will be below the ACLs being considered for the Gulf in Reef Fish 55/Snapper Grouper 44.

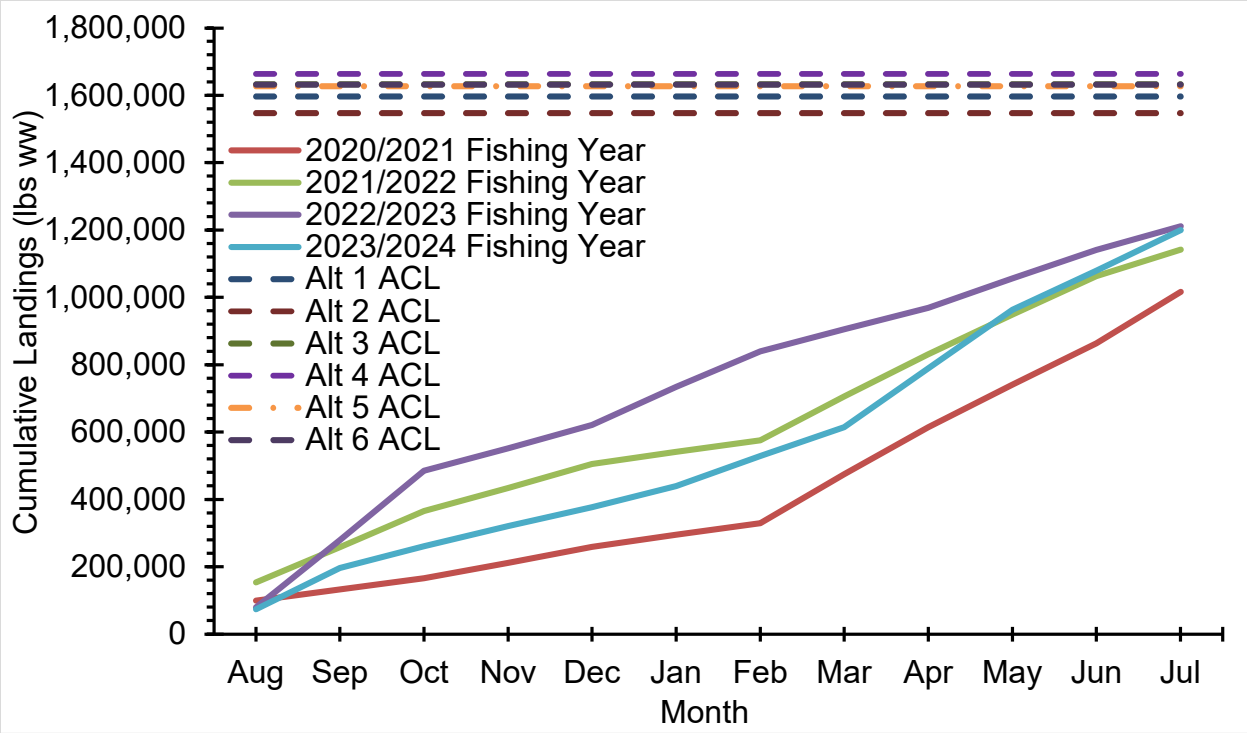

Figure D.6.1. South Atlantic yellowtail snapper commercial cumulative landings by month for the fishing years of 2020/2021 through 2023/2024. The dashed lines are the South Atlantic ACLs being considered in Reef Fish 55/Snapper Grouper 44 in Action 4.