

Action 2. Modify the Fishing Year for Gulf Yellowtail Snapper

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not modify the fishing year for yellowtail snapper. The fishing year (commercial and recreational) is the calendar year, January 1 through December 31.

Alternative 2: Modify the fishing year for the commercial sector for yellowtail snapper:

Option a: June 1 through May 30

Option b: July 1 through June 30

Option c: August 1 through July 31 **(South Atlantic Council Adopted)**

Option d: September 1 to August 31

Alternative 3: Modify fishing year for the recreational sector for yellowtail snapper:

Option a: June 1 through May 30

Option b: July 1 through June 30

Option c: August 1 through July 31 **(South Atlantic Council Adopted)**

Option d: September 1 to August 31

Note: The South Atlantic Council voted to adopt Option c in both Alternative 2 and 3, and submitted that preference to the Secretary of Commerce at their December 2015 meeting.

Discussion:

The fishing year for yellowtail snapper in the Gulf presently runs from January 1st to December 31st. The South Atlantic Council recently voted to change the fishing season for yellowtail snapper in their jurisdictional waters to open on August 1st and close on July 31st. The South Atlantic Council's rationale for this change was that if the yellowtail snapper fishery is going to close in a given year, then the closure should correspond with the spawning season. Though spawning of yellowtail snapper in the southeastern US can occur year-round, the peak spawning period is from April to August (McClellan and Cummings 1998; SEDAR 27 2012). Commercial landings of yellowtail snapper from the South Atlantic typically peak in the late spring to early summer (Figure 2.2.1). The commercial sector in the South Atlantic was closed on October 31st of 2015 for meeting its allocation.

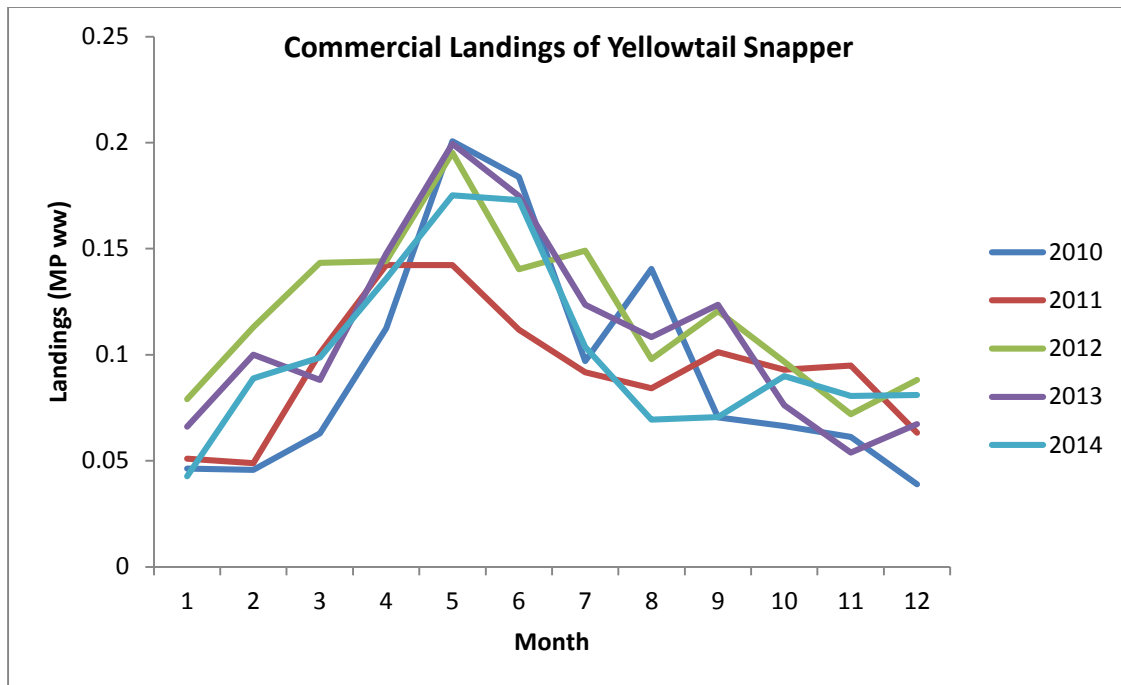


Figure 2.2.1. Distribution of South Atlantic yellowtail snapper commercial landings by month, 2010-2014. Source: SEFSC Commercial ACL Data (Oct 2, 2015).

Yellowtail snapper in the Gulf are managed under a single annual catch limit (ACL), meaning that there are not recreational and commercial sector allocations. The commercial sector of the yellowtail snapper fishery has not closed in the Gulf since the jurisdictional division of the stock ACL was implemented through the Generic ACLs and Accountability Measures (AMs) Amendment (GMFMC 2011). Some commercial fishermen fish for yellowtail snapper in both the Gulf and the South Atlantic. These fishermen have indicated in the past that following the regulations would be less burdensome if those regulations were then same for both Councils' jurisdictions. Recreational landings of yellowtail snapper in the Gulf historically have accounted for only a small fraction of the total landings (Table 1.2.2.1).

Since Gulf fishermen are collectively not harvesting the Gulf ACL for yellowtail snapper, a change in the fishing season is unlikely to result in any direct or indirect biological effects. An exception to this would be if South Atlantic waters were closed to yellowtail snapper harvest while Gulf waters were open, and effort shifted from the South Atlantic to the Gulf.

Alternative 1 would not change the fishing year for yellowtail snapper in the Gulf from the current opening date of January 1st, closing on December 31st or when the ACL is reached.

Alternative 1 would not result in any changes to the biological environment, since the ACL in the Gulf is not being reached. Since there are some commercial fishermen, mainly in the Florida Keys, who fish in both the Gulf and the South Atlantic for yellowtail snapper, a disparity between the fishing seasons in both regions may be burdensome if the fishing seasons differ.

Alternatives 2 and 3 would change the fishing season for yellowtail snapper for the commercial and recreational sectors, respectively, in the Gulf. **Option a** would change the fishing season to

open on June 1st and close on May 30th. **Option b** would change the fishing season to open on July 1st and close on June 30th. **Option c** would change the fishing season to open on August 1st and close on July 31st. **Option d** would change the fishing season to open on September 1st and close on August 31st. The South Atlantic Council adopted **Option c** for **Alternatives 2 and 3** at their December 2015 meeting, citing the desire for any closed season to occur during the peak spawning season for yellowtail snapper. In the Gulf, landings of yellowtail snapper are generated primarily by the commercial sector (Tables 1.2.2.1 and 1.2.2.2). Thus, any change to the fishing season in the Gulf may affect commercial landings disproportionately to recreational landings. However, since the ACL in the Gulf has not been landed in recent history, the potential for impacts to Gulf fishermen as a result of a fishing season change would depend on the degree to which effort shifts from the South Atlantic to the Gulf in the event of a closure of the commercial sector in the South Atlantic. **Options a, b, and d** also would protect some portion of the spawning season if a closure were implemented; however, commercial fishermen indicated that they thought **Option c** would protect the stock when spawning activity is most intense.