

**Draft of the Decision Points for Reef Fish Amendment 58:
Modifications to the Shallow-water Grouper Complex Catch Limits
and Management Measures**

The shallow-water grouper (SWG) complex is comprised of four species: black grouper, yellowfin grouper (YFG), scamp, and yellowmouth grouper (YMG). These four species are contained within the ‘Other Shallow-water Grouper’ share category in the Grouper-Tilefish Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program.

At its March 2023 meeting, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council’s (Gulf Council) Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) passed a motion setting updated overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) limits for scamp and YMG, based on SEDAR 68. At its May 2023 meeting, the SSC passed a motion setting updated OFL and ABC limits for black grouper and YFG; however, changes to black grouper management requires concurrent action by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council).

After receiving the motions from the SSC, the Gulf Council passed the following motion at its June 2023 meeting:

Motion: To direct staff to modify the amendment for scamp and yellowmouth grouper OFLs, ABCs, and ACLs to include black grouper and yellowfin grouper SSC catch recommendations. In the amendment, consideration should be given also to implications to the IFQ fishery involving the shallow-water grouper complex.

At its February 2024 meeting, the SSC passed a motion to revise the updated OFL and ABC for black and YFG, as the previous limits were based on Monroe County recreational landings being assigned to the Gulf Council’s jurisdiction, rather than to the South Atlantic Council.

As the motions from the SSC set updated OFL and ABC limits as pairs of the four species, the initial consideration before the Council is modification of the current SWG complex. Scamp and YMG are in MRIP-FES, and black grouper and YFG are in MRFSS; thus, they cannot be combined.

Action 1: Modify the SWG Complex

Alternative 1. No Action – Maintain the current composition of the SWG complex: scamp, YMG, black grouper, and YFG.

Alternative 2. Modify the composition of the SWG complex to form two sub-complexes. Sub-complex A is comprised of scamp and YMG; sub-complex B is comprised of black grouper and YFG. Create two new share categories: one for scamp and YMG; and one for black grouper and YFG.

Option 2a: Current shares are applied to the new share categories.

Option 2b: Current shares are applied based on landings history by species.

Sub-Option 1: Use landings history from 2010 – 2023

Sub-Option 2: Use landings history from 2011 – 2019, and 2021 – 2023

Sub-Option 3: Use landings history from 2016 – 2019, and 2021 – 2023

Because of the difference in data units and the declined stock condition of scamp and YMG, these species need to be managed separately from black grouper and YFG to avoid the possibility of overharvest.

Action 2: Modify the SDC for SWG

Alternative 1. No Action – Maintain the current SDC for maximum sustainable yield (MSY), maximum fishing mortality threshold (MFMT), minimum stock size threshold (MSST), and optimum yield (OY) for SWG as defined in Reef Fish Amendment 48 for the new SWG sub-complexes (A and B).

$$MSY = F_{30\%SPR}$$

$$MFMT = F_{MSY}$$

$$MSST = 75\% \text{ of } B_{MSY}$$

$$OY = 90\% \text{ of } MSY$$

Alternative 2. Modify the MSY proxy for SWG sub-complex A (scamp and YMG) to be $F_{40\%SPR}$. Maintain the MSY proxy for SWG sub-complex B (black and YFG) as $F_{30\%SPR}$. Maintain the current SDC for MFMT, MSST, and OY for SWG as defined in Reef Fish Amendment 48 for the new SWG sub-complexes (A and B).

$$MFMT = F_{MSY}$$

$$MSST = 75\% \text{ of } B_{MSY}$$

$$OY = 90\% \text{ of } MSY$$

At its October 2023 meeting, the Council passed the following motion:

Motion: The Gulf Council will delay any changes in allocation between the commercial and recreational sectors of any Gulf fishery resources that are subject to MRIP-FES until such time as the 2024 pilot study has been completed and deemed consistent with BSIA by the Gulf SSC.

If the two sub-complexes for SWG are created, then the Council will need to determine the allocation for the sub-complexes. An allocation decision is required here to move forward. Because of the use of MRIP-FES for scamp/YMG, if the Council does nothing, then it serves as an automatic reallocation to the commercial sector. So, doing nothing is still doing something. Further, the recreational sector is managed to the overall ACL, which may exceed 19.9% unless the commercial sector has already harvested their entire quota.

Action 3: Establish Sector Allocations

Alternative 1. No Action – Maintain the current allocation. Other SWG ACLs assume a black grouper allocation of 73% commercial, 27% recreational, and an allocation of 80.1% commercial, 19.9% recreational for scamp, YFG and YMG combined, based on the Generic ACL/AM Amendment (2012).

Alternative 2. Modify the sector allocation for the SWG sub-complexes. Sub-complex A (scamp and YMG) will be split XX.X% for the commercial sector and XX.X% for the recreational sector. The allocation will be based on THIS. Sub-complex B will use the allocation of 73% commercial, 27% recreational for black grouper; and, 80.1% commercial, 19.9% recreational for YFG from the Generic ACL/AM Amendment.

For Alternative 2, the Council may decide to base the allocation on recent time series to be reflective of current usage between the two sectors, and to consider exclusion of certain years such as 2010 with the DWH oil spill or 2020 with coronavirus.

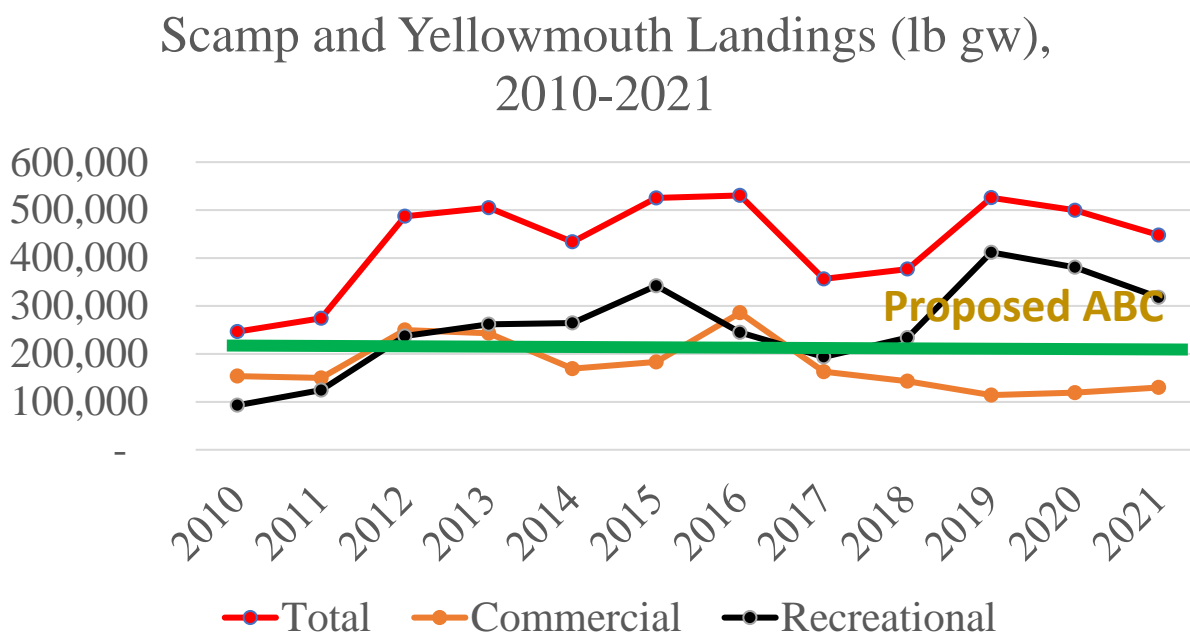


Figure 1. Scamp and yellowmouth grouper landings (lb gw), 2010-2022.

Once the Council has determined the SDC for the two sub-complexes and the sector allocations for scamp/YMG, catch limits for the two sub-complexes can be established.

Action 4: Modify Scamp and YMG Catch Limits

Alternative 1. No Action – Maintain the current catch limits for the SWG complex. The ABC = 0.710 mp gw. The commercial ACL = 0.547 mp gw, and the commercial ACT = 0.526 mp gw. The recreational ACL and ACT are undefined.

Alternative 1 is not viable because it uses MRFSS data units, and because the SSC has established a separate OFL and ABC for scamp/YMG. Black and yellowfin grouper remain in MRFSS under the criteria for the ACL/AM Amendment. Alternative 1 is not consistent with BSIA.

Alternative 2. Establish catch limits for scamp and YMG based on the SSC's recommendations from SEDAR 68 (2022) for 2024 – 2026 and subsequent years. Catch limits are expressed and will be monitored in MRIP-FES data units, and in mp gw.

Year	OFL	ABC	Comm ACL	Rec ACL
2024	0.271	0.203	<i>Depends on sector allocation</i>	
2025	0.263	0.203		
2026+	0.257	0.203		

Note that the commercial IFQ program is managed to the commercial ACT/quota. Also, the 2024 catch limit is unlikely to be implemented due to document development timing.

Modifying Black Grouper and Yellowfin Grouper Catch Limits (done as part of Action 4, by default)

Current Black Grouper Management:

Based on average landings from 2004-2008: Recreational = 27% and Commercial = 73% of ACL. Apportionment between the Councils is based on the Council jurisdictional boundary: South Atlantic = 47% of ABC and Gulf = 53% of ABC (Established by using 50% of catch history from 1986-2008 + 50% of catch history from 2006-2008).

Current Yellowfin Grouper Management:

Commercial = 80.1%, Recreational = 19.9%, of yellowfin grouper, based on landings during 2001-2004.

Black Grouper and Yellowfin Grouper Catch Limits (lb gw):

	Gulf ABC	Gulf Com ACL	Gulf Com ACT	Gulf Rec ACL
2015+	310,844	227,735	218,626	83,109

*In MRFSS data units

Things for June 2024:

- Cannot modify these catch limits without cooperation from the SAFMC.
- SSC recommendations cannot be applied in its current form.
- For now, black grouper jurisdictional apportionment, sector allocation and catch limit remains on the books.
- YFG catch limit is added to black grouper (same data units)

Action 5: Modify the DWG Complex Catch Limits

The SSC met in February 2024 to review SEDAR 85 for yellowedge grouper (YEG), and the landings of the other three DWG species: snowy grouper, Warsaw grouper, and speckled hind. The SSC recommended OFLs and ABCs for YEG, and for rest of DWG, and recommended combining the OFLs and ABC for all 4 DWG species since they use the same data units.

Alternative 1. Maintain the current ABC for the DWG complex. The ABC for the DWG complex is 1.024 mp gw.

Alternative 1 is not viable because it uses MRFSS data units, and because the SSC has established OFLs and ABCs for DWG species using MRIP-FES. Alternative 1 is not consistent with BSIA.

Alternative 2: Establish an OFL and modify the ABC for the DWG complex for 2025 – 2029 and subsequent years. The OFL is 731,035 lb gw, and the ABC is 555,026 lb gw. Catch limits are established using, and will be monitored in, MRIP-FES data units.

Action 6: Modify the IFQ Program Flexibility Considerations

Alternative 1. No Action – Maintain the Grouper-Tilefish IFQ program flexibility considerations for the sub-complexes within the SWG complex. Scamp may be landed under a shareholder's DWG allocation if that shareholder does not have any remaining SWG allocation. Warsaw and speckled hind may be landed under SWG if all DWG allocation in a shareholder's account is depleted.

Alternative 1 is not viable because the SSC has established a separate OFL and ABC for scamp/YMG. Without modification, allowing for scamp to be landed under DWG allocation could result in overfishing of scamp/YMG. Alternative 1 is not consistent with BSIA.

Alternative 2. Eliminate the flexibility considerations for the SWG and DWG share categories within the Grouper-Tilefish IFQ program.

Alternative 3. Modify the flexibility considerations in the Grouper-Tilefish IFQ program for the SWG and DWG complexes:

- Scamp retains flexibility under DWG, if scamp/YMG is not in a rebuilding plan. Warsaw grouper and speckled hind may be landed under Scamp/YMG complex if warsaw grouper and speckled hind are not under a rebuilding plan.
- Consider a formula to create subcategories of multi-use for scamp, Warsaw grouper, and speckled hind (similar to gag/red grouper multiuse allocation categories).