

representative on VHF–FM channel 16 or by telephone at 1–(833) 769–8724. Those in the safety zone must comply with all lawful orders or directions given to them by the COTP or the COTP’s designated representative.

(d) *Enforcement period.* This section will be enforced from 8 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. on September 19, 2026.

**Anthony R. Migliorini,**

*Captain, U.S. Coast Guard, Captain of the Port Sector Columbia River.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

#### 50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 260708–0166]

RIN 0648–BO28

#### Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of America, and South Atlantic; Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region; Abbreviated Framework Amendment 5

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Proposed rule; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS seeks public comment on proposed regulations to implement Abbreviated Framework Amendment 5 (Abbreviated Framework 5) under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (FMP). If implemented by NMFS, this proposed rule would revise catch levels for blueline tilefish in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the South Atlantic. The purposes of these proposed regulatory changes are to ensure the catch levels for blueline tilefish are based on the best scientific information available (BSIA), to achieve and maintain optimum yield (OY), and to prevent overfishing while minimizing adverse social and economic effects to the extent practicable in accordance with NMFS’ statutory mandates.

**DATES:** Written comments on this proposed rule must be received no later than August 12, 2026.

**ADDRESSES:** A plain language summary of this proposed rule is available at <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NMFS-2026-0727>. You may submit comments on the proposed rule, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2026-0727 by either of the following methods:

- *Electronic Submission:* Submit electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Visit <https://www.regulations.gov> and type NOAA–NMFS–2026–0727 in the Search box. Click on the “Comment” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- *Mail:* Submit written comments to Mary Vara, NMFS Southeast Regional Office (SERO), 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

*Instructions:* Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period may not be considered by NMFS. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on <https://www.regulations.gov> without change. All personal identifying information, confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments. Enter “N/A” in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous.

An electronic copy of Abbreviated Framework 5, which includes a Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA) analysis and a regulatory impact review, may be obtained from <https://www.regulations.gov> or the NMFS SERO website at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/abbreviated-framework-amendment-5-catch-levels-blueline-tilefish>.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Mary Vara, NMFS SERO, telephone: 727–824–5305, email: [mary.vara@noaa.gov](mailto:mary.vara@noaa.gov).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The snapper-grouper fishery in the South Atlantic region is managed under the FMP and includes blueline tilefish, along with other snapper-grouper species. The FMP was prepared by NMFS and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) and is implemented by NMFS through regulations at 50 CFR part 622 under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires NMFS and fishery management plans to prevent overfishing and continually achieve the OY from federally managed fish stocks to ensure that fishery resources are managed for the greatest overall benefit to the Nation. This action is proposed under the authority of section 303(a)(1)(A) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act as necessary and appropriate for the conservation and management of the fishery to prevent overfishing and rebuild overfished

stocks and to promote the long-term health and stability of the fishery.

All weights described in this proposed rule are in round weight, unless noted otherwise. The metric conversion for the imperial measurement used in this document is 1 pound (lb) equals approximately 0.45 kilograms.

### Background

NMFS and the South Atlantic Council manage blueline tilefish in the EEZ from the North Carolina and Virginia border southward to the South Atlantic Council’s jurisdictional boundary in the Florida Keys. NMFS and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Mid-Atlantic Council) manage blueline tilefish in the EEZ from the North Carolina and Virginia border northward through Maine as part of the Tilefish Fishery Management Plan of the Mid-Atlantic Region. In the South Atlantic region, the South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic Councils collaborate with NMFS on the management of blueline tilefish from the border of Virginia and North Carolina to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. NMFS and the Mid-Atlantic Council began managing blueline tilefish in 2017 due to increased fishing activity in the mid-Atlantic. Previously, NMFS and the South Atlantic Council exclusively managed the species off the East Coast.

A Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) operational stock assessment for blueline tilefish (SEDAR 92) was completed in March 2025, utilizing the newly calibrated Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES) data in place of MRIP Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) data. Abbreviated Framework 5 would change the overfishing level (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic. The South Atlantic Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) updated the total ABC recommendation for the South Atlantic as part of SEDAR 92, in combination with the joint recommendations from the South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic Council SSCs for the area north of Cape Hatteras to the border with Virginia.

The South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic Councils’ SSCs recommended use of a data-limited methods model based on average catch rather than the surplus production model for management to establish the ABC for areas north and south of Cape Hatteras in the South Atlantic. The data-limited methods model was used to address deficiencies in the surplus production model and to provide scientifically justifiable catch

level recommendations for use in management. The OFL would change from the current level of 328,985 lb to “unknown,” because the data-limited methods model did not produce an OFL recommendation. From north of Cape Hatteras to the Virginia and North Carolina border, the South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic Councils’ SSCs recommended incorporating updated data from the South Atlantic Deepwater Longline Survey to apportion the catch recommendations. Thirty percent of the recommended ABC for this area was apportioned to the South Atlantic equaling 193,800 lb, with the remainder apportioned to the Mid-Atlantic. The recommended ABC is 133,000 lb for the South Atlantic from south of Cape Hatteras to the jurisdictional boundary line in the Florida Keys. Therefore, the recommended total ABC for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic is 326,800 lb (total removals). These ABC recommendations were presented to the South Atlantic Council at its June 2025 meeting. The Mid-Atlantic Council supported the formation of a joint sub-committee to inform future catch level specifications. The Mid-Atlantic Council also recommended moving forward with the ABC recommendations presented by the South Atlantic Council’s SSC at the June 2025 South Atlantic Council meeting as they were developed through a mutually agreed-upon process, supported by a joint SSC recommendation, and reflect the BSIA.

The current total annual catch limit (ACL) for blueline tilefish is allocated between the commercial sector at 50.07 percent and the recreational sector at 49.93 percent. The final rule for Abbreviated Framework Amendment 3 under the FMP implemented these ACLs (85 FR 43145, July 17, 2020), and the current sector allocations were established by the final rule for Regulatory Amendment 13 under the FMP (78 FR 36113, June 17, 2013). This proposed rule would use the existing allocation percentages to update the commercial and recreational ACLs.

#### Management Measure Contained in This Proposed Rule

This proposed rule would revise the total and sector ACLs for South Atlantic blueline tilefish based on updated information from SEDAR 92.

Currently, the blueline tilefish commercial ACL is 117,148 lb and the recreational ACL is 116,820 lb for each fishing year, which is the same as the calendar year. The total ACL, which is equal to the sum of the sector ACLs, is 233,968 lb. This proposed rule would increase the ACLs for blueline tilefish consistent with the results of SEDAR 92,

the ABC recommendation from the SSCs of both the South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic Councils, and Abbreviated Framework 5. The total ACL (landed fish) for blueline tilefish would be 314,058 lb, which is equal to the ABC in the South Atlantic of 326,800 lb reduced by an average annual discard estimate of 12,742 lb. After applying the same allocation percentages to the proposed total ACL, the commercial ACL would be increased to 157,249 lb, and the recreational ACL would be increased to 156,809 lb. Although the numerical value of the ACLs would increase relative to the current ACLs, the proposed recreational ACL is not directly comparable to the current recreational ACL because it was derived, in part, from MRIP FES estimates rather than MRIP CHTS estimates. The proposed ACLs are consistent with the ABC recommendations from the South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic Council’s SSCs, and this proposed rule would not change the allocation percentages of the total ACL between the commercial and recreational sectors.

In the South Atlantic, blueline tilefish is open to commercial harvest the entire calendar year (January 1 through December 31) unless a closure is necessary, which occurs when NMFS projects commercial landings will reach the commercial ACL during the year. Each year since 2020, commercial landings have reached the commercial ACL during the fishing year and resulted in closures that began between July and September. The proposed increase in the commercial ACL is estimated to result in an annual increase in gross revenue of \$142,732 and may extend the length of future fishing seasons.

In the South Atlantic, blueline tilefish is open to recreational harvest each year for as long as 4 months (May 1 through August 31). Each year, NMFS projects the length of the recreational season based on catch rates from the previous fishing year to determine when landings of blueline tilefish are estimated to meet the recreational ACL. NMFS announces the corresponding length of the recreational season and the season end date in the **Federal Register**. On May 19, 2026, NMFS announced that the 2026 recreational season opened on May 1 and will close on September 1, 2026 (91 FR 29091). NMFS estimates the proposed recreational ACL increase may result in longer season durations under recent levels of fishing effort and catch.

#### Classification

Pursuant to section 304(b)(1)(A) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the NMFS

Assistant Administrator has determined that this proposed rule is consistent with Abbreviated Framework 5, the FMP, other provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and other applicable law, subject to further consideration after public comment.

This proposed rule has been determined to be not significant for purposes of Executive Order (E.O.) 12866. This proposed rule is not an E.O. 14192 regulatory action, because this rule is not significant under E.O. 12866.

The Senior Lead Council for Regulation of the Department of Commerce certified to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration that this proposed rule, if adopted, would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. The factual basis for this certification follows. A copy of the full analysis is available from NMFS (see **ADDRESSES** section). All monetary estimates in the following analysis are in 2024 dollars.

A description of this proposed rule, why it is being considered, and the objectives of this proposed rule are contained in the **SUMMARY** and **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** sections of this proposed rule.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act provides the statutory basis for this proposed rule. No duplicative, overlapping, or conflicting Federal rules have been identified. In addition, no new reporting, recordkeeping, or other compliance requirements are introduced by this proposed rule.

Abbreviated Framework 5 would change both the OFL and ABC for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic. The OFL would change from 328,985 lb to “unknown” due to the data-limited methods model used, which did not produce an OFL recommendation. The ABC for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic would increase from 233,968 lb to 326,800 lb. The South Atlantic ABC would be based on the sum of the ABCs from areas north and south of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina in total removals, which was the recommendation of the South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic Councils’ SSCs. The current ABC is inclusive of MRIP CHTS estimates to account for recreational landings from private and charter vessels, while the updated ABC would be inclusive of MRIP FES estimates for these landings. This proposed rule would set the total ACL for blueline tilefish at 314,058 lb, which is equal to the ABC minus average annual discards. Sector allocations would remain at 50.07 percent commercial and 49.93 percent recreational. When these allocations are applied to the proposed

total ACL, the commercial ACL would change from 117,148 lb to 157,249 lb, and the recreational ACL would change from 116,820 lb to 156,809 lb. The proposed changes to the total ACL and sector ACLs for South Atlantic blueline tilefish would apply to all commercial fishing businesses, for-hire fishing businesses (recreational charter vessels and headboats), and recreational private anglers that fish for blueline tilefish in Federal waters of the South Atlantic.

The RFA requires NMFS to describe the impact of the proposed rule on small entities (5 U.S.C. 603). Small entities include small businesses, small organizations, and small governmental jurisdictions (5 U.S.C. 601(3)–(6)). Recreational anglers are not businesses, organizations, or governmental jurisdictions, so they are outside the scope of this analysis.

Any fishing vessel that harvests and sells any of the federally managed snapper-grouper species from the South Atlantic EEZ must have a valid South Atlantic commercial snapper-grouper permit, which is a limited access permit. In 2024, there were 508 valid or renewable South Atlantic snapper-grouper unlimited permits and 86 valid or renewable 225-lb trip-limited permits. On average from 2020 to 2024, there were 133 federally permitted commercial vessels with reported landings of South Atlantic blueline tilefish. Ex-vessel revenue from landings of blueline tilefish averaged \$420,364 during this period, representing 4.1 percent of total ex-vessel revenue for the vessels that harvested blueline tilefish. The average total revenue per vessel for 2020 to 2024 was \$78,467. For commercial vessels that harvest blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic, NMFS estimates that economic profits are \$2,903 or 3.7 percent of annual gross revenue, on average. The maximum annual revenue from all species reported by a single vessel that harvested blueline tilefish from 2020 to 2024 was \$445,119.

Although this proposed rule would apply to for-hire vessels, it would not be expected to have any direct effects on these entities. From 2020 to 2024, charter vessels targeting blueline tilefish made an average of 1,423 trips in the South Atlantic, with no such trips recorded in 2023 or 2024. Equivalent data for headboats that participate in the Southeast Region Headboat Survey are not available. However, headboats cater to large, diverse groups of individual anglers on a single vessel and generally advertise a wide range of species to be caught rather than targeting a single stock. This indicates that blueline tilefish are incidentally harvested

species and for-hire vessels do not typically sell targeted trips for these fish. Therefore, NMFS does not expect the proposed changes to the management measures for blueline tilefish to directly alter the services sold by these vessels. In summary, only the impacts on commercial fishing businesses will be discussed.

For RFA purposes only, NMFS has established a small business size standard for businesses, including their affiliates, whose primary industry is commercial fishing (see 50 CFR 200.2). A business primarily engaged in commercial fishing (North American Industry Classification System code 11411) is classified as a small business if it is independently owned and operated, is not dominant in its field of operation (including its affiliates), and has combined annual receipts not in excess of \$11 million for all its affiliated operations worldwide. All of the commercial fishing businesses directly regulated by this proposed rule are believed to be small entities based on the NMFS size standard. No other small entities that would be directly affected by this proposed rule have been identified.

This proposed rule would increase the blueline tilefish total ACL from 233,968 lb to 314,058 lb. Applying the existing commercial allocation of 50.07 percent to the proposed total ACL would result in a 157,249-lb commercial ACL, which would be a 40,101-lb increase relative to the current commercial ACL. Assuming the proposed commercial ACL is harvested in full, it would lead to an annual increase in commercial landings of 33,984 lb in gutted weight, worth \$142,732. When divided by the average number of vessels that harvested blueline tilefish from 2020 to 2024, this results in an annual increase in ex-vessel revenue of \$1,073 per vessel (approximately 1.4 percent of average annual per vessel gross revenue). Average annual economic profits per vessel would increase by \$40.

Based on the above analysis, this proposed rule would not be expected to have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. As a result, an initial regulatory flexibility analysis is not required and none has been prepared.

This proposed rule contains no information collection requirements under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995.

#### List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 622

Commercial, Fisheries, Fishing, Recreational, Snapper-grouper, South Atlantic.

Dated: July 8, 2026.

**Samuel D. Rauch III,**

*Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, National Marine Fisheries Service.*

For the reasons set out in the preamble, NMFS proposes to amend 50 CFR part 622 as follows:

#### PART 622—FISHERIES OF THE CARIBBEAN, GULF OF AMERICA, AND SOUTH ATLANTIC

■ 1. The authority citation for part 622 continues to read as follows:

**Authority:** 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

■ 2. Amend § 622.193, by revising paragraph (z) to read as follows:

#### § 622.193 Annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs).

\* \* \* \* \*

(z) *Blueline tilefish*—(1) *Commercial sector.* (i) The commercial ACL is 157,249 lb (71,327 kg) in round weight.

(ii) If NMFS estimates that commercial landings will reach the commercial ACL specified in paragraph (z)(1)(i) of this section during the fishing year, the AA will file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register to close the commercial sector for the remainder of the fishing year. On and after the effective date of such a notification, all sale or purchase of blueline tilefish is prohibited and harvest or possession of blueline tilefish in or from the South Atlantic EEZ is limited to the bag and possession limits while recreational harvest is allowed. If the recreational harvest of blueline tilefish is not allowed during a period of the fishing year, then the bag and possession limits are zero during that period. These bag and possession limits apply in the South Atlantic on board a vessel for which a valid Federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper has been issued, without regard if such species were harvested in state or Federal waters.

(iii) If commercial landings exceed the commercial ACL in paragraph (z)(1)(i) of this section, and the total ACL specified in paragraph (z)(3) of this section is exceeded, and blueline tilefish is overfished based on the most recent Status of U.S. Fisheries Report to Congress, the AA will file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register, at or near the beginning of the following fishing year to reduce the commercial ACL for that following year by the amount of the commercial ACL overage in the prior fishing year.

(2) *Recreational sector.* (i) The recreational ACL is 156,809 lb (71,127 kg) in round weight.

(ii) NMFS will project the length of the recreational fishing season based on catch rates from the previous fishing year and when NMFS projects the recreational ACL specified in paragraph (z)(2)(i) of this section will be met, and annually announce the recreational fishing season end date in the **Federal Register**. On and after the effective date

of the recreational closure notification, the bag and possession limits for blueline tilefish in or from the South Atlantic EEZ are zero. The bag and possession limits of zero also apply in the South Atlantic on a vessel for which a valid Federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper has been

issued, and applies to such species harvested in state or Federal waters.

(3) *Total ACL*. The ACL for the commercial and recreational sectors combined is 314,058 lb (142,454 kg) in round weight.

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