

Gulf Council
Standing Scientific and Statistical Committee
Review of 2026 SEDAR 49 Update for Lane Snapper
January 22, 2026
Webinar

Gulf Lane Snapper Interim Analysis and Catch Advice

Dr. Francesca Forrestal (Southeast Fisheries Science Center [SEFSC]) presented an updated interim analysis (IA) for Gulf of America (Gulf) lane snapper. This IA is based off the ITarget model used initially in SEDAR 49 (2016)¹ and has been updated to use the Gulf Fishery-Independent Survey of Habitat and Ecosystem Resources (G-FISHER) composite video index as the representative index of relative abundance. The last IA conducted for lane snapper used the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) index but is no longer being considered due to concerns about the representativeness of that index for the fishery. Dr. Forrestal discussed the requirements for conducting an IA, which uses a 10-year reference period during which the fishery is thought to be in a stable condition. She added that G-FISHER is currently a Gulf-wide survey that samples both natural and artificial reef sites. For this analysis, only natural reef sites were considered.

An SSC member noted the large increase in the index beginning in 2016 and asked about the sample sizes reported from the G-FISHER survey. A G-FISHER analyst replied that the increase in sampling since 2016 has been accounted for in the standardization of the index. Council staff reported a correlation analysis conducted comparing the increase in the sample size from G-FISHER against the standardized index and found strong correlation ($\rho=0.87$). Council staff inquired whether sample size and index performance might be conflated. Several SSC members were similarly concerned. An SSC member thought G-FISHER was appropriate for lane snapper with respect to survey coverage. They further asked if biological data (i.e., ages and lengths) were available to provide context for the patterns observed in the ITarget analysis. Dr. Forrestal replied that ages and lengths are not used to directly inform IAs. Council staff confirmed that fishermen are reporting catching lane snapper in greater numbers and at larger sizes than in years past.

Dr. Forrestal reviewed the merits of using different reference periods (2006-2015, 2019-2023, and 2009-2018) of CPUE data from G-FISHER and described how each informed the various overfishing limits (OFL) for lane snapper. Ultimately, the SEFSC recommended the use of G-FISHER for lane snapper, and the reference period of 2009-2018, which corresponds to an OFL of 1,336,445 lb whole weight. This reference period captures more interannual variability without management bias and is likely to be more representative of the fishery. An SSC member thought it may be best to consider a reference period from 2016-2023 which would be completely inclusive of the expanded sampling regime. However, the SSC determined that the 2009-2018 reference period incorporated long-term uncertainty in the index, accounted for the likely increase in abundance since 2016, but did not include recent years where in-season closures occurred in

¹ <https://sedarweb.org/documents/sedar-49-final-stock-assessment-report-gulf-of-mexico-data-limited-species/>

December. In conclusion, the SSC advocated moving away from using the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) since dockside sampling has been recently interrupted due to funding issues and advised that SEFSC analysts closely examine whether G-FISHER survey expansion in 2016 does affect CPUE estimates for lane snapper.

Motion: The SSC considers the 2026 lane snapper interim analysis using the G-FISHER index with the reference period of 2009-2018 as consistent with the best scientific information available.

Motion carried with one in opposition and one abstention.

Motion: The SSC recommends an OFL of 1,336,445 lb whole weight, and an Acceptable Biological Catch of 1,304,917 lb whole weight for Gulf lane snapper for 2026-2028, based on the 2026 lane snapper interim analysis.

Motion carried without opposition.

Meeting Participants

Standing SSC

Luiz Barbieri
Harry Blanchet
Dave Chagaris
Tom Frazer, *Vice Chair*
David Griffith
Tiffany Hopper
Jack Isaacs
John Mareska
Paul Mickle
Trevor Moncrief, *Chair*

James Nance
Will Patterson
Dan Petrolia
Sean Powers
Andrew Ropicki
Ralph Townsend

Council Representative

Mike Allen