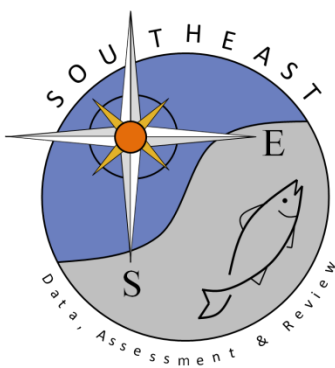


# Summary of Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting Program Records for Red Snapper Catch in the South Atlantic Region

LAPP/DM Branch  
NOAA Fisheries Service  
Southeast Regional Office

SEDAR90-DW-31

14 May 2025



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Please cite this document as:

LAPP/DM Branch NOAA Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office. 2025. Summary of Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting Program Records for Red Snapper Catch in the South Atlantic Region. SEDAR90-DW-31. SEDAR, North Charleston, SC. 11 pp.

## **Summary of Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting Program Records for Red Snapper Catch in the South Atlantic Region**

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### *Background*

In 2021, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) implemented an amendment to modify reporting for all for-hire vessels that have been issued federal permits to fish for species in the snapper grouper, dolphin wahoo or coastal migratory pelagic (CMP) fishery management plans. Prior to this amendment, only the federally permitted vessels selected for the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) were required to complete logbook reports for trips that fished for or landed snapper grouper, dolphin wahoo, or CMP species in state or federal waters in the South Atlantic region. The amended regulation modified the timing of reporting for headboats subject to the SRHS, and implemented a new electronic reporting requirement for all other federally permitted vessels via the Southeast For-Hire Electronic Integrated Reporting (SEFHIER) program. This program is intended to improve timeliness and accuracy of data from the for-hire fleet, by using a census approach to improve catch statistics used to monitor and manage federal fisheries under the purview of the South Atlantic Council. While the purview of the federal fisheries under the South Atlantic Council extends through Maine for certain permits, this report is limited to the waters off of Florida through North Carolina.

Federally permitted for-hire vessels not selected for the SRHS program, are required to submit weekly trip level or no-fishing reports to SEFHIER through an approved electronic application. Approved applications at this time are either Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program's (ACCSP) eTRIPS mobile or Bluefin Data LLC's VESL application. Logbook records that provide fishing information include: trip start and end dates/times, end port, vessel and captain information, number of angles, number of crew, fishing method, hours fished, primary fishing depth, common name and count for each species kept or discarded, charter fee, fuel used, and fuel price per gallon. Data collected by the approved applications is aggregated and warehoused by ACCSP. These data are later made accessible to the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) to aid with customer service, quality control and quality assurance checks, monitoring of compliance, and data analysis for participants in SEFHIER.

### *Aggregation of Catch Statistics*

Since January of 2021, SEFHIER vessels have been required to report a logbook for every for-hire fishing trip they take. However, 2021 is considered a "burn-in" year due to very low compliance, therefore only data from 2022 onward is considered in this analysis. Trip reports that landed or discarded red snapper in the South Atlantic region from North Carolina through the east coast of Florida (Duval through Miami-Dade County), were subset to aggregate catch

statistics for SEFHIER vessels (data provided March 20, 2025). The disposition of fish reported by SEFHIER vessels can only be categorized as retained or discarded, with no ability to discern the difference between fish released alive and dead. Annual SEFHIER logbook reports of retained and discarded red snapper were aggregated for the region, by year (**Table 1**). On average, SEFHIER vessels in Florida reported the greatest magnitude of both retained and discarded red snapper in the South Atlantic region, followed by North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia (**Figure 1**). Red snapper harvest is allowed year round in state waters, but the federal season for red snapper only occurs during the short recreational mini-seasons, generally starting in July, if at all. With full compliance, SEFHIER logbooks would allow managers to determine the number of retained and discarded red snapper on a finer time scale than is currently possible. **Figure 2** shows a comparison between SEFHIER Wave 4 and SEFHIER federal mini-season catch values, from 2022 to 2024. SEFHIER logbooks have the potential to allow managers to determine number of retained and discarded red snapper by federally permitted vessel (not including SRHS vessels) on a finer time scale than is currently possible, but only with full compliance by participants and validation of reporting.

#### *Comparison of SEFHIER and MRIP*

Since SEDAR 73, management of red snapper in the South Atlantic region has relied on a decision tree process to determine the most appropriate estimates to represent harvest and discards from available state and federal surveys. Currently, charter (state and federally permitted vessels) estimates are derived by combining effort estimates generated by the For-Hire Telephone Survey (FHS) and catch data from dockside intercepts of charter vessels in the Marine Recreational Information Program's Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (MRIP APAIS). SEFHIER logbooks have the potential to provide an alternative estimate of federal charter effort, harvest and discard levels. The following analysis provides a comparison of SEFHIER and MRIP charter fleet summary data to quantify red snapper catch and effort levels.

SEFHIER logbooks are provided at the vessel trip level, but MRIP charter effort is generally calculated by expanding MRIP APAIS angler trip intercept data based on the effort estimates from the weekly FHS. For this analysis, MRIP effort estimates were instead generated in vessel trips to match the effort units available. The number of vessel trips where red snapper were caught (retained or discarded) were aggregated by year for each program (**Table 2**). Annually, MRIP estimates a much higher number of red snapper vessel trips, as compared to SEFHIER, but show similar trends in fishing pressure throughout the year (**Figure 3**). Some of the difference in magnitude between vessel trip estimates for MRIP vs SEFHIER may be attributed to the inclusion of state permitted charter trips in the estimation for MRIP. Despite these differences, both programs have the highest estimates or reports of red snapper trips in summer months (May-August).

MRIP charter catch data from the ACL monitoring file (MRIP FES ACL file, downloaded February 25, 2025) was aggregated from 2022 to 2024, to match the retained and discard catch dispositions reported in SEFHIER logbooks for the same time period. Wave 4 catch data was compared between the two programs, to investigate differences at the finest temporal scale available for both programs, when the short federal season is open (**Figure 4**). In all years, MRIP

estimated discards are much higher than SEFHIER reports, but retained catch is much closer in magnitude between the two programs in Wave 4. Historically, landings include both retained (A) and unobserved harvest (B1) for a species, whereas discards refer to fish discarded alive (B2). Data from both programs was aggregated to show the finest disposition categories available to show the contribution of B1 (unobserved harvest) to the MRIP discards (**Figure 5**). The unobserved harvest accounts for only a small proportion of the discard values from MRIP estimates. The difference in magnitude between retained and discarded red snapper corresponds with a much higher discard to retained catch ratio for the MRIP survey as compared to SEFHIER (**Figure 6**). Overall, the SEFHIER and MRIP programs show similar trends in the effort distribution throughout the year, similar magnitudes of retained red snapper in Wave 4 in recent years, but vastly different magnitudes of reported discards as compared to MRIP estimates.

#### *Utility of SEFHIER Estimates*

The SEFHIER program has suffered from low compliance in the South Atlantic region since its inception. A large proportion (>50%) of SEFHIER vessels report late, and more than half of federally permitted SEFHIER vessels that do report, submit “Did Not Fish” reports in each month of the calendar year (**Figure 7**). These low reporting compliance rates undercut the value of the data provided by SEFHIER vessels, as a census count of charter fishing effort in the South Atlantic region. SEFHIER logbooks do not include catch from state for-hire vessels, solely permitted to fish in state waters, where red snapper harvest is permitted year round. Additionally, the aggregated counts of retained and discarded red snapper reported by the SEFHIER fleet do not have an accompanying trip or effort validation survey that can be used to correct for mis- or non-reporting. The lack of a trip validation method also limits the availability of biological data to describe the size, weight and age of the fish retained by SEFHIER participants, inhibiting the ability to generate an estimate of the weight and age distribution of red snapper retained by the fleet. In a [letter](#) to the South Atlantic Council, both SERO and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) stated that SEFHIER program data should not be used for science or management due to low compliance and lack of independent validation. Without independent validation, the data cannot be evaluated for representativeness nor can the size or direction of any biases be determined. It is recommended that the data should be used only in a qualitative nature as SERO and SEFSC indicated in the letter to the South Atlantic Council that SEFHIER does not represent best scientific information available.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council has undertaken steps to improve the compliance with SEFHIER reporting requirements. Until compliance improves, decisions to consider using SEFHIER data to represent the charter fleet should be weighed heavily against the ability to employ a valid statistical method to properly expand the catch and discards reported in logbooks. SEFHIER reports may represent the only counts of retained charter catch for some South Atlantic states, as low sample sizes may prevent MRIP from generating wave level estimates of red snapper harvest outside of Florida. Despite this data gap, SEFHIER catch data lack an appropriate methodology to expand the census reporting to account for mis- and non-reporting. Additionally, SEFHIER and MRIP discard to retained catch ratios indicate very different trends in the prevalence of discarding in the red snapper fishery. More analysis is

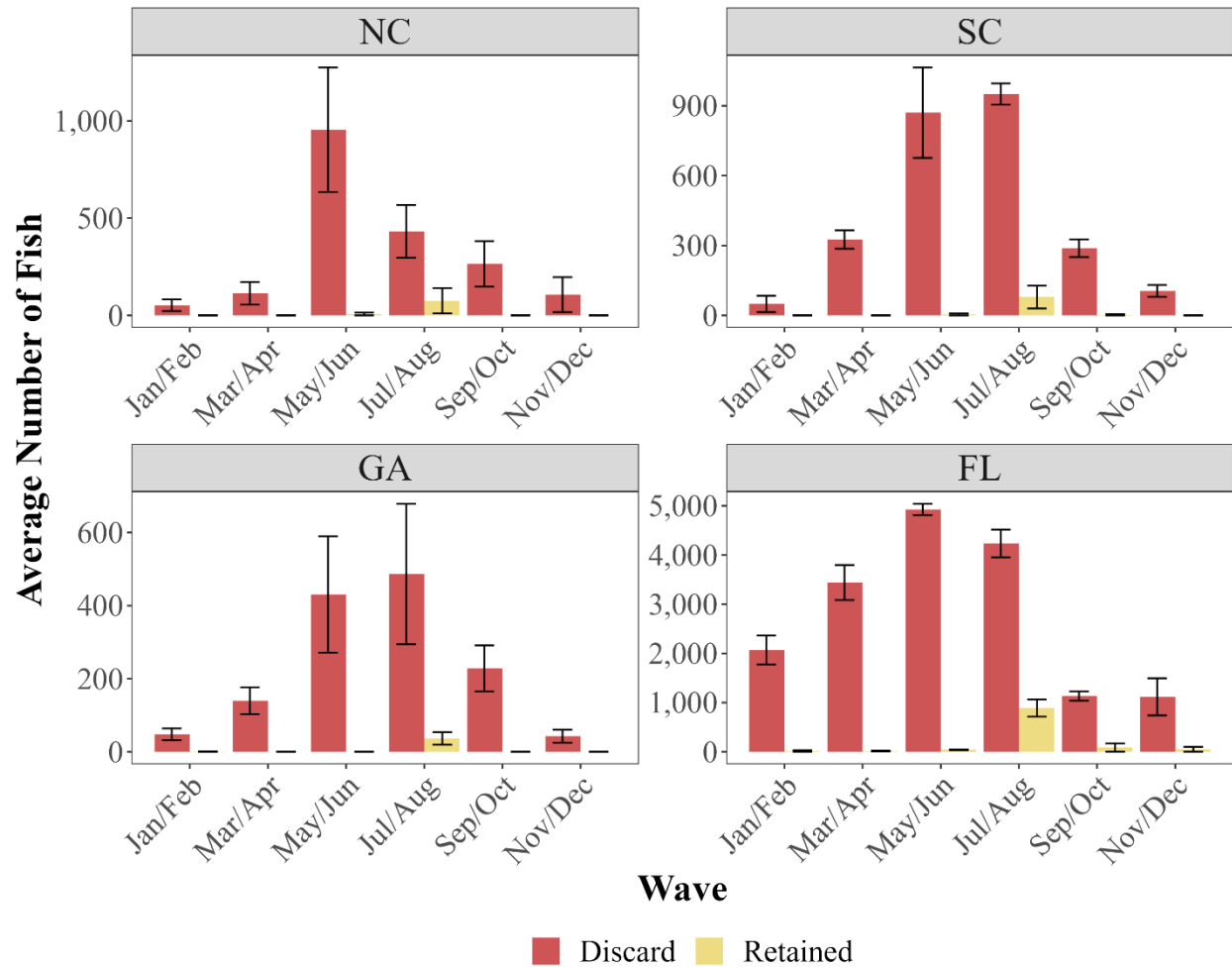
necessary to understand what is driving the much lower discard rates reported in SEFHIER vessel logbooks and those reported by anglers intercepted by MRIP APAIS biologists. Any decisions to replace existing charter estimates with SEFHIER data should clearly document the expected benefit to the stock assessment process before improvements to compliance and validation can be implemented.

**Table 1.** Annual number of red snapper reported as retained and discarded by SEFHIER vessels between 2022 and 2024. Discarded fish corresponds with red snapper that were released alive and dead.

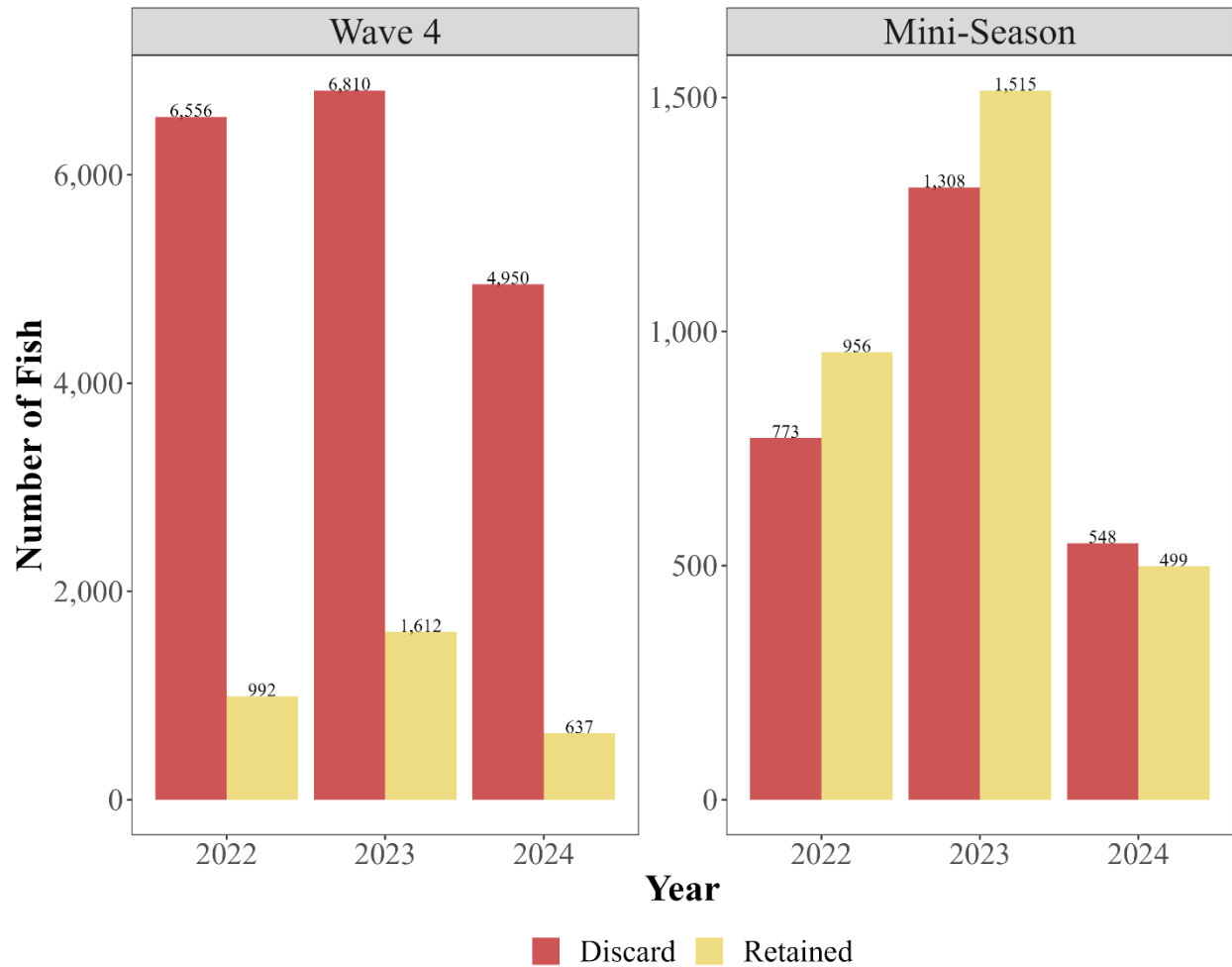
<b>Year</b>	<b>Trips</b>	<b>Retained</b>	<b>Discarded</b>
2022	1,803	1,094	24,137
2023	2,201	1,665	23,730
2024	1,705	1,153	20,508

**Table 2.** Annual number of red snapper vessel trips estimated by MRIP charter or reported to SEFHIER between 2022 and 2024. Data from 2024 are considered preliminary for MRIP.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Estimated MRIP Charter Vessel Trips</b>	<b>Reported SEFHIER Vessel Trips</b>
2022	21,264	1,803
2023	24,667	2,201
2024	22,137	1,705

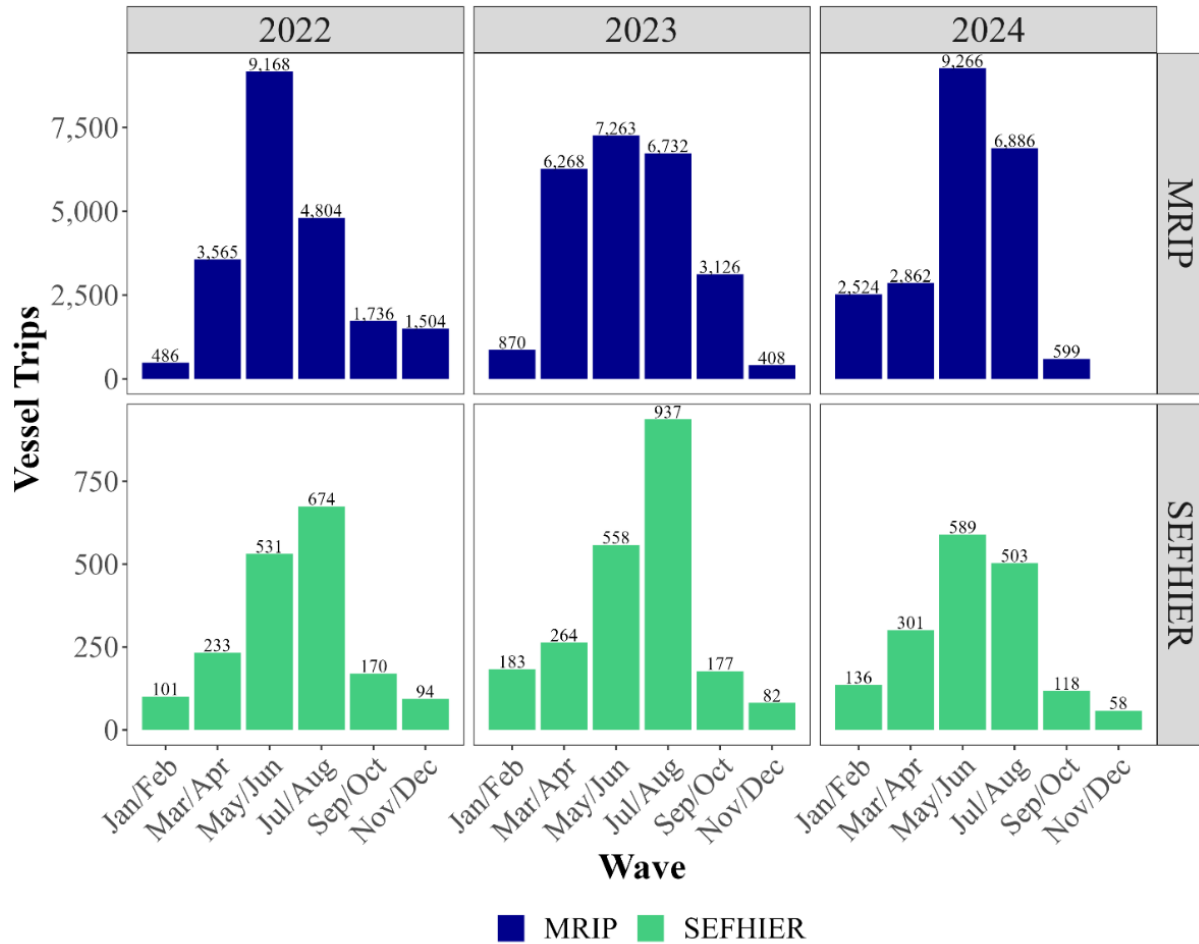


**Figure 1.** Average number of red snapper reported as retained and discarded by SEFHIER vessels between 2022 and 2024, in the South Atlantic region, by state and wave. Discarded fish correspond with red snapper that were released alive or dead.

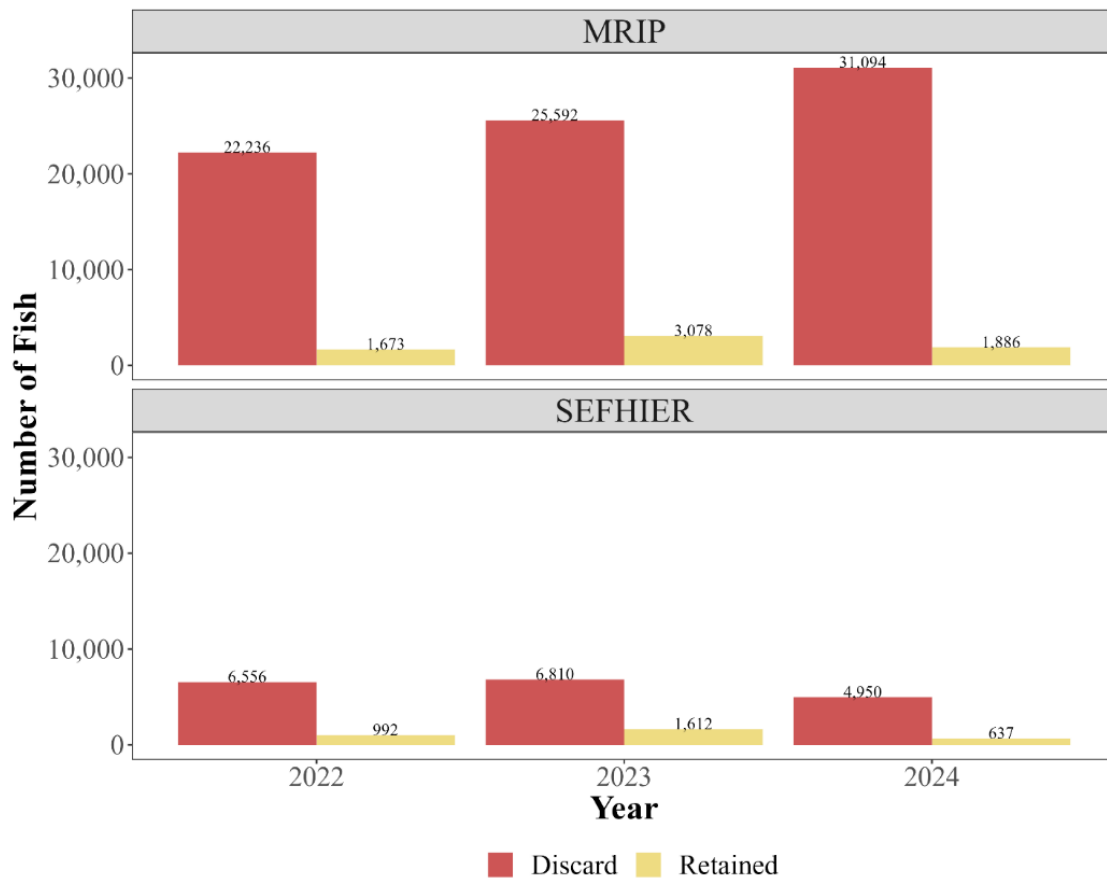


**Figure 2.** Number of red snapper reported as retained and discarded by SEFHIER vessels in Wave 4 (July & August) or during the federal mini-season openings between 2022 and 2024, in the South Atlantic region. Discarded fish correspond with red snapper that were released alive or dead.

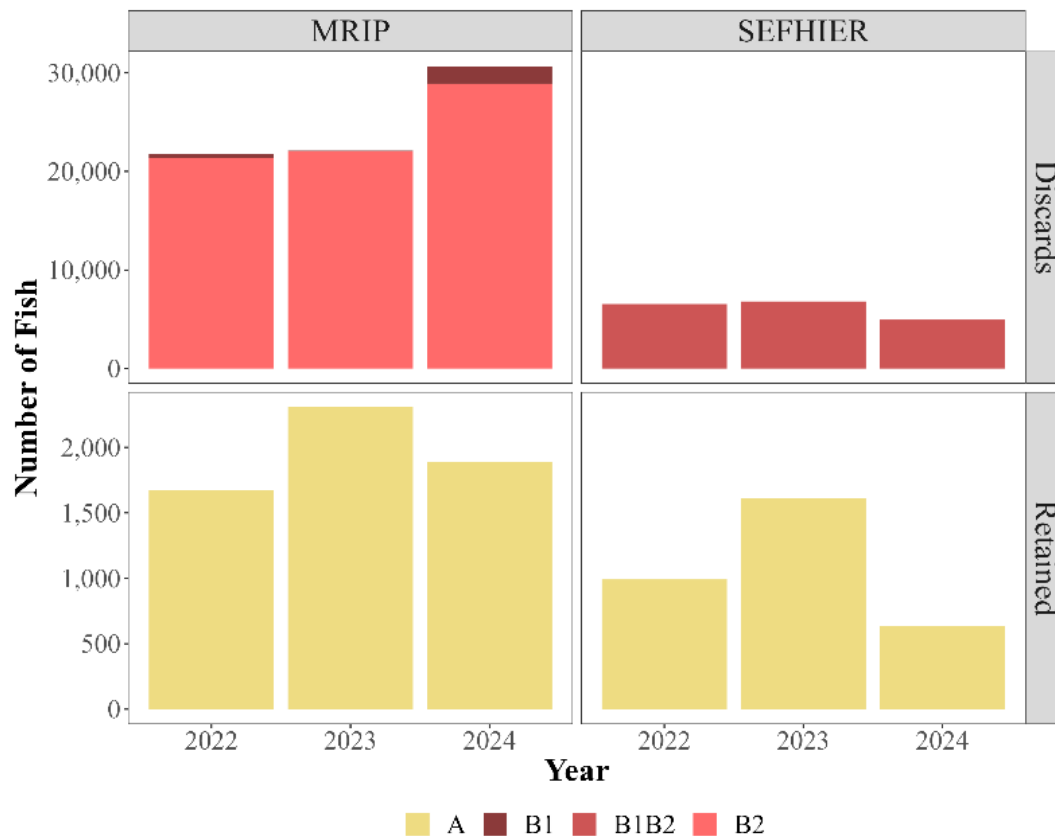




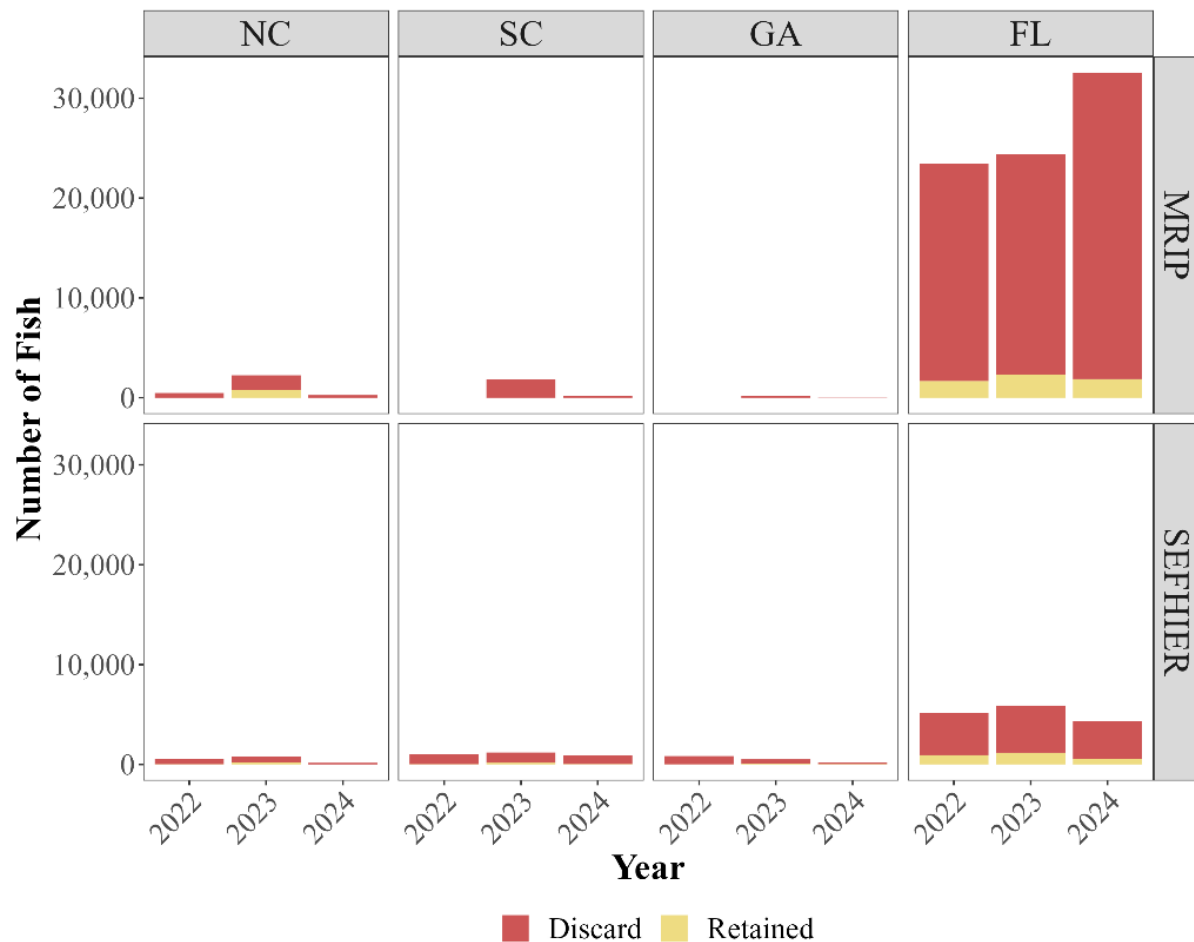
**Figure 3.** Number of red snapper charter vessel trips estimated by MRIP (blue) or reported in SEFHIER logbooks (green) by year and wave, from 2022 to 2024. Data from 2024 are considered preliminary for MRIP.



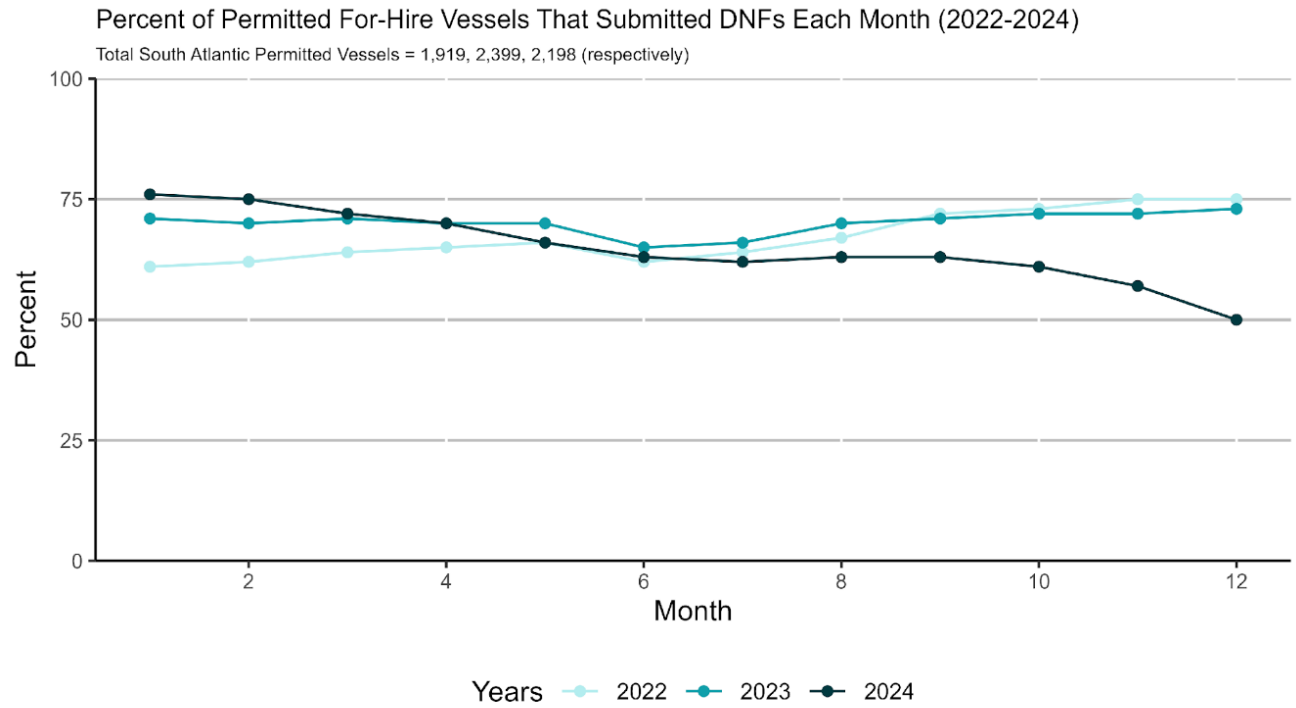
**Figure 4.** Number of retained and discarded red snapper by sampling program in Wave 4 of each, from 2022 to 2024. Data from 2024 are considered preliminary for MRIP.



**Figure 5.** Number of retained and discarded red snapper by sampling program in Wave 4 of each, from 2022 to 2024, grouped by catch disposition. Data from 2024 are considered preliminary for MRIP.



**Figure 6.** Number of retained and discarded red snapper by sampling program in Wave 4 of each, from 2022 to 2024, grouped by catch disposition and state. Data from 2024 are considered preliminary for MRIP.



**Figure 7.** Proportion of South Atlantic federal for-hire permitted vessels, excluding vessels that report to the Southeast Region Headboat, submitting “Did Not Fish Reports”, from 2022 to 2024.