

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Update and Liaison Report



September 2024

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in Charleston, South Carolina, on September 16-19, 2024. Below is a summary of salient discussions.

Secretarial Amendment to End Overfishing of Red Snapper

Three red snapper legal cases are currently under litigation. One lawsuit alleges that NOAA Fisheries violated the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and Administrative Procedures Act because it failed to address overfishing of red snapper. The settlement agreement was approved on August 22, 2024, and states that NOAA Fisheries will complete and submit a secretarial amendment, the final rule for which needs to be submitted to the Federal Register by June 6, 2025. The Council will be able to comment on the secretarial amendment, and there will be opportunities for public comment prior to implementation. The Notice of Intent is expected to be published next month. See [Fishery Bulletin](#).

Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER)

In June 2024, the Council initiated work on an amendment to address shortcomings of the SEFHIER program focusing on [recommendations](#) from NOAA Fisheries' Southeast Regional Office (SERO) and Southeast Fisheries Science Center and considering actions being explored by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. During the September 2024 meeting, it was noted that the agency cannot validate the for-hire logbook until reporting compliance improves. The Council requested additional feedback from the agency as to what level of compliance would be necessary for validation to take place and for data to be subsequently used in management. The Council modified the draft purpose statement for the developing amendment to include gathering of economic data for the recreational for-hire industry. The Council also requested additional information, including: details on the process of approving landing locations and how it was carried out previously in the Gulf of Mexico, the importance of approved landing locations to data validation, how the approval process would function for vessels holding permits in more than one region or operating outside of the South Atlantic region, clarification on incongruent requirements for Did Not Fish reports among regions, and an example of a validation survey and how one could be administered in the South Atlantic.

It was also noted that SERO is developing a new reporting platform that is intended to eventually allow one-stop reporting. The data collected through this application would continue to be funneled through the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program. SERO intends to beta test the application with fishermen and conduct outreach. Another project involves the creation of a permit registry. Both projects intend to ease the burden on stakeholders as well as the agency. Council members requested to be kept informed regarding the agency's outreach and education plans for these new projects. Additionally, the Council will be requesting a presentation from NOAA Highly Migratory Species on the recently published proposed rule addressing electronic reporting requirements for for-hire and commercial vessels.

Coral Amendment 11/Shrimp Amendment 12

The Council initiated work on an amendment to allow fishing for rock shrimp in an area that was historically accessible to the fishery but is currently encompassed within the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern (CHAPC). The Council did not intend for this area to be included within the CHAPC when it was put in place via Coral Amendment 8 but, due to timing issues, Coral Amendment 8 was submitted without modification. The Council attempted to re-establish access to the fishery with Coral Amendment 10. However, NOAA Fisheries disapproved the amendment because it did not describe how opening this area would minimize the effects of fishing on Essential Fish Habitat, did not meet the goals and objectives of the Coral Fishery Management Plan, and did not address bycatch. To address these issues the Council is starting work on a joint shrimp and coral amendment to create a Shrimp Fishery Access Area along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the Oculina Bank CHAPC.

Marine Recreational Information Program Listening Session

NOAA Fisheries' Office of Science and Technology (OST) has been conducting a large-scale study to determine differences in respondent recall and resulting recreational fishing effort estimates (for shore and private modes) between the current Fishing Effort Survey design and a revised design. The Council received an update on this effort. Additionally, OST is re-evaluating recreational fishing data collection partnership approaches with the intent to transition to a new, collaboratively developed vision for the state-federal partnership in 2026. To that effect, OST has hosted discussions with key partners via webinars and listening sessions during fishery management council meetings. NOAA OST plans to designate and/or reformulate working groups in early 2025 and host a series of regional workshops during summer 2025 to develop a shared vision and action plan for public release by the end of 2025. Council members provided feedback to OST guided by a series of questions designed to inform the re-envisioning process, including discussion points for the workshops in 2025.

Snapper Grouper Amendments and Projects

The Council finalized two amendments to the Snapper Grouper FMP and approved them for formal review:

- *Regulatory Amendment 36* proposes revising the gag and black grouper recreational vessel limits and revising transit stowage requirements for commercial black sea bass pots equipped with on-demand gear.

- *Amendment 55* proposes the creation of a new Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper Complex and adopts status determination criteria, a rebuilding plan, catch level recommendations, sector allocations, and management and accountability measures for the new complex. The amendment also reorganizes the other Shallow Water Grouper Complex and adjusts catch levels accordingly.

Black Sea Bass Management (Amendment 56)

Amendment 56 responds to the SEDAR 76 stock assessment of black sea bass, which indicates the stock is depleted. NOAA Fisheries sent a letter on May 30, 2024, indicating that black sea bass will continue to be listed as not overfished and not overfishing (the status from the previous stock assessment, SEDAR 56), pending the adoption of new status determination criteria that have been recommended by the assessment panel and endorsed by the SSC. The SSC is expected to review additional projections at their October 2024 meeting. The Council discussed a list of potential management actions and expected changes to fishing behavior in response to these potential changes. The Council will address management of black sea bass incrementally. First, new biological reference points, catch limits (once provided), and other measures (e.g., sector allocations, management and accountability measures) will be adopted through Amendment 56. A framework amendment will follow to put in place a rebuilding plan.