

Gulf and South Atlantic Council
Scientific and Statistical Committees
Scope of Work
May 8, 2025
Tampa, Florida

Agenda Item IV: Revised OFL and ABC Projections for Red Grouper (SEDAR 88)

Action: Presentation, discussions, and recommendations

Committee input and next steps: Dr. Francesca Forrestal (Southeast Fisheries Science Center [SEFSC]) will provide updated catch projections for Gulf red grouper based on the SEDAR 88 stock assessment. At its February 2025 meeting, the SSC recommended an overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) for 2027 – 2029, using a proxy for fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield (F_{MSY}) of the fishing mortality at a 40% spawning potential ratio ($F_{40\%SPR}$). At its April 2025 meeting, the Council requested an emergency rule on social and economic grounds be initiated by NMFS to increase red grouper catch limits beginning in the 2025 fishing season. To meet the needs of this request, the Council has requested that the SSC review these updated projections, which begin in 2025; previously, 2025 and 2026 were modeled as interim years in the last set of catch projections. The SSC should consider the revised projections, select from a three- (2025 – 2027) or five-year (2025 – 2029) constant catch scenario, and recommend a revised OFL and ABC to the Council.

Motion/recommendation to Council expected

Agenda Item V: Discussion: Status Determination Criteria and OFL and ABC Projections Settings for Gulf Stock Assessments

Action: Presentation, discussions, and recommendations

Committee input and next steps: Dr. Katie Siegfried (SEFSC) and Council staff will review previous decisions about projections settings for Gulf stock assessments and explain differences in some of those decisions. The presentation will then recommend how to standardize future projections settings for consistency in the data used to generate OFL and ABC advice. The SSC should evaluate the information presented and make recommendations to the SEFSC and Council staff as appropriate.

Agenda Item VI: Review: SEDAR 68 Updated Projections for Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper

Action: Presentation, discussions, and recommendations

Committee input and next steps: Council staff will provide a brief overview on Council actions and requests since the SEDAR 68 scamp and yellowmouth grouper projections were last reviewed and recommended by the SSC. Dr. Skyler Sagarese (SEFSC) will provide updated catch projections for Gulf scamp and yellowmouth grouper based on the SEDAR 68 operational stock assessment. These projections have been updated at the Council's request to include finalized landings data for 2021 – 2023, using F_{MSY} proxy values of $F_{30\%SPR}$ and $F_{40\%SPR}$. Based on this request the projections result in a change in stock status for Gulf scamp and yellowmouth grouper at $F_{40\%SPR}$, such that the complex is considered to be overfished and undergoing overfishing. This is because catch limits were not reduced following the completion of the SEDAR 68 operational assessment in a timely manner, and landings above that which is estimated to be sustainable by the complex have continued in the interim.

Thus, the projections at $F_{40\%SPR}$ will be projected at $F_{Rebuild}$, with the rebuilding period forecast from 2026 – 2035. Projections under both $F_{30\%SPR}$ and $F_{40\%SPR}$ will assume a 54% reduction in landings from the 2021 – 2023 average for 2026, in keeping with the framework action currently being developed by the Council to reduce fishing mortality ahead of the completion of the more comprehensive Reef Fish Amendment 58A. The SSC should consider the revised projections and recommend a revised OFL and ABC under each scenario ($F_{30\%SPR}$ and $F_{40\%SPR}$) to the Council and should reiterate their scientific recommendation for the appropriate SPR proxy.

Motion/recommendation to Council expected

Agenda Item VII: Review: Center for Independent Experts (CIE) Independent Peer Review of the Shrimp Bycatch Estimation Methodology for Finfish Species

Action: Presentation, discussions, and recommendations

Committee input and next steps: The trawl fishery for shrimp in the Gulf of America (Gulf) is one of the most important commercial fisheries of the US in terms of landings, economic value, and number of vessels participating. This fishery also captures many non-target species discarded as bycatch. Estimates of bycatch are crucial input data for assessing many fish species in the southeastern U.S., and particularly for determining annual quotas for red snapper, a key species. In 2021, NMFS established a project team to update and quality assure the bycatch estimation procedures, and to assess possible sources of bias. A recent preliminary examination by the project team uncovered substantial systematic bias in the previous method used for bycatch estimation. Therefore, a complete overhaul of the methodology was conducted at the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC). The new method utilizes four main data sources: effort data, observer data, a gear and landings survey, and shrimp landings data. A project team formed in 2021 implemented a cross-check procedure, estimating annual brown shrimp landings and comparing them to reported fleet landings. The results indicated a consistent 45% underestimation of bycatch, revealing a systematic bias in the bycatch estimation process. The proposed methodology combines refined effort estimates with catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) estimates derived from observer data within spatial and temporal post-strata. Effort scaling is now conducted using a survey-design framework that aggregates time, area, and depth. A model-based approach was employed to explore potential stratification variables for gear

characteristics and diurnal periods in the CPUE estimation. The SSCs will review the independent peer-review of this new shrimp bycatch estimation methodology for finfish, as reviewed by the CIE. The CIE reviews are included as background material. The SSCs should ask questions and make recommendations as appropriate and consider whether the new methodology is considered consistent with the best scientific information available.

Motion/recommendation to Councils expected

Agenda Item VIII: Review: New Bycatch Estimates and Other Analyses for Smalltooth Sawfish and Giant Manta Ray

Action: Presentation, discussions, and recommendations

Committee input and next steps: Ms. Jennifer Lee (NMFS Southeast Regional Office [SERO]) will present anticipated deliverables from the new bycatch estimates associated with supporting the Biological Opinion on the Shrimp Fishery. Ms. Lee will also present updated information regarding recent recovery actions for giant manta ray, the mortality event afflicting sawfish in the Florida Keys in 2024, trends in juvenile sawfish abundance in Charlotte Harbor, and the re-initiation of the Section 7 consultation on shrimp fisheries. The SSC should evaluate the information presented, ask questions of Ms. Lee, and make any recommendations to the Council as appropriate.

Motion/recommendation to Councils expected

Agenda Item IX: Review: Population Viability Analysis for Endangered and Threatened Resources that Interact with the Shrimp Fishery

Action: Presentation, discussions, and recommendations

Committee input and next steps: The SEFSC will present an updated population viability analysis for endangered and threatened species that may interact with the Gulf shrimp fishery. The purpose of this analysis is to consider the effects of the continued operation of the shrimp fishery on the maintenance or rebuilding of key vulnerable stocks. The SSC should consider the information presented, ask questions, and make recommendations as appropriate.

Agenda Item X: SEDAR Process Update

Action: Presentation, discussions, and recommendations

Committee input and next steps: Dr. Siegfried and Council staff will discuss proposed changes to the SEDAR process. Briefly, these changes will primarily affect the assessment process portion of the stock assessment process. As opposed to SEDAR coordinating this portion, the SEFSC will instead take the lead, with public webinars still used when necessary to

make key decisions in view of the public. Also, the SEFSC will present interim progress to the SSC when appropriate, to collect feedback about key decisions. This modification is expected to increase the efficiency of the stock assessment process without sacrificing transparency or quality. The SSC should evaluate the information presented, ask questions of Dr. Siegfried and Council staff, and make recommendations as appropriate.

Agenda Item XI: SEDAR 100: Gulf Gray Triggerfish Participants for Review Workshop Phase

Action: Discussion and recommendations

Committee input and next steps: Council staff will request volunteers from the SSC for participation in the review workshop phase of the upcoming SEDAR 100 stock assessment for Gulf gray triggerfish. The assessment began with data scoping in April 2025, and will conclude with an in-person Review Workshop in February 2027. SSC members should review the terms of reference and proposed schedule for the assessment before volunteering to participate.

Agenda Item XII: SSC SEDAR Workshops Update

Action: Discussion and recommendations

Committee input and next steps: Council staff will provide a brief update about the progress of the SEDAR 87 stock assessment on Gulf white, brown, and pink shrimp. Dr. Will Patterson will provide a brief update about the progress of the SEDAR 98 stock assessment on Gulf red snapper. The SSC should ask questions as appropriate. These updated are informational only.

Agenda Item XIII: Review of Takeaways from the 8th Science Coordination Subcommittee Meeting in Boston, MA

Action: Presentation, discussions, and recommendations

Committee input and next steps: Council staff will provide a brief presentation summarizing the 8th Scientific Coordination Subcommittee meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, which was held in August 2024 (National SSC Meeting). The SSC should evaluate the information presented, ask questions of Council staff and SSC representatives who attended the meeting, and make recommendations as appropriate.

Agenda Item XIV: Public Comment

Action: Information

Committee input and next steps: Members of the public will be able to address the SSC directly with respect to the topics discussed during this meeting, and other matters, as time allows.

Agenda Item XV: Other Business

Action: Discussion

Committee Input and Next Steps: Additional items may be brought up for discussion by SSC members, time permitting. If the SSC wishes to pursue action, then action can be scheduled at a future SSC meeting.