

# South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Update and Liaison Report



March 2025

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in Jekyll Island, Georgia, on March 3-7, 2025. Below is a summary of salient discussions.

## **Advisory Panel Meetings**

The Council reviewed and approved topics for the spring meetings of its Snapper Grouper, Mackerel Cobia, and Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panels and for the July 2025 meeting of its Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel.

## **Habitat and Ecosystem**

The Council approved submitting a letter to NMFS detailing proposed modifications to Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) to fulfill the EFH 5-year review.

## **Committee Membership**

The Council discussed representation from adjacent councils on committees. Representatives of the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils serve as members on some committees but there is no committee representation from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. Both the Mid-Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Councils are represented at each South Atlantic Council meeting by liaisons. On the other hand, the South Atlantic Council does not have representation on any committees of other councils. Therefore, the Council is discontinuing committee membership for representatives of the Mid-Atlantic and New England Councils on South Atlantic Council committees. Input on fisheries issues from adjacent Councils will continue to be provided through designated representation on advisory panels. Because the New England Council does not have a liaison to the South Atlantic Council, the New England representative on the Dolphin Wahoo committee will be converted to a non-voting, liaison position. These changes will be effective in June 2025.

## **Climate Readiness Projects**

NOAA has provided funding to support Council efforts to develop and advance climate ready fisheries management. The Council's Climate Readiness Projects Coordinator gave a presentation including background information and updates on the Council's Climate Readiness Projects. Updates to the Council will be provided at quarterly meetings in the staff report and a more detailed update on each project will be provided once a year.

### **For-Hire Reporting Improvement Amendment**

The Council received feedback from its For-Hire Reporting and Law Enforcement Advisory Panels on potential actions to improve for-hire reporting in the South Atlantic region.

The Council reviewed the draft purpose and need statement and acknowledged there may be a need to revise the current language to include the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) as some of the actions being considered would apply to that program. Actions in the amendment would address reporting frequency; trip declaration requirements, including Did Not Fish Reports; approved landing locations, collection of economic data, and a mandatory validation survey. The Council approved conducting scoping on this amendment ahead of the June 2025 meeting.

### **Mackerel Cobia**

In 2024, at the urging of their Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel, the Council hosted a series of 16 in-person and six virtual port meetings along the Atlantic coast to obtain additional information from participants in the Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel fisheries. Port meetings attendees discussed their perspectives with other fishery participants and local Council members. Council staff reviewed the draft report from this effort and provided options for moving forward with the development of management actions. Before determining how to move forward with management actions, the Council will request information on results of the Gulf Council's coastal migratory pelagics stakeholder engagement effort. Additionally, the Council directed staff to bring detailed information from port meetings in June 2025 on a list of identified management topics.

### **SEDAR Committee Charge and Name Modification**

The Committee revised the charge for the Southeast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) Committee to encompass the review of schedules and terms of reference for various methods to develop advice for assess stocks. The Council added data collection into the Committee's charge, which will benefit discussions related to data collection such as the Standard Bycatch Reporting Methodology review. The Committee's name was changed to the Data, Assessment, and Catch Advice Committee.

### **Snapper Grouper Amendments**

#### *Snapper Grouper Management Unit Revision*

The Council acknowledged the need to reduce the number of species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU). There are currently 55 species in the FMU, of which approximately 15 have undergone a stock assessment. The Council selected stocks that must remain in the FMU (e.g., overfished stocks) and those that would require further evaluation to determine the need for conservation and management under a federal fishery management plan. The Council acknowledged that the composition of the FMU will directly affect other management efforts in the region, such as a potential private recreational permit for snapper grouper species.

#### *Commercial Fishery Management*

The Commercial Snapper Grouper Sub-Committee discussed and prioritized actions to explore in an amendment to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management plan that would address the needs of the commercial fishery. The Council approved initiating the amendment to: 1) revise the "two

for one” permit policy for unlimited permits, and 2) increase trip efficiency. The Sub-Committee will be convened again in June 2025 to focus on developing the amendment.

#### *Secretarial Amendment to End Overfishing of Red Snapper (Amendment 59)*

The NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office presented information on Amendment 59 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan, to end overfishing of South Atlantic red snapper and reduce dead discards. The Council’s feedback and recommendations will be submitted to NOAA Fisheries by March 17, 2025.

#### *Black Sea Bass (Amendment 56)*

Amendment 56 responds to the results of the most recent South Atlantic black sea bass stock assessment (SEDAR 76), which indicated that the population is depleted. The Council reviewed scoping comments and revised the list of actions to include:

- Revising status determination criteria for black sea bass,
- reducing catch levels for black sea bass,
- changing the black sea bass fishing year start date (for both sectors),
- re-opening nearshore areas to commercial on-demand black sea bass pots,
- prohibiting multi-hook rigs for recreational fishing in the snapper grouper fishery,
- revising the recreational bag limit for black sea bass,
- reducing the recreational size limit for black sea bass,
- exploring a seasonal retention closure for black sea bass, and
- exploring regional management actions (e.g., aligning recreational fishing year start dates for deep water snapper grouper species).

#### *Private Recreational Permit and Education Requirements (Amendment 46)*

Amendment 46 considers establishing a private recreational permit and education requirement for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. The Council continued to move forward with his amendment, discussing ways to potentially allow states to be exempt from the federal permit and education requirement. State directors on the Council intend to further discuss with NMFS the specifics of such an exemption. Meanwhile, staff will continue gathering information to bring to the Council in June 2025, when the Council will consider approving the amendment for public hearings.

#### *Golden Tilefish Amendment*

The SEDAR 89 stock assessment of South Atlantic golden tilefish was completed in 2024 and indicated that the stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing. The Council decided to develop actions to address: 1) updating catch levels to be consistent with the Scientific and Statistical Committee’s most recent recommendations, and 2) consider changing the recreational season start date. Updating catch levels will be addressed through an Abbreviated Framework to the Snapper Grouper FMP, which would be approved for submission to NMFS in June or September 2025. An action to explore changing the start date for recreational harvest of golden tilefish will be addressed in a separate amendment (possibly Amendment 56).