

## South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Update and Liaison Report



June 2025

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in Cape Canaveral, Florida, on June 9-13, 2025. Below is a summary of salient discussions.

### **Executive Orders**

Executive Order (EO) 14276 *Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness* requests that the Regional Fishery Management Councils provide updates to their 2020 responses to EO 13921 to reduce burdens on domestic fishing and increase production. NMFS has established a deadline of September 30, 2025, for Councils to respond. The Council briefly discussed items to include in the response to the EO (see bullets below) and directed staff to produce informational material to post on the Council's website and solicit public input. The Council also intends to convene advisory panels (remotely) to gather their recommendations. Staff will prepare a draft response for the Council to review and finalize at the September meeting. The Council directed that the following items be included in the response:

- Remove the commercial snapper grouper "2 for 1" permit provision.
- Remove species from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan that are not in need of federal management.
- Consider actions the Council can take to address shark depredation.
- Consider shifting management of spiny lobster to the state of Florida.
- Explore use of Exempted Fishing Permits to manage Red Snapper and Black Sea Bass.
- Continue to develop an amendment to allow access to a portion of the Oculina Habitat Area of Particular Concern to the rock shrimp fishery.
- Explore how the Council can support improvements to habitat for managed species in Florida.

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

The Council paused work on this amendment to focus on actions that are de-regulatory in accordance with recent Executive Orders. The amendment remains in the Council's workplan, but its timeline of development is uncertain.

### **South Atlantic Headboats**

Since June 2024, in response to public input, the Council has been gathering information to consider modifying species' vessel limits for headboats. At its June 2025 meeting, the Council

narrowed this consideration to three species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (black grouper, gag, and snowy grouper) and will continue discussion of modifying headboat vessel limits for these species at its March 2026 meeting.

### **Mackerel Cobia**

In 2024, the Council hosted a series of 16 in-person and six virtual port meetings along the Atlantic coast where attendees discussed their perspectives with other fishery participants and local Council members. In March 2025, Council staff reviewed the draft report and high-level themes from this effort. The Council requested detailed information on a suite of management options to be brought to the June 2025 meeting. Council staff presented this information in addition to a refresher on the results of SEDAR 78 (Atlantic Spanish mackerel).

The Council opted to postpone work on adjusting catch levels for Atlantic Spanish Mackerel until the results of the MRIP FES pilot study are received and directed staff to work with the SEFSC to determine if the next Atlantic Spanish Mackerel assessment can occur sooner in the SEDAR schedule. In addition, Council staff will begin to look at the potential port meeting response actions as regulatory or deregulatory to address recent EO mandates.

### **Coral/Shrimp**

The Council approved modifications to the purpose and need and selected a preferred alternative for the amendment, which proposes to establish a Shrimp Fishery Access area along the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern. An in-person public hearing (in north or central Florida) will be held this summer, as well as a hearing via webinar.

### **Snapper Grouper**

#### *Commercial Fishery Management*

The Commercial Snapper Grouper Sub-Committee reviewed draft actions based on previous discussions and directed staff to include the actions listed below in Amendment 60 and solicit feedback from the public:

- Revise the 2-for-1 snapper grouper commercial (unlimited) permit policy.
- Revise the requirements to acquire or retain a snapper grouper commercial (unlimited) permit.
- Establish a framework for dynamic trip limits that vary throughout the season, based on the tracked catch and the time remaining in the season.
- Establish a non-target or out-of-season allowance for harvest.

In addition, the Council wants to explore consideration of replacing “gear onboard” restrictions with “stowage requirements” and multi-day trip limits for a subset of snapper grouper species. Public scoping will be conducted ahead of the next sub-committee meeting, which will be held in conjunction with the Council’s September 2025 meeting.

#### *Innovation Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery*

An [Innovation Plan](#) was introduced (under Other Business) that provides a potential framework for future discussions towards adapting to changes in NMFS and maximizing commercial and recreational goals through innovative and comprehensive management in the Snapper Grouper fishery. The Council intends to engage in further discussion on this topic at upcoming meetings.

### *Snapper Grouper Management Unit Revision*

The Council initiated a plan amendment to modify the number of species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP. It was determined that an evaluation is needed to see if 17 species currently included in the management unit should remain, be removed, or be designated as Ecosystem Component species. Since some state-level regulations for these species, particularly in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, are currently tied to federal regulations, the Council will review current mechanisms in place at the state level in more detail at the September 2025 meeting.

### *Black Sea Bass*

The SEFSC presented results of the SEDAR 76 Update stock assessment of black sea bass, which suggests that the stock in the South Atlantic is overfished and is experiencing overfishing. The SSC's review of the assessment noted several uncertainties in the information used to develop catch-level recommendations. Given the notable decline in abundance of black sea bass in the South Atlantic, the Council did not want to wait until the issues with the stock assessment were resolved to initiate management action. Therefore, the Council intends to begin a framework amendment to lower black sea bass catch levels using average landings from 2019-2023 for each sector. In addition, the Council will explore changes to size limits, a reduction in the recreational bag limit, and a spawning season closure (for both sectors). Meanwhile, the Council requested that the SSC re-evaluate its recommendations as soon as possible and that an additional external peer review of the stock assessment be considered.

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

The Council paused work on this amendment to focus on actions that are de-regulatory in accordance with recent Executive Orders. The amendment remains in the Council's workplan, but its timeline of development is uncertain.

### *Atlantic Blueline Tilefish*

In spring 2025, the SSC reviewed the blueline tilefish stock assessment and supported a data-limited approach based on average catch to establish the ABC for areas north and south of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. For the region north of Cape Hatteras, the SSC recommended incorporating updated data from the South Atlantic Deepwater Longline Survey to inform the allocation of the ABC. This resulted in 70% of the northern ABC being allocated to the Mid-Atlantic and 30% to the South Atlantic. The Council was concerned about potential reductions in catch for the South Atlantic region and questioned the apportionment approach. Since a management response is not immediately required for this stock, the Council will request discussions with the Mid-Atlantic region to explore alternative ways to divide the ABC noting that developing an approach to address jurisdictional allocations will soon be necessary as species distributions change.