

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Update and Liaison Report



September 2025

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in North Charleston, South Carolina, on September 15-19, 2025. Below is a summary of salient discussions.

Executive Orders

The Council reviewed public input received on Executive Order (EO)14276 *Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness*. The Council solicited online public comment from July 28 through August 15, 2025, as well as input from its advisory panels via a virtual meeting held on August 11th. Directives in Executive Order 14276 include measures to reduce regulatory burden and promote domestic fisheries.

In its response to the EO, the Council is focusing on actions that were already underway, to ensure they would be accommodated in the workplan and thus have a high chance of completion. Actions already underway that were considered high priority were:

- Removing or considering ecosystem component designation for species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.
- Continuing work on Snapper Grouper Amendment 60 which aims to address permit issues and improve commercial trip efficiency.
- Supporting the development of Exempted Fishing Permit applications from the four South Atlantic states to explore state management of the recreational Red Snapper fishery.

The Council's response will also describe how the Council is working to increase stakeholder engagement with the management and science processes. Stakeholder input is a fundamental component of the Council process and critical to understanding how the Council can improve the competitiveness of fisheries in its jurisdiction. Other recommendations will be considered for the Council's response to Executive Order 14192 or for inclusion into the Council's workplan. In addition, the Council recommends that NOAA Fisheries prioritize the following items in its response to Executive Order 14276:

- Maintaining capacity for data collection (e.g., dockside sampling) and for conducting stock assessments in the South Atlantic region.
- Supporting the funding of citizen science and cooperative research initiatives.
- Eliminating the prohibition of shark fin sales due to its negative impacts on fishing business and potential contribution to depredation.
- Removing the requirement to report discards in the commercial fishery or develop and fund a discard reporting program that will meet best scientific information available standards.
- Supporting funding for the Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program, especially activities that promote marketing and development, infrastructure, and capacity building.

Snapper Grouper

State Management of Red Snapper

The Council held an informational session on joint state-federal management. NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office and the Gulf Council addressed regulatory procedures and their roles in implementing state-based management of red snapper in the Gulf of America. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission provided a state perspective, and a broader Atlantic viewpoint was presented by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The Council discussed issues to be addressed if joint state-federal management of the recreational red snapper fishery is considered in the South Atlantic and gave staff direction to begin working on an amendment to the Snapper Grouper FMP. Each state will initially develop and submit Exempted Fishing Permit applications to NOAA Fisheries to begin exploring the concept. Presentations on the state's proposals are scheduled for the December 2025 Council meeting, when discussion on next steps will continue.

Commercial Fishery Management

The Council settled on actions to include in Amendment 60, which focuses on improving management of the commercial snapper grouper fishery. The Council will go over refined actions and alternatives in December 2025 and a draft amendment in March 2026, when the Council will consider approving the amendment for public hearings. The Council requested input on the draft amendment from the Law Enforcement and Snapper Grouper Advisory Panels at their meetings in Winter and Spring 2026, respectively.

Innovation Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery

The Council discussed a proposed framework, first introduced in June 2025, to reset Snapper Grouper fishery discussions and make progress toward innovative actions that improve the overall fishery. The framework is built around establishing “goalposts” that describe overarching fishery objectives and aim to guide individual decisions and agreeing to “principles” and facts to avoid repetitive discussions. The Council intends to develop a series of short, medium, and long-term actions that are achievable given the current science and regulatory challenges. During this meeting, Council members brainstormed ideas for goalposts and principles, followed by discussion and grouping of ideas. At the December 2025 meeting, the Council will continue to develop the Innovation Plan by reviewing and discussing identified priorities.

Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision

Through the development of Amendment 61, the Council has identified 17 species to examine more in-depth to determine whether the species should be removed from the fishery management unit (FMU) or designated as ecosystem component (EC) species. These species are misty grouper, margate, sailor's choice, tomtate, white grunt, bar jack, jolthead porgy, knobbed porgy, saucereye porgy, scup, whitebone porgy, banded rudderfish, blackfin snapper, cubera snapper, queen snapper, Atlantic spadefish, and sand tilefish. The amendment was approved for scoping.

Black Sea Bass

The Council continued work on Regulatory Amendment 37 to quickly implement measures to address the continuing decline in abundance of black sea bass in the South Atlantic. Additional actions will be considered through Amendment 56 to the Snapper Grouper FMP.

Regulatory Amendment 37 proposes to establish recreational and commercial annual catch targets equal to 50% of the average landings from 2019 through 2023. The Council would reconsider the ACTs and associated measures two years after implementation. Additionally, the Council is considering changing minimum size limits, reducing the recreational bag limit, and implementing a spawning season closure of at least two months for both commercial and recreational sectors. Virtual public hearings for Regulatory Amendment 37 will be held prior to the Council's December meeting.

Yellowtail Snapper and Mutton Snapper

The Council discussed Joint Snapper Grouper Amendment 44/Reef Fish Amendment 55, which is being developed in response to recent stock assessments for both species. Neither species is overfished or experiencing overfishing. For each species, the amendment will: adopt recommended catch levels, establish the apportionment of the ABC between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, establish ACLs, and establish sector allocations for the South Atlantic. The Gulf Council is the administrative lead for this amendment.

Atlantic Blueline Tilefish

Following the March 2025 stock assessment for Atlantic Blueline Tilefish (SEDAR 92), the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee recommended an ABC level that would allow an increase in harvest. The assessment addressed the stock of blueline tilefish that spans the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils' jurisdictions. To implement new catch limits for the 2026 fishing season, the Council is preparing Abbreviated Framework Amendment 5 to adopt the recommended ABC and establish a total annual catch limit. Jurisdictional allocations and other management measures will be addressed in a future amendment. A public hearing will be held during the Council's December 2025 meeting in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

Coral/Shrimp

The Council approved completing a joint amendment to the Coral and Shrimp FMPs that proposes establishing a Shrimp Fishery Access Area for the rock shrimp fishery along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern. The Council discussed additional information included in the amendment and provided rationale for

how the proposed action meets the objectives of each FMP. The amendment will be considered for final approval at the Council's December 2025 meeting.