

# South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Update and Liaison Report



## December 2025

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on December 8-12, 2025. Below is a summary of salient discussions.

### **Coral/Shrimp**

The Council received an update on Coral Amendment 11/Shrimp Amendment 12, which was scheduled for approval by the Council at the December meeting. However, due to the extended government shutdown, sections of the amendment were not updated. The Council opted to delay approval to allow completion of the document and will hold a special webinar meeting on January 23, 2026, to consider approving the amendment.

### **Citizen Science**

The Council reviewed and adopted the updated Citizen Science (CitSci) Research Priorities, which incorporated input from the CitSci Projects and Operations Advisory Panels. In 2020, the Council adopted the CitSci Program's goals, objectives, and strategies. Council staff have used them to guide the overall Program's direction and develop annual work plans. The Program reviews its activities under each goal, objective, and strategy every five years. The first review took place in fall 2024 and covered Program activities from 2019-2024. Staff provided an overview of the 14 recommended indicators for regular monitoring, which were developed with input from the advisory panels. The Council was supportive of the indicators as presented, noting they help to monitor and assess key components of the Program. Members also observed that as the Program matures, there may be opportunities to narrow the list of indicators and monitor trends in data over time. The Council approved adding an ACCSP representative to the CitSci Operations AP.

### **Snapper Grouper**

#### ***State Management of Red Snapper***

Representatives from each of the South Atlantic states presented each of their Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) applications that were submitted on November 10, 2025, to explore state management of the recreational red snapper fishery. The Council also received a presentation, including methodology and results of Year 1 of the EFP that was awarded to the Florida FWC in 2024. Council members submitted comments that will be used to develop a Council letter in response to the EFPs. A 30-day public comment period will be announced in the *Federal Register*

### ***Black Sea Bass***

The Council received an overview and public comment on Regulatory Amendment 37, which proposes an annual catch target below the current ACL, a reduction in the bag limit, and a two-month spawning season closure during February and March. Following public comments, the Council changed the preferred bag limit from 2 fish per person per day to 3 per person per day. No changes to the minimum size limits are being proposed. The Council approved the amendment for submission to NOAA Fisheries and Secretarial approval.

### ***Blueline Tilefish***

The Council approved Abbreviated Framework 5 to implement the catch level recommendations for blueline tilefish. Since the recommended ABC was in total removals, the total ACL will be reduced by 3.9% to account for discards. Including this adjustment results in approximately an 80,000-pound increase in the total ACL from the current level, however, it is important to note that the new assessment transitions recreational effort monitoring from the Coastal Household Telephone Survey to the Fishing Effort Survey. The Council expressed concerns about the uncertainty of available discard estimates but ultimately felt the benefit to the fishery of quickly implementing the recommended ABC was greater than the potential benefits of waiting for a more prolonged process. The Council still intends to work on a subsequent amendment that would include reevaluating jurisdictional apportionment percentages with the Mid-Atlantic Council, sector allocations, and discard estimates.

### ***Golden Tilefish***

Staff presented the results of the revised golden tilefish stock assessment (SEDAR 89). The assessment was revised when a discrepancy in the commercial landings was identified. The Council discussed whether to reinitiate work on Abbreviated Framework 4 to adjust the golden tilefish ABC and ACL based on the SSC recommendation. The current total ACL is set to increase in 2026, but the newly recommended ABC is slightly below this level (~1,000 pounds). Therefore, the Council decided not to proceed with Abbreviated Framework 4 to adjust catch levels, since the stock is not overfished and the adjustment to the annual catch limit would be minimal. Instead, an action to adjust catch levels will be included in another Snapper Grouper FMP amendment in 2026.

### ***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 Council reviewed scoping comments and feedback from its Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel, reviewed draft ecosystem management objectives relevant to EC species, the number of species that would continue to be considered in the amendment, and potential management measures to include in the amendment. The Council had previously requested a report on commercial landings for unmanaged and EC species in the South Atlantic Region, like the one produced in the Mid-Atlantic. Staff will prepare the report and provide it to the Council at a meeting in the latter half of 2026 and annually thereafter. The Council requested more information to settle the species and potential measures that will be

further considered in the amendment. Staff will prepare additional information to present to the Council at its March 2026 meeting.

***Mutton and Yellowtail Snapper***

Through the development of joint Snapper Grouper Amendment 44/ Reef Fish Amendment 55, the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils are responding to the most recent stock assessments for mutton and yellowtail snapper (SEDAR 79 and SEDAR 96, respectively). The amendments propose updating the stock OFL and ABC (spanning the South Atlantic and Gulf), the jurisdictional apportionment between the Councils, regional ACLs, and South Atlantic sector allocations for both species. The Council reviewed a set of actions and alternatives and discussed an additional range of alternatives for the South Atlantic sector allocation actions. The Council will review preliminary analyses at its March 2026 meeting.

**Other Business**

The Council directed staff to compile information on other Councils' parental leave policies and bring it to the next meeting of the Executive Committee.