

**Public Comment Summary**  
**Reef Fish Amendment 58A**  
**Modifications to Other Shallow-Water Grouper Complex Management Measures**

**Madeira Beach, Florida**  
**January 8, 2026**

**Council/Staff:**

Ed Walker  
Lisa Hollensead  
Annie Sutor  
John Froeschke  
Carrie Simmons  
Emily Muehlstein

14 Members of the Public in Attendance

**Jim Zurbrick** – Commercial, Steinhatchee, Florida

Pointed out that this amendment is reallocating this fishery. He had understood that we weren't going to do anything until the FES pilot program was finished. He suggests that we wait until the SSC can see the current FES pilot study before making this decision. If we waited for final action in April, this amendment would still be able to be enacted in 2027. He does not want to get us into an overfishing and overfished situation.

**Steve Pappen** – Charter and Commercial, Madeira Beach, Florida

Has worked in the charter and commercial sector for 30 years, fishing here and catching scamp here for his entire life. Some fish go through highs and lows, but the scamp population has been neutral, not much different than it was 30 years ago. He can still catch big ones past 240. Scamp aren't present in the areas they weren't found 30 years ago, and they're still in areas they were 30 years ago. There is not much data on the species. The only hard data is the IFQ data from commercial docks which is 100% accurate. Everything else is a dart being thrown on a wall. It will be hard to get industry support behind this amendment because nobody believes the numbers. He mentioned that there was a 200k pounds to 400k jump in recreational landings in one year which is hard to believe. The allocation should be weighted more commercial than recreational. Recreational guys don't catch much scamp. Commercial landings have declined because there is no available gag quota.

**Pat Neukam** – Commercial, Madeira Beach, Florida

We need to look at dead discards. Scamp isn't as hardy as other fish; they don't vent well. The recreational sector doesn't vent, and in the commercial sector they don't get vented as fast as they should. The Council needs to plan the scamp season around the gag season. If you cut scamp below 100,000 you will get 200,000 pounds of dead fish. If you pull up a scamp in 200 feet of water, it's dead. We had learned from gag that the recreational numbers were skewed, and we are now going back to the same problematic numbers, which will now affect the commercial side and the livelihood of commercial industries. He suggested that we should wait until MRIP calibrations before making a decision. Supports Action 5, Preferred Alt 2, option 2a, using the status quo allocation for scamp.

**Kyle Paulhus** – Recreational, Saint Petersburg, Florida

Does not catch a ton of scamp. He discards everything he releases. Suggested we should delay making a decision until MRIP FES is fixed. He supports Action 7.1, Preferred Alternative 3, starting the scamp season July 1st. Assuming the hurricanes will let people fish, they can catch scamp with gag.

**Sean Heverin** – Commercial Vessel Owner and Fish-House, Madeira Beach

He owns three longline boats, just built a bandit reel boat, and buys and sells fish across the Gulf. Ran the numbers and saw that they landed and sold 21% of SWG in the Gulf. He has guys in Louisiana who target scamp specifically. He supports Action 5, Preferred Alternative 2, Option 2a, and to keep the commercial sector scamp allocation at 80%. This is not out of his own interest as a commercial fisherman, but because the recreational data is incorrect. In the data, recreational landings are all over the map while commercial is very consistent over the years. The commercial sector shouldn't be unfairly treated, and scamp should not be taken away because the recreational data is not the best. Most recreational fishermen occasionally catch scamp, but it doesn't affect their livelihoods. He supports Action 7.1, Preferred Alternative 3, with a July 1<sup>st</sup> start date for the scamp season as recreational fishermen will want to catch gag and scamp on the same trip.

**Tarik Gul** – Seafood Dealer

He runs a seafood house and unloads fish. He does not get much scamp and last year unloaded under 500 pounds. Most fishermen release scamp because they don't have allocation, so they have dead discards. It could help if the commercial sector had more allocation so that they would be able to land more scamp. Supports Action 5, Preferred Alternative 2, Option 2a, and to keep the commercial sector scamp allocation at 80%.

**Jason Delacruz** – Commercial, Madeira Beach, Florida

Agrees with Sean Heverin. Supports Action 5, Preferred Alternative 2, Option 2a, and to keep the commercial sector allocation at 80%. He asks: if we've had this data for five years why do we have to take action now? We could potentially get better MRIP data in a few years. Every time we use FES, the results are bound to be problematic. He understands that if we don't do something that NMFS could be sued but is concerned that to pacify an NGO we will create a lot of dead fish by increasing dead discards. If you use the only good data source, landings are stable. He indicates that the stock assessment may be incorrect, and it doesn't make sense right now if we're on the precipice of getting better data. He agrees to keep the current 80% commercial allocation.

**Keith Neukam** – Commercial, Madeira Beach, Florida

Runs a longline vessel and owns a rod and reel boat. He doesn't want to see fish floating because there is not enough quota in the fish house. This creates a dead discard problem especially since predators are bad. We have a huge predator problem this year because we haven't had a hurricane blowing them out. He supports Action 5, Preferred Alt 2, Option 2a, to keep the status quo allocation for scamp.

**Randy Schwab** – Commercial, Madeira Beach, Florida.

Has rod and reel boats. Agrees with Action 5, Preferred Alt 2, Option 2a and supports the commercial sector keeping 80% of allocation for scamp.

**Galveston, Texas**  
**January 12, 2026**

**Council/Staff:**

Kesley Banks  
Lisa Hollensead  
Annie Suitor

8 Members of the Public in Attendance

**Mark Baker** – Commercial

States that he is not a guide and has been a deckhand. He has been in business in the fishery for the past 30 years. He thinks the problem that fishermen in Texas are facing is that they are

getting lumped together with the Eastern Gulf. As these two areas are very different, this does not seem scientifically valid.

**Michael Losoya** – Private captain, Galveston, Texas

Has been fishing for fifteen to eighteen years out of Galveston. He went to Texas A&M and had been a Fisheries Management major until swapping to Marine Biology. His concern is that Texas and Louisiana are the best habitat for scamp but are being managed with a place (Florida) where there is lots of overfishing. The fishery is crowded in Florida whereas he uses \$1,500 in fuel every day to catch four scamp a person. He doesn't see anyone else out, on the same bank, or on the radar. Texas doesn't have near the amount of pressure on the fishery, and he doesn't want Texas fishermen to get penalized for a region that is overfished. There are many scamp in Texas and its completely different here. He's fished in the Keys and the Tortugas and there's more pressure there. He expressed if scamp is taken away then people will just target beeliners, which will still result in dead scamp discards. It is not fair to group Texas and Florida fisheries together.

**Johnny Williams** – Charter, Galveston, Texas

He operates Williams Party Boats and is a third-generation party boat operator. He believes that the 40% SPR is ambitious. He supports Action 5, Preferred Alternative 2, Option 2b based on landing years for sector allocations. He supports opening the scamp recreational season when the red snapper season closes so that people can catch another fish or to wait until September 1<sup>st</sup> as people in Florida want to catch gag with scamp. If there's a very short season—if it opens July 1<sup>st</sup> and lasts only 25 days—there will be a lot of discard mortality when people are fishing for gag. He supports waiting until September 1<sup>st</sup> to open up the Scamp season.

**Buddy Guindon** – Commercial, Galveston, Texas

He is a commercial fisherman and owns a fully integrated seafood business. He suggests that the Council should leave allocation alone until they receive the proof that MRIP FES is garbage. After this they can set sector allocations. Otherwise, sector allocations will need to be revisited once the scientific community gets all the information on FES. He likes that we're thinking about allocating the resource back to those who have it now in a fishery that has been open to the public. He hopes we can consider what discards do to the fishery and the management plans going forward. We should be looking at Magnuson-Stevens National Standard 9 (Bycatch), that could be violated if we reallocate a significant amount away from the commercial sector in this amendment. He supports Action 5, Alternative 2, Option 2a.

**Billy Wright** – Commercial, Galveston, Texas

He concurs with Buddy, Scott, and Rachel. He supports Action 5, Alternative 2, Option 2a.

**Rachel Heisler** – Commercial, Double Bayou, Texas

She is from a multigenerational commercial family. Her first point is that a motion had been made to not move forward with MRIP FES numbers. She would like to see the Council honor this decision. If we move forward without knowing the results of the FES pilot study, it will hurt the integrity of the Gulf Council. There's a lot of negative connotations and comments made about the Gulf Council, and it's likely that this will hurt the integrity of the organization. She understands that there are time limits but expresses that it is important to stall or otherwise we will have to do the work over again when the pilot study comes out and it's revealed that MRIP FES is not the best scientific information. Her second point relates to concerns around new entrants and reallocation. If someone enters the fishery, buys shares, and it is reallocated to another sector it will hurt them financially and will make them hesitant to enter the industry. Currently her business focuses on red snapper, but if they wanted to diversify or prevent dead discards by buying new shares and then that allocation is taken away that is not equitable or in accordance with the Magnuson Stevens Act. She supports Action 5, Alternative 2, Option 2a to keep current allocation until we receive new information.

**Scott Hickman** – Charter Fisherman's Association, Charter and Commercial, Galveston, Texas

He has been a charter-for-hire permit holder for almost forty years and is also a red snapper IFQ shareholder. He is a founding and current board member of the Charter Fishermen's Association, the largest charter association in the Gulf. Having good data is paramount for making good decisions and not having legal issues. SEFHIER (Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting) 2.0 has good data and it is important to get it on the water again. The biggest embarrassment to the Agency in the last fifty years has been the MRIP FES debacle which has management implications. He states that we can't move forward with anything until we have a clear picture of what is going on. It doesn't look good with scamp; we got a hold of gag. This will end up in court and we need good data to make a decision. He will not give any alternatives of what he does and does not support as Dylan Hubbard will share the views of the CFA in the January Council meeting in New Orleans as he has more expertise on Grouper. This is a strong example of why we need to get the best recreational data with SEFHIER 2.0.

**Costa Kouzounis** – Commercial and Recreational, Galveston, Texas

There was a lot of validity in the points made earlier. He is building on Rachel's comments. No one sets an actual value on the share percentage, but as a business model, if you have the IFQ shares held as equity and there is a reallocation, why does the Federal Finance Department not realize this? Discussing the stock assessment and FES, if you're trying to move forward from a legal standpoint, there should be an interim assessment or no cause of action until that assessment is brought forth.

**Lafayette, Louisiana**  
**January 13, 2026**

**Council/Staff:**

Billy Broussard  
JD Dugas  
Chris Schieble  
Lisa Hollensead  
Annie Suitor

2 Members of the Public in Attendance

**Hunter Foray – Recreational**

He is a multigenerational recreational outdoorsman who has been fishing his entire life. He fishes out of Venice and averages 10-20 fishing trips a year. He expressed concern that once species go under regulation, the odds of them getting out of regulations are unlikely. He's seen few occasions where fishermen are happy, and management are happy and finds it unsettling if there's not a future plan for scamp. Targeting scamp is his specialty. He has trips where he targets scamp during certain times of the year. He states that the commercial sector does not target scamp not due to the price of IFQ shares but rather because the technique is very costly, and they lose a lot of rigging. The recreational sector has capitalized of catching scamp because the species not being hunted by the commercial sector, which has allowed for a healthy stock. Scamp has a very niche fishery that takes special techniques. Most recreational fishermen do not target them but catch them as bycatch when they're snapper fishing or bottom fishing during the summer. Both sides of Louisiana have a very healthy fishery that few people are fishing. The artificial reefs, for example, are insulated from commercial and most recreational fishermen. These are 35-40 acres of breeding sanctuary that are protected. He can fish 1-8 miles around this area but never in them and are able to catch lots of scamp and shallow water grouper, and the fishery stays healthy. Very few people are fishing out there. He studies his own fishery, understands the reason for sector separation, but is mainly concerned that a 58% reduction will be very difficult to recover from. He is concerned that his children can't experience what he had, not because of a lack of fish, but instead, because of regulation. He mentions that there's a significant amount of coral bottom across Louisiana that recreational fishermen are documenting, discovering, and sharing with each other.

**Joey Massey – Charter, Port Fourchon, Louisiana**

He is a charter fisherman out of Port Fourchon who operates a 6-pack. He believes Louisiana's scamp fishery is very healthy. Other locations don't have the reefs, bottom structures, and rigs that Louisiana has. There are about five other charter fishermen who target scamp across the state. He has many videos of scamp that extend from 120-450 feet, where you can see as far as

15-20 feet. Some of these camera frames have 50 scamp in them. He is happy to share these with the Council. He also has videos of marble grouper and cubera snapper. He asks if we've had conversation about different regional management. He believes that because we're discussing different bottoms, different depths, different lengths of the continental shelf from each state, that they should be managed differently. In Florida people shouldn't be allowed 3 a person but it's okay here. Louisiana's fishery is better because of the Mississippi River, Flower Gardens Banks, and Oil Rigs. He expressed concern that he doesn't report anything. He was required to report for a year and a half, and he liked doing so though there were some issues. There needs to be some reporting required from federally permitted vessels so the Council can get more data. SEFHIER asked some questions that they didn't need to know, but it is important that they have information about how many fish were caught and how long the trip was. This could show that people are catching scamp and it is a healthy fishery in some areas.

**Virtual**  
**January 21, 2026**

**Council/Staff:**

Troy Frady  
Michael Allen  
Lisa Hollensead  
Annie Sutor  
Emily Muehlstein

14 Members of the Public in Attendance

**Andrew Godley** – Recreational Fisherman, Cypremort Point, Louisiana

He stated that he's one of the most avid grouper fishermen out of southwest Louisiana and does about 10-20 grouper trips a year. He fishes along Flower Garden Banks and oil and gas platforms and finds tons of scamp and yellowmouth grouper. He is concerned if we split and reduce the amount of scamp it will result in a lot of floating fish in the water. People might go to get yellowfin and black grouper because they had caught their limit of scamp, and the scamp that they incidentally harvest are not going to survive. He uses a descending device to release fish in 200-250 feet. He asks what exactly this amendment will look like for the private recreational angler? If we go from an aggregate of four fish per person, most fishermen will get four and rarely catch scamp and yellowmouth or if the limit is set to two fish per person, then they will continue to fish for other fish and waste viable fish in the process. He has caught yellowfin and black grouper, which are rare in Louisiana. There have been five yellowfin groupers caught in Louisiana and he has caught two of them. If the two complexes are separated, people will continue to fish for yellowfin and black grouper but won't be able to catch them, which will

cause them to have scamp discards. The aggregate is smarter because it will stop people from targeting any of these species.

From where he fishes there is a distance of 150 miles until there is a major drop off in depth. The slope is 340 feet deep and most scamp and yellowmouth grouper can be found at 180-400 feet. Yellowmouth grouper are generally found shallower than scamp and scamp are larger when you find them deeper. The oil platforms have a lot of scamp. In the same depth he has found black and yellowfin grouper, as well as marbled grouper. He and some charter captains are very concerned about marbled grouper and thinks the Council should pay attention to the species.

He expressed that there are very different ecosystems across the Gulf and suggests that it might not be appropriate to manage the entire Gulf with one solution and suggests state management. He said that red snapper private recreational management has been working well in Louisiana and grouper could as well.

#### **Ashford Rosenberg – Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance**

She asks us to delay final action until April 2026. In December 2025 during the SAFMC Council Meeting, NOAA gave a presentation about the FES pilot study and showed that they are able to estimate differences between the results of the new study and the version of MRIP FES used in this amendment. This is something that could have an impact on allocations. In October of 2023, the Gulf Council said it would not make decisions about allocations until the FES pilot study was done. It seems premature that such a drastic reduction in commercial allocation would be done based on MREP FES. She urges the Council to uphold its previous motion to not re-allocate until the pilot study had been reviewed. If the Council goes ahead anyways, the shareholders alliance sees this in violation of Magnuson Steven’s National Standard 2. The PSE (Percent Standard Error) of MRIP FES is not suitable for management as it is well over 40% . The commercial sector is concerned that there would be an increase in discards if catch limits are reduced. Scamp would become choke species. It is unfair that the Council is using a growing private recreational sector as a justification for reallocation as the commercial sector is restricted because of the IFQ system. The Council should consider: at what point is effort too much?

### **Written Comment Summary** **November 2024 – January 21, 2026**

**336 Public Hearing Video Views**

**28 Written Comments Received**

- Support for splitting the complex.
- The Council should take no action.
  - MRIP data used the assessment is proven to be incorrect and no action should be taken until the SRFS data can be used.

- Data improvements are essential.
- SWG is not undergoing overfishing and is not overfished.
- Harvest should not be reduced based on faulty data.
- This amendment interferes with the E.O. Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness and burdens fishermen unnecessarily especially since the stock is neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing.
- SWG are doing great in the Panhandle of Florida.
- Scamp and black grouper closures are not evidence based.
- Scamp Allocations:
  - The Council should follow the motion it passed in October of 2023 regarding the use of MRIP-FES for allocation decisions.
  - Using data from 2001-2004 to make allocation decisions makes no sense.
  - Allocation decisions should better reflect current socioeconomic realities.
    - Reliance on historical landings is self-reinforcing and should instead focus on long term economic value to Gulf communities.
  - Support Action 5, Alternative 2c
    - The most recent time series better reflects current conditions.
- Recreational scamp management measures:
  - The scamp season should overlap with red snapper season.
    - This would reduce dead discards and shark depredation.
  - The scamp season should be open year-round.
  - Consider a slot limit for scamp to protect the breeders.
  - Consider reducing the scamp bag limit rather than reducing the season.
    - 1 fish per person and 6 per vessel.
  - Reduce charter seasons and bag limits.
  - Ban the use of electric reels to reduce pressure on grouper.
- SPR ratios for yellowedge grouper and scamp should not be the same since yellowedge have a longer lifespan and reach sexual maturity much later.
- Support for mandatory reporting.