

# Regulatory Streamlining Prioritization and Work Plan



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# Regulatory streamlining report



**Review of U.S. Fishery Management Councils' Regulatory Processes: Final Report and Recommendations**

*Submitted to:*

**Gulf Fishery Management Council**

*Submitted by:*

Deirdre Boelke  
Fisheries Insight Network LLC

Willy Goldsmith, PhD  
Pelagic Strategies LLC



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Jul 2025	Review Initiated
Oct 2025	Preliminary findings presented to SSC
Nov 2025	Draft report and recommendations presented to Council
Dec 2025	<u>Final report</u> submitted

# Regulatory streamlining report



Aim: Identify approaches employed by other regional fishery management councils that could improve efficiency and throughput in Gulf fisheries management

## 15 Recommendations, 3 Categories:

1. Procedural Mechanisms
2. Innovative Regulatory Approaches
3. Collaboration, Coordination, and Communication Best Practices

\*See Final Report, Table 11

# 1. Procedural Mechanisms



Recommendation	Expected Outcome	Timeline	Contributors
1.1 Evaluate whether typical FMP adjustments in the Gulf could qualify for Categorical Exclusions	Increased use of CEs could reduce time/resources needed for minor/routine adjustments	Short	Council, SERO
1.2 Identify potential opportunities to use automatic or conditional (“if/then”) management measures that allow direct rulemaking and explore how SIRs could work in the Gulf	Automatically triggered management responses could allow for rapid (potentially in-season) adjustments	Long	Council, SERO, SEFSC
1.3 Consider potential establishment of an Ad-Hoc Regulatory Review Group (ARRG)	Council-NMFS ARRG could streamline communications and planning around more responsive rulemaking approaches	Short	Council, SERO, SEFSC

## 2. Innovative Regulatory Approaches



Recommendation	Expected Outcome	Timeline	Contributors
2.1 Evaluate whether certain species in the Gulf should be designated as Ecosystem Component Species	ECS designation would free up resources for management of other species while preventing premature development of new directed fisheries	Medium	Council, SERO
2.2 Assess whether a generic/omnibus amendment could efficiently update all Gulf FMPs with provisions to enhance responsiveness	Would facilitate more rapid document development and/or use of efficiency tools for future actions	Medium	Council, SERO
2.3 Evaluate potential opportunities and feasibility for in-season management	Evaluate whether existing infrastructure could support in-season management before further action	Long	Council, SERO, SEFSC
2.4 Explore ways the Council can play a more active role in the Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) process	Leverage EFPs to address key research/management needs and inform future Council actions	Medium	Council, SERO

# 3. Collaboration, Coordination and Communication Best Practices



Recommendation	Expected Outcome	Timeline	Contributors
3.1 Consider updating Regional Operating Agreement with NMFS to define roles and streamline document preparation process	Can streamline the document preparation/review process prior to and after Council action	Medium	Council, SERO
3.2 Consider implementing annual coordination/strategy meetings between Gulf Council and NMFS (SERO, SEFSC, and potentially General Counsel) staff	Provide a platform for high-level discussions to enhance working relationships and efficiency	Medium	Council, SERO, SEFSC
3.3 Explore strategies to grant Gulf Council staff access to federal databases	Facilitate rapid Gulf Council staff analysis; mitigate need for iterative data requests	Medium	Council, SERO, SEFSC
3.4 Discuss provision of annual data updates by SEFSC to the Gulf Council in off-assessment years	Enable rapid interannual data comparisons between stock assessments	Medium	Council, SEFSC

# 3. Collaboration, Coordination and Communication Best Practices



Recommendation	Expected Outcome	Timeline	Contributors
3.5 Consider development of Fishery Performance Reports for priority species	Provide standardized on-the-water snapshot for consideration by SSC and Council staff and members	Short	Council
3.6 Consider expanded use of SSC subgroups to dive deep into high priority issues	Accelerate process of developing SSC recommendations to the Council	Short	Council
3.7 Evaluate strategies to expand AP interaction with SSC/Gulf Council	Facilitate consideration of on-the-water observations by SSC/Council	Short	Council
3.8 Explore “incorporation by reference” to living online references in analytical documents	Reduce document preparation review time while improving readability	Medium	Council, SERO

# 1. Procedural Mechanisms



## 1.1 - Evaluate whether typical FMP adjustments in the Gulf could qualify for Categorical Exclusions

- Ultimately a NMFS decision
- Track developing NEPA guidance
  - Updated NOAA NEPA Companion Manual - July 2025
  - Continued engagement with CCC NEPA working group
  - NOAA crosswalk between MSA and NEPA (in-progress)
- More thoughtful evaluation via IPT of NEPA document type and Council documentation needs

# 1. Procedural Mechanisms



1.2 - Identify potential opportunities to use automatic or conditional (“if/then”) management measures that allow direct rulemaking and explore how SIRs could work in the Gulf

- Contractor (TBD): Identify pilot fishery, data streams, develop mechanisms and analysis
- Aligns with Recreational Initiative Recommendation 3.1 to explore development of a harvest control rule approach

## 2. Innovative Regulatory Approaches



### 2.1 - Evaluate whether certain species in the Gulf should be designated as ecosystem component species (ECS)

- Work with NMFS to identify species currently in FMPs that are no longer in need of conservation and management
- Aligns with EO 14276 Seafood Competitiveness recommendation to remove low priority species from FMPs
  - The Council will initiate a plan amendment to address the removal of species from FMPs during the first half of 2026 and expect to finalize the amendment and submit it for rulemaking by May 2027

## 2. Innovative Regulatory Approaches



2.2 - Assess whether a generic/omnibus amendment could efficiently update all Gulf FMPs with provisions to enhance responsiveness

- Conduct inventory of regulatory actions that can be considered via framework in Gulf FMPs
  - Focus on Reef Fish and CMP
  - Consider expanding list of framework actions for increased flexibility and prioritize routine actions for applicable FMPs

# 3. Collaboration, Coordination, and Communication Best Practices



3.3 - Explore strategies to grant Gulf Council staff access to federal databases

- Assess feasibility of direct data access with NMFS partners
- Other considerations - GulfFIN, SRFS

3.4 - Discuss provision of annual data updates by SEFSC to the Gulf Council in off-assessment years

- Identify priority species in need of annual interim analyses with consideration of criteria previously discussed by SSC and SEFSC

# 3. Collaboration, Coordination, and Communication Best Practices



## 3.5 - Consider development of Fishery Performance Reports for priority species

- Review FPR development approaches/use in other regions
- Develop a template to pilot FPR approach with select AP

## 3.6 - Explore “incorporation by reference” to living online references in analytical documents

- Review mechanisms for incorporation by reference in compliance with MSA/NEPA
- Increase efficiency, reduce redundancy

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Aim: Identify approaches employed by other regional fishery management councils that could improve efficiency and throughput in Gulf fisheries management

## 15 Recommendations, 3 Categories:

- 1. Procedural Mechanisms
  - 2. Innovative Regulatory Approaches
  - 3. Collaboration, Coordination, and Communication Best Practices
- Focus on mechanisms to streamline minor/routine adjustments (1.1, 1.2, 2.2)

\*See Final Report, Table 11

# Next steps



- Confirm Council regulatory streamlining priorities
- Form working group with SERO/SEFSC to identify:
  - Opportunities for “if/then” management measures
  - Appropriate indices and data streams
  - Necessary adjustments to items that can be modified via framework
- Develop RFP to solicit contractor
  - Identify deliverables, scope, and expertise to begin operationalizing Council priorities/recommendations
  - Limit additional staff workload