

Data Collection Committee Report
January 26, 2026
Ed Walker, Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab F, No. 1**) and approved the minutes (**Tab F, No. 2**) of the April 2025 meeting.

Southeast For-hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) Document (Tab F, No.4)

The Council reviewed the document with discussion focused primarily on Action 4, which would establish reporting of economic data for the program. A Committee member asked why a stipulation for a maximum proportion to be sampled was not stated within the Alternative 3 language and asked for clarification on the definition of sampling strata. Additionally, several Committee members asked for an explanation about the sampling methodology outlined in the action discussion.

Dr. Christopher Liese (Southeast Fisheries Science Center [SEFSC]) replied that the sample size could change based on management needs. An initial sampling of 20% during the first year would provide information that could then be used to determine how much sampling is needed in future years to achieve desired levels of precision in the survey responses. This information would help fisheries economists focus sampling design to better address economic analyses required for management documents.

Several Committee members mentioned that the for-hire/charter sector had been recently designated as a category eligible for disaster relief funds. Economic data collected through the SEFHIER program would provide program participants an avenue with which to apply for available funds after a disaster event. To that end, a Committee member noted that census-level reporting of economic data (Alternative 2) would provide the most complete analysis for the purposes of disaster relief. However, he acknowledged the concerns of industry and supported the rationale for a survey sampling approach (Alternative 3) for economic data collection.

The Committee then discussed availability of funding and the potential incomplete implementation of the program if dockside surveying could not be supported. A Committee member noted that President Trump recently signed a congressional budget bill that would provide more funding for fisheries than had been initially anticipated; however, it was still unclear exactly how those budgeted funds would be appropriated for electronic reporting projects. Dr. Clifford Hutt (Atlantic Highly Migratory Species) added that their office was considering the Council's input on their proposed rule for modifying their charter/for-hire electronic reporting program. He stated that it was their intention to work towards developing sampling approaches that avoided duplicative reporting for dual permit holders.

Committee members indicated that public comment for the SEFHIER program has been mixed. Federal for-hire permit holders in some regions have expressed support for the program while those in other regions have been opposed to any reiteration of a SEFHIER program. Generally, the Committee expressed interest in continuing with document development and decided to revisit the issue at full Council.

Commercial Electronic Logbook Program Implementation Plan (Tab F, No. 5)

Dr. John Walter (SEFSC) provided an update presentation on the progress of implementing electronic reporting for the commercial coastal logbook program. A Committee member inquired why multi-factor authentication (MFA) was being required for fisheries data collection. Dr. Jessica Stephen (Southeast Regional Office [SERO]) responded that a government-wide mandate for MFA was authorized to better secure government collected data. She continued that the Individual Fishing Quota program would also be modified to fulfill this obligation. A Committee member expressed support for electronic reporting and recommended that outreach initiatives, including in-person and video tutorials be conducted to help program participants transition to the new application platforms.

Update on Southeast Region Permit System (Tab F, No. 6)

Mr. Kevin McIntosh (SERO) presented recent updates to the Southeast Region Permitting System (PIMS). A Committee member asked when the updated Freedom of Information Act page would be available. Mr. McIntosh responded that update would be implemented the second week of February, as long as last-minute testing was successful. Another Committee member asked if there were future plans that would allow for participants in Limited Access Programs to print their permits from home during the renewal process. Mr. McIntosh replied that law enforcement regulations require printing of Limited Access permits on special paper as a security feature.

Deep-water Grouper Complex Recreational Mandatory Reporting (Tab F, No. 7)

Mr. Gregg Bray (Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission) and Council staff provided a collaborative presentation regarding existing mandatory reporting for the private recreational sector and initiate discussion for exploring novel recreational data collection for the deep-water grouper fishery. The Committee acknowledged that, while relatively few private recreational anglers participate in the deep-drop fishery, most of those land at private docks and are never intercepted by a dockside sampler. Additionally, recreational data collection programs have varying compliance results which can lead to uncertainty. Despite these challenges, the Committee contended that better data collection was needed to manage the deep-water grouper complex.

The Committee discussed several ideas to improve deep-water grouper management. These ideas included state-issued offshore endorsements, augmentation or modification of the NMFS Bottom Longline fishery-independent survey for deep-water grouper species, as well as considering management approaches such as multi-year average catch limits, and improving the correction factor for non-reporting. Ultimately, the Committee decided to deliberate on this topic and revisit the discussion at full Council

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.