



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Trish Murphey, Chair | Jessica McCawley, Vice Chair
 John Carmichael, Executive Director

March 27, 2026

Karyl Brewster-Geisz
 Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Rulemaking Branch Chief
 NMFS/SF1
 1315 East-West Highway
 Silver Spring, MD 20910

RE: South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Comments on the Proposed Rule to Revise Commercial Atlantic Blacknose Shark & Recreational Atlantic Shark Fisheries Management Measures

Dear Ms. Brewster-Geisz:

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) welcomes the opportunity to provide our comments on the Proposed Rule to Revise Commercial Atlantic Blacknose Shark & Recreational Atlantic Shark Fisheries Management Measures. As you are aware, the Council has expressed concern over current shark management and frustration with the increasingly common interactions with sharks in a wide range of fisheries in the South Atlantic region. We welcome the opportunity to provide our input on the proposed rule from Highly Migratory Species (HMS).

The Council feels that there are several circumstances where Atlantic shark fishery resources are being wasted or underutilized due to discards, both alive and dead, stemming from low trip limits and other management measures that are restrictive for the fishery. As such we are in favor of many of the measures being put forth in the proposed rule.

Specifically for the commercial blacknose shark fishery, a species that is a highly desirable and marketable small coastal shark species due to its superior meat quality, the Council supports removal of the blacknose shark management boundary in the Atlantic region (Preferred Alternative A2) and increasing the commercial retention limit for blacknose sharks (Preferred Alternative B2 or Alternative B3). The current commercial retention of eight blacknose sharks per person and the management boundary of 34°00' N. latitude, which prohibits harvest north of the boundary, creates unnecessary discards in the commercial shark fishery. Removing this boundary and increasing the commercial trip limit through this proposed rule will reduce waste in the fishery by turning dead discards into landed fish, better utilize the blacknose shark quota, and improve the profitability of commercial shark trips.

For the recreational shark fishery, the Council appreciates that HMS is taking a more species-focused approach and is in support of changing management measures to allow for an increase in

recreational harvest of sharks. That said, the Council is apprehensive of some proposed recreational measures in the proposed rule. When the proposed HMS rule was discussed at the Council's March 2026 meeting, Council members noted the following:

- The concept of flexible regulations is encouraging, but recreational measures should be structured to allow for an increase in harvest of sharks where quota allows.
 - There is growing interest in targeting sharks recreationally in the South Atlantic and many shark stocks in the region are notably increasing.
- The application of the proposed vessel limits is not intuitive and will be confusing to anglers. These limits need to be further clarified if implemented.
- The relatively large size limits for many large coastal shark (LCS) species are prohibitive for recreational anglers who want to harvest sharks. Specimens are too large for most anglers to harvest and are dangerous to bring onboard vessels.
 - Regulations should allow anglers to concentrate on harvesting smaller LCS specimens and smaller shark species due to their superior food quality and to increase safety at sea.
 - Consider substantially lowering the minimum size limits for recreationally desirable species, such as blacktip and spinner sharks, to encourage harvest and increase safety.
 - Atlantic sharpnose sharks are very prevalent throughout the South Atlantic region and measures should be implemented to allow for an increase in their harvest. The default limit needs to be much higher than one fish per vessel. The Council feels that there should not be a vessel limit for the species and HMS should consider increasing the current bag limit.
- The species groupings do not necessarily match those of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and how shark regulations are implemented at the state level.
 - If recreational shark regulations change from year to year, it will be difficult for states to follow suit and for anglers to know of the regulation changes.
 - Make sure blacktip and spinner sharks remain in the same species grouping under the D Alternatives. These two species are commonly misidentified as it can be difficult for anglers to distinguish between the two species.

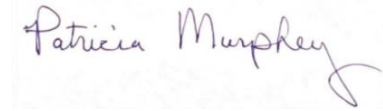
[Public comment](#) provided to the Council at the March 2026 meeting also noted that vessel limits for shark species would be particularly problematic for headboats. This comment focused on Atlantic sharpnose sharks and remarked that:

- Atlantic sharpnose sharks are an important species for headboat anglers due to their desirable food quality and are safe to land due to their relatively small size.
- HMS should not consider a vessel limit for Atlantic sharpnose sharks.
- Consider maintaining the current 1 fish per person bag limit or remove the bag limit.
- A four fish vessel limit will not work for headboats that may carry upwards of 50 anglers.
- There should continue to be no size limit for Atlantic sharpnose sharks.
- Federally permitted headboats report all shark landings via electronic logbooks, allowing for accurate accounting of harvest.

The Council appreciates the opportunity to provide our comments and express our support for many of the alternatives being considered in this proposed rule. We look forward to continuing to work with HMS in the future to help implement actions with mutually beneficial outcomes for

our managed fisheries. If further information is desired, please reach out to John Carmichael, Executive Director at the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Patricia Murphey". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a faint, light-colored rectangular stamp.

Trish Murphey
Council Chair

cc: SAFMC Members & Staff
Shepherd Grimes, NOAA GC
Heather Blough and Rick DeVictor, NMFS SERO
Clay Porch and John Walter, SEFSC Miami

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