

Public Hearing Summary

Generic Amendment: Modifications to Gulf Charter For-hire Data Collection Program

Virtual Meeting

August 13, 2026

Council / Staff

Kesley Banks – Council Member

Troy Frady – Council Member

Emily Muehlstein

Lisa Hollensead

Carrie Simmons

Leo Eguia

State/Federal Staff

Michelle Masi – NOAA

Richard Malinowski - NOAA

19 Members of the public attended; 5 Members of the public spoke.

Billy Archer – Seminole Wind (Charter Boat); Panama City, FL

He has no problem with Council's current preferred alternatives including submitting economic data for his fishing business and submitting did not fish reports. He wants to contribute to stewardship of the resource that his anglers and business relies on. He does not want to continue to be part of an extrapolation from a small data sample. He wants all of the federal permits to operate within the same data collection program. The for-hire industry deserves to have their own data collection program so that they may develop fishery management plans for their anglers and businesses. He asks that the Gulf Council pass this modifications document so that they can get their data collection program back on the water as soon as possible.

Judah Barbee –

Seconds what Billy Archer said and agrees with him 100%. He thinks all of the charter boats are going to be on the same page. He backs Billy and Jim Green 100% that they're all for it. Let's do it!

Donald Dineen –

He'd like to double down on what Billy Archer said. He was highly disappointed a few years ago when the program got nullified by a court order. He felt they were on a good track to prove what they caught within their accountability measures. He'd like to second what Billy Archer just stated. He's not sure if this is part of the same meeting, but he is HIGHLY against regional or state management of federal resources.

Jim Green – Headboat Operator & Charter Fishing Association; Destin, FL

He'd like to first thank the Council for moving this issue to Public Hearing. This has been a long time coming, and everyone has been working together on this since the court struck down some of the elements of the last program. The big thing that everyone needs to realize is these are the same permits. Whether you meet headboat requirement or not, that permit could also be switched to a different boat the following year and it's really important that the data stay apples to apples instead of apples to oranges. There's no difference in federal permits, a headboat is just

a criteria, and 76-78 of federally permitted vessels currently meet that criteria. Keeping the permits together and the same format is very important. It's very important to have each trip reported, and he agrees with reporting prior to offloading or within 30 minutes if you have no fish. Some smaller boats suggested they would feel more comfortable getting back to the dock safely and then reporting, and he thinks that's very relevant and acceptable. He has been electronic reporting for about 10 years, the Did Not Fish reports are extremely easy. 90 days is great as headboats can only do up to 30 days in advance currently, all you have to do is check a little box. He was happy to hear that it's not burdensome if you pick up a trip after you've submitted a Did Not Fish report for that week. A lot of people were against the VMS, and that's understandable. The Did Not Fish report is a really nice tradeoff for VMS requirement.

The Council went outside the box and pushed back against the agency to allow selective economic reporting. It puts a lot of people at ease. He thinks the selective economic data reporting is fair and gives a broad picture and it keeps people from feeling like they're getting pinned down on something. There was a lot of confusion before, it wasn't clear if you had to report if you take your friends fishing and don't charge them anything, and I think by selecting that group randomly and allowing it to get what the agency needs while being less burdensome on the fleet is a great thing.

One of the reasons we want to do this is there is a different desire from people on the Western Gulf vs Eastern Gulf. Getting this data allows us to look at how we could possibly portion fish out to different areas in the future in a fair and equitable manner. Doing state/regional allocation how it was done in Amendment 50 was very dirty and messy, this data will allow us to look at things like this in the future if our industry desires to do so. This is something that a majority of our industry has wanted for a long time. Being pulled out of an extrapolation and a guess, it's way easier to shut down a fishery if you have hard numbers and can show that instead of being part of an estimate. Whenever you have the uncertainty our data system has had over the years, this narrows that down and allows us to get a true picture of what's going on. So, if you feel like you've been overestimated, this is your opportunity to get the right data and prove that. It also protects the fishery; some people just want to fish hard and run it down and we have way too many lumberjacks and not enough trees. So, by having the correct data, it allows our managers to manage these fisheries better and then we don't have short seasons get cut off early. We have something we can look at and not just say that's the estimate we came up with. He is grateful and hopeful this gets implemented as soon as possible.

Dale Woodruff – Alabama Charter Boat Association; Orange Beach, Alabama

We have come a long way from being told we can't do this, and we can't do that to having a reporting system. He likes what's going on, and thinks his association is going to like what's happening. This reporting program needs to get going as soon as possible, that way some of the uncertainty can be cut back and maybe not cook the books as much now. He likes what's going on, doesn't want to get repetitive, but he's definitely for the program and looking forward to getting to reporting.

Virtual Meeting
August 17, 2026

Council/Staff

Troy Frady – Council Member
Emily Muehlstein
Leo Eguia
Lisa Hollensead

State/Federal Staff

Michelle Masi – NOAA
Frank Helies – NOAA
Jenny Ostroff – NOAA
Richard Malinowski – NOAA
Megan Fleming – MS DMR

6 Members of the public attended; 3 Members of the public spoke.

Melissa Gribble – Dive Charter Operator

From a practicality standpoint she wants to ensure that the Council considers that cell phone connection, internet, or even Wi-Fi are not always prevalent and that causes her concern in reference to reporting prior to offloading at the dock. She's concerned about the trip notification requirements if changes or cancellations happen last minute. She wants to stay in compliance and support the initiative. There will be a growing period as the fleet works through it and familiarizes themselves with it. She asked for consideration that it may not always be logistically possible to report prior to docking, while she also understands the importance of accurate recollection.

Jim Green – Headboat Operator & Charter Fishing Association; Destin, Florida

He was on the Ad Hoc Advisory Panel for this program, and they spent roughly a day and a half coming up with these recommendations to make this program as useful as possible. All of the recommendations at the AP were unanimous which is remarkable, and not common. He thought that there was a 30-45-minute window after submitting a trip notification where it could be modified prior to sending an email. Perhaps this needs to be brought up to the IPT team before this gets implemented. Maybe something that can be looked at is if there can be a box that you check if you submit a trip notification but don't actually end up fishing. Previously, you could not submit a report with all zeros if you came in early or did not fish at all.

Susan Boggs – Marina Owner; Orange Beach, AL

She certainly supports all the preferred alternatives. In regard to the NMFS approved software, she hopes that NMFS is considerate of the hardware problems with the court order last time. While last time it may have been hardware, not software, she hopes NMFS and the Council are considerate of potential glitches or issues with the software that may lead to the same situation as before. There are some people out there that will try to trip this up so that should be considered carefully. In regard to the 20% economic data collection – if that includes headboats, every headboat is already required to submit that data for every trip. It is not clear in the preferred alternative that it is 20% of charter boats only and excludes headboats. We need to make the language very clear on what the Council is trying to do so that we don't get tripped up on something again and end up where we were last time. She doesn't want to hold the document up, but it might be good to read the preferred alternatives again and save us headaches in the future. She requested that there be language added to the preferred alternatives that clarify the

distinction of headboats and that only 20% of non-SRHS for-hire vessels would be submitting economic data. She does not want a repeat of SEFHIER 1.0.

Written Comment Summary
April 1, 2024 – August 18, 2026

72 Public Hearing video views.

41 comments received.

Comments received regarding For-Hire Electronic Reporting

- Support for development of a for-hire electronic reporting program
 - Importance of accurate, real-time data to for better management and stock assessments
 - Desire to reinstate the program quickly.
- Opposition to development of a for-hire electronic reporting program
 - Would cause unnecessary burdens
 - Is overly complicate
 - Would be overturned as the previous program was.
- Support for the re-implementation of electronic reporting but felt it should be simple, inexpensive, quick, and prioritize valuable information.
- It's important that these data are utilized.
 - Frustration with previous data not being utilized at all
 - Hope that these data could be used in assessments and for accountability measures.
- Concern regarding reporting prior to offloading.
 - It's easier to count fish after docking,
 - It will be distracting to captains.
- Private recreational anglers should be subject to the same data collection requirements.
- Concern for the collection of economic data because it is irrelevant to fisheries and it's benefit is unclear.

Other Comments

- Concern regarding the accuracy of recreational catch estimates, especially for gag grouper and red grouper.
- Concern and disapproval of state or regional management of federal for-hire fisheries.
- Support for state or regional management of federal for-hire fisheries.
- For-hire vessels should be considered commercial since they profit off of natural resources.
- Important to speed up data collection and consolidate data collection methods to provide data in a simple program.