Sustainable Fisheries Committee Report
October 29, 2026
Dr. Micheal Allen, Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda **(Tab E, No. 1)** and approved the minutes **(Tab E, No. 2)** of the August 2026 meeting.

Overview of the Southeast Fisheries Observer Program (Tab E, No. 4)

Scott Leach (Branch Chief, Southeast Observer Program) gave a presentation on the Southeast Fisheries Observer Program. Mr. Leach discussed the statutory mandates and coverage requirements of the program, and listed agencies using the data collected. He described the steps of the vessel selection process and provided examples based on the shrimp and reef fish fisheries. A Committee member asked whether Starlink constituted an acceptable form of communication with the observer program. Mr. Leach indicated that the US Coast Guard guidelines followed by the observer program do not currently include Starlink in the list of accepted communication forms. The Committee asked whether special emphasis is placed on vessels with prior violations. Mr. Leach replied that vessels are not flagged, the selection process is randomized within survey strata.

Regulatory Streamlining and SSC Recommendations (Tab E, No. 5)

The Committee received a presentation from Mr. Peter Hood (independent contractor) on the development of regulatory streamlining measures to improve the efficiency of routine and minor adjustments to management advice, including developing an automated process for setting catch limits for a suite of pilot species and increasing flexibility in changes allowable under the framework procedures. Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) staff contributed that this regulatory streamlining work aligns with ongoing efforts to improve the efficiency of the science to management process and simplify the stock assessment process. SEFSC staff suggested that aligning the timing of multiple interim analyses could improve efficiency by allowing several simple management changes to move together as a package through the Council and rulemaking process. Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff stated that reductions in staff have resulted in increased workload and the need for prioritization, contributing to delays in the rulemaking process.

A Committee member recognized the need to work with limited resources and was supportive of the regulatory streamlining efforts. Several committee members suggested removing cobia and Spanish mackerel from the list of pilot species, given the unexplained variability in some coastal migratory species. The Committee members stated that this would simplify the pilot process for developing automatic annual catch limit (ACL) change procedures, and that these species could be reconsidered for future automation. A Committee member suggested that reviewing approaches used by other regions for annual specifications could be informative. Council staff added that the thresholds for allowable automatic ACL changes should be flexible enough to consider the large ACL changes that can occur between data currencies. A Committee member asked Mr. Hood for his perspective on changes that could be made within the Council process

itself to improve efficiency, and Mr. Hood responded that focused Council discussions and allowing documents to develop without priority shifts could improve efficiency.

NOAA General Counsel contributed that any automatic procedures developed to change ACLs would still need to go through the rulemaking process because the current closed framework procedures operate as temporary rules, and changing ACLs would require a change in the code of federal regulations. She also suggested that the Council consider its role in minor changes to ACLs, and that processes could be developed to implement ACL changes without Council deliberation. Council staff stated that more information was needed on processes that would involve management changes without Council input. SERO staff were supportive of the regulatory streamlining efforts, but cautioned that their staff will have limited capacity to participate in the development of regulatory streamlining amendments. Council staff contributed that General Counsel participation would be necessary to effectively develop automatic management measures.

The Committee recommends, and I so **move, to direct staff to work with the contractor and IPT staff to continue work on the regulatory streamlining initiative to improve efficiency of routine and minor adjustments to management advice. This initiative should provide options for a better process to update catch limits and management changes and expand the range of actions that are allowable under the framework process where appropriate.**

Motion carried with no opposition.

Scientific and Statistical Committee Summary (Tab B, No. 8b)

Mr. Moncrief reviewed SSC discussions on regulatory streamlining and the SHELF Egg Project. Regarding the latter, a Committee member saw value in expanded larval sample collection for consideration in stock assessments. Another Committee member agreed, recalling very low sample sizes from SEAMAP plankton surveys in the past, especially for species like king mackerel. The Committee noted that the spatial distribution over which king mackerel larvae were being observed by SHELF had contracted in recent years, and that the centroid of spawning activity was now occurring more northward compared to historical estimates. Mr. Moncrief also reviewed SSC discussions on a SEFSC social science questionnaire, recalling limitations relative to survey design and targeting.

Madam Chair, this concludes my report.