

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Update and Liaison Report



March 2023

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in Jekyll Island, Georgia, March 6-10, 2023. Below is a summary of salient discussions.

Commercial Electronic Logbook Amendment

This amendment is being developed jointly with the Gulf Council to require commercial logbooks be submitted via electronic reporting forms instead of the currently used paper-based forms for the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper, Atlantic Dolphin Wahoo, Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Coastal Migratory Pelagics, and Gulf Reef Fish Fishery management plans. The Council reviewed progress on the amendment and approved it for public hearings. Additionally, the timeline was revised to have final approval in September 2023.

Snapper Grouper Amendments and Projects

Discard Mortality Reduction & Red Snapper Catch Levels (Regulatory Amendment 35)

Regulatory Amendment 35 was initiated to revise red snapper catch levels to be based on the most recent acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendations from the SSC and to reduce dead discards of snapper grouper species in response to concerns over impacts of dead discards on allowable catches of snapper grouper species, most notably red snapper.

Staff presented the draft amendment, including a summary of public comment and draft rationale for each action. NMFS SERO discussed potential recreational opportunities for exempted fishing permits for red snapper. NMFS is developing a request for EFP proposals that will be focused on reducing discards of red snapper and testing potential management strategies. A separate path for experimental commercial fishing opportunities is being developed through internal funding.

The Council approved the amendment for formal review.

If approved, the amendment will reduce red snapper catch levels based on the SSC's recommendation and prohibit the use of more than one hook per line for the snapper grouper recreational sector in the South Atlantic EEZ.

Gag and Black Grouper (SG Amendment 53)

Amendment 53 proposes establishing a rebuilding plan and adjusting catch levels for gag in response to the most recent stock assessment (SEDAR 71) and proposes management measure modifications for gag and black grouper. The Council reviewed public hearing comments, approved modifications to the purpose and need, and reviewed rationale for each action. The Council approved the amendment for formal review.

Management Strategy Evaluation for the Snapper Grouper Fishery

The Council is conducting a Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) to explore long-term management strategies for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. The Snapper Grouper Committee received a presentation on MSEs from Blue Matter Science. Blue Matter Science described preliminary information being included in the MSE, and discussions at the most recent Snapper Grouper AP and SSC meetings. The Committee provided guidance on conceptual management options and key uncertainties.

Private Recreational Permitting (Amendment 46)

Amendment 46 considers the establishment of a private recreational permit and education component for the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery. The Council reviewed scoping comments and provided guidance on actions and alternatives to develop for discussion in June 2023.

Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper (Amendment 55)

SEFSC staff presented the results of the SEDAR 68 stock assessment for scamp and yellowmouth grouper. Staff provided an overview of management changes that are needed to incorporate the results from SEDAR 68 into management. The Council directed staff to initiate work on the amendment.

Wreckfish (Amendment 48)

A review of the Wreckfish ITQ Program was completed in 2019 and included recommendations for improvement, particularly with respect to confidentiality issues and related constraints; moving away from a paper coupon-based program to an electronic program; cost recovery; wreckfish permit requirement; allocation issues; offloading sites and times; and economic data collection. Staff reviewed the amendment and NMFS staff provided a presentation on cost recovery in ITQ fisheries. The Council solicited public comment on this amendment during the public comment session and will consider the amendment for formal approval in September 2023.

Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendments and Projects

Atlantic Spanish Mackerel

At their December 2022 meeting, the Council expressed their frustration with the Atlantic Spanish mackerel assessment (SEDAR 78) and the importance of having accurate catch level recommendations to move forward with needed management discussions. To that end, the Council passed a motion directing the SSC to provide catch level recommendations for Atlantic Spanish mackerel at their April 2023 meeting, either from the updated assessment or using a data-limited approach. SSC Chair Dr. Jeff Buckel updated the Council on the January 2023 SSC

meeting including the terms of reference developed by the Spanish mackerel workgroup and discussion of alternative methods of setting ABCs.

The Council received a letter from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC), stating that the revisions to SEDAR 78 requested by the SSC in January are exploratory in nature and would require extensive rework. The SEFSC recommended the SSC develop its ABC advice based on the assessment and supporting analyses completed to date.

The Council discussed the potential for adding an Atlantic Spanish mackerel research track assessment on the SEDAR schedule. The Committee would like the research track assessment to occur during the same time block as the greater amberjack research track assessment but acknowledges that this may present workload challenges and should be discussed at the next SEDAR Steering Committee meeting.

Port Meetings

In December 2022 the Council directed staff to begin working on a plan to conduct port meetings for king and Spanish mackerel to aid in revising the goals and objectives of the CMP FMP and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the fisheries to improve management efforts. Council staff presented a planning document and received the following guidance:

- Port meetings should focus on the king and Spanish mackerel fisheries (Gulf and Atlantic)
- Port meetings will be open to all members of the public (commercial, for-hire, recreational, and others) interested in discussing the king and Spanish mackerel fisheries.
- As possible, port meetings should be conducted in key communities throughout the Gulf of Mexico and along the Atlantic up to the southern end of Massachusetts. As such, working with the Gulf of Mexico, Mid-Atlantic, and New England Fishery Management Councils, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and state agencies will be integral to the success of port meetings.
 - This is especially important given the joint nature of the CMP FMP and the need to concur with the Gulf Council on modifications to the FMP goals and objectives.
- After port meetings have been conducted, staff will develop a final report that includes notes from all port meetings conducted and a thematic analysis identifying patterns and themes among the different port meetings.

Habitat Projects

Habitat Blueprint

In 2020 the Council set out to re-state and evaluate its goals and objectives pertaining to EFH in the South Atlantic region and relative to meeting mandates under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This effort resulted in this *Habitat Blueprint*, which the Council intends to use as a guide to better focus activity that supports these mandates in a coordinated and effective manner with regional and state partner agencies. Work on the project was interrupted by other priorities but the Council is re-initiating it with the intent of completing the Blueprint in September 2023. Council staff provided background on the development of the Blueprint, an overview of Habitat Blueprint Workgroup progress and anticipated work for 2023.

Essential Fish Habitat Policies and 5-year Review

The Council is undertaking revisions to existing EFH policies and a review of current EFH designations to satisfy 5-year review requirements. Work will be conducted throughout 2023 and will be initially coordinated through the Habitat and Ecosystem-Based Management Advisory Panel.