

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Update and Liaison Report



December 2023

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in Beaufort, North Carolina, December 4-8, 2023. Below is a summary of salient discussions.

The Council heard reports from three advisory panels during its meeting. A common recommendation from the Snapper Grouper and Coastal Migratory Pelagics Advisory Panels was exploring limited-entry for the for-hire components of those fisheries. Additionally, the Council received an update on the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) program indicating poor compliance with reporting requirements in the South Atlantic. Given this information, the Council directed to begin work on an amendment to establish limited entry for the South Atlantic for-hire fisheries and established a control date of December 8, 2023. Additionally, the Council stipulated that Federal permit holders that have not reported snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagic, and/or dolphin and wahoo catch from the South Atlantic to the SEFHIER program on or prior to December 5, 2023, will not be assured of future access should a management regime that limits participation in the sector be prepared and implemented.

Snapper Grouper Amendments and Projects

Private Recreational Permitting (Amendment 46)

Amendment 46 proposes establishing a private recreational permit and education requirement for the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper fishery to address deficiencies in recreational data and to encourage best fishing practices that help reduce discard mortality. The Council reviewed input from its advisory panels and created a Private Recreational Angler Ad-Hoc Advisory Panel to provide further stakeholder input on permit and education program alternatives. The Council chose preferred alternatives that would apply permit requirements to *individuals* as opposed to a vessel and would require *a permit to fish for all species in the Snapper Grouper management complex*. The Council will receive additional input from its advisory panels at upcoming meetings and public hearings will be scheduled for later in 2024.

Yellowtail Snapper (Amendment 44/Reef Fish Amendment 55)

This amendment would modify catch levels for South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico yellowtail snapper, update the jurisdictional allocation of the stock acceptable biological catch, total South Atlantic annual catch limit, Gulf of Mexico annual catch limit, and South Atlantic sector

allocations. At their December meeting, the South Atlantic Council deprioritized work on this amendment until the stock assessment is updated with calibrated recreational estimates from the Florida State Reef Fish Survey.

Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper (Amendment 55)

The amendment would establish a Scamp Yellowmouth Grouper complex in response to SEDAR 68 Operational Assessment (2022) and put in place stock status determination criteria, a rebuilding plan, acceptable biological catch, annual catch limits, sector allocations, management measures, and accountability measures. In addition, the amendment would reorganize and update the Other South Atlantic Shallow Water Grouper complex. At their December meeting, the South Atlantic Council selected preferred alternatives for several actions and directed staff to add actions for management measures (season, bag limit, and trip limit) for the Scamp Yellowmouth Grouper Complex.

Red Snapper Catch Levels (Regulatory Amendment 35)

After a thorough review and much discussion, the Council rescinded its approval to submit Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 35 for formal review. The amendment was developed to address overfishing for red snapper, reduce the number of fish that are caught and released, and reduce mortality of released fish. The Council will continue work on the amendment and further explore actions to reduce release mortality while maintaining access to the overall Snapper Grouper fishery. The Council acknowledged that while the red snapper stock is deemed to be overfished and undergoing overfishing, taking additional time to work on the regulatory amendment poses little risk to the stock as it is rebuilding faster than expected and exhibiting strong recruitment, increasing abundance, and an expanding age structure. The Council will continue working on a holistic approach for managing the Snapper Grouper fishery via a management strategy evaluation and expanding outreach for best fishing practices.

Gag and Black Grouper Recreational Vessel Limits and On-Demand Black Sea Bass Pots (Regulatory Amendment 36)

Regulatory Amendment 36 considers revising the recreational vessel limits for gag and black grouper and making necessary regulatory changes to accommodate the use of on-demand (also known as ‘ropeless’) black sea bass pots in the commercial fishery. The Council initiated this amendment in September 2023, after clarifying their intent to recommend aggregate recreational vessel limits for gag and black grouper in Snapper Grouper Amendment 53. The Council also added consideration of accommodating on-demand black sea bass pots based on positive perspectives from fishermen that have experimentally used these types of gear under an ongoing exempted fishing permit (EFP). The Council approved this amendment for scoping and directed staff to communicate with black sea bass pot endorsement holders, particularly those that participated in the EFP project, asking which types of on-demand gear they would want to be available for use. Scoping will help determine what actions are necessary to accommodate on-demand pots and the most appropriate timeline for implementing those actions.

Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendments and Projects

Atlantic Spanish Mackerel

The Council reviewed actions and alternatives in CMP Framework Amendment 13 to update catch levels for Spanish Mackerel and added an action to modify the long-term optimum yield and revise recreational accountability measures. However, the Council decided to pause work on the amendment while Mackerel Port Meetings are conducted throughout 2024.

Port Meetings

Based on recommendations from the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel, the Council directed staff to begin work on a plan to conduct port meetings for king and Spanish mackerel to gain a comprehensive understanding of the fisheries to improve management efforts. Staff presented the Committee with a draft structure for port meetings and tentative meeting locations. Staff will prepare a finalized plan for Council approval in March 2024. Port meetings will begin in April 2024 and occur throughout the year along the east coast from Florida to southern Massachusetts.

Citizen Science

The Council adopted the updated Citizen Science Research Priorities which guide the projects the Citizen Science Program will support and pursue over the next two years. Additionally, the Council received an update on the citizen science platform, SciFish, which will support the capture and sharing of information about fish stocks along the Atlantic Coast. SciFish is a mobile application and menu-driven project builder designed to collect citizen science data. It will allow ACCSP partners to easily create a customizable app without the need to develop stand-alone applications for each new data need or project.

Other Items

Allocation Review Guidelines

The Council developed allocation review guidelines that outline the Council's process for allocation reviews, including an allocation decision tool process, the updated allocation review trigger policy, and the types of information that will be documented following an allocation trigger and subsequent review. The Council approved the guidelines at the December 2023 meeting.