

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Update and Liaison Report



March 2024

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) met in Jekyll Island, Georgia, March 4-8, 2024. Below is a summary of salient discussions.

Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER)

In December 2023 the Council stated their intent explore ways to modify the SEFHIER program to improve compliance, strengthen reporting requirements, and explore validation. At their March meeting, the Council received presentations on the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources for-hire reporting program and the Southeast Region Headboat Survey. To begin to identify needed changes to the SEFHIER program, and to obtain feedback from those who are required to report, the Council will assemble an advisory panel (AP) whose charge will be to explore improvements to the existing program. The Council approved the structure of the AP and will solicit applicants this spring with the intent of appointing members in June 2024. While the new AP is only tasked with discussing improvements to the existing SEFHIER program, the Council may revisit the AP's membership and its charge in the future to address limited access or other mechanisms to improve compliance and data collection.

For-Hire Limited Entry Amendment

Council staff presented available information on the number of federal for-hire permits in the Snapper Grouper, Dolphin Wahoo, and Coastal Migratory Pelagics (Atlantic only) fisheries from 2008 through 2020. Subsequent years of data were not available due to issues affecting the electronic permits system at the Southeast Regional Office. Staff also summarized information from Snapper Grouper Amendment 47, which considered implementing a moratorium on for-hire permits in the Snapper Grouper fishery, but was not completed. The Council directed staff to prepare a discussion document for June 2024, including a list of details the Council will have to work out as they move forward, e.g., Equity and Environmental Justice, impacts from climate change, governance shift considerations, etc. Additionally, the Council intends to wait to hold scoping hearings on this amendment until permit data from 2021 onwards are available later this year (possibly by May 2024).

Snapper Grouper Amendments and Projects

Private Recreational Permitting (Amendment 46)

The Council continued to make progress on an amendment to require a permit for the private component of the recreational sector. The Council requested additional feedback from their Outreach and Communications AP, Technical AP, and Private Angler AP ahead of the Council's next meeting. The intent is to consider approval for public hearings in September 2024.

Red Snapper

The Council received an overview of three projects proposed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation (FWC) that require Exempted Fishing Permits to allow harvest of red snapper. A total of five projects are recommended for funding. The Council provided comments on the FWC proposals.

NOAA Fisheries stated it is unknown whether there will be a recreational or a commercial season in 2024. Additionally, during the meeting week, NOAA Fisheries notified the Council that the agency is considering interim measures to reduce overfishing of red snapper during the 2024 fishing year.

The Council developed Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 35 to address overfishing for red snapper but rescinded approval of the amendment in December 2023. At their March meeting, the Council requested the SSC provide feedback on the Shertzer et al. management strategy paper and to what extent strategies discussed therein could meet goals for reducing discards and rebuilding the red snapper stock. Additionally, the MSE Planning Team will compile an initial prioritized list of strategies for the Council to review in June based on potential for discard reduction while preventing overfishing and optimizing access. The Council will then use the MSE to evaluate these strategies.

Black Sea Bass Management (Amendment 56)

The Council received a presentation from the SEFSC on revised projections of future catch used for setting ABC and a rebuilding timeframe. Staff delivered a [presentation](#) focused on population conditions and past, present, and future management challenges. The Council requested additional information be compiled to inform discussions and consideration of the amendment for scoping in June 2024.

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

The Council reviewed scoping comments and Law Enforcement Advisory Panel comments about potentially expanded use of on-demand pots. The Council reviewed actions and alternatives and directed continued development of the draft amendment with consideration of approval for public comment scheduled for June 2024.

Snapper Grouper Commercial Fishery

The Council also continued discussion of the snapper grouper commercial fishery, including the current permit structure and trends in the fishery. The Council requested additional information for their next meeting, including the number of vessels by revenue bins, regulatory and legal

mechanisms for leasing and overall statistics on leasing, and trends in imports. The Council intends to take a focused look at both short-term and long-term changes needed for the fishery by continuing to engage the AP, looking back at suggested strategies in the Vision Blueprint, and consider other approaches to obtain feedback from stakeholders.

Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendments and Projects

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. The Council approved the final plan for conducting port meetings. Port meetings will begin in North Carolina on April 1-4, 2024. A Council webpage has been completed for port meetings, including outreach materials: <https://safmc.net/king-and-spanish-mackerel-port-meetings>