

South Atlantic Research and Monitoring Prioritization Plan for 2015-2019

Introduction

The 2006 reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA) directs the Federal Regional Fishery Management Councils to develop a prioritized research plan for annual submission to the Secretary of Commerce. The following research and monitoring needs for 2014-2018 were developed by the South Atlantic Council in fulfillment of that requirement, *and will be offered for approval by the Council in June 2015.*

Highlighted Issues for 2015

The South Atlantic Council requests that NMFS provide, as required in the MSRA, annual SAFE reports that provide stock status including OFL and MSY, an evaluation of the management program including whether ACLS were met or AMs triggered and addressing reasons for such, results of independent fisheries monitoring, complete landings and discard losses in weight and numbers of fish, fishery dependent monitoring statistics, and measures of effort and economic value for all managed stocks by June 1 of each year. This information is critical for the Council and its SSC to set annual specifications (including ABC, ACL, and ACT) and evaluate AMs.

The South Atlantic Council requests that obtaining accurate fishery information including increased spatial resolution for landings, discards, and effective effort remain a top priority for NOAA fisheries.

The South Atlantic Council requests that efforts continue to improve recreational fisheries data collection, with increased emphasis on improving the precision of estimates for the many stocks in the snapper-grouper complex with extremely high PSE's **and low ACLs.**

The South Atlantic Council requests increased funding for fisheries independent monitoring in the South Atlantic. This includes restoration of MARMAP funding to a minimum of \$850,000 annually, **funding to allow reinitiating Long Bottom Longline sampling that provides the only abundance information for deepwater stocks such as tilefish,** and sufficient funding of the SEFIS program to ensure video monitoring data are available by June 1 of the year following collection. The Council requests that an Annual Report on the SEFIS program be provided, in writing, by October 1 of each year for review by the Council and SSC.

The South Atlantic Council requests evaluation of stock structure and identification of stock units before conducting a first time benchmark assessment for any stock. Based on current assessment plans, stock identification should be conducted for scamp and gray snapper by 2017 for use in the scheduled benchmark assessments.

The South Atlantic Council requests increased monitoring of discarding during seasonal and area closures.

The South Atlantic Council requests that NMFS implement adequate monitoring to enable evaluating the effectiveness of South Atlantic MPAs for protecting and ensuring adequate spawning biomass of snapper grouper stocks.

The South Atlantic Council requests that NMFS provide the Council an annual progress report detailing efforts to implement the research recommendations noted in annual Council Research and Monitoring Reports. This report should be provided by May 1 of each year for consideration as the Council develops its annual research prioritization.

Comments on Progress since 2007

Very little has changed on this list of priorities since the first Research Prioritization Plan was submitted under the MSRA requirements in September 2007. The basic data needs that existed nearly a decade ago still exist today. While some progress has been made on portions of recommended priorities, such as increased fishery-dependent monitoring, the Council has received very little feedback from NMFS efforts to implement and otherwise act upon the items provided in these annual plans submitted since 2007. The Council will continue to put forth this list of basic monitoring needs until they are addressed in their entirety. In addition, a number of direct and specific requests made in last year's plan remain unaddressed and are highlighted in the following list.

SAFE reports are a particular concern. The South Atlantic Council does not receive SAFE reports from the Agency for managed stocks. In recent years, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center has provided landings and effort data files to the Council which contain some of the information desired in SAFE reports. While the Council appreciates increased access to detailed landings information, this is just the first step in developing a truly useful and informative SAFE report. Additional information required includes sampling intensity by gear and species, discard losses for all managed stocks, progress reports on agency fishery-independent monitoring and socio-economic summary statistics. The Council notes that data files do not equate to a SAFE report as described in the MSRA. A major drawback is that data files are not accessible to the public and therefore do not result in a transparent SAFE report.

SAFMC Prioritized Research Recommendations for 2015-2019

Research and monitoring priorities are recommended that will enable the SAFMC to manage the resources under its jurisdiction in a manner consistent with the requirements of the MSRA. This list is in priority order; SAFE reports are the top council priority.

1. Provide regular reports to the Council on fishery, monitoring, and research status.
 - a. Provide annual SAFE Reports for all FMPs and managed stocks that include stock status, estimates of MSY and OFL, schedules of ACLs and ABCs, landings and discards by fishery sector in pounds and numbers, trends in abundance as provided by fishery surveys, descriptive statistics on observer coverage, evaluation of current management addressing if and why ACLs and AMs were met, measures of economic value, and summarized findings of any recent research activities.
 - b. Provide annual reports to the Council on implementation of research needs prioritized in this document.
2. Provide an evaluation of the independent survey and biological sampling information available for all SAFMC managed stocks that are currently unassessed. This evaluation

should document past sampling intensity and current sampling targets and provide guidance on the type of stock assessments feasible given currently available data.

3. Implement adequate fishery and population monitoring programs by 2015. (*revise deadline?*), Provide an annual written report by each June Council meeting that includes final values and progress updates for the information and tasks below.
 - a. Collect basic fishery information (landings, discards, and biological characteristics) for all managed stocks.
 - b. Collect and analyze additional biological and survey information necessary to develop age-based quantitative stock assessments for those stocks which comprise the bulk of the fishery, or serve as important ecological indicators. These are listed in Appendix 2 as primary species.
 - c. Initiate comprehensive fishery monitoring and sampling to support quantitative assessments, not necessarily age-based, for all secondary species listed in Appendix 2.
 - d. Initiate monitoring programs to provide adequate stock status and fishery exploitation information on stocks characterized as "Special Needs" (See Appendix 2)
4. Resolve data collection and dissemination issues that burden constituents, create availability delays, and impede access by the Council and its technical bodies to the information required for adequate management.
 - a. Fully implement the biological, economic, and social data collection standards developed through ACCSP and ensure all data are provided to ACCSP in a timely basis.
 - b. Resolve data confidentiality issues that prevent dissemination of basic landings information to the SAFMC and its SSC.
 - c. Eliminate duplicative data collection programs and adopt electronic reporting options for commercial and for-hire fisheries.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of current MPAs and other closed areas with regard to preventing overfishing and restoring overfished stocks, and provide a full report on findings to the Council by March 1, 2015. (*Deadline per 2014 submission. If addressed, Council should consider removing this*)
6. ~~RECOMMEND DELETION: DUPLICATED BY 3(d): Develop population evaluation and monitoring approaches that will enable determination of stock status and development of reliable fishing level recommendations for those stocks identified by the SAFMC SSC as "Special Needs Stocks" (Appendix 2).~~
7. Monitor the mixing rates of Gulf and South Atlantic king mackerel. Mixing rates may change over time and should therefore be regularly evaluated, although annual monitoring may not be necessary.
8. Implement a monitoring and research program to address issues relevant to ecosystem management. Topics include trophic interactions, food preferences, predator-prey relationships, and ecosystem connectivity.

9. Evaluate the cumulative biological, economic and social impacts of existing regulations on the multi-species snapper grouper fishery in the South Atlantic.
10. The Council requests that appropriate SEFSC staff meet with the SSC at its Spring meeting each year when these research priorities are reviewed, to increase interaction and communication between the SSC and agency scientists.

Appendix 1. SAFMC Recommended Fishery Monitoring Framework

1. Basic fishery data required for managed species

The following information is required for all managed fisheries and stocks:

- Complete catch and bycatch reporting by species
- Per unit (ie, tow, set, site, deployment, depending on the nature of the fishery) information from for-hire and commercial fisheries collected through onboard electronic logbooks linked to GPS
- Representative biological sampling of catches
- Representative sampling of bycatch and discards
- License id information for all participants and vessels linked to trip and set reports
- Global participant frame provided through licensing of all participants
- Desired location elements include latitude, longitude, and depth

1. Shrimp Trawl Fishery

Per tow: duration, location, trawl details, catch estimate, discard estimate

Per trip: landings by species, trip costs, price paid per lb, # crew

Supplement: 5% observer coverage for discard, 20% coverage for detailed social & economic reporting.

2. Finfish Trap Fisheries

Per trap/string: duration, location, trap details, catch estimate, discard count

Per trip: landings by species, trip costs, price paid per lb, # crew

Supplement: 2% observer coverage for discard, 10 % video discard coverage, 20% coverage for detailed social & economic reporting.

3. Dive or Spear Fisheries

Per dive: duration, location, gear details, # divers, catch estimate

Per trip: landings by species, trip costs, price paid per lb, # crew

Supplements: 20% coverage for detailed social & economic reporting.

4. Handline Fisheries

Per set/site: duration, location, gear details, catch estimate, discard count

Per trip: landings by species, trip costs, price paid per lb, # crew

Supplement: 5% observer coverage for discard, 10% video discard coverage, 20% coverage for detailed social & economic reporting.

5. Deepwater Longline Fishery

Per set/deployment: duration, location, gear details, catch estimate, discard count

Per trip: landings by species, trip costs, price paid per lb, # crew

Supplement: 5% observer coverage for discard, 10% video discard coverage, 20% coverage for detailed social & economic reporting.

6. Pelagic Longline Fishery

Per set/deployment: soak, location, gear details, catch estimate, discard count

Per trip: landings by species, trip costs, price paid per lb, # crew

Supplement: 5% observer coverage for discard, 10% video discard coverage, 20% coverage for detailed social & economic reporting.

7. Bottom Longline

Per set/deployment: soak, location, gear details, catch estimate, discard count

Per trip: landings by species, duration, trip costs, price paid per lb, # crew,

Supplement: 5% observer coverage for discard, 10% video discard coverage, 20% coverage for detailed social & economic reporting.

8. Private Recreational

Per trip: mode, location, gear details, duration, landings by species, discard by species, expenditures,

Per Year: # trips by mode, location

Supplement: Voluntary logbook for discard characteristics (e.g., size and reason for discarding), 20% coverage for detailed social & economic reporting.

9. Headboat Recreational

Per set/site: location, duration, catch & discard estimate by species

Per Trip: # anglers, # lines, duration, landings by species

Supplement: 5% observer coverage for discard characteristics. Voluntary logbook for discard (size), 20% coverage for detailed social & economic reporting of owner/operators. 20% coverage for social & economic evaluations of participants.

10. Party/Charter Recreational Fishery

Per trip: mode, location, gear details, duration, catch & discard by species

Supplement: 5% observer coverage for discard characteristics. Voluntary logbook for discard (size), 20% coverage for detailed social & economic reporting of owner/operators. 20% coverage for social & economic evaluations of participants.

Appendix 2. Priority Stocks

SAFMC Primary Data Collection Species:

vermilion snapper	white grunt
snowy grouper	yellowtail snapper
tilefish	gray triggerfish
red grouper	mutton snapper
black grouper	red porgy
scamp	dolphin
black sea bass	king mackerel
gag grouper	Spanish mackerel
greater amberjack	blueline tilefish

Expanded Data Elements for Primary Species:

- Representative sampling, adequate to support quantitative age-based stock assessments, by season, fishery, and area, of length, age, sex, and weight for landed & discarded fish
- Fishery-independent survey derived measures of population abundance (preferred). If this is not possible, develop appropriate fishery-dependent measures.
- Timely and up-to-date life history research: rates of growth, mortality, maturity, fecundity; movements, migrations, and stock structure evaluations

SAFMC Secondary Data Collection Species

tomtate	banded rudderfish
knobbed porgy	rock hind
bar jack	red hind
almaco jack	wahoo
lane snapper	Penaeid shrimp

Additional Data Elements for Secondary species:

- Fishery-dependent survey measures of population abundance
- Evaluation of life history traits: rates of growth, mortality, maturity, fecundity; and movements, migration, and stock structure evaluations.

SAFMC "Special Needs" Stocks

Stocks listed here include those subject to restrictive management actions or possessing biological traits that hinder monitoring and evaluation by typical catch-based approaches. Some may also be listed as primary or secondary data collection stocks so they are not overlooked in data collection planning.

Warsaw grouper	red snapper
speckled hind	wreckfish
Goliath grouper	spiny lobster
Nassau grouper	golden crab