

## 2026 South Atlantic SEDAR Assessments

### SEDAR Committee

September 2024

At the July 2024 SEDAR Steering Committee Meeting, NMFS updated SAFMC representatives on which stocks would be scheduled for 2026 stock assessments. Previously, the Council had requested assessments for Gag, Gray Triggerfish, King Mackerel, Red Grouper, and Snowy Grouper and hoped for a Black Sea Bass assessment in 2026. These requests were ambitious. NMFS indicated that the Red Snapper Assessment will need two analysts due to the level of complexity associated with the assessment. Additionally, the Coastal Migratory Pelagic assessment slot was removed as an option for SEDAR assessments. This left two open slots in 2026. The SAFMC representatives selected Gag and Red Grouper to fill these slots since both species are in a rebuilding plan and were previously delayed. The Gag Assessment was scheduled to begin in 2025, but the assessment was delayed due to the potential estimation bias in recreational effort. The Red Grouper Assessment was scheduled to begin in 2024, but the assessment was cancelled when it was recommended that the model be changed to a two-stock model. When changes to stock definition are recommended in an assessment, the assessment is recommended to have external peer review, which was not included in the scope of work or terms of reference for the assessment.

Since three species were removed from the 2026 slots to later in the calendar, an updated SEDAR Grid is provided (**Table 1**). Below is rationale for developing the SEDAR Grid. The Committee may recommend changes in species/stocks listed as future requests for 2027 and 2028 assessments.

#### **Species Moved from 2026**

##### **Gray Triggerfish**

Stock Status:           Overfished – Unknown  
                              Overfishing – Unknown

The Gray Triggerfish stock was recently assessed through the Research Track Process. This meant no management advice was developed from the assessment. An operational assessment was originally scheduled to begin in 2024 but was delayed due to the potential bias in recreational effort data and workload issues. Gray Triggerfish have been removed from the assessment grid due to limited number of assessments that can be completed in a timely manner as well as issues with aging and identification of unit stock.

##### **King Mackerel**

Stock Status from SEDAR 38 Update:       Overfished – No  
  Overfishing – No

The King Mackerel stock was previously conducted by an analyst designated as a slot for Coastal Migratory Pelagic species. The assessment will now be conducted by an analyst in the SA slots. This will likely result in a change in the assessment model framework. King Mackerel were previously assessed using Stock Synthesis, but the Beaufort Lab typically uses the Beaufort Assessment Model. A continuity run will be needed to ensure that the change in the model

framework does not cause any issues with the assessment. This will require more time for the assessment, which is currently scheduled to take 12 months. The assessment is scheduled to begin in 2027. The terminal year for the previous assessment was 2018.

**Snowy Grouper**

Stock Status from SEDAR 36 Update:           Overfished – Yes  
  Overfishing – Yes

The Snowy Grouper Assessment was scheduled to start in 2026. The assessment was moved to 2027. The Council has not been provided with an update since 2022 when the assessment was presented. Due to the overall low abundance of Snowy Grouper, this assessment was prioritized. Snowy Grouper are a species with low recruitment in recent years.

**Black Sea Bass**

Stock Status from SEDAR 56:                   Overfished – No\*  
  Overfishing – No\*

\*This status is not based on SEDAR 76, which is the most recent stock assessment for Black Sea Bass. The most recent assessment, SEDAR 76, used an updated version of the Beaufort Assessment Model with data through 2021. This assessment indicates that in recent years the Black Sea Bass stock has greatly declined and has experienced the lowest recruitment levels estimated for this stock.

The SSC recommended another assessment or analysis be conducted in 2026, but Black Sea Bass have not been added to the SEDAR Schedule. The SSC only provided projections through 2026, which is five years after the terminal year of the assessment. The chevron trap index of abundance was lowest on record in 2023. Due to these concerns and the low stock abundance, Black Sea Bass are recommended for an assessment in 2027.

**Other Species with Assessments Scheduled Revised**

**Vermilion Snapper**

Stock Status from SEDAR 55:           Overfished – No  
  Overfishing – No

An interim analysis was completed for Vermilion Snapper in 2023. This analysis was not accepted by the SSC because the assessment model did not fit the index and thus did not inform the population estimates and management advice. The terminal year of the last assessment for Vermilion Snapper was 2016. Updated catch levels are needed for this species and have been placed on the SEDAR Grid for 2027.

**Red Porgy**

Stock Status from SEDAR 60:           Overfished – Yes  
  Overfishing – Yes

A new rebuilding plan for Red Porgy started in 2022. Previous rebuilding plans proved unsuccessful at rebuilding the stock. The stock is overfished and at historic lows. Red Porgy have shown low recruitment in recent years and only minor increases in abundance have been observed in the chevron trap index of abundance. The next assessment has been scheduled for 2028. The terminal year for the last assessment was 2017.

## **Greater Amberjack**

Stock Status from SEDAR 59:           Overfished – No  
  Overfishing – No

The terminal year for the Greater Amberjack assessment was 2016. At that time the stock was neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing. The Amberjack Research Project data will be considered for the upcoming stock assessment. This assessment is scheduled after the Gulf of Mexico stock assessment, where methods may be developed for incorporating the information into the South Atlantic stock assessment. Due to the new data streams, this assessment will likely take longer than other assessments. The project is currently expected to start in 2028.

## **Spanish Mackerel**

Stock Status from SEDAR 78:           Overfished – No  
  Overfishing – No

The terminal year for the last Spanish Mackerel assessment was 2021. The SSC and Council expressed concerns with the model and projections. The SSC developed a list of items for sensitivities and model changes. These changes are likely some of the changes that SSC would recommend for the next Spanish Mackerel assessment. The assessment is currently scheduled to start in 2028.

## **Species Previously Assessed Not in the SEDAR Grid (Species Assessed by Florida not included)**

### **Scamp/Yellowmouth Complex**

Stock Status from SEDAR 68:           Overfished – Yes  
  Overfishing – No

A new stock complex is being developed for Scamp/Yellowmouth Grouper through Snapper Grouper Amendment 55. The terminal year for the operational assessment was 2020. The Scamp/Yellowmouth stock could be assessed in 2028.

### **Gray Triggerfish**

See above.

### **Wreckfish**

Stock Status from Rademeyer and Butterworth 2012:           Overfished – No  
  Overfishing – No

The Wreckfish Shareholders supported a stock assessment in 2012. The model has not been updated since. Wreckfish could be a species selected for an assessment in 2028; however, the stock structure for the species spans the Atlantic Basin, similar to Dolphin. A management strategy evaluation approach may be more appropriate for this stock. Staff have proposed a management strategy evaluation project with Wreckfish or other species through IRA grant funding. The management strategy evaluation project would be completed by 2027, if funded.

**Table 1.** South Atlantic SEDAR Schedule based on the outcomes of the July 2024 SEDAR Steering Committee Meeting. Green designates approved by the SEDAR Steering Committee and scheduled by NMFS. Orange designates approved by the Steering Committee but not scheduled. Blue designates future requests.

YEAR	SA Team			
	1	2	3	4
2024		S82 Gray Triggerfish RT		S89 Tilefish OA
		S95 Atlantic Migratory Cobia Benchmark	S92 Blueline Tilefish OA	S90 Red Snapper Benchmark
2025	S90 Red Snapper Benchmark		Dolphin MP RW	
	2026		Gag Grouper	Red Grouper -single stock continuity -External Peer Review
				S90 Red Snapper Benchmark
2027				SA King Mackerel
	Snowy Grouper	Vermilion	BSB	
2028				
	Red Porgy	Greater Amberjack	Spanish Mackerel	

## Appendix A. South Atlantic SEDAR Projects

The summaries below describe ongoing and upcoming projects requested by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. There are 2 completed projects and 6 ongoing projects addressing stocks managed by the SAFMC that are scheduled or expected to start by 2025.

### **Completed Projects**

#### SEDAR 82 South Atlantic Gray Triggerfish, Research Track

**SEDAR Contact:** Julie A Neer

**Summary:** The Review Workshop was held in Atlantic Beach, NC (DoubleTree) March 12-14, 2024. The completed assessment report was released on May 8, 2024. An Operational assessment to produce management advice was removed from the schedule.

#### SEDAR 89 South Atlantic Tilefish, Operational Assessment

**SEDAR Contact:** Julie A. Neer

**Summary:** A Life History Topical Working Group was developed for this assessment to address specific items in the terms of reference. This group held a series of webinars from November 2023 to February 2024 to discuss and address these items. Findings from these webinars were included in the final assessment report. The report was provided to the SAFMC in July 2024 and will be reviewed by the SSC in October 2024.

### **Projects – Ongoing**

#### SEDAR 79 Southeastern US Mutton Snapper, Benchmark

**SEDAR Contact:** Julie A. Neer

**Summary:** The Benchmark assessment for SE US Mutton Snapper was rescheduled for 2023. The terminal year of data for the assessment will be 2022. The Data Workshop occurred August 21-25, 2023. Assessment webinars were held from November 2023 to April 2024. The Review Workshop occurred September 10-12, 2024. Staff from the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils are working together to set a joint review by their SSCs.

#### SEDAR 90 South Atlantic Red Snapper, Research Track Assessment

**SEDAR Contact:** Julie A. Neer

**Summary:** The assessment is currently scheduled to begin in November 2024 and to be completed in November 2026. The process includes a data workshop to be held in April 2025, a series of assessment webinars from September 2025 to April 2026, and a review workshop to be held in September 2026. Additionally, there is an integration plan to evaluate and consider using SARRP data in this assessment.

#### SEDAR 92 Atlantic Blueline Tilefish, Operational Assessment

**SEDAR Contact:** Julie A. Neer

**Summary:** A Landings Stream Topical Working Group (TWG) met via webinars from April to July 2024. During those webinars, it was determined that an additional Life History TWG would be needed to review new age information. That group will meet via webinar in August/September 2024. The addition of the second TWG will cause a delay

in the completion of the assessment (originally scheduled for November 2024). The new completion date is being discussed. The SSC will review the assessment in April 2025.

SEDAR 94 Southeastern Hogfish Snapper, Benchmark

**SEDAR Contact:** Julie A. Neer

**Summary:** The Benchmark assessment for SE hogfish (Florida West Coast and East Florida/Florida Keys Stocks) was slated to begin in 2024 but has been postponed until 2025 to allow for a yellowtail snapper operational assessment to be conducted in 2024. The terms of reference have been approved by the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, and participants have been appointed. SEDAR will work with the Florida assessment team to revise the project schedule to accommodate this shift in timing. Once an updated schedule is developed, SEDAR will work with the appropriate Councils to update and finalize participants.

SEDAR 95 Atlantic Cobia

**SEDAR Contact:** Julie A. Neer

**Summary:** A Data Scoping webinar was held in March 2024, and three data webinars have been conducted (one each for Removals, Indices, and Life History). A second data webinar for each topic will be held in July and August 2024. Assessment Webinars are scheduled for April to September 2025. The review workshop is scheduled for October 2025 and the assessment will be completed in November 2025.

SEDAR 96 Florida Yellowtail Snapper

**SEDAR Contact:** Julie A. Neer

**Summary:** This assessment is scheduled to have one Topical Working Group to review recreational catch information and discuss the use of the Florida State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS). Webinars were held May to September 2024. The assessment is scheduled to be completed in late 2024.

**Other Projects – External to SEDAR**

Dolphin Management Strategy Evaluation

**Contact:** Cassidy Peterson, NMFS

**Summary:** The review workshop for the management procedure is currently listed to occur in 2025 based on the SEDAR Schedule.