



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Modifications to South Atlantic For-hire Reporting

Decision Document, June 2025

Background

The Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) Program was launched in 2021 with the implementation of the Comprehensive For-Hire Electronic Reporting Amendment ([SAFMC 2020](#)). The amendment put in place or modified reporting requirements for federally permitted charter vessels and headboats in the snapper grouper (SG), dolphin wahoo (DW), and coastal migratory pelagics (mackerels; CMP) fisheries. Reporting requirements through SEFHIER were effective for charter/for-hire vessels in January 2021.

Additional information on the intended outcomes of the Comprehensive For-Hire Electronic Reporting Amendment and recommendations of the related technical sub-committee were provided to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) at its [September 2024 meeting](#).

The Gulf Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) has continued to work on the Gulf For-Hire Reporting Amendment, which would establish a revised for-hire electronic reporting program for the Gulf fisheries. The United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit set aside the Gulf's SEFHIER final rule in February 2023. The developing amendment includes actions that would establish the frequency and mechanism for data reporting from charter vessels,

modify the existing reporting requirements for headboats, establish trip notification and effort reporting requirements, and establish reporting of economic data. The Gulf Council selected preferred alternatives at their [April 2025 meeting](#) and the amendment is tentatively scheduled to be approved for secretarial review in June 2025.

Additionally, NMFS Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) is developing changes to their for-hire reporting requirements. In January 2025, the Council submitted comments on NMFS Atlantic HMS proposed rule to modify and/or expand reporting requirements. A summary presentation of the HMS proposed rule was provided to the Council's at its [December 2024 meeting](#).

The Council reviewed and approved the For-Hire Reporting Improvements Amendment for scoping at their March 2025 meeting. Scoping was held via the [Council's webpage](#), with a comment period from April 24 to May 8, 2025. One scoping comment was submitted via the Council's webpage. **The online scoping comment may be accessed [HERE](#).** Also at their spring 2025 meetings, the Snapper Grouper, Mackerel Cobia, and Dolphin Wahoo advisory panels (APs) reviewed potential actions and alternatives to include in the amendment. At the June 2025 meeting, the Council will review summary comments received during scoping and from the three finfish APs.

Objectives for this Meeting (June 2025)

1. Review feedback from scoping and the APs.
2. Review timing of amendment development.
3. Review the updated draft Purpose and Need statements.
4. Review list of potential actions and range of alternatives.

Tentative Amendment Timing

March 2025	Reviewed suite of actions and alternatives and approved for public scoping
Spring 2025	Obtained feedback from public scoping as well as the SG, DW, and CMP APs
June 2025	Review scoping and AP feedback. Update amendment
September 2025	Update amendment
December 2025	Approve for public hearings
Winter 2026	Conduct public hearings
March 2026	Review public hearing comments and approve all actions
June 2026	Consider approval for formal review
2027/2028	Regulation changes become effective

Purpose and Need Statements

Purpose: The *purpose* of this amendment is to make modifications to the South Atlantic Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting Program and the Southeast Region Headboat Survey to improve the accuracy, precision, and timeliness of landings, discards, fishing effort, and economic data for South Atlantic permitted charter/headboat vessels participating in the snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, and dolphin wahoo fisheries.

Need: The need for this amendment is to improve compliance and allow for data validation so the information collected can be used in managing the fisheries for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, and dolphin wahoo.

Council Action:

CONSIDER IF EDITS ARE NEEDED TO THE PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENTS AND APPROVE.

Draft Actions and Alternatives

1. Modify Reporting Frequency of Fishing Trips for For-Hire Vessels

***Purpose of Action:** Increase reporting frequency to improve monitoring and enforcement and increase the quality of reported data. This action would apply to vessels with a valid charter/headboat permit, regardless of whether they participate in the Southeast Region Headboat Survey, as the reporting frequency is currently the same for both headboats and charter vessels.*

Alternative 1 (No Action). The owner or operator of a charter vessel for which a charter vessel/headboat permit for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo has been issued, must record all fish harvested and discarded, regardless of where the fish are caught (state or federal waters), **for each trip, and submit an electronic fishing report weekly** (on Tuesday following each previous reporting week of Monday through Sunday) via National Marine Fisheries Service approved software. If the owner or operator has been issued a Federal permit that requires more restrictive reporting requirements, those more restrictive regulations apply.

Alternative 2. Require that the owner or operator of a charter vessel or headboat with a valid charter vessel/headboat permit for snapper grouper species, coastal migratory pelagics, dolphin, or wahoo submit trip, catch, and effort information **for each trip** via National Marine Fisheries Service approved electronic software.

Sub-alternative 2a. An electronic logbook form must be submitted within **30 minutes of arriving at the dock**, regardless of whether fish are harvested on a trip.

Sub-alternative 2b. An electronic logbook form must be submitted within **1 hour of arriving at the dock**, regardless of whether fish are harvested on a trip.

Sub-alternative 2c. If fish are harvested during the trip, electronic reporting is required **prior to arrival at the landing location**. If no fish are retained on a for-hire fishing trip, an electronic logbook form must be submitted within **30 minutes of arriving at the landing location**.

Sub-alternative 2d. If fish are harvested during the trip, electronic reporting is required **prior to arrival at the landing location**. If no fish are retained on a for-hire fishing trip, an electronic logbook form must be submitted within **1 hour of arriving at the landing location**.

Alternative 3. Require that the owner or operator of a charter vessel or headboat with a valid charter vessel/headboat permit for snapper grouper species, coastal migratory pelagics, dolphin, or wahoo submit trip, catch, and effort information **for each trip daily** via National Marine Fisheries Service approved electronic software.

Sub-alternative 3a. Electronic reporting is not required prior to arrival at the landing location.

Sub-alternative 3b. If fish are harvested during the trip, electronic reporting is required prior to arrival at the landing location.

Discussion

- The South Atlantic Council is looking to adopt similar measures being considered by the Gulf Council (i.e., trip level or daily reporting as well as a reporting requirement before offloading fish). Other than a no action alternative, the Gulf Council is considering two other alternatives. One that would require **submittal of trip reports within 30 minutes** of arriving at the dock if no fish are harvested, **or prior to offload if fish are harvested**. The other would require **reporting for each trip daily** (i.e., within 24 hours of the end of the trip).
 - At their April 2025 meeting, the Gulf Council selected a preferred alternative that would require trip-level reporting, with trip information being submitted prior to landing if fish are harvested or within 30 minutes if no fish are harvested (**Alternative 2, Sub-Alternative 2c**).
- A summary comparison of existing and developing reporting requirements that may affect South Atlantic permitted for-hire vessels is in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of existing and developing for-hire **reporting frequency** and timing requirements for the South Atlantic (SA) SEFHIER, Southeast (SE) Headboat Survey, Gulf SEFHIER, Greater Atlantic Region (GARFO) Vessel Trip Report (VTR), and Highly Migratory Species (HMS).

	SA SEFHIER and SE Headboat Survey	Gulf SEFHIER	GARFO VTR	HMS
Existing	Weekly	N/A	Generally 48 hours after entering port. For recreational tilefish: 24 hours after end of trip.	Electronic report, telephone, or other means like catch cards.
Proposed	?	Prior to offload of catch, within 30 minutes of completion of the trip, or each trip daily.	No proposed changes.	Electronic report (all species) 24 hours after end of trip.

Source: Information and concept based on HMS presentation to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council December 2, 2024. https://safmc.net/documents/fc1_a3_hms_e-reporting-proposed-rule-presentation_safmc_202412-pdf/

Scoping Comments/Recommendations

- Make the reporting app more self-explanatory and faster to use.
- Make more captains aware of the need for federal permits and electronic reporting. There are no incentives to comply.
- Increasing reporting frequency is not practical; captains have so much to do during the busy season they have trouble keeping up with the current requirement.
- Training new captains on all the reporting requirements is burdensome.

AP Comments/Recommendations

- Some members felt that the phone app-based systems currently used for reporting are not user friendly, even to just set up an account. This is especially challenging if fishermen are not as familiar with using this technology. Overall, there are too many resources needed to report (the app, internet, cell service).
 - The process of submitting data should be as simple as possible. Compliance would improve if the Council could make it easier for fishermen to report.
- Being required to report before offloading passengers would be burdensome and potentially dangerous.
 - Need to stay alert looking for nautical hazards coming into port.
 - It takes time to help passengers off of the vessel and prepare for the next trip.
 - Reporting frequency and timing should be as flexible as possible.
 - Many captains are not comfortable with a smartphone and are reporting via a computer.
 - May compromise the quality of the data reported since captains may be rushing to report.
- Many AP members felt the current weekly reporting frequency is working and doesn't need to change. Increasing the frequency of reporting could lead to a decrease in compliance.
 - Some AP members supported a 48-hour reporting requirement.
- Some AP members stated that vessels operating charters without the proper permits is a bigger issue than non-reporting and needs to be addressed before improvement to reporting can occur.
- Consider improving compliance through increased enforcement.
 - Increase the minimum fine for non-reporting.
 - Increase non-compliance notifications and implement a "strike system" where captains lose their permit if they receive multiple violations.

IPT Comments/Recommendations

- Reporting frequency may impact certification with MRIP and for use of data in management. This is important for the Council to be aware of.
- ACCSP has brought on a consultant for statistical modeling and simulation work to test and validate methodology that ACCSP is proposing for standardizing for-hire reporting. This will likely take all of 2025.
- In the GARFO region, they differentiate when the logbook is required to be completed vs. when it is required to be submitted. (Must be completed when they arrive at the dock but can be submitted 48 hours after a trip).

- From a law enforcement perspective: compliance is likely to go up if reporting requirement is before getting to the dock.
- Requirement to submit before arrival at the dock may raise safety at sea issues.
- Are there any enforcement or interpretation issues? There have been several \$500 summary settlements issued for not having required permit. The open access nature of the program presents challenges for enforcement.

Council Action

CONSIDER FEEDBACK FROM IPT, SCOPING, AND ADVISORY PANELS. MAKE MODIFICATIONS IF NEEDED.

2. Require Trip Notification for For-Hire Vessels

Purpose of Action: This action would require federally permitted charter/headboat vessels to provide a notification to NMFS declaring the intent to initiate a for-hire or fishing trip, return from a for-hire or fishing trip, or both. This action would improve estimates of effort by providing a validation process that is not in place with the current MRIP survey (for charter vessels) or Southeast Regional Headboat Survey. This action would also alert law enforcement officers in advance of a trip, thus improving their ability to address non-reporting or late reporting.

Alternative 1 (No Action). There are currently no trip notification requirements for federally permitted charter/headboat vessels participating in the snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo fisheries.

Alternative 2. Require that the owner or operator of a charter vessel or headboat issued a valid charter vessel/headboat federal permit for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo submit a trip declaration for trips that will be engaging in any type of for-hire fishing and:

Sub-alternative 2a. Bait fishing.

Sub-alternative 2b. Private recreational fishing.

Sub-alternative 2c. Commercial fishing (applicable for properly permitted vessels).

Sub-alternative 2d. Other for-hire activity (e.g., sunset cruises, dolphin watching, ecotours; when fish will not be targeted).

Sub-alternative 2e. Anytime the vessel leaves the dock.

Discussion

- This action would implement a trip notification requirement that may include the initiation of a trip (declaration), return from a trip (pre-landing notification), or both.
- Both notices assist in monitoring program requirements.
- Trip notifications can help:
 - law enforcement to maximize vessel encounters at sea and at the dock,
 - port samplers obtain biological samples,
 - improve data quality, trip accounting, and compliance audits.
- The Gulf Council is considering requiring a declaration for trips that will be engaged in any type of fishing (e.g., charter, bait fishing, private trips, commercial trips) or for-hire activity (non-fishing activities involving paying passengers) or only for trips that will be engaging in any type of fishing activity.
 - The trip notification measures may also vary between charter vessels and headboat vessels in the Gulf Council's amendment.
 - At their April 2025 meeting, the Gulf Council noted that a trip notification would only apply for for-hire fishing activity in their preferred alternative (Alternative 2).
- Sub-alternatives under Alternative 2 could be included if the Council were to consider a trip declaration from permitted vessels when they were being used for activities other than for-hire fishing. However, staff recommend excluding the sub-alternatives and only considering

a trip notification when a vessel is engaged in for-hire fishing based on feedback from advisory panels and to simplify the effects analysis.

Previous guidance from the Council

- It is important there is clarification to explain why there are various types of activities under this action. Consider focusing the language on whether passengers are onboard. Look to consolidate sub-alternatives like the Gulf’s draft amendment.

Scoping Comments/Recommendations

- One commenter stated opposition for any trip notification, stating the current requirements are already burdensome.

AP Comments/Recommendations

- APs agreed that if a trip notification is implemented, it should only be applicable to for-hire fishing and no other activity the vessel may be engaged in.
 - Some AP members were not in favor of requiring a trip notification.
- APs agreed that submitting a trip notification should be as easy and simple as possible.
- It was suggested that a trip notification be incorporated into an existing NMFS-approved reporting platform (e.g., VESL).
- While it was noted that reporting non-fishing activities could help with enforcement, non-fishing activities fall outside of the Council’s jurisdiction and should not be considered for a trip notification.

IPT Comments/Recommendations:

- Trip notification data is useful to evaluate social and economic characteristics of the fisheries. It provides information on business activity.
- From a law enforcement perspective: it would be helpful to specify the timing of submittal for a trip declaration. Also, a trip that is underway cannot shift from being for-hire to commercial or vice-versa. Intent needs to be clear when the vessel is leaving the dock.
- Declaration also helps with trip accounting from beginning to end. In some areas multiple types of trips can happen in a day. Many HMS vessels have for-hire and commercial permits and are allowed to sell their catch. They are supposed to make a decision on the type of trip but this doesn’t always happen.
- There is no current mechanism to cancel a trip declaration; instead, a trip declaration can be overridden by initiating a new declaration.

Council Action

CONSIDER FEEDBACK FROM STAFF, THE IPT, SCOPING, AND ADVISORY PANELS.
MAKE MODIFICATIONS IF NEEDED.

3. Establish Approved Landing Locations for For-Hire Vessels

Purpose of Action: *Establishing approved landing locations for offload support the ability of the agency to enforce and monitor compliance with reporting and conduct a validation survey.*

Alternative 1 (No Action). There is no requirement for federally permitted charter or headboat vessels participating in the snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo fisheries to offload clients or harvested catch at pre-approved landing locations.

Alternative 2. Require that a charter vessel or headboat issued a valid charter vessel/headboat federal permit for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo only land at pre-approved locations.

Discussion

- A landing location is the street address location where fish and passengers are expected to be offloaded.
- Can be public locations, private residences, or dock slip in a large marina.
- Landing locations supply law enforcement with an exact location where a for-hire trip will offload fish and passengers.
- Landing locations provide information to validate the information collected through the program.
- The Gulf Council is considering a similar action; however, requiring landing locations is considered to be part of the program rather than a Council decision. Therefore, the requirement for approved landing locations is explained in the discussion section of the pertinent actions.

Scoping Comments/Recommendations

- No comments received on this action.

AP Comments/Recommendations

- APs recommended re-wording the action. The current wording gives the impression that vessels can only offload at certain locations.
- It was suggested that landing locations could be done like how they are reported in the commercial fishery where there is a place to enter the landing location on the form and afterwards it becomes an approved location.
- Some AP members were not in favor of approved landing locations.
 - Picking up or dropping off clients at private docks is going to be problematic.
 - May need to use multiple private docks in a week.
 - Do not want to get a ticket if the location is not pre-approved. Offload locations can be added or change on short notice.

IPT Comments/Recommendations

- A location would need to be submitted in advance for approval. There are no restrictions on location (could be all the way up to ME). Anyone can pick any site listed in the pre-approved locations. Fishermen can choose to list their private residences.
- NOAA OLE confirmed that enforcement is across regions and would not be an issue with enforcing landing locations.

Council Action

CONSIDER FEEDBACK FROM IPT, SCOPING, AND ADVISORY PANELS AND MAKE MODIFICATIONS, IF NEEDED.

4. Require Participation in a Validation and Estimation Survey

Purpose of Action: *Independent validation of the electronic vessel reports would improve the usefulness of the catch information for estimation. A validation survey, in addition to requiring that catch be reported prior to offloading as proposed under Action 2, would meet the SEFSC's requirements for data obtained through SEFHIER to be used in management decisions.*

Alternative 1 (No Action). There is no mandatory participation in a validation and estimation survey for federally permitted charter/headboat vessels participating in the snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo fisheries.

Alternative 2. Mandate participation in a validation and estimation survey for federally permitted charter/headboat vessels participating in the snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo fisheries.

Discussion

- Currently there is no measure in place that would mandate participation in a validation and estimation survey (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**). While such a survey could take place, for-hire captains can refuse to participate in the survey.
- **Alternative 2** would make participation in a validation and estimation survey *mandatory* for federally permitted charter/headboat vessel owners or operators if selected to participate in the survey.
- The Gulf Council is considering a similar action; however, requiring participation in a validation survey is considered to be part of the program rather than a Council decision. Therefore, the requirement is explained in the discussion section of the pertinent actions in the Gulf Council's amendment.
 - Staff recommend removing this action and following the Gulf Council's approach (note that the Gulf Council is also handling the requirement for approved landing locations in this way).

Scoping Comments/Recommendations

- No comments received on this action.

AP Comments/Recommendations

- Validation is the most important aspect of the for-hire improvement amendment and AP members were concerned that there are not enough port samplers or law enforcement officials to actively intercept vessels currently.

- Requiring participation in a validation survey is important and essential to program success and fishermen buy-in. It will be important to make sure any survey is quick and easy to access and complete.
- Headboats already have validation incorporated into their survey.
- The validation survey should be conducted with captains and not the passengers/clients.
- AP members didn't have concerns about mandatory participation in a validation survey once it was clarified that such an action would simply mean that they could not refuse to be interviewed by a port sampler.
- Some AP members were not in favor of requiring participation in a validation survey. Members were concerned that an additional dock-side survey could be overly burdensome in some circumstances, such as if they need to have a quick turnaround for another charter.

IPT Comments/Recommendations

- Change to "validation and estimation" survey. The point of validation is to estimate final landings.
- Would the validation survey be run by SERO? SEFSC? The agency would have to work out who would lead and administer the survey.
- Consider that ACCSP already has developed a validation survey and if the survey is successful, there would be the option to use it in the SEFHIER program.
- Look at language that HMS has in [https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/part-635/section-635.5#p-635.5\(f\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/part-635/section-635.5#p-635.5(f)) regarding validation surveys.

Council Action

CONSIDER FEEDBACK FROM IPT, SCOPING, AND ADVISORY PANELS AND MAKE MODIFICATIONS, IF NEEDED. CONSIDER REMOVING THIS ACTION SINCE A SIMILAR ONE IS NOT BEING CONSIDERED IN THE GULF.

5. Revise Reporting of Economic Data for Charter Vessels

Purpose of Action: *Reporting of economic information on the charter fee, fuel usage, and fuel price for each for-hire fishing trip is already required for each for-hire fishing trip taken by South Atlantic permitted charter vessels. This action may implement a stratified random sampling design that would require reporting of economic information from some, but not all South Atlantic permitted charter vessels. Charter vessels that would need to report economic information would change annually. Note that this action does not apply to vessels that participate in the NMFS Southeast Regional Headboat Survey.*

Alternative 1 (No Action). Federally permitted charter vessels with a valid charter vessel permit for snapper grouper species, coastal migratory pelagics, dolphin, or wahoo are required to economic information for each for-hire fishing trip.

Alternative 2. Require federally permitted charter vessels with a valid charter vessel permit for snapper grouper species, coastal migratory pelagics, dolphin, or wahoo to submit economic information for each for-hire fishing trip **only if selected**. Annually, a stratified random sampling design of permitted vessels will be used for selecting vessels that are required to report economic data. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center will determine the strata (based on previous years' data and minimum sample sizes by strata) sufficient for providing scientific and management advice.

Discussion

- Currently all South Atlantic permitted charter vessels must provide charter fee, fuel usage, and fuel price for each for-hire fishing trip (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**). This is a census-based approach to data collection.
- **Alternative 2** would maintain the reporting requirement of economic information for charter vessels, but not all permitted vessels would be required to submit economic information each year. A stratified random sampling design of permitted vessels would be used for selecting vessels that are required to report economic data, and the vessels reporting would change annually.
 - A similar alternative is being considered by the Gulf Council and was selected as the preferred alternative.

Previous guidance from the Council

- Further consider whether a sampling approach may be appropriate.
 - Noted that it could improve compliance since this has been a controversial aspect of the for-hire logbook.
- Would like to encourage consistency.

Scoping Comments/Recommendations

- No comments received on this action.

AP Comments/Recommendations

- AP members generally supported moving to sampling for reporting of economic information as opposed to a census approach to reduce the overall reporting burden. However, some would prefer less government intrusion, especially regarding the reporting of fuel usage and cost. Often this cost is included in the charter fee.
- While it is complicated to break out some of the expenses that are currently required (e.g., fuel usage), some AP members recognized the importance of generating economic value estimates for the for-hire industry.

Council Action

CONSIDER FEEDBACK FROM IPT, SCOPING, AND ADVISORY PANELS. MAKE MODIFICATIONS IF NEEDED.

Other items?

Did Not Fish (DNF) reports: The [letter](#) from SERO and the SEFSC mentions the need for weekly submission of DNF reports. The Council’s motion from the June 2024 meeting also mentions considering DNF reports in this amendment. A DNF requirement is already in place where vessels must submit DNF reports by Tuesday following a fishing week and up to 30 days in advance.

A summary of existing and developing requirements for no fishing reports under the various programs is in Table 2. Currently, the Council has not specified the potential to remove the DNF report requirements but could do so in this amendment. Note that DNF reports are not required in the Greater Atlantic region but the required reporting frequency is higher.

Table 2. Summary of existing and developing did not fish reports requirements for the South Atlantic (SA) SEFHIER, Southeast (SE) Headboat Survey, Gulf SEFHIER, Greater Atlantic Region (GARFO) Vessel Trip Report (VTR), and Highly Migratory Species (HMS).

Topic	SA SEFHIER and SE Headboat Survey	Gulf SEFHIER	GARFO VTR	HMS
Existing	Weekly Limit to no more than 30 days in advance	N/A	Not required	Not required
Proposed	?	Weekly	Not required	Monthly. No limit to how far in advance.

Source: Information and concept based on HMS presentation to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council December 2, 2024. https://safmc.net/documents/fc1_a3_hms_e-reporting-proposed-rule-presentation_safmc_202412-pdf/

Scoping Comments/Recommendations

- No comments received on this action.

AP Comments/Recommendations

- Current requirement is valuable when vessels must undergo repairs or captains face health or other issues.
- Consider adding a voluntary comment field so captains can have the option to specify the reason for submitting a DNF report. This could also be a potential way to identify vessels that have Southeast permits that aren’t active.
- There is a difference between ‘did not go’ fishing and ‘could not go’ fishing. It is more important to be able to note *why* the vessel did not go fishing.
- Some AP members felt that there is already so much information fishermen have to submit; the Council should focus on reporting of catch over everything else.
- Some AP members did not want to change DNF reporting requirements.

- If changes are made, consider increasing the advanced notice that could be given by allowing reports to be submitted up to 60 days ahead of time.

Council Action

- CONSIDER FEEDBACK FROM SCOPING AND APs AND PROVIDE DIRECTION WHETHER TO INCLUDE AN ACTION THAT WOULD CHANGE DNF REQUIREMENTS.