



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Trish Murphey, Chair | Jessica McCawley, Vice Chair
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DRAFT

Eugenio Piñeiro Soler
Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Springs, MD 20910

Dear Mr. Piñeiro Soler,

Enclosed is the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) response to Executive Order 14276 on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness and an update on recommendations made in October 2020 in response to Executive Order 13921 on Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth.

The Council reviewed the order and guidance provided by NOAA Fisheries on topics to consider. Over several meetings, the Council evaluated and prioritized a wide range of concerns and issues raised by members, staff, fishermen and advisors. The Council also solicited input from advisors and the public. Our response addresses data, policy and fishery management topics that would stabilize markets, improve access to fishing opportunities, enhance economic profitability and prevent closures for fisheries that are managed by the Council.

We appreciate the opportunity to elaborate on the fishery management challenges within our region and look forward to working with NOAA Fisheries to address the topics identified in response to this Executive Order. Please do not hesitate to contact me or John Carmichael if you have any questions regarding our submitted materials.

Sincerely,

Trish Murphey
Council Chair

LN: 202530

cc: SAFMC Members & Staff
Kelly Denit and Morgan Corey, NOAA Fisheries
Monica Smit-Brunello, NOAA GC
Andy Strelchek and Rick DeVactor, NMFS SERO
Clay Porch and John Walter, SEFSC Miami



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's List of Recommended Actions in Response to Executive Order 14276 on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness (DRAFT)

On April 17 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order 14276: Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness. The purpose of the executive order is to “address unfair trade practices, eliminate unsafe imports, level the unfair playing field that has benefited foreign fishing companies, promote ethical sourcing, reduce regulatory burdens, and ensure the integrity of the seafood supply chain.” The Regional Fisheries Management Councils have been asked to identify actions that would stabilize markets, improve access to fishing opportunities, enhance economic profitability, and prevent closures. The Regional Fishery Management Councils must commit to a work plan that would ensure identified actions are prioritized.

September 2025

Note: final Council recommendations will be placed into the table format recommended by NOAA Fisheries before being submitted.

Council Authority

Remove or consider ecosystem component designation for species in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

Action Type: Regulatory (Amendment)

Action By: Council

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Review species currently managed under the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan to determine if any species are no longer in need of federal conservation and management.

Rationale: The agency, through the Southeast Fisheries Science Center and Southeast Regional Office, lacks the resources necessary to adequately assess and monitor the entire range of species now included in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. Over half of the species in the FMP are unassessed with catch levels based on average landings and large uncertainty reductions. Removing species from the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan will allow more focused scientific and management effort, ensure those species in the FMP are adequately assessed and monitored, and relieve regulatory burdens created by attempting to manage species that are not in need of federal conservation and management.

Implementation Plan: The Council has initiated an amendment to consider removal or ecosystem component designation for seventeen species currently included in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

Shift management of spiny lobster to the state of Florida.

Action Type: Regulatory (Amendment)

Action By: Council

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Review the spiny lobster fishery to determine if it is still in need of federal conservation and management via the Spiny Lobster Fishery Management Plan.

Rationale: The spiny lobster fishery primarily occurs in waters off the coast of Florida. Additionally, management of a stock-wide optimum yield under the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) is impossible due to the pan-Caribbean stock.

Implementation Plan: The Council would determine if spiny lobster are in need of federal conservation and management under the MSA. If not, the Council could initiate an amendment

to remove spiny lobster from federal management. Collaboration would be necessary with the states and the Gulf Fishery Management Council as the Spiny Lobster Fishery Management Plan is a joint plan.

Increase catch levels for commercial and recreational spiny lobster in states north of Florida.

Action Type: Regulatory (Amendment)

Action By: Council (*or state agencies*)

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Increase the possession limit of spiny lobster in the exclusive economic zone off of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Rationale: Stakeholders, including members of the Spiny Lobster Advisory Panel, have indicated that the population of spiny lobster off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia has increased in recent years. Allowing fishermen to harvest more spiny lobster would increase recreational trip satisfaction and would allow commercial fishing businesses to increase trip profits if a commercially viable number of spiny lobster were allowed for harvest.

Implementation Plan: The Council would begin an amendment to the Spiny Lobster Fishery Management Plan to increase the possession limit. Collaboration with the Gulf Fishery Management Council would be needed as the Spiny Lobster Fishery Management Plan is a joint plan. (*Note: if the above action to remove spiny lobster from federal management is considered, this action is no longer applicable to the Council*).

Reinstate bag limit sales for dolphin and wahoo.

Action Type: Regulatory (Amendment)

Action By: Council

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Allow bag limit sales of dolphin and wahoo for dually-permitted (commercial and for-hire) vessels.

Rationale: Allowing bag limit sales would provide additional income for charter/for-hire operators, which may help them adjust to the increasing cost of living and doing business on the coast. Electronically reported landings could be used to accurately account for catch by sector to avoid double counting. This measure was previously supported by dealers, restaurants, and fishermen in South Florida.

Implementation Plan: The Council would begin an amendment to the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery Management Plan to allow bag limit sales of dolphin and wahoo.

Improve ability to transfer commercial Atlantic Spanish mackerel quota between zones.

Action Type: Regulatory (Amendment)

Action By: Council

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Improve the ability to transfer commercial Atlantic Spanish mackerel quota between North Carolina (Northern Zone) and Florida (Southern Zone) by adjusting the commercial fishing season.

Rationale: The commercial Spanish mackerel Northern Zone (NC/SC line to the NY/CT/RI line) quota has been met or exceeded in recent years resulting in a closure to commercial Spanish mackerel harvest in the area. There is a process that allows Florida to transfer some of the Southern Zone (NC/SC line to the Miami-Dade/Monroe County Line, Florida) quota to the Northern Zone. Peak fishing for Spanish mackerel in the Northern Zone occurs in summer and fall, peak fishing for Spanish mackerel in the Southern Zone occurs in late-fall and winter. Modifying the current fishing season (March to the end of February) to a season that begins in late-fall or winter, would allow the Southern Zone to finish their peak fishing season first, allowing any remaining quota available to transfer to the Northern Zone. This would ensure that the entirety of the commercial quota is available to be utilized.

Implementation Plan: The Council would begin an amendment to the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan to adjust the commercial fishing season. Collaboration with the Gulf Fishery Management Council would be needed as the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan is a joint plan.

Remove operator card requirement in the rock shrimp fishery.

Action Type: Regulatory (Amendment)

Action By: Council

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Remove the requirement for operators of vessels with a commercial vessel permit for rock shrimp to have an operator permit.

Rationale: Law enforcement officers and fisheries participants have indicated that the operator card is not used to enforcement purposes and is onerous for fishermen to acquire. Removal would reduce overall regulatory burden for fishery participants.

Implementation Plan: The Council would begin an amendment to the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan to remove the operator card requirement.

Develop Separate Regulations for Headboats

Action Type: Regulatory (Amendment)

Action By: Council

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Develop regulations for the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan and other fishery management plans that would be specific to the headboat component of the recreational sector.

Rationale: Headboats represent a unique component of the for-hire and recreational sector. They operate differently and carry more passengers than traditional charter or “six-pack” for-hire vessels. Developing separate regulations for headboats would allow additional consideration of their specific social and economic needs, better tailoring regulations to this unique fishery and reducing overall burden on the headboat component.

Implementation Plan: The Council would begin an amendment to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan and other fishery management plans, as needed, to adjust regulations pertaining to headboats.

Allow commercial vessels on multi-day trips to harvest multiple days' worth of limits.

Action Type: Regulatory (Amendment)

Action By: Council

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Allow commercially permitted vessels on multi-day trips to harvest multiple days' worth of per day trip limits.

Rationale: Allowing multi-day trips to harvest multiple days' worth of commercial trip limits would improve the efficiency of commercial fishing operations, ensuring they are able to harvest fish needed to cover the expenses associated with their fishing activities.

Implementation Plan: The Council would begin an amendment to applicable fishery management plans, as needed, to adjust regulations pertaining to multi-day trips. For the Snapper Grouper FMP, this may be included in Amendment 60, which is addressing commercial management measures. *(Note: a person that is on a for-hire trip targeting coastal migratory pelagic fish that spans more than 24 hours may possess no more than two bag limits provided the vessel has two licensed operators aboard and each passenger is issued and has in possession a receipt that verifies the length of the trip).*

State led data collection and management of red snapper.

Action Type: Regulatory

Action By: Council, NMFS, State Agencies

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Delegate management and data collection for red snapper to the south Atlantic state agencies.

Rationale: Red snapper has been a management challenge for the Council with low annual catch levels resulting in a short recreational fishing season. Many recreational constituents lack confidence in the estimates of their catch. Delegating management to the state agencies may be an innovative way to manage red snapper and improve data collection.

Implementation Plan: The Council has begun discussing the possibility of state-led management of the red snapper fishery. In September 2025, they received presentations on state management from NOAA Fisheries, the Gulf Council, Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Discussion.

Provide year-round access to fisheries in the South Atlantic region.

Action Type: Regulatory

Action By: Council

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Modify current management measures to prioritize year-round commercial and recreational fishing access.

Rationale: Year-round access to commercial fishing opportunities would provide flexibility and stability to commercial fishing businesses, optimizing their efficiency. Additionally, year-round commercial fishing would ensure consistent access to domestic seafood for consumers. Recreational anglers have also requested year-round access to fishing opportunities to enable them to avoid dangerous weather and optimize their use of the resource.

Implementation Plan: The Council would begin an amendment(s) to fishery management plans, as needed, to adjust regulations in order to provide year-round fishing opportunities.

History of South Atlantic Council Managed Fisheries Over the Last 50 Years.

Action Type: Non-regulatory (Information)

Action By: Council

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Gather and preserve the management history and the social, economic, and biological changes for fisheries managed by the South Atlantic Council.

Rationale: This history of a fishery is a critical foundation for making informed and effective management decisions. Narrative histories can provide insight into successful and unsuccessful management strategies, help illustrate how fish populations and fishing communities have changed over time, and how future changes may affect them in the future.

Implementation Plan: The Council would direct staff to develop historical narratives for priority fishery management plans and present them, as needed, at a future Council meeting. The Council has already digitized historical documents from all fishery management plans and completed a narrative history of the Coastal Migratory Pelagics fishery from 1982-2005.

Increase Stakeholder Engagement with the Management Process

Action Type: Non-regulatory (Outreach)

Action By: Council

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Work towards increasing stakeholder engagement in the management process by increasing advertisement of current engagement opportunities, creating additional opportunities to interact with Council members locally, and providing information on the structure of the management process to help lower known barriers to participation in the process.

Rationale: Stakeholder input has always been a fundamental component of the MSA and Council system. However, fisheries constituents increasingly express declining confidence in management institutions and often state that they feel their concerns are not heard or addressed. While citizen science and localized ecological knowledge are important ways of improving the resolution and timeliness of the decision-making information available to the Council, stakeholders must be willing to get involved for these techniques to succeed. New ways of interacting with constituents are needed to address declining confidence and improve the ability of the Council to address developing challenges.

Implementation Plan: Council staff have developed a new engagement initiative called *Lines of Communication: Conversations with the Council (Lines)*. Lines aims to build relationships with fisheries stakeholders and provide an opportunity for mutual sharing of information. Different from other engagement efforts, Lines will provide attendees with the opportunity to actively discuss their perspectives with local Council members, Council staff, and other fishery participants. Lines will be held in-person throughout the South Atlantic, meeting fishermen in their communities. The first set of Lines meetings are scheduled in November 2025 (Georgia) and February 2026 (North Carolina).

NOAA Fisheries Authority

Prioritize the Funding of Citizen Science and Cooperative Research Initiatives.

Action Type: Policy and Funding

Action By: NMFS, Council, Other Agencies

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Provide more opportunities and support for data collection through citizen science, cooperative research, and other non-traditional methods (ex. reinstating NOAA Fisheries' external Cooperative Research Program in the southeast region).

Rationale: Existing data collection programs do not provide all of the necessary data to make informed management decisions. Citizen science and other non-traditional methods can be used to help fill data gaps more efficiently and at a lower cost. Additionally, citizen science provides a mechanism for turning fishermen's on the water knowledge and experience into data that can be used to inform science and management positions.

Implementation Plan: The Council has a Citizen Science Program to develop and support projects that help fill identified South Atlantic data gaps. However, the Program relies upon Council funds and limited grant programs that are available to councils for support. NMFS and other agencies should prioritize funding opportunities for citizen science programs that are available to Council's and support smarter science, stronger stakeholder engagement, and more resilient fisheries management in the South Atlantic and beyond.

Determine the economic effects on fishing communities from the Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act

Action Type: Policy

Action By: NMFS

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Conduct an analysis detailing the economic effects of the Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act of 2023 on fishing communities in the south Atlantic region.

Rationale: Stakeholders have expressed concerns about the Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act, indicating that it has caused undue burden on the domestic shark fisheries resulting in the loss of fishing businesses and public safety concern. The sale of legally harvested shark fins incentivizes sustainable commercial shark harvest, reduces waste that is created by mandating fins be disposed of or destroyed, and improves economic returns in the fishery. Additionally, it may also alleviate shark depredation that has become problematic in multiple other fisheries in the southeast.

Implementation Plan: NMFS should develop a report evaluating and quantifying the impact of the Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act and shark depredation. The report should recommend management changes to the appropriate entities.

Remove the requirement to report discards in the commercial fishery.

Action Type: Regulatory

Action By: Council and NMFS

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Remove the requirement for commercial vessels to submit additional discard information through the Coastal Fisheries Logbook Program.

Rationale: Removing the requirement to submit discard information when selected through the Coastal Fisheries Logbook Program would reduce regulatory burden for commercial fishermen in the southeast. Additionally, NOAA Fisheries has stated that discard logbooks are not considered best scientific information available and has declined to provide the Council discard estimates of from the program.

Implementation Plan: The Council could initiate a comprehensive amendment to address this requirement in all of their fishery management plans and prohibit the Southeast Fisheries Science Center Director from selecting anyone to report discard information through the current logbook program. The Council could also request that SEFSC develop, and NMFS fund, a discard reporting program that will meet best scientific information available standards.

Avoid regional-based duplicative reporting for commercial and for-hire logbooks.

Action Type: Coordination

Action By: NMFS

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Address issues with commercial and for-hire fishermen having to fill out multiple logbooks required by different NMFS regions or divisions for a single fishing trip.

Rationale: Duplicative logbooks are unnecessarily burdensome for commercial and for-hire fishing businesses and data managers. Addressing the duplications would reduce regulatory and reporting burden for fishermen operating in fisheries covered by multiple logbook programs. The Council has a long-standing stated intent to avoid duplicative reporting.

Implementation Plan: NOAA Fisheries has indicated that the needed branches are coordinating efforts to eliminate requirements that lead to commercial and for-hire fishermen reporting to multiple logbooks for a single trip, including the Highly Migratory Species Logbook, Vessel Trip Reports, Coastal Fisheries Logbook Program, and the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting Program.

Incorporate innovative sampling methodologies to estimate fishing effort.

Action Type: Funding

Action By: NMFS

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Incorporate innovative sampling methods that may improve estimates of recreational fishing effort.

Rationale: Innovative methods, such as aerial surveys, are increasingly feasible through technology advancements.

Implementation Plan: NMFS should prioritize funding for testing and validation of new sampling methodologies.

Support programs consistent with the Young Fishermen's Development Grant Program of 2021.

Action Type: Policy and Funding

Action By: NMFS

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Develop programs that would address recruitment and retention challenges in the commercial fishing industry, consistent with the Young Fishermen's Development Grant Program of 2021.

Rationale: Stakeholders consistently express concern about the "greying of the fleet" with few young individuals getting into the commercial fishery industry. Programs that provide targeted career development opportunities for young fishermen, including recruitment, training, and mentoring, would bolster domestic production of seafood over the long-term.

Implementation Plan: NMFS should prioritize funding Sea Grant and the Young Fishermen's Development Grant Program.

Explore improvements to habitat for managed species in the southeast region.

Action Type: Funding

Action By: NMFS and Other Agencies

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Explore ways to improve and create fish habitat for Council managed species in the southeast region.

Rationale: Offshore habitat is often used by competing industries. It is critical that habitat for offshore fish species is created and maintained to ensure the long-term sustainability of fish stocks and the fishing businesses that rely on them.

Implementation Plan: Support research on the effectiveness of current habitat designations (spawning special management zones, essential fish habitat, habitat areas of particular concern, etc.) and create a federal program to support the deployment of artificial reefs and other habitat-creating initiatives.

Outside of NOAA Fisheries Authority

Implement policies that would help domestic seafood compete against foreign imports.

Action Type: Policy

Action By: Other Agencies

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Develop programs and policies that would support the domestic seafood industry.

Rationale: Imported seafood has substantial negative economic effects on the domestic seafood industry, especially the shrimp industry. Imported seafood lacks the regulatory requirements of United States caught seafood and is often sold at a lower price, undercutting the domestic market. Mislabeling of imported seafood as locally caught exacerbates this problem and makes it challenging for consumers to know when they are purchasing a domestic vs. foreign product.

Implementation Plan: Actions could include, but are not limited to, funding and reform of NOAA's Seafood Import Monitoring Program, curtailing illegal advertising of imported seafood as local, requiring labeling of seafood as domestic vs. imported, developing labeling requirements that would clearly distinguish between domestic seafood and imports, and creating a program to assist with overall marketing of domestic seafood including consumer education.

Establish a federal program to aid in the protection and maintenance of working waterfronts.

Action Type: Policy

Action By: Other Agencies

Priority Level:

Description of Action: Establish a federal program that would support and protect that working waterfronts needed to support local fishing communities and their businesses.

Rationale: Loss of working waterfront and increasing pressure from other industries (e.g., real estate) to acquire these lands has increased costs for fishermen and fishing-related businesses, limiting their profitability. Programs protecting working waterfronts would stabilize or increase profitability of marine businesses and ensure their long-term persistence.

Implementation Plan: Develop programs that would set-aside working waterfront areas or assistance programs to maintain operations in these critical areas.

Update on Actions Submitted by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council in Response to Executive Order 13921 on Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth (2020).

Description of Action	Responsible Entities	Status	Additional Notes
Adequate monitoring for deepwater species.	NMFS	In Progress	South Atlantic Deepwater Longline Survey is now online and awaiting enough years of information to be applied in stock assessments of deepwater species.
Restore longline surveying for tilefish to reduce stock assessment uncertainty.	NMFS	Complete	
Provide increased funding for SEFIS to fully support the SERFS and MARMAP components.	NMFS	Unknown	
Address the priorities of the Fishery Independent Monitoring Workshop.	NMFS	Not Addressed	
Fully support SEAMAP priorities.	NMFS	Unknown	
Develop juvenile surveys for the priority stocks identified in the Prioritization Plan for the South Atlantic.	NMFS	Not Addressed	
Change tag and permit fee policies so that fees are provided to the Region where collected and allow funds from tags or fees to be directed to fishery and data improvement projects to benefit the fishery that provides the funds.	NMFS	Not Addressed	
Provide SAFE Reports to the SAFMC as required under National Standard 2 guidelines.	NMFS	Not Addressed	SAFE Reports for some FMPs have been prepared by Council staff.
Request that NMFS create a regional working group across the Gulf and Atlantic to evaluate, characterize, and quantify the impact of shark depredation and trends over time by shark species. The working group should recommend management changes to the appropriate entities.	NMFS	Not Addressed	
Evaluate the National Standard 1 guidelines relative to the Modern Fish Act and provide clarification on the flexibility available to the GFMC and SAFMC to implement alternative approaches for managing recreational fisheries.	NMFS	Not Addressed	No changes have been made to National Standard 1 or the Magnuson-Stevens Act.
Complete the work of the Rare Event Species Estimation Working Group and provide the Council recommendations on management actions it can take to improve data collects and estimation precisions.	NMFS	In Progress	

Description of Action	Responsible Entities	Status	Additional Notes
Develop protocols to incorporate supplemental and voluntarily submitted data from recreational anglers.	NMFS	Not Addressed	
Develop methods to provide more timely MRIP estimates of harvest for the stocks requiring in-season accountability measures.	NMFS	In progress	Plans have been developed but are currently on hold due to staff and funding limitations
Provide funding to ensure the success of the for-hire electronic reporting in the South Atlantic.	NMFS	Not Addressed	Participation in SEFHIER is low in the South Atlantic region leading NMFS to consider the data unreliable. The Council began discussion of new regulations, however, in June 2025 the Council postponed work on the amendment.
Provide financial support to the SAFMC, MAFMC, and NEFMC to pursue the Scenario Planning process initiated through the Northeast Region Coordinating Council.	NMFS	In Progress	Scenario planning was completed by the councils and implementation was recognized as an allowable activity under IRA grants.
Request that NMFS implement an order to improve the disaster relief process and develop efficient methods of distributing allocated relief funds. Relief funds should be distributed within six months of disaster allocation by Congress.	NMFS	In Progress	Meeting held with the states. Unknown progress since that time.
Evaluate the Wreckfish ITQ program and consider changes.	Council	In Progress; Council portion complete	Amendment submitted to the NMFS by the Council in December 2024.
Establish a shrimp fishery access area along with the eastern boundary of the northern extension of the Oculina Bank closed area.	Council	In Progress	The Council submitted Coral Amendment 10 in December 2021; however, it was rejected by NMFS. The Council is currently developing a joint Coral and Shrimp amendment to address concerns with plans to resubmit the amendment in December 2025.

Description of Action	Responsible Entities	Status	Additional Notes
Implement commercial electronic logbooks.	Council	In Progress; Council portion complete	Amendment submitted to the NMFS by the Council in February 2024.
Evaluate performance of the snapper group commercial permit two for one provision and consider if changes will provide social and economic benefits to the fishery.	Council	In Progress	The Council has initiated work on Snapper Grouper Amendment 60, which includes consideration of the two-for-one provision.
Modify the Atlantic king mackerel management actions through an FMP amendment to address optimum yield.	Council	Complete	New catch levels effective on June 8, 2023.
Evaluate stock determination criteria and biological reference point alternatives for Spiny Lobster.	Council	Not Started	
Evaluate reasons for early commercial closures in the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery.	Council	Delayed	Management action on Atlantic Spanish mackerel delayed until results from the MRIP pilot study are available.