

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
DOLPHIN WAHOO COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
December 3, 2024

The Committee approved the minutes from the December 2023 meeting and the agenda for the December 2024 meeting.

Dolphin Management Strategy Evaluation update

The NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) is conducting a management strategy evaluation (MSE) for the Atlantic dolphin fishery. The goal of this project is to develop an index-based management procedure that may provide catch level and management advice that best achieves the multiple management objectives of the fishery.

SEFSC staff updated the Council on progress of the Dolphin MSE and recent stakeholder working group meetings. It was noted that the MSE timeline would include several feedback sessions from the Council and SSC through 2025 and early 2026 to refine the MSE modeling results. The Committee discussed the MSE timeline and the timing of changes to Dolphin management through Regulatory Amendment 3 or a potential future amendment.

Modifications to the minimum size limit, recreational retention limits, and reducing for-hire captain and crew bag limits for dolphin (Regulatory Amendment 3)

This amendment includes measures that would extend the applicable range of the 20-inch fork length minimum size limit for dolphin, modify recreational retention limits for dolphin, and remove captain and crew bag limits for dolphin. At the June 2023 meeting, the Council passed a motion to *delay development of the amendment until the Dolphin MSE results are available or until the December 2024 Council meeting, whichever is earlier*. This guidance was reiterated at the December 2023 meeting.

Council staff reviewed the Committee's previous guidance on draft actions and requested guidance on the timeline for developing Regulatory Amendment 3. With the final results of the Dolphin MSE not likely available for review by the Committee until early 2026, the Committee discussed how to proceed with Regulatory Amendment 3, offering the following comments:

- Direct staff to continue work on developing Regulatory Amendment 3 with the existing actions and range of alternatives.
 - Work towards developing an amendment that could be approved for public hearings at the December 2025 meeting.
- Use the Dolphin MSE modeling results to inform Committee decisions on the actions in the amendment.
 - **Proposed Action Plan:** The MSE would be used to compare the performance of current status quo management with the management actions as proposed in Regulatory Amendment 3 and applied to the base MSE Operating Model (OM). This may help narrow the set of reference OMs. Alternate static management actions should include geographic range of 20" minimum FL for commercial and recreational dolphin, and modification of the daily recreational bag and vessel limits or modify the

daily recreational captain and crew bag limits. This work is to be presented for **SSC review in April 2025** and then **to June 2025 Council meeting** to inform Amendment 3 actions. Work will continue in parallel for the MSE to develop a full empirical management procedure. A detailed plan will be provided to the MSE technical team.

Other Business

There were no items under other business.

Timing and Tasks:

DRAFT MOTION: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- CONTINUE WORK ON REGULATORY AMENDMENT 3 FOR NEXT REVIEW AT THE JUNE 2025 MEETING.
 - DIRECT THE IPT TO CONDUCT ANALYSES AND PREPARE THE AMENDMENT TO CONSIDER FOR APPROVAL FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS AT THE DECEMBER 2025 MEETING.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL