



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Modifications to South Atlantic For-hire Reporting

Decision Document, March 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 of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) has continued to work on an [amendment](#) to re-implement for-hire electronic reporting after the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit set aside the Gulf’s SEFHIER final rule in February 2023. This 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’s amendment is tentatively scheduled to be approved for public hearings in April 2025 and approved for secretarial review in June 2025.

In January 2025, the Council submitted comments on NMFS Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (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](#).

Also in January 2025, the *Ad Hoc* For-Hire Reporting Advisory Panel (AP) held its first meeting (via webinar) and provided feedback on potential modifications to current reporting requirements for federally permitted charter/headboat vessels participating in the SG, DW, and CMP fisheries. The Law Enforcement AP met in February 2025 to provide feedback on for-hire reporting requirements as well.

Objectives for this Meeting (March 2025)

- Review feedback from *Ad Hoc* For-Hire Reporting AP.
- Review feedback from Law Enforcement AP.
- Review timing of amendment development.
- Review the updated draft Purpose and Need statements.
- Review list of potential actions and range of alternatives.
- Consider whether to approve the amendment for scoping.

Tentative Amendment Timing

Winter 2025	Obtain feedback from For-Hire Reporting and Law Enforcement APs
March 2025	Review suite of actions and alternatives and consider approving for public scoping
Spring 2025	Obtain feedback from public scoping as well as the SG, DW, and CMP APs
June 2025	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

Draft 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, adjust reporting requirements, 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.

IPT Comments/Recommendations

- Add: "...South Atlantic permitted vessels participating in..."
- Look at Gulf's amendment for Purpose & Need
- Gulf is looking at program that is very similar to what was operating previously (except VMS). Gulf's program will pick up some of the items the South Atlantic is considering.
- In need statement perhaps mention that fisheries overlap and consistency between the two programs would diminish burden to fishermen.
- A subset of fishermen will be required to report to HMS, GARFO, and SEFHIER depending on the permits they hold. The Council should consider all these programs when modifying regulations.

Purpose and Need statements from the Gulf Council's For-Hire Reporting Amendment

The purpose of this amendment is to improve the accuracy, precision, and timeliness of landings, discards, and fishing effort data from federally permitted for-hire vessels within the recreational sector of the Gulf reef fish and CMP fisheries. Improvements would increase stakeholder trust and buy-in associated with data collection. Another purpose is to collect economic information related to the operational costs and earning of federally permitted for-hire vessels participating in the Gulf reef fish and CMP fisheries.

The need for this action is to improve management and monitoring of the federally permitted for-hire component of the recreational sector of Gulf reef fish and CMP fisheries to prevent overfishing while achieving, on a continuing basis, the OY.

Council Action:

- CONSIDER EDITS TO THE PURPOSE STATEMENT AND APPROVE.

Potential 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 NMFS-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 NMFS 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 NMFS 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 **submission 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).
- 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), Southeast (SE) Headboat Survey, Gulf of Mexico (GOM), Greater Atlantic Region (GARFO) Vessel Trip Report (VTR), and Highly Migratory Species (HMS).

	SA SEFHIER and SE Headboat Survey	GOM 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 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/

Previous Council guidance

- For scoping, include a question that asks to input on the appropriate timeframe.
- For scoping, also provide a broad range of times (up to 24 or 48 hours) for reporting and request more information on what would be an appropriate timeframe.
 - Include Table 1 in scoping material so stakeholders are informed as to what is being considered in other programs.

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.
- Suggest “prior to arrival at dock” instead of “prior to offload” also wording that avoids repeating the permits/fisheries for which the requirement applies.
- From a law enforcement perspective: compliance is likely to go up if reporting requirement is before getting to the dock.
- May need to clarify what “arriving to dock means”. Consider “prior to arriving at landing location”
- Refer to language in previous rulemaking for for-hire requirements.
- 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.
- Suggest requesting information from NOAA litigation attorney to find out whether current requirements are able to be prosecuted.

Council Action

CONSIDER FEEDBACK FROM IPT AND ADVISORY PANELS AND MAKE NEEDED MODIFICATIONS.

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 or:

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.

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, return from a trip, or both.
- 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.

Previous guidance from the Council

- Task the IPT to clarify the intent of the action and that Alternatives 2 and 3 would apply to dually permitted vessels (commercial and for-hire).
- What would happen if a for-hire trip changed to a commercial trip?
- Clarify what is meant by “other for-hire activity.” Also add a sub-alternative to Alternative 2 that would include anytime a vessel leaves the dock.

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.
- Gulf Council is working on framework trip declaration action that this IPT can look into.
- There is no current mechanism to cancel a trip declaration; it would have to be built into e-trips and other vendors' reporting platforms.
- Is there the ability to override a declaration? There is in the Gulf's IFQ program.
- In VESL you can currently submit a declaration but can't delete it.

Council Action

CONSIDER FEEDBACK FROM IPT AND ADVISORY PANELS AND MAKE NEEDED MODIFICATIONS.

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.

Previous guidance from the Council

- Make sure there is allowance for a “plan B” in case a vessel is not able to return to a pre-specified location for unexpected reasons (mechanical failure, inclement weather, etc.).

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 AND ADVISORY PANELS AND MAKE NEEDED MODIFICATIONS.

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.

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 AND ADVISORY PANELS AND MAKE NEEDED MODIFICATIONS.

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.

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.
- For scoping, include examples of how the data could be used (e.g., disaster declaration).

Council Action

CONSIDER FEEDBACK FROM ADVISORY PANELS AND MAKE NEEDED MODIFICATIONS.

6. 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.

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

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

Previous guidance from the Council

- Gather more information on Did Not Fish reports and whether the current requirements need to be changed.
- Where did the 30-day notice originate and what is the rationale?

IPT Comments/Recommendations

- 30-day rationale came about to be consistent with other requirements. Also due to patterns of activity in the for-hire fleet.
- Suggest adding a program review. Gulf is considering adding to its amendment (not in the form of an action).

Council Action

- CONSIDER FEEDBACK FROM IPT AND ADVISORY PANELS AND MAKE NEEDED MODIFICATIONS.
- IS THERE A NEED TO FURTHER DISCUSS DID NOT FISH REPORTS?