

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
FULL COUNCIL I
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
March 3-4, 2025

The Council met on Monday, March 3, 2025, and Tuesday, March 4, 2025, in Jekyll Island, GA. The Council adopted the agenda for the week and approved minutes from the December 2024 meeting.

1. Reports

- Monica Smit-Brunello, NOAA General Counsel, provided a brief update on litigation related to South Atlantic managed fisheries.
- Capt. Scott Pearce, Chair of the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel (AP), provided a summary of the AP's feedback to the Council regarding background checks for advisory panel applicants and how to improve the nomination process for the Law Enforcement of the Year award.
- General Joe Spraggins provided a report from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and Sonny Gwin summarized activities of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC).
- State agency representatives updated the Council on activities related to fishery management by each South Atlantic state. Jessica McCawley gave an update on the Exempted Fishing Permit projects the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission is conducting.
- Jennifer Lee provided a brief regarding protected resources.
- Andy Strelcheck gave an update regarding operations of the NMFS Southeast Regional Office (SERO):
 - SERO has lost several employees in the past few weeks. Due to the current hiring freeze, SEVERAL positions have not been filled. The DOC is required to submit a Reduction in Force (RIF) Plan in mid-March.
 - Regarding the ongoing issues with the SERO Permits Office, progress has been made to prepare "snapshot" information to the Council to resume work on developing amendments.
 - There has been a suite of Executive Orders issued in recent weeks and guidance is emerging on how they will impact the activities of the Regional Office. The "10 for 1" deregulation will be challenging to address. NOAA Fisheries is working with NOAA on a process for how to implement it. The Council was encouraged to focus on deregulatory actions.
 - Workforce optimization requires that for every new hire, 4 others need to be let go. This will affect travel restrictions and other activities.
- John Walter provided an update on activities of the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC):
 - The SEFSC lost 14% of its staff in 2 days. Ten recruitments have been put on hold.
 - Stock assessment capacity is down by 20% and it is anticipated that there will be a significant reduction in the Center's ability to conduct regional surveys. The SEFSC is looking to borrow staff from around the country to conduct surveys.
 - The RIF will also affect the SEFSC.
 - There are congressional funds for rebuilding the facility in Beaufort, NC.

DIRECTION TO STAFF: Prepare a letter to support preserving the Beaufort facility

2. Recreational Reform Initiative

The Recreational Reform Initiative is an effort by the MAFMC and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to improve management of the recreational fisheries for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. Julia Beaty, MAFMC staff, delivered a presentation on the Recreational Reform Initiative the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council has been conducting in collaboration with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

Below are the salient points of the ensuing discussion:

- How would the described approach be applicable to managed fisheries in the South Atlantic and could the framework be adapted to the South Atlantic region?
- There would need to be a demand model built for the region and the approach vetted by the Scientific and Statistical Committee.
- Developing a model to estimate recreational harvest in the South Atlantic region could be added to the Research and Monitoring Plan.
- It is interesting that the approach brings in different factors besides MRIP estimates for estimating catch.
- The MAFMC receives more frequent science and assessment products and updates harvest levels more frequently than SAFMC. The fisheries for black sea bass, scup, summer flounder and bluefish are significantly larger than fisheries in the SA region.

3. For-Hire Electronic Reporting Improvement Amendment

Bob Zales II, For-Hire Reporting AP Chair, delivered comments from the AP relative to proposed modifications to the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) Program, and Captain Scott Pearce delivered the Law Enforcement AP's feedback. Michelle Masi and Dominique Lazarre, NMFS SERO, presented information the Council had requested following the December 2024 meeting.

Council staff presented an overview of the draft actions and alternatives that could be considered in an amendment as well as IPT comments and recommendations. The Council reviewed the draft purpose and need statement. Staff indicated there may be a need to revise the current language to include the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) as some of the actions being considered would apply to that program. Alternatively, the draft actions and alternatives could be revised to exclude the SRHS. The Council did not approve the revised language at this time, as the amendment is very early in its development and there will be opportunity in the future to consider revisions.

Relative to **draft Action 2 (Trip Notification)**, the Council directed staff to focus the language of draft Alternative 2 on whether they pertain to activities including passengers. Staff were asked to consolidate the sub-alternatives like those in the Gulf's draft amendment.

Relative to draft **Action 4 (Landing Locations)**, the Council directed staff to make sure it is well explained why information on landing locations is important for validation and enforcement. Consider language that is not too restrictive given the scarcity of working waterfronts. Also, explain that this action would help improve sampling intercepts.

The Council directed staff to include potentially modifying the frequency of Did Not Fish reports in scoping this amendment.

The Council approved the following motion.

MOTION 1: APPROVE THE FOR-HIRE REPORTING IMPROVEMENT AMENDMENT FOR SCOPING.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

*****GUIDANCE TO CONDUCT “PASSIVE” SCOPING (I.E., NO WEBINAR HEARING)***.**

4. Topics for the Dolphin Wahoo AP’s Spring 2025 Meeting Agenda

The Dolphin Wahoo AP is scheduled to meet in Charleston, SC from April 22-23, 2025. Council staff reviewed a draft list of agenda topics, which the Council approved. It was clarified that an update on results of the ongoing Management Strategy Evaluation for dolphin would not be available for the AP to discuss but staff would provide an update on its development.

5. Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

The planned presentation on the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Restoration Blueprint and Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was not received due to an action by Florida Governor DeSantis declaring the re-proposed FKNMS designation documents and final rule unacceptable for implementation in Florida’s state waters (clarification that it was a veto for all newly proposed items in state waters). It is likely that the timeline for approving the MOA will be delayed as a result. The Council provided the following suggestions on the MOA:

1. *Revise Section IV to include definition of Habitat Support Structure or Artificial Reef*
2. *Insert a New Section V. C. Habitat support structures to enhance marine resources in Monroe County*

The Parties acknowledge and agree that permitting for Habitat Support Structures can be handled through the same process used in State Waters outside of the Sanctuary. The Parties agree that permits for Habitat Support Structures will be obtained from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Army Corps of Engineers without any further requirements from FKNMS or ONMS. The Parties further agree that any installations that do not require excavation shall not require an archeological survey.

6. Climate Readiness Projects

NOAA has provided funding to support Council efforts to develop and advance climate ready fisheries management. Lara Klibansky, Climate Readiness Projects Coordinator, gave a presentation including background information and updates on the Council’s Climate Readiness Projects.

The Council discussed how staff would keep the Council informed of progress on the various projects. Updates to the Council will be provided at quarterly meetings in the staff report and a more detailed update on each project will be provided once a year.

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION 2: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Prepare a letter to support restoring the Beaufort, North Carolina, facility.
- Conduct scoping for the For-Hire Reporting Improvement Amendment prior to the June 2025 meeting.
- Provide comments on the draft MOA with the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary to Sanctuary staff.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL