

**FINAL  
SUMMARY REPORT  
FULL COUNCIL I  
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL  
March 2026**

The Council met in open session on Tuesday, March 3, 2026. The Council adopted the agenda for the week and approved minutes from the December 2025 meeting.

**1. Reports**

The Council received report from various representatives. Below are highlights from selected reports.

- State agency representatives highlighted activities in recent months. Neither Georgia nor South Carolina requested concurrent closure of the EEZ to protect white shrimp impacted by cold water temperatures this winter as the trigger was not met (temperatures below 9 degrees Celsius for over 7 days). State agency representatives submitted revised applications for Exempted Fishing Permits (EFP) to NOAA Fisheries. The EFPs will pilot approaches that could lead to state management of recreational red snapper in the South Atlantic.
- The Law Enforcement Advisory Panel (LE AP) Chair, Major Michael Paul Thomas, reported on discussions that took place at the LE AP's January 2026 meeting. The report included recommendations on items the Council requested and developing actions.
- Lara Klibansky, SAFMC contactor, updated the Council on the progress of four Resilient Fisheries Projects that were undertaken in 2025 with Inflation Reduction Act funding. Lara noted progress reports are posted on each project on the Council's website: <https://safmc.net/resilient-fisheries/>. The projects are on slightly different timelines but are expected to be completed from fall 2026 to fall 2027. The Council is including these projects in their workplan moving forward and will begin planning for how the outcomes of each will be implemented.
- Stacie Crowe, Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel (HEAP) Chair delivered a report to the Council on topics discussed during the HEAP's January 2026 meeting. A Council member asked how a member of the public would find out which projects have been submitted for Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) consultation. The Army Corps of Engineers website, <https://www.sam.usace.army.mil/Missions/Planning-Environmental/Public-Notices/>, publishes projects that are coming up for public comment. Council members expressed support for obtaining information on impacts from the space industry on fisheries using citizen science.
- Allie Iberle, Council staff, provided an update on the South Atlantic Shrimp Workgroup including the goals and objectives. Staff also reviewed the milestones of the workgroup

thus far. The first workgroup meeting is scheduled for late March, and the Council will receive an update on the workgroup's progress during the June 2026 meeting.

- Andy Strelcheck and Clay Porph, Southeast Regional Administrator and Southeast Fisheries Science Center Director, respectively, provided brief updates from the agency:
  - An Advanced Notice for Proposed Rulemaking has been issued to obtain information on the right whale speed rule. The agency is receiving public comment through June 2.
  - The Regional Office is in the process of hiring an Assistant regional Administrator.
  - There are numerous actions undergoing rulemaking. SERO urges patience since the process is taking longer than it used to.
  - Two stock assessment scientists will be hired (one will focus on South Atlantic assessments).
  - The Council of Independent Experts (CIE) review of the South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Project has been completed. Generally positive of CKMR estimates of abundance; not so supportive of the other estimates due to high uncertainty.
  - The agency is moving forward with building a new facility in Beaufort, NC.

## **2. NMFS' Risk/Value Matrix for Managed Stocks**

John Carmichael reviewed information on the NMFS risk and priority evaluation provided to the Fishery Management Council Executive Directors in January 2026, noting changes and progress since initially presented to the CCC in May 2025. The goal of the evaluation has shifted from aligning Council and NMFS priorities to narrowing the scope of management and science. A multi-step process is being implemented to assign managed stock to risk/value categories. Alternative, simpler management approaches will be considered for lower value and risk stocks. An optimistic timeline for the process is currently proposed, concluding in Summer 2026 to assess resource priorities and inform FY27 planning.

Clay Porph presented on progress by the SEFSC to further develop tools to assist decisions making related to narrowing the scope of management. Additional information on management alternatives that could be considered for the risk/value categories was provided, along with progress on compiling the value and risk information necessary to assign stocks to risk/value categories. A national approach has been developed to support comparisons across regions. The Council agrees that the agency has been unable to provide adequate science for managing South Atlantic stocks and therefore supports the intent of the scope narrowing exercise. However, the Council raised concerns with the timeline and noted it will be difficult to obtain input from its scientific and fishery advisors on the social value and degree of risk. Additional concern was expressed with the end goal of the process and how value could impact future funding allocations, particularly if the only value considered is related to fish harvest and thereby omits many other important components of the Council's management program. Focusing on fishery value may create an incentive for Council's to characterize stocks as high value and a disincentive to remove stocks from an FMU.

The Council noted that details have not been provided on how value is estimated, and raised a number of specific concerns, listed below, related to the data used in estimating fishery value. The Council requested sending a letter to SERO and SEFSC documenting the data concerns.

1. SAFMC recreational landings value is underrepresented due to the following:
  - a. Monroe County MRIP counted as Gulf Value
  - b. Headboat trips omitted
  - c. DW and CMP from Northeast omitted
  - d. Note letter from Senators indicating rec fishing in the SA is worth 27 billion and 170,000 jobs – 10x greater contribution to the GDP than the 3.7b here.
2. Overall recreational value is underrepresented due to only considering ‘final consumption.’
3. Commercial value is underrepresented due to omitting DW and CMP landings from the Northeast Region.
4. No value is recognized for non-harvest species and FMPs including goliath grouper, speckled hind, warsaw grouper, Nassau grouper, corals, and sargassum

**DIRECTION TO STAFF: DRAFT A LETTER EXPRESSING THE COUNCIL’S CONCERNS. DRAFT TO COUNCIL MEMBERS NO LATER THAN 3/21 AND GIVE COUNCIL UNTIL 3/27 TO REVIEW. INTENT TO SEND TO NMFS FIRST WEEK OF APRIL.**

### **3. Draft comments on Proposed Rule for Commercial Atlantic Blacknose Shark and Recreational Atlantic Shark Fisheries**

NOAA Fisheries Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) has announced a [proposed rule](#) to revise commercial Atlantic blacknose shark and recreational Atlantic shark fisheries management measures. The comment period for this proposed rule has been extended through May 29, 2026. The Council reviewed a draft comment letter on the proposed rule and provided the following comments:

- Council members were supportive of the proposed changes to commercial measures being considered for Atlantic blacknose sharks and felt that the draft comment letter accurately captured this sentiment.
- Council members were appreciative of the general efforts to increase recreational harvest of Atlantic shark species, but were apprehensive of some proposed recreational measures. Specifically, the Council noted that the comment letter should reflect the following:
  - The concept of flexible regulations is encouraging, but recreational measures should be structured to allow for an increase in harvest of sharks where quota allows.
    - There is growing interest in targeting sharks recreationally in the South Atlantic and many shark stocks in the region are notably increasing.
  - The application of the proposed vessel limits is not intuitive and will be confusing to anglers. These limits need to be further clarified if implemented.
  - The relatively large size limits for many large coastal shark (LCS) species are prohibitive for recreational anglers who want to harvest sharks. Specimens are too large for most anglers to harvest and are dangerous to bring onboard vessels. Consider substantially lowering the minimum size limits for recreationally desirable species, such as blacktip and spinner sharks, to encourage harvest and increase safety.

- Regulations should allow anglers to concentrate on harvesting smaller LCS specimens and smaller shark species due to their superior food quality and to increase safety at sea.
  - Atlantic sharpnose sharks are very prevalent throughout the South Atlantic region and measures should be implemented to allow for an increase in their harvest. The default limit needs to be much higher than 1 fish per vessel. The Council feels that there should not be a vessel limit for the species and consider increasing the current bag limit.
- It was noted that the species groupings do not necessarily match those of the ASMFC and how regulations are implemented at the state level.
  - If regulations change from year to year, it will be difficult for states to follow suit and for anglers to know of the regulation changes.
  - Make sure blacktip and spinner sharks remain in the same species grouping under the D Alternatives. These two species are commonly misidentified as it can be difficult for anglers to distinguish between the two species.
- Public comment provided to the Council also noted that vessel limits for shark species where there currently are none would be particularly problematic for headboats. This comment particularly focused on Atlantic sharpnose sharks and noted that:
  - Atlantic sharpnose sharks are an important species for headboat anglers due to their desirable food quality and are safe to land due to their relatively small size.
  - HMS should not consider a vessel limit for Atlantic sharpnose sharks.
  - Consider maintaining the current one fish per person bag limit or remove the bag limit.
  - A 4 fish vessel limit will not work for headboats that may carry upwards of 50 anglers.
  - There should continue to be no size limit for Atlantic sharpnose sharks.
  - It was noted that federally permitted headboats report all shark landings via electronic logbooks, allowing for accurate accounts of harvest.

**Timing and Tasks:**

**MOTION 1: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:**

- PREPARE LETTER TO NMFS ON RISK/VALUE MATRIX
- PREPARE LETTER TO HMS IN RESPONSE TO PROPOSED CHANGES TO SHARKS MANAGEMENT

APPROVED BY COUNCIL