

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
FULL COUNCIL II
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
September 2026

The Council met in open session during the afternoon of Thursday, September 17. In addition to the topics below, the Council finalized committee reports from the meeting week. The Council elected Jessica McCawley as Chair and Kerry Marhefka as Vice-Chair. The Council presented Awards of Excellence to Trish Murphey and Jeff Buckel.

Comprehensive Amendment to Address Commercial Trip Limit Sale and Revise the Abbreviated Framework Process

During scoping hearings for Snapper Grouper Amendment 60 the Council received comments related to enforcing daily trip limits sales, noting that for areas where fish houses are open for limited hours on weekends, fishermen may not always be able to sell their harvest each day. Because they can only sell one trip limit per day, they miss out on being able to fish and generate income on days when dealers are unable to buy their harvest.

The issue was discussed at several recent Council meetings, and it was determined that the regulations that govern the sale of commercial trip limits for coastal migratory pelagics and dolphin and wahoo are similar to those for snapper grouper. Council instructed staff to begin working on a comprehensive amendment to the Snapper Grouper, Coastal Migratory Pelagics, and Dolphin Wahoo Fishery Management Plans to develop regulatory changes that will allow fishermen to harvest the daily allowable trip limits even if fish houses are not open to allow completing the sale of that trip limit on the same day.

Additionally, the Council asked staff to investigate potential modifications to the abbreviated framework procedures to include changes to trip limits and bag limits so these changes can be accomplished faster.

The Council provided the following directions to staff:

- Clarify when a trip ends and compare South Atlantic and Gulf regulatory language defining a trip.
- Sale and purchase regulations should be addressed separately from the conclusion of a trip.
- The Council may need to take action to change the definition of a commercial daily limit.
- Date of the harvest is important to provide. Consider that the actual sale can legally occur sometime (e.g., days) after the fish are delivered to the dealer or otherwise attempted to be sold or transferred.
- Write a letter to NOAA OLE and state how the Council envisions the transaction of selling a daily trip limit. Include common practices and request feedback. Bring the draft letter to the Council in December for review with the intent that it be submitted to NOAA OLE before the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel meets in January 2027.
- Move Action 10 (require sale of all snapper grouper caught on commercial trips) from Snapper Grouper Amendment 60 to this amendment.

- Look into whether we can require that all commercial species (for all the FMPs) be accounted for on the dealer report with various dispositions.
- The Council has concerns about adopting a “use it or lose it” approach as the removal of the 2 for 1 requirement in Amendment 60 may result in more permits being used.
- The Council wants to reduce speculation and ensure permits are used for the original intent.
- Obtain feedback on this topic from the Snapper Grouper AP in October 2026.
- Include the measures below (from Gulf Council) as allowable to modification via an abbreviated framework in the Snapper Grouper and Dolphin Wahoo FMPs. Remove prescriptive language (e.g., less than 10% of the previous trip limit, designated with strike through in the list). Make the same changes to the CMP FMP through Amendment 38.
 - Vessel trip limit changes ~~of not more than 10% of the prior trip limit~~
 - Bag and possession limit changes ~~of not more than 1 fish~~
 - Reporting and monitoring requirements
 - Permitting requirements
 - Gear marking requirements
 - Vessel marking requirements
 - Restrictions relating to maintaining fish in a specific condition (whole condition, filleting, use as bait, etc.)
 - Size limit changes ~~of not more than 10% of the prior size limit~~
 - Closed seasons ~~of not more than 10% of the overall open fishing season~~
 - ~~Species complex composition, including species subject to limited access privilege program (LAPP) management, requiring new share specification~~
 - Restricted areas (seasonal or year-round) ~~affecting no more than a total of 100 square nautical miles~~
 - Re-specification of ACL, ACT or quotas that had been previously approved as part of a series of ACLs, ACTs or quotas
 - Specification of MSY, OY, and associated management parameters (such as overfished and overfishing definitions) where new values are calculated based on previously approved specifications
 - Gear restrictions, except those that result significant changes in the fishery, such as complete prohibitions on gear types
 - Quota changes ~~of not more than 10%~~, or retention of a portion of an annual quota in anticipation of future regulatory changes during the same fishing year
 - Release gear requirements for sea turtles and other protected resources
 - Handling requirements for sea turtles and other protected resources

Sea Turtle Release Gear Review

In June 2026, the Gulf Council requested that NMFS reconsider the requirement for sea turtle release gear on commercial and federally permitted for-hire vessels operating in the Gulf, as the release gear and protocols currently required are overly burdensome and impractical for many smaller vessels. NMFS replied to the request by initiating a formal review of these regulations. Additionally, because the sea turtle release gear regulations are identical to those in place for the South Atlantic region, NMFS is expanding the scope of the review to include the commercial

and for-hire South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery regulations.

The Council approved the following motion:

MOTION: REQUEST NMFS REVIEW AND ASSESS THE EFFICACY AND NEED FOR THE CURRENT SEA TURTLE RELEASE GEAR REQUIREMENTS FOR FEDERALLY PERMITTED CHARTER FOR-HIRE AND COMMERCIAL SNAPPER GROUPER VESSELS AND DOLPHIN WAHOO PELAGIC LONGLINE VESSELS. AS PART OF THIS ASSESSMENT, NMFS CONSIDER STREAMLINING THE CURRENT REGULATORY BURDEN ON THESE FLEETS, INCLUDING PROPOSING A SIMPLIFIED GEAR KIT THAT REPRESENTS THE MOST RECENT RESEARCH ON INTERACTIONS WITH SEA TURTLES WHEN FISHING FOR SNAPPER GROUPER AND DOLPHIN WAHOO SPECIES.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

DIRECTION TO STAFF: PREPARE A LETTER AND COPY STAFF AT HMS.

Workplan

The Council directed staff to make the following changes to its workplan:

- Add action(s) to adjust catch levels for golden Tilefish to Regulatory Amendment 38 (Headboat Vessel Limits)
- Initiate a framework action to align recreational seasons for deepwater snapper grouper species
- Conduct webinar hearings for Regulatory Amendment 39 (Spawning Special Management Zones)
- Move Snapper Grouper Amendment 61 (Revision of Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit) and Regulatory Amendment 38 (Headboat Vessels Limits and Catch Level Adjustment for golden Tilefish) to the March 2027 meeting, and consider approval for public hearings at that time.
- Schedule approval of the Wreckfish ITQ Review for December 2026. Staff will provide the draft to SERO staff for review prior to the meeting.
- Do not schedule a joint meeting of the Coral and Habitat and Ecosystem APs at this time. Continue to keep each group informed of developments on the Blake Plateau.
- Remove anticipated future amendments addressing Dolphin Wahoo longlines, aligning Dolphin Wahoo regional measures, and deepwater coral HAPCs.

Other Business

The Council noted that information from the NMFS Fisheries Economics of the US report included in a presentation earlier in the meeting did not accurately reflect South Atlantic fisheries values. One issue is the ongoing practice of incorrectly attributing fishing activity in Monroe County solely to the Gulf region. Another is an apparent mistake in the national summary figure showing commercial fishery value.

DIRECTION TO STAFF: WRITE A LETTER TO NMFS AND ACCSP TO REQUEST THEY ACCURATELY REFLECT THE ECONOMIC VALUE BY COUNCIL (INCLUDING HOW LANDINGS ARE ATTRIBUTED TO THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AND THE GULF) IN THE FISHERIES ECONOMICS OF THE US REPORT.