

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
FULL COUNCIL I
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
December 2024

Reports

Dr. Cisco Werner, NOAA Fisheries Director of Scientific Programs and Chief Science Advisor, addressed the Council and provided an update on data collection considerations between the NEFSC and the SEFSC, surveys and assessments in the South Atlantic, and the Fisheries Integrated Modeling System (FIMS). Dr Werner also updated the Council on the Climate and Ecosystem Fisheries Initiative (CEFI) and how the Council's involvement is envisioned.

Agency representatives from NOAA Office of Law Enforcement and the US Coast Guard provided reports to the Council on enforcement efforts. State agency representatives briefed the Council on state activities, including an update on the Red Snapper Exempted Fishing Permits projects currently underway in east Florida.

Southeast Reef Fish Survey (SERFS) and Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) Update

Dr. Tracey Smart, Coastal Research Section Manager with the SCDNR Marine Resources Research Institute, presented abundance indices based on trap, video, and trawl surveys for several snapper grouper species, mackerel species, and shrimp species.

Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Update on Electronic Reporting

Staff from the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Division of NOAA Fisheries briefed the Council on the proposed rule, published on September 6, on Atlantic HMS electronic reporting requirements. The proposed changes aim to streamline and modernize reporting through electronic reporting and consolidation of reporting deadlines, expand electronic logbook reporting to additional commercial and charter/headboat vessel owners, and collect additional information from dealers through existing electronic reporting mechanisms.

Below are salient points of the discussion:

- HMS would use existing platforms (E-trips and VESL) to require e-reporting.
 - E-trips is the only reporting app that is considered to meet all the one-stop reporting requirements of the various programs.
 - VESL anticipates having HMS data elements in the app as soon as early next year.
- HMS has been working with SERO and ACCSP for a long time to integrate their logbooks with the common goal of having a combined logbook program, and any implementation would be done in concert.
- None of the existing applications are set up to select a subsample of trips to request info (e.g., economic data). HMS does not set a specific percentage rate of selection. They select which vessels are required to submit cost and earnings data at the beginning of the year.
- Most fishermen have been supportive of proposed rule.
- Sub-sampling across different programs will be tricky and contingent on the various entities to conduct outreach. HMS sends out certified letters to permit holders that are selected to do the survey.
- Alignment of requirements is important. All programs need to work towards that goal.
- HMS is still working out the timing of implementation but anticipate it at the beginning of 2026. Not sure if implementation would be all at once, in pieces, or maybe go back out to

- public comment, etc.
- HMS does not have resources to implement a validation survey on their own. Would need to piggy-back on other regional partners. One validation survey that fits everyone's needs would be ideal.

Comments on the proposed rule are due by January 6, 2025.

Direction to Staff: Draft a comment letter to HMS emphasizing the four main concerns cited by the Gulf council (validation, consistency in reporting, including non-HMS species, and reporting of economic data), ensuring the letter emphasizes the need for data validation and avoiding duplicative reporting.

Southeast For-hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) Improvement Amendment

Feedback and recommendations from the Social and Economic Panel (SEP) on ways to improve the SEFHIER program were presented to the Council, followed by a presentation on utilization of for-hire electronic Vessel Trip Reports (eVTR) data in the Mid-Atlantic region. Subsequently, Dr. Jessica Stephen, NMFS SERO provided a detailed presentation addressing items the Council requested in September and clarifying aspects of the existing program in the South Atlantic and how it was conducted in the Gulf of Mexico while it was operational.

Below are salient points of the discussion:

- Council members expressed confusion regarding the original intent of the SEFHIER program and asked for clarification on whether the intent was to supplement the MRIP For-Hire Survey or replace it once SEFHIER was certified.
- There was a general sentiment that data have been collected through SEFHIER for a number of years yet there have been no attempts to use the data. Fishermen who report are increasingly frustrated that they are taking the time to submit data to the program, yet compliance is low and data are not considered useable.
- Additionally, Council members expressed a desire and commitment to fishermen to either work to improve the program so the data can be used in some fashion or end the program.
- While low compliance has been cited by the NMFS as a barrier to utilizing the information collected, NOAA GC reminded the Council that a limited entry program cannot be implemented only to improve compliance.
- The Council does not want to overpromise and underdeliver. In Florida, the State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS) is a supplement to MRIP and is not replacing MRIP off of FL.

Council staff presented an overview of draft actions and alternatives and requested feedback from the Council. The following guidance was provided:

- Draft Action 1 (Reporting Frequency) - for scoping, 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.
- Draft Action 2 (Trip Notification) – 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.
- Draft Action 3 (Approved Landing Locations) – 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.).
- Draft Action 5 (Reporting of Economic Data) – for scoping include examples of how the data could be used (e.g., disaster declaration).
- 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?
- Council members discussed whether to convene the For-Hire Reporting Advisory Panel before approving the amendment for scoping or vice versa. It was noted that feedback from the For-Hire AP could be considered scoping.
- Provide an update and request feedback from the Law Enforcement AP.
- During scoping for this amendment, ask how people feel about limited entry for the for-hire industry in the South Atlantic.
 - Also ask stakeholders for their recommendations to improve and ease compliance with for-hire reporting requirements.

Staff recommendation: Convene the For-Hire Reporting AP and the Law Enforcement AP before the March 2025 meeting. Review feedback and consider approving the amendment for public scoping at the March 2025 meeting.

Direction to Staff: Explore a permit decal and discuss with the Law Enforcement AP (note that decals are used in the Gulf, but it is a limited entry system)

Direct staff to request the following from NMFS:

- Possible SEFHIER data evaluations (to understand the utility of the data that has been provided thus far):
- Reporting Characteristics
 - Number of SEFHIER reports – by state, year, permit held
 - Number of participating permit holders – by state, year, permit held
- Characteristics of participating fishermen: Frequency distribution of trip reports by permit holder. Same for DNF reports
 - Overall, by state, by year, by permit held
 - Number of reminders and violations
- Discards
 - Catch to discard ratio, SEFHIER vs MRIP
- Species spotlight – Red snapper, Black Sea Bass, Yellowtail Snapper, Dolphin, Spanish Mackerel, King Mackerel
 - Catch to discard ratio for SEFHIER reports vs MRIP estimates (or for-hire observers)
 - Annual number of reports in SEFHIER & number of samples in MRIP
- Species spotlight - Deepwater Species
 - By species for blueline tilefish, golden tilefish, snowy grouper
 - Annual number of reports in SEFHIER & number of samples in MRIP
 - SEFHIER reported harvest & MRIP observed harvest & MRIP estimated harvest

Allocations Review For Atlantic Spadefish and the Jacks Complex

In September 2024, the Council reviewed current sector allocations and other relevant information for Atlantic Spadefish and the three species that make up the Jacks Complex (Almaco Jack, Lesser Amberjack, and Banded Rudderfish) in accordance with the Council's Allocation Review Policy. Council staff developed summary allocations review reports based on the Council's discussion. These reports will serve as documentation of the allocations review until these species are up for review at a future date. The Council approved the following motions:

MOTION 1: APPROVE THE ALLOCATIONS REVIEW REPORT FOR ATLANTIC SPADEFISH.
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

**MOTION 2: APPROVE THE ALLOCATIONS REVIEW REPORT FOR THE JACKS COMPLEX.
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

Headboat Vessel Limits Report

In June 2024, the Council requested a report be prepared to examine headboat vessel limits for South Atlantic managed species for discussion at the December 2024 meeting. The impetus behind this request came from discussions regarding the recent modifications to the vessel limits for gag and black grouper in Snapper Grouper Amendments 53 and Regulatory Amendment 36. Additionally, the Council received public comment indicating that vessel limits are highly impactful to the headboat component of the for-hire industry.

The Council requested the following information be added to the report for review at the June 2025 meeting:

- Additional information on effort
 - Capacity on vessels or size of vessels
 - Depth fishing (potentially min or max)
 - Minimum number of anglers for a trip
 - Number of trips by month (may need to aggregate trip type) in last 6 to 8 years.
- Analyze catch and discards for (potentially bag limit analysis and rates):
 - Red Snapper
 - Shallow-water grouper
 - Black Sea Bass
 - White Grunt
 - Yellowtail Snapper
 - Vermilion Snapper
- Impact of closed season on different species (was there an impact in catch rates or number of anglers when different seasons were closed)
- Map of locations for headboats (and all for-hire vessels)

Council Coordination Committee (CCC) Report

Council staff summarize discussions that took place during the October 2024 CCC Meeting in Washington DC.

Staff Report

The Executive Director briefed the Council on staff activities since the September 2024 meeting.

Stakeholder Engagement Meetings (*Lines of Communication: Conversations with the Council*)

Council staff has worked to develop a plan for holding stakeholder engagement meetings along the South Atlantic coast, meeting fishermen in their communities. The goal of these meetings is to build relationships with fishery stakeholders by engaging them in an informal setting that allows for two-way conversations. Building and maintaining relationships and momentum for participation in the management process require consistent interaction with stakeholders over time, so staff intend for these types of meetings to become a regular part of the Council's engagement efforts.

Staff presented an updated planning document for the meetings, including options for timing of the 2025 round of meetings.

The Council provided the following feedback on the proposed meeting structure and topics for 2025/2026:

- Council members supported the use of a sticky wall to gather feedback during the meetings. Attendees at similar meetings, such as Snapper Grouper Visioning, responded positively to the use of sticky walls and attendees that aren't comfortable speaking up during a breakout group may be more comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas in writing.
- The Council recommended conducting the topical discussion before the sticky wall activity. Having small breakout groups first would help attendees become comfortable having discussions with each other and Council members. It may also help bring out questions and discussion topics for the sticky wall activity.
 - Holding mocks of these meetings with staff as well as advisory panels meeting in the spring will help with determining the best order for the different meeting activities.
- The topic on releases is more appropriate for a topical discussion, move trip satisfaction to the informal information session.
- The Council noted the importance of having a 'Fisheries Management 101' table to provide information on the management process as well as a 'Miscellaneous' table for stakeholders to bring up concerns that the meeting may not explicitly address.
 - Include paper advisory panel applications at the fisheries management table.

The Council provided the following feedback on meeting timing and planned outreach efforts:

- The Council would like to conduct the first round of stakeholder engagement meetings late in the fall quarter 2025 (October/November) for two states and the beginning of the winter quarter 2026 (January/February) for the other two states.
- Council members felt comfortable conducting outreach for these meetings by reaching out to their communities and encouraging fishermen to attend.
- It will be important to schedule these meetings as far in advance as possible so Council members can incorporate them into their schedules.
- When conducting outreach and encouraging attendance, it may be beneficial to focus on specific examples of where public input directly influenced a management decision.
- In the past, fireside chats at Council meetings did a lot to show stakeholders that Council members are accessible. Incorporating them back into Council meeting agendas could help improve relationships between stakeholders and the Council.
- Consider renaming the "fireside chats" and including back into Council meetings and explore topics to cover.
- Council members to assist in reaching out to constituents in their communities.

Timing and Tasks:

MOTION 3: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Submit a comment letter to HMS covering the proposed for-hire reporting requirements prior to the January 6, 2025 comment deadline.
- Convene the For-Hire Reporting and Law Enforcement APs to provide input on the SEFHIER Improvement Amendment.
 - Prepare the amendment for approval for public scoping at the March 2025 meeting.
- Prepare requested information on the headboat fishery for review at the June 2025 meeting.
- Work to plan the first round of stakeholder engagement meetings late in the fall quarter 2025 (October/November) for two states and the beginning of the winter quarter 2026 (January/February) for the other two states.
- Request that the Southeast Regional Office provide the following permit-related information:
 - South Atlantic permitted (SG, CMP, DW) for-hire vessels from 2020 through 2024. (Addresses needs for SEFHIER and Limited Entry Amendments)
 - Include the home port of vessels.
 - The number of vessels that would and would not be affected by the new control dates

(December 5 and December 8, 2023)

- Rock Shrimp permitted vessels from 2019 through 2023. (Addresses needs for Coral 11/Shrimp 12)
 - All permit related information necessary for social and economic sections of the Coral 11/Shrimp 12 Amendment.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL