

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
Full Council II
March 8, 2024

Litigation brief

The Council received a briefing on ongoing litigation from NOAA General Counsel.

Staff Report

The Council received a summary of activities since the December 2023 meeting from the Executive Director.

Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ)

The Council received a presentation from NOAA Fisheries titled *Advancing Equity and Environmental Justice in Underserved Communities of the Southeast Region*. Staff gave an overview of the purpose and goals of the agency's EEJ strategy, the engagement strategy and outcomes, a list of potential action items, and next steps. Regional implementation plans for the agency's EEJ strategy are due April 5, 2024. The agency conducted focus groups, scoping sessions, an online public request for information, and a virtual multilingual listening session.

Council members had the following comments:

- A more coordinated effort between NMFS and state agencies would likely have improved the level of engagement that was achieved (NMFS stated that issues with Paperwork Reduction Act clearance prevented more timely engagement with state agencies).
- Churches play an important role in communities in the South Atlantic region.
- Headboats are a means for people who are underprivileged to access fishing.
- Council members were grateful for the work the agency has done but were concerned about the lack of financial resources to accomplish the numerous action items that resulted from this effort.
- States are sometimes already supporting EEJ efforts but maybe not thinking about them from an EEJ perspective. Agency should consider including state employees that are working on federal projects in proposed training.

Council staff draft a letter to NMFS summarizing the Council's comments and recommendations for the Southeast Region EEJ Implementation Strategy.

SERO report

- Queen conch was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in February 2024. The listing decision was based on the status of queen conch throughout its range. Regulatory actions are forthcoming, but none have been proposed.
- A final rule listing Critical Habitat for Nassau grouper published in January.
- Nineteen North Atlantic Right Whale calves were born but have lost 3 and at least one was due to a vessel strike.

- Frank Helies has been hired as the new Gulf Branch chief.
- Staff asked why scamp is not included in the Fishery Stock Status Updates (December 31, 2023, Update).
 - Because scamp was assessed in conjunction with yellowmouth grouper as a complex and the complex has not yet been established, it was excluded.

SEFSC report

- Launched initiative to improve state-federal partnerships, so regional implementation plan has been released with goals of improving data and will be funded with IRA funds.
 - The work is being done in cooperation with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and will be mostly focused in the Gulf, but relevant to the South Atlantic.
 - In spring or summer, the SEFSC will hold a workshop addressing recreational effort estimation approaches and best ways to estimate effort.
 - Another workshop will focus on ways to estimate private recreational discards.
 - The SEFSC invites participation from the Council or staff.
- The SEFSC is working with commissions and states to implement a comprehensive for-hire observer program.
 - In the Gulf there are IRA funds that are being put toward that.
 - Also working with states in the South Atlantic region (\$500K dollars from spend plan was retained for this effort).
 - Also looking at funding some projects that come out of the two workshops above.

Council Workplan and Upcoming Meetings

The Council reviewed the revised workplan based on actions taken during the meeting week.

The Council was generally supportive of the revisions that included:

- Noting that Snapper Grouper Amendment 55 (Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper) may be approved for submission at the September 2024 meeting.
- Adding Coral Amendment 10 to the workplan for the June 2024 and September 2024 meetings.
- Moving the next Citizen Science Committee meeting to December 2024.
- Adding discussions of Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 35 (Red Snapper) and SEFHIER improvements to the June 2024 meeting.
- Noted that a follow up discussion on commercial snapper grouper permits would take place in the latter half of 2024 or early 2025, depending on the timing of updated permit and landings data availability.