Joint Meeting of the South Atlantic and Gulf Scientific and Statistical Committees

October 20, 2026

SSC Meeting Overview

Hybrid Meeting

In-Person:

Town & Country Inn
2008 Savannah Highway
Charleston, SC 29407

via Webinar:

https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8675082330212920411

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**Indicates materials not available for briefing book at time of posting. These materials will be added to the recent materials section when available.*

SAFMC PUBLIC COMMENT PROCESS

Written comment:

Written comments on SSC agenda topics are provided to the Committee through an online form, similar to all other Council briefing materials. Written comment can be submitted at this link. For this meeting, the deadline for submission of written comment is 12:00 p.m., October 20, 2026.

Verbal comment:

Two opportunities for comment on agenda items will be provided at set times during SSC meetings. The first will be at the beginning of the meeting, and the second near the conclusion. Those wishing to comment should indicate such in the manner requested by the Chair, who will then recognize individuals to provide comment.

An opportunity for comment on specific agenda items will also be provided as each item comes up for discussion. Comments will be taken after all the initial presentations are given and questions from the SSC are answered, but before the SSC starts making recommendations to address the action items. As before, those wishing to comment should indicate such in the manner requested by the Chair, who will then recognize individuals to provide comment. All comments are part of the record of the meeting.

Meeting Format:

This meeting will be held as hybrid format: in-person and via webinar. Online registration for the meeting can be found at the Council's website: https://safmc.net/events/oct-2026-joint-south-atlantic-and-gulf-ssc-meeting/

1. INTRODUCTIONS

1.1 Documents

Attachment 1a. Joint SSC October 2026 Agenda

1.2 Action

- Introductions
- Review and approve agenda.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

The public is provided this comment period for any general comments pertaining to any items on the agenda. There will also be time provided for public comment during each specific agenda item as they are discussed. Those wishing to make comments should indicate their desire to do so to the Committee Chair.

3. SOUTHEAST BLACK GROUPER MANAGEMENT STRATEGY EVALUATION

3.1 Documents

Attachment 3a. Black Grouper MSE Final Report
*Attachment 3b. Black Grouper MSE Presentation
Attachment 3c. SEDAR 48 Data Workshop Report (Background)

3.2 Presentation

Dr. Bill Harford, Nature Analytics

3.3 Overview

Nature Analytics will present a proposed foundation for designing management procedure options for Black Grouper fisheries in the U.S. Southeast Region. The need for a stock assessment alternative occurred as a result of the termination of the last stock assessment for Black Grouper (SEDAR 48, 2017), due to a variety of issues that were raised in the data workshop, particularly with regard to the misidentification of Black Grouper and Gag leading to uncertain landings time series data (see executive summary in SEDAR 48 data workshop report). With this unresolvable issue, the SEDAR steering committee supported the decision to halt the SEDAR 48 assessment and seek alternative solutions that would be investigated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission. The presentation and supporting materials provided by Nature Analytics aim to provide such a solution by illuminating a pathway to designing and testing management procedures to ultimately provide management advice for Southeastern Black Grouper using a management strategy evaluation framework.

Management of black grouper (*Mycteroperca bonaci*) fisheries within in the U.S. Southeastern Region (South Atlantic and Gulf of America) is made complicated by concerns about information quality, which has previously led the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to suspend a stock assessment (SEDAR 48, 2017). Accordingly, the FWC is engaged in an on-going process of exploring alternative decision-making approaches. Here, a process was initiated to progress the design and evaluation of multi-indicator management procedures (MPs) to confront issues of data quality and availability and robustness to ecological uncertainties. Performance of MPs was quantified using management strategy evaluation (MSE) that relied upon a simulated fishery system with characteristics representative of the black grouper fishery. Notably, MP performance was measured against a target reference point of 30% SPR, which serves as an MSY proxy for black grouper, as prescribed by the Gulf Council and South Atlantic Council. At least three multi-indicator MPs were demonstrated to have the potential to produce stability in stock biomass while subtly guiding longer-term outcomes towards the Council prescribed management target. It should be noted that this analysis represents a desktop MSE designed to evaluate the robustness of candidate management procedures under a range of operating model scenarios, rather than to provide immediate stock status determinations or prescriptive management advice. However, with continued work, an MP approach could lead to an interim policy for decision-making during which improved data collection is considered and conventional stock assessment becomes viable.

3.4 Public Comment

3.5 Action

- Review operating model configurations, data inputs and diagnostics, and discuss uncertainties.
- Evaluate candidate Management Procedures and their performance metrics and discuss trade-offs and uncertainties.
- Identify and discuss additional data inputs and modeling configurations necessary in order to provide stock status determination (if possible), and catch level projections.

4. OTHER BUSINESS

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

The public is provided one final opportunity to comment on SSC recommendations and agenda items. Electronically submitted comments can be viewed here.

6. CONSENSUS STATEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is provided with an opportunity to review its report, final consensus statements, and final recommendations.

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