



# Stakeholder-Driven AIM for Wreckfish Fishery

## Resilient Fisheries Project Overview

### Description

This project will apply an adaptive management technique called Adaptive Implementable Management (AIM) to guide a stakeholder-driven management development process for the South Atlantic wreckfish fishery. During this process contractors will work directly with managers and stakeholders to develop management recommendations robust to future uncertainty. Stakeholder engagement is being prioritized during the AIM process via interviews and stakeholder workshops planned throughout the project period. Using decision-support tools, the contractors will work directly with stakeholders to explore and compare various management measures and harvest control rules.

### Progress Updates

- The project is on track and progressing as expected. The Project Oversight Team met in late March.
- The updated Wreckfish stock assessment model was presented to the SSC for review. The model is being developed as the operational model for the Harvest Control Rule Design Tool.
- The team has started distributing project newsletters to stakeholders, ensuring they remain informed and engaged with the project. [Click here for the Wreckfish AIM Newsletter \(attached below\)](#).
- Following the November AIM Stakeholder Workshop, familiarizing stakeholders with the AIM process, a follow-up webinar took place in May. Participants received updates on the assessment and the next steps.
- The team have a series of webinars planned over the summer culminating in an in-person Harvest Control Rule stakeholder workshop this fall.

### Project Team

*Contractors:* Jeremy Collie; Mateja Nenadovic; Josh Nowlis; Thomas Remington, Lynker; Brian Snouffer

*Oversight Team:* Chip Collier, Christina Curtis, Judd Curtis, Allie Iberle, Lara Klibansky, Nikolai Klibansky (NOAA), Mike Schmidtke

### Project Timeline

#### 2024

- ✓ **Dec** - Request for proposals released.

#### 2025

- ✓ **Jan** - Proposals reviewed and contractor selected
- ✓ **Feb** - Project Oversight Team formed
- ✓ **Mar** - Begin monthly Project Oversight Team meetings with contractors
- ✓ **Oct** - SSC review of draft Wreckfish Assessment
- ✓ **Nov** - AIM Workshop for Stakeholders

#### 2026

- ✓ **Jan - Jun** - Customize AIM Harvest Control Rule Design Tool based on stakeholder feedback (**Underway**)
- ✓ **Apr** - SSC review of draft Wreckfish Assessment outcomes
- ✓ **May - Aug** - Stakeholder webinars (**Underway**)
- Oct** - Stakeholder Management Design Workshop

#### 2027

- Apr** - SSC review of draft project report
- Jun** - Present to Council; Submit final report

Implementation will begin with the Council reviewing and project outcomes and recommendations.

## UPDATE ON THE WRECKFISH FISHERY STAKEHOLDER-DRIVEN MANAGEMENT STRATEGY PROJECT

In November (12-14), the Lynker project team organized a workshop in Charleston, SC with a group of fishermen to discuss wreckfish management in the South Atlantic. The purpose of the workshop was to make sure fishermen's experience, concerns, and ideas are an integral part of developing a management system that better reflects the nature and dynamics of this fishery. The workshop focused on the following three major topics:

### **1. Understanding the new stock assessment**

Scientists shared progress on the new wreckfish stock assessment and walked through the main challenges with the available data. Fishermen provided practical feedback on how catch rates, fish size, and fishing behavior should be interpreted. This discussion made one issue clear: the fishery still contains a lot of uncertainty, and improving management will require better information and better collaboration. Participants agreed that fishermen's knowledge can play an important role in helping scientists make sense of what the numbers do, and do not, tell us.

### **2. Defining what good management should achieve**

Fishermen were asked a basic but important question: "What do you want wreckfish management to accomplish?" The answers covered a wide range of priorities, ranging from keeping quotas as high as possible to reducing unnecessary reporting and compliance burdens. A major takeaway was that not every goal (i.e., production, ecology, constancy, and robustness) can be maximized at the same time. For example, maximizing catch (i.e., production) in the short term may reduce long-term stability (i.e., robustness). The group spent time discussing these tradeoffs and how future management might better balance them.

### **3. Exploring new management tools and cooperative research**

Participants were introduced to a new decision-support tool designed to help fishermen and managers think through different quota-setting strategies before management measures are adopted. The goal is to move toward a more adaptive management system, one that can respond better to changing stock conditions while also considering fishermen's need for consistency and fairness. There was also strong interest in cooperative research, especially projects that could improve the stock assessment without placing excessive burden on fishermen. Fishermen emphasized that they are willing to contribute data and effort, as long as they can clearly see how that information will be used to improve management.

### **Summary**

This workshop showed that there is real interest among wreckfish fishermen in building a management system that is (1) more transparent, (2) more flexible, and (3) based on more complete science. Just as importantly, the discussions showed that fishermen want to be involved not only after decisions are made, but while the science and management options are being developed.

### **Next steps**

1. Several virtual working sessions will be held between July and September 2026 to help fishermen and other stakeholders discuss management objectives, learn how harvest control rules (HCRs) work, and begin developing their own preferred management approaches.
2. Individual and/or group follow-up meetings will be offered between September and the final workshop to answer questions, provide technical support, and assist stakeholders in refining HCR alternatives.
3. A final in-person workshop will take place in October or November 2026, where stakeholders will have the opportunity to share ideas for potential HCR proposals, discuss group perspectives, and identify other priority management issues.

Feedback from all these activities will be used to provide strategies for more adaptive management in evolving ecosystems and regulatory contexts, as well as inform future wreckfish management discussions with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.