



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Modifications to South Atlantic For-hire Reporting

Law Enforcement Advisory Panel Discussion Document

January 2025

Background

The Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) Program was launched in 2021 with the implementation of the Comprehensive For-Hire Electronic Reporting Amendment ([SAFMC 2017](#)). The amendment put in place or modified reporting requirements for federally permitted charter vessels and headboats in the snapper grouper (SG), dolphin wahoo (DW), and coastal migratory pelagics (mackerels; CMP) fisheries. Reporting requirements through SEFHIER were effective for charter/for-hire vessels in January 2021.

Additional information on the intended outcomes of the Comprehensive For-Hire Electronic Reporting Amendment and recommendations of the related technical sub-committee were provided to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) at their [September 2024 meeting](#).

Recent South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Action

The Council has received periodic updates on compliance with reporting requirements of the SEFHIER Program since its implementation. The presentations summarized information to date compliance with reporting requirements in the South Atlantic region and other statistics. Overall compliance is low in the South Atlantic Program (46%; see [December 2023 presentation](#)) compared to what was observed in the Gulf of Mexico Program (78%) while the program in that region was operational. Hence, the Council initiated discussion on ways to improve compliance, strengthen reporting requirements, and explore data validation, with the goal of utilizing the information collected in future management decisions.

At the June 2024 meeting, the Council received [feedback](#) from the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office and Southeast Fisheries Science Center that data being collected through the SEFHIER program and for-hire logbook cannot be used for management due to low compliance and lack of validation. Recommendations in this letter include:

- Require logbook submission prior to offload of catch,
- A dockside intercept survey to estimate mis-reporting and non-reporting,
- Require declaration/pre-landing combination submission prior to a trip,
- Require landing only at approved listed landing locations, and
- Require weekly did not fish reports when fishing does not occur within the for-hire sector.

The Council also initiated development of an amendment to consider improvements to the SEFHIER program at this meeting.

At the December 2024 meeting, the Council received a [detailed presentation from the NMFS](#) with supporting information for the improvement of the current SEFHIER program.

Other Changes to For-Hire Fisheries Reporting: Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and NMFS Atlantic Highly Migratory Species

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) and NMFS Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) are considering modifying reporting requirements in their for-hire fisheries. Some participants in these fisheries also report to the South Atlantic SEFHIER Program. The Gulf Council is currently working on an [amendment](#) to re-implement for-hire electronic reporting after the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit set aside the Gulf's SEFHIER final rule in February 2023.

The Gulf Council is considering establishing the following for the for-hire component:

- Establish the frequency and mechanism for data reporting from charter vessels,
- modify the existing reporting requirements for headboats,
- establish trip notification and effort reporting requirements, and
- establish reporting of economic data.

The Gulf Council most recently reviewed the draft amendment in November 2024. The amendment is tentatively scheduled to be completed by June 2025.

The NMFS Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) is proposing the following for the for-hire component:

- require electronic reporting within 24 hours of the end of each trip for all trips, regardless of whether fish were caught, and including trip-level cost and earnings information;
- include reporting of all species caught (including non-HMS) and fishing location; and
- require monthly no-fishing reports.

Additionally, if selected, vessels would also be required to report additional annual expenditure information via an annual survey. A [summary presentation of the HMS proposed rule](#) was provided to the Council at its December 2024 meeting. The Council submitted comments during the comment period that ended on January 6, 2025 (see Attachment 1d).

Tentative Timing for Amendment

Winter 2024	Obtain feedback from FHR AP.
March 2025	Review Feedback from FHR AP and approve for public scoping
Spring 2025	Obtain feedback from other advisory panels.
December 2025	Approve for public hearings.
Winter 2026	Conduct public hearings.
March 2026	Review public hearing comments and approve all actions.
June 2026	Consider approval for formal review.
2027	Regulation changes become effective.

Purpose and Need Statements

Purpose: Make modifications to the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting Program to improve the accuracy, precision, and timeliness of landings, discards, fishing effort, and economic data for the for-hire component of the recreational sector of the snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, and dolphin wahoo fisheries.

Need: Improve compliance, adjust reporting requirements, and allow for data validation so the information collected can be used in managing the fisheries for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, and dolphin wahoo.

Draft Actions

Modify Reporting Frequency of Fishing Trips for For-Hire Vessels

Purpose of Action: *Increase reporting frequency to better enable monitoring and enforcement and increase the quality of reported data. This action would apply to vessels with a valid charter/headboat permit, regardless of whether they participate in the Southeast Region Headboat Survey, as the reporting frequency is currently the same for both headboats and charter vessels.*

Current requirement: The owner or operator of a charter vessel for which a charter vessel/headboat permit for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo has been issued, must record all fish harvested and discarded, **for each trip, and submit an electronic fishing report weekly** (on Tuesday following each previous reporting week of Monday through Sunday) via NMFS-approved software. If the owner or operator has been issued a Federal permit that requires more restrictive reporting requirements, those more restrictive regulations apply.

Potential modifications:

1. Frequency of reporting (how often fishermen would be required to report)
 - Every day?
 - After every trip?
 - Other frequency?
2. Timing of reporting (deadline for each report to be turned in):
 - Within 24 hours of the end of a trip?
 - Within 48 hours of the end of a trip?
 - Within 1 hour of offloading catch?
 - Within 30 minutes of offloading catch?
 - Prior to offloading catch?
 - Other timing?

Discussion

- The South Atlantic Council is looking to adopt similar measures being considered by the Gulf Council (i.e., trip level or daily reporting as well as a reporting requirement before offloading fish). Other than a no action alternative, the Gulf Council is considering two other alternatives. One that would require submittal of trip reports within 30 minutes of arriving at the dock if no fish are harvested, or prior to offload if fish are harvested. The other would require reporting for each trip daily (i.e., within 24 hours of the end of the trip).
- A summary comparison of existing and developing reporting requirements that may affect South Atlantic permitted for-hire vessels is in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of existing and developing for-hire **reporting frequency** and timing requirements for the South Atlantic (SA), Southeast (SE) Headboat Survey, Gulf of Mexico (GOM), Greater Atlantic Region (GARFO) Vessel Trip Report (VTR), and Highly Migratory Species (HMS).

	SA SEFHIER and SE Headboat Survey	GOM SEFHIER	GARFO VTR	HMS
Existing	Weekly	N/A	Generally 48 hours after entering port. For recreational tilefish: 24 hours after end of trip.	Electronic report, telephone, or other means like catch cards.
Proposed	?	Prior to offload of catch, within 30 minutes of completion of the trip, or each trip daily.	No proposed changes.	Electronic report 24 hours after end of trip.

Source: Information and concept based on HMS presentation to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council December 2, 2024. https://safmc.net/documents/fc1_a3_hms_e-reporting-proposed-rule-presentation_safmc_202412-pdf/

AP Recommendations

- Does the AP have feedback or recommendations on the range of modifications that the Council is considering for:
 - Reporting frequency?
 - Timing of reporting?

Require Trip Notification for For-Hire Vessels

Purpose of Action: *This action would require federally permitted charter/headboat vessels to provide a notification to NMFS declaring the intent to initiate a for-hire or fishing trip, return from a for-hire or fishing trip, or both. This action would improve estimates of effort by providing a validation process that is not in place with the current MRIP survey (for charter vessels) or Southeast Region Headboat Survey. This action would also alert law enforcement officers in advance of a trip thus improving their ability to address non-reporting or late reporting.*

Current requirement: There are currently no trip notification requirements for federally permitted charter/headboat vessels participating in the snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo fisheries.

Potential modification:

Require a trip declaration:

- Anytime the vessel leaves the dock (e.g., including getting fuel for the vessel)
- When the vessel is used for fishing.
 - For-hire fishing
 - Bait fishing
 - Private recreational fishing
 - Commercial fishing
- Other activity involving paying passengers (e.g., sunset cruises, dolphin watching)

Discussion

- This action would implement a trip notification requirement that may include the initiation of a trip, return from a trip, or both.
- The Gulf Council is considering requiring a declaration for trips that will be engaging in any type of fishing (e.g., charter, bait fishing, private trips, commercial trips) or for-hire activity (involving paying passengers) or only for trips that will be engaging in any type of fishing activity.
 - The trip notification measures may also vary between charter vessels and headboat vessels in the Gulf Council's amendment.

AP Recommendations

- Does the AP have feedback or recommendations on the range of modifications that the Council is considering for trip notification requirements?

Establish Approved Landing Locations for For-Hire Vessels

Purpose of Action: *Establishing approved landing locations for offload would support the ability of the agency to enforce and monitor compliance with reporting and conduct a validation survey.*

Current requirement: There is no requirement for federally permitted charter or headboat vessels to offload clients or harvested catch at pre-approved landing locations.

Potential modification:

Require landing at pre-approved locations.

Discussion

What are approved landing locations?

- Actual street address location where fish are expected to be offloaded.
- Can be public locations, private residences, dock slip in a large marina.

Why are approved landing locations needed?

- Supplies law enforcement with an exact location where a for-hire trip will offload fish and passengers.
- Provides information to validate the information collected through the program.

How are landing locations approved?

- Participants submit landing location via website
 - Must enter a name not in use
 - Contact information – who is submitting (name, phone, email)
 - Address (street, county, city, state, zip)
 - Type – Private or Public
- SEFHIER staff verifies the location, if the address exists and is on the water, before approval.
 - If approval is unclear, SEFHIER staff calls submitter for clarifying information.
 - Approved locations are assigned a landing location code and enforcement zone.
 - Submissions are often approved within 1 business day.

AP Recommendations

- Does the AP have feedback or recommendations on potential approved landing location requirements?

Revise Reporting of Economic Data for Charter Vessels

Purpose of Action: Reporting of economic information on the charter fee, fuel usage, and fuel price for each for-hire fishing trip is already required for each for-hire fishing trip taken by South Atlantic permitted charter vessels. This action may implement a stratified random sampling design that would require reporting of economic information from some, but not all South Atlantic permitted charter vessels. Charter vessels that would need to report economic information would change annually. **Note that this action does not apply to vessels that participate in the NMFS Southeast Regional Headboat Survey.**

Current requirement: Federally permitted charter vessels with a valid charter vessel permit for snapper grouper species, coastal migratory pelagics, dolphin, or wahoo are required to report economic information for each for-hire fishing trip.

Potential modification:

- Retain census approach to economic data collection?
- Only require selected vessels to report economic data?
- If selected, also require participation in an annual survey (HMS has proposed this but the Gulf Council has not)?

Discussion

- Currently South Atlantic permitted charter vessels must provide charter fee, fuel usage, and fuel price for each for-hire fishing trip. This is a census-based approach to data collection that fishermen have stated creates additional burden.
- The reporting requirement of economic information could be changed to a sampling approach, where not all permitted vessels would be required to submit economic information each trip. A stratified random sampling design of permitted vessels would be used for selecting a sub-set of vessels that are required to report economic data, and the vessels reporting would change annually.
- A similar alternative is being considered by the Gulf Council.

AP Recommendations

- Does the AP have feedback or recommendations on potential modifications that the Council is considering for economic information requirements?

Other items

Did Not Fish Reports

The [letter](#) from SERO and the SEFSC mentions the need for weekly submission of DNF reports. The Council’s motion from the June 2024 meeting also mentions considering DNF reports in this amendment. Currently, vessels participating in the SEFHIER program must submit DNF reports by Tuesday following a fishing week and up to 30 days in advance. A summary of existing and developing requirements for no fishing reports under the various programs is in Table 2. Currently, the Council has not specified potential to remove the DNF report requirements, but could do so in this amendment.

Table 2. Summary of existing and developing did not fish reports requirements for the South Atlantic (SA), Southeast (SE) Headboat Survey, Gulf of Mexico (GOM), Greater Atlantic Region (GARFO) Vessel Trip Report (VTR), and Highly Migratory Species (HMS).

Topic	SA SEFHIER and SE Headboat Survey	GOM SEFHIER	GARFO VTR	HMS
Existing	Weekly Limit to no more than 30 days in advance	N/A	Not required	Not required
Proposed	?	Monthly	Not required	Monthly. No limit to how far in advance.

Source: Information and concept based on HMS presentation to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council December 2, 2024. https://safmc.net/documents/fc1_a3_hms_e-reporting-proposed-rule-presentation_safmc_202412-pdf/

Validation Survey

Validation of the electronic vessel reports would improve the usefulness of the catch information for estimation. A validation survey, in addition to requiring that catch be reported prior to offloading, would meet the SEFSC’s requirements for data obtained through SEFHIER to be used in management decisions.

Current requirement: There is no mandatory participation in a validation survey for federally permitted charter/headboat vessels participating in the snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo fisheries.

Potential modification:

Require participation in a validation survey for all federally permitted charter/headboat vessels.

AP Recommendations

- Does the AP have feedback or recommendations on changes to Did Not Fish Reports?
Are changes needed?