




**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration**

National Marine Fisheries Service
Southeast Fisheries Science Center
75 Virginia Beach Drive
Miami, Florida 33149 U.S.A.
(305) 361-4200 Fax: (305) 361-4499

January 31, 2024

TO: John Carmichael
Executive Director, South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council

FROM: Clay Porch, Ph.D. 
Director, Southeast Fisheries Science Center

SUBJECT: Center response to proposed 2026 SEDAR SOWs

The Center has reviewed the proposed 2026 Statements of Work for the South Atlantic SEDAR assessments of Snowy Grouper, Gag Grouper and King Mackerel. We note that the SEDAR project planning calendar also includes significant workload related to the assessments of Red Snapper, Gray Triggerfish and Red Grouper. Much of that work will take place in 2026. The Center lacks sufficient resources to conduct all six projects in 2026. Given the need to prioritize the workload, the Center recommends the following:

1. We acknowledge that the draft SOWs represent the assessment and research priorities of the Council, and considered individually they are acceptable as written. The Center will carefully consider each Council's priorities as we prepare the upcoming SEDAR Calendars, and will work closely with the Councils and SEDAR to develop acceptable project schedules that achieve the highest priorities of the Council and the Center. The final SOWs may require adjustments to accommodate that effort.
2. With regard to the specific SOWs, the Center notes that:
 - a. The Snowy Grouper assessment would benefit from the inclusion of the SADL survey, which should have 5 years of data and be available by March/April 2026. The process would benefit from a mid-2026 start date to accommodate this.
 - b. We expect the Gag Grouper and King Mackerel assessments will be impacted by the MRIP FES large-scale study. It may be necessary to reconsider whether these assessments should continue as this study evolves. Research efforts are underway to identify and evaluate methodologies that are robust to potential bias and uncertainty in removals. These efforts could be accelerated by redirecting assessment staff to support these efforts.

c. The Center also proposes to transition the King Mackerel assessment from Stock Synthesis to BAM.

I am aware that our staff have been working with you and others to improve the assessment process, and better achieve Council and Center priorities. I support these efforts wholeheartedly. The Center will continue to collaborate closely with the Council and SEDAR staff to develop and implement procedural changes that enhance the delivery of timely management advice.

cc: Andy Strelcheck
 John McGovern
 Sue Gerhart
 Shannon Cass-Calay
 Mike Jepson
 Julie Neer
 Larry Massey