

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PANEL OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE



SEP Meeting Overview

April 13-14, 2026

**Town and Country Inn
2008 Savannah Highway
Charleston, SC 29407**

PURPOSE

This meeting is convened to discuss and provide input to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) on:

- Recent and developing Council actions and amendments,
- Citizen Science Program projects,
- Improving Communication with and Increasing Resilience of Fishing Communities in the South Atlantic Region project,
- Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation,
- Economic value and social value analyses for the Risk Value Matrix tool,
- Understanding citizen scientists’ experience with the SMILE Project (Size Matters: Innovative Length Estimates) project,
- Fishery Performance Report text analysis,
- Introduction to social science and economics for fishermen.

CONTENTS

1.	Introduction.....	3
2.	Recent and Developing Council Actions.....	3
3.	Update on the Citizen Science Program	5
4.	Improving Communication with and Increasing Resilience of Fishing Communities in the South Atlantic Region	6
5.	Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation Economics.....	6
6.	Risk Value Matrix Introduction and Economic Value Analysis	8
7.	Understanding citizen scientists’ experience with the SMILE Project (Size Matters: Innovative Length Estimates)	9
8.	Risk Value Matrix Recap and Social Value Analysis	10
9.	Fishery Performance Report Text Analysis	11
10.	Introduction to Social Science and Economics for Fishermen	12
11.	Other Business	13
12.	Report and Recommendations Review.....	13
13.	Next SEP Meeting.....	13

DOCUMENTS

Attachment 1a: Social and Economic Panel Agenda Overview

Attachment 1b: Minutes from the April 2025 meeting

Attachment 1c: Minutes from the February 2026 meeting

Attachment 2: Recent and developing South Atlantic Council amendments

Attachment 3: Citizen Science Program update presentation

Attachment 4: Increasing Resilience of Fishing Communities introduction presentation

Attachment 5: Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation Economics presentation

Attachment 6a: Risk Value Matrix Introduction Presentation to SAFMC (March 2026)

Attachment 6b: CCC Response to NMFS Risk Value Matrix (February 2026)

Attachment 6c: Risk Value Matrix Economic Value Presentation

Attachment 7a: Understanding citizen scientists' experience with the SMILE Project report

Attachment 7b: Understanding citizen scientists' experience with the SMILE Project presentation

Attachment 8: Risk Value Matrix Social Value Presentation

Attachment 9a: FPR Text Analysis Internal Documentation

Attachment 9b: FPR Text Analysis External Documentation

Attachment 9c: FPR Text Analysis Presentation

Attachment 10: Introduction to Social Science and Economics for Fishermen Outline

1. Introduction

1.1. Documents

- **Attachment 1a.** Social and Economic Panel Agenda Overview
- **Attachment 1b.** Minutes from the April 2025 meeting
- **Attachment 1c.** Minutes from the February 2026 meeting

1.2. ACTIONS

- Introductions
- Review and approve the agenda
- Approve April 2025 and February 2026 minutes
- Opportunity for public comment

2. Recent and Developing Council Actions

2.1. Document

- **Attachment 2.** Recent and developing South Atlantic Council amendments

2.2. Overview

Council staff will provide a briefing on recent and upcoming amendments and actions (*Attachment 2*). The following amendments may be of particular interest to SEP members:

Amendment 61 (Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision)

Purpose of the Amendment: Evaluate whether 14 species currently in the FMU should remain, be removed, or be designated as ecosystem component species. Note: this amendment supersedes an earlier proposed amendment to specify ABCs for unassessed snapper grouper species.

Action Summary: To determine the need for conservation and management of 14 snapper grouper species.

Development level: Scoping completed. In March 2026, the Council reviewed draft purpose and need statements. Narrowed down the scope of species considered in the amendment to 14 species.

Amendment 60 (Commercial management measures)

Purpose of the Amendment: The amendment has two main objectives: 1) address issues related to the commercial Snapper Grouper Unlimited (SG 1) permit, and 2) increase commercial trip efficiency.

Action Summary: Revise the 2-for-1 snapper grouper commercial unlimited permit policy; establish dynamic (step-down) trip limits; and revise existing stowage requirements for gear on board.

Development level: Scoping has been conducted and the amendment is being developed. Approval for public hearings is expected at the June 2026 meeting.

Amendment 62 (Joint State-Federal Management of Recreational Red Snapper)

Purpose of the Amendment: To establish a mechanism for joint federal-state management of the recreational red snapper fishery in the South Atlantic.

Development level: The Council expects to begin development once the states' EFPs have been approved and are underway.

Regulatory Amendment 37 (Black Sea Bass Management Measures)

Purpose of the Amendment: Address depleted status of black sea bass in the South Atlantic immediately with management measures aimed at reducing regulatory discards and protecting the spawning stock.

Action Summary: Establish recreational and commercial annual catch targets that reduce harvest by 50% and revise accountability measures, reduce the recreational bag limit, and implement an annual spawning season closure in February and March for both commercial and recreational sectors.

Development level: Approved for submission

Headboat Vessel Limits

Purpose of the Amendment: Consider developing vessel limits for gag, black grouper, scamp, and yellowmouth grouper that account for the higher number of passengers on headboats compared to charter vessels.

Action Summary: Establish vessel limits that may be based on the number of paying passengers to allow for vessel limits that exceed those established for gag, black grouper, scamp, and yellowmouth grouper onboard private or charter vessels.

Development level: Scoping has been conducted and the amendment is being developed. Approval for public hearings is expected at the December 2026 meeting.

Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation

Purpose of the Amendment: Dead releases are a major issue in the snapper grouper fishery as a whole and affect many species within the complex. The Council has directed a management strategy evaluation (MSE) project that would consider multispecies effects of potential

management changes and be used to develop a more holistic approach to management of the snapper grouper fishery. The amendment will follow the MSE project and consider implementation of management changes evaluated through the MSE.

Action Summary: This amendment will provide actions intended to incorporate recommendations from the MSE project.

2.3. Presentation and Discussion

John Hadley and Christina Curtis, SAFMC staff

2.4. ACTIONS

Discuss and make recommendations as appropriate. In general, this agenda item is meant to brief the SEP on potential Council actions that may be presented to the group for review later in the meeting or at a future SEP meeting.

SEP RECOMMENDATIONS:

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3. Update on the Citizen Science Program

3.1. Document

- **Attachment 3.** Citizen Science Program update presentation

3.2. Overview

SAFMC staff will provide an update on program activities and recent efforts within the [SAFMC's Citizen Science Program](#). This will include updates on current projects such as SMILE, FISHstory, and SAFMC Release. Staff will also share information on key indicators developed under each of the Program's goal to help evaluate progress, identify opportunities for improvement, and measure the Program's ongoing impact.

Presentation and Discussion

Julia Byrd and Meg Withers, SAFMC staff

3.3. ACTIONS

Discuss and make recommendations as appropriate. In general, this agenda item is meant to brief the SEP on current citizen science projects that may be presented to the group for review later in the meeting or at a future SEP meeting.

SEP RECOMMENDATIONS:

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4. Improving Communication with and Increasing Resilience of Fishing Communities in the South Atlantic Region

4.1. Document

- **Attachment 4.** Increasing Resilience of Fishing Communities introduction presentation

4.2. Overview

Part of the Council’s Resilient Fisheries Initiative, this project would operationalize recommendations from East Coast scenario planning efforts by identifying communities that interact with Council-managed species in the South Atlantic region and beyond. The purpose is to identify and engage communities where outreach has been lacking in the past. This will improve the Council’s understanding of constituent preferences for engagement and provide an opportunity to inform constituents about the Council process and improve their ability to become engaged. The proposed work would also describe community impacts from increasing environmental uncertainty. The SEP will receive an introduction to the project and a description of the work to be completed.

4.3. Presentation

Ed Camp, University of Florida
Jennifer Sweeney-Tookes, Georgia Southern University

4.4. ACTIONS

Discuss and make recommendations as appropriate. In general, this agenda item is meant to brief the SEP on a project that will be scheduled for detailed review a future SEP meeting.

SEP RECOMMENDATIONS:

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5. Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation Economics

5.1. Documents

- **Attachment 5:** Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation economics presentation

5.2. Overview

The Council is in the process of developing a management strategy evaluation (MSE) for the recreational snapper grouper fishery focusing on strategies to reduce the number of released fish to improve yield throughout the fishery. The management strategy will also consider the need for fishery access and resource use while preventing overfishing and rebuilding overfished stocks.

The MSE is focusing on red snapper, gag, black sea bass, and potentially other species to provide projections of landed and discarded fish under various scenarios modeling management changes to the recreational sector. As such, it is possible to add an economic component to these landings and discards streams that would allow the Council to make a comparison of estimated

net economic benefits between various management scenarios to evaluate tradeoffs. Council direction to this point has been to evaluate the theoretical implementation of aggregate bag limits, mandatory stopping, seasonal management, and spatial management (closed and open areas) in the recreational snapper grouper fishery.

Staff have begun to develop methods that would allow this comparison, utilizing willingness to pay (WTP) estimates for harvesting and discarding the three original species identified for the MSE, which are red snapper, gag, and black sea bass. Specifically, staff are considering applying WTP estimates for harvested or discarded red snapper and gag provided in [Carter and Liese \(2012\)](#)¹ and WTP estimates for harvested black sea bass provided in [Haab et al \(2010\)](#)². Council staff will provide an overview of the initial methodology that is being developed for application within the MSE and ask for feedback from the SEP on these methods as well as for improvements that could potentially be implemented.

5.3. Presentation

John Hadley, SAMFC staff

5.4. ACTIONS

Discuss and make recommendations as appropriate.

Discussion Questions:

1. The MSE can provide projected catches over several decades, thus discounting future benefits and costs will be necessary. Current federal guidance is to utilize a discount rate of 3% and 7% when conducting benefit-cost analysis. Does the SEP suggest an additional discount rate outside of this range that should be explored when examining the net present value of benefits and costs for the management scenarios in the MSE? If so, what discount rate and why?
2. Does the SEP know of alternative estimates of consumer surplus for harvested or discarded fish that should be used instead of those initially identified?
 - a. Does the SEP know of consumer surplus estimates for released black sea bass?
 - b. Could consumer surplus for non-groupers or red snapper be set a fraction of the consumer surplus for other species?
3. How would the SEP recommend determining that the conclusions are robust to the assumptions?
 - a. It is important to note that we do not need a “perfect number” since we are examining which management scenario is performing better compared to the others based on a certain set of assumptions. Those assumptions can include a range to provide a sensitivity analysis.

¹ Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David-Carter-40/publication/233843864_The_Economic_Value_of_Catching_and_Keeping_or_Releasing_Saltwater_Sport_Fish_in_the_Southeast_USA/links/56d0641108aeb52500cd7536/The-Economic-Value-of-Catching-and-Keeping-or-Releasing-Saltwater-Sport-Fish-in-the-Southeast-USA.pdf

² Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46448189_Angler_Heterogeneity_and_the_Species-Specific_Demand_for_Marine_Recreational_Fishing

4. Does the SEP have any comments on the general methods and assumptions that are being proposed to add an economic component to the MSE?
 - c. Assumption 1: For discarded red snapper or gag, utilize a WTP estimate that is the average value between a bag limit and minimum size limit release value since it is unknown whether discards in the MSE model are due to minimum size, bag limit, or other reasons.
 - i. Also utilize the fourth fish estimate for red snapper and gag since it is unknown how many fish may be discarded on a hypothetical trip in the MSE.
 - d. Assumption 2: Harvest and discards of these fish are considered a benefit and dead discards a cost.
 - i. Since the size and disposition (harvest vs discard) of a dead discard that hypothetically could have otherwise survived to be caught in the fishery again is unknown, the average of the WTP estimates for harvest and discards may be utilized to apply a value to the dead discards.

SEP RECOMMENDATIONS:

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6. Risk Value Matrix Introduction and Economic Value Analysis

6.1. Document

- **Attachment 6a.** Risk Value Matrix Introduction Presentation to SAFMC (March 2026)
- **Attachment 6b.** CCC Response to NMFS Risk Value Matrix (February 2026)
- **Attachment 6c.** Risk Value Matrix Economic Value Presentation

6.2. Overview

At the May 2025 CCC meeting NMFS discussed the need to “narrow the scope of NMFS management and science” to accommodate future agency resources and capabilities. In March 2026 the Council was provided with an update on progress by the SEFSC to further develop tools to assist decision making related to narrowing the scope of management. Additional information on management alternatives that could be considered for the risk/value categories was provided, along with progress on compiling the value and risk information necessary to assign stocks to risk/value categories. A national approach has been developed to support comparisons across regions. SEFSC staff will provide an overview of the risk value effort and details on the analyses being used to populate the economic data component of the priority matrix.

6.3. Presentation

TBD, SEFSC staff

6.4. ACTIONS

Discuss and make recommendations as appropriate.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Envisioning this effort as a pilot to potentially further refine to help the Council prioritize species for ongoing management (annual catch limits, accountability measures, size limits, etc.) versus removing from federal management (removal from FMP or designated an ecosystem component species), are there ways that the economic component of the Risk-Value matrix could be improved?
 - a. Are value added economic impacts a good metric to use as a proxy for economic importance of a species? If not, what readily available economic data or metric should be used instead?
 - b. Are there other readily available economic data or metrics that should be used in addition to value added impacts?

- 2) Will results of the economic component of this effort, as designed, be useful in helping to guide decisions on the scope of science and management, such as revisiting or prioritizing species and complexes in need of assessments and federal management and resources allocated across fisheries and regions?

SEP RECOMMENDATIONS:

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7. Understanding citizen scientists' experience with the SMILE Project (Size Matters: Innovative Length Estimates)

7.1. Document

- **Attachment 7a.** Understanding citizen scientists' experience with the SMILE Project report.
- **Attachment 7b.** Understanding citizen scientists' experience with the SMILE Project presentation.

7.2. Overview

Size matters – especially for fisheries! The SMILE Project (Size Matters: Innovative Length Estimates) is a citizen science project, led by the REEF Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) with support from SAFMC's Citizen Science Program. As part of this project, citizen scientists use innovative technology designed to obtain fish lengths, which ultimately contributes data for management and conservation of reef fishes. Snorkelers and divers are equipped with a low-cost, laser-mounted waterproof camera to obtain images of 12 target species (e.g., grouper, hogfish, parrotfish, snapper) that are then used to estimate fish length in post-analyses through AI and depth of field technologies.

A key component of citizen science projects is understanding who is likely to participate, what motivates their involvement, and the skills and knowledge they bring. This information is essential for recruiting and retaining participants, particularly for specialized tasks that are critical to a project's success. In 2025, REEF collaborated with social scientists to develop a structured survey designed to identify the factors that may interest and motivate snorkelers and divers to engage with SMILE. The SEP will receive a presentation of survey results highlighting key findings and progress on this project.

7.3. Presentation

Jennifer Loch, Allison Candelmo, Reef Environmental Education Foundation
Jessie Mader, Kaylin Clements, Jennifer Solomon, Colorado State University

7.4. ACTIONS

Discuss and make recommendations as appropriate.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Does the panel know of other projects, particularly marine-based citizen science initiatives using innovative and non-app-based technologies, that have reported similar findings?
 - a. While we have perused peer-reviewed and widely available gray literature, we are especially interested in reports or materials that may be difficult to access.
- 2) Does the panel have recommendations on ways to help citizen scientists feel that their data are meaningful and actively informing management decisions?
- 3) What kinds of future social science research should REEF prioritize in relation to this project?
 - a. Would it be preferable to conduct another user survey in the future, when we will have more citizen scientists who have engaged with the camera?
 - i. Does the SEP have a suggested time interval between surveys?
 - b. In your opinion, is informal user survey data collected internally by REEF (with no IRB approval) valuable? If so, for what use (participant engagement? Program review? Etc.)?

SEP RECOMMENDATIONS:

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8. Risk Value Matrix Recap and Social Value Analysis

8.1. Documents

- **Attachment 8.** Risk Value Matrix Social Value Presentation

8.2. Overview

At the May 2025 CCC meeting NMFS discussed the need to “narrow the scope of NMFS management and science” to accommodate future agency resources and capabilities. In March 2026 the Council was provided with an update on progress by the SEFSC to further develop tools to assist decision making related to narrowing the scope of management. Additional information on management alternatives that could be considered for the risk/value categories was provided, along with progress on compiling the value and risk information necessary to assign stocks to risk/value categories. A national approach has been developed to support comparisons across regions. SEFSC staff will provide details on the analyses being used to populate the social data component of the priority matrix.

8.3. Presentation

TBD, SEFSC Staff

8.4. ACTIONS

Discuss and make recommendations as appropriate.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Do the scoring criteria adequately capture the range of social values for species in the South Atlantic region? Are the definitions of each criterion sufficient to capture the intended information?
 - a. Does the survey adequately and fairly represent all relevant fishing sectors or are there any groups that are underrepresented or overlooked?
- 2) Are the species groupings used in the survey appropriate for a social value analysis or should other groupings be considered?
- 3) Are survey concepts distinct so that results are easy to interpret accurately or does the survey attempt to capture too many concepts at once?
- 4) After the pilot phase, what audience/sample frame does the SEP recommend for the survey?
- 5) Will results of the survey, as designed, be useful in helping to guide decisions on the scope of science and management, such as revisiting or prioritizing species and complexes in need of assessments and federal management and resources allocated across fisheries and regions?

SEP RECOMMENDATIONS:

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9. Fishery Performance Report Text Analysis

9.1. Documents

- **Attachment 9a:** FPR Text Analysis Internal Documentation
- **Attachment 9b:** FPR Text Analysis External Documentation
- **Attachment 9c:** FPR Text Analysis Presentation

9.2. Overview

The purpose of fishery performance reports (FPR) is to assemble information from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) fishery advisory panel members' experience and observations on the water and in the marketplace to complement scientific and landings data. The FPRs are provided to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and the Socioeconomic Panel (SEP) to complement stock assessment reports and aid in developing stock status recommendations. Fishery performance reports are currently summarized as a narrative. In addition to the narrative, Council and SEDAR staff have developed a complementary report that utilizes automated text analysis to summarize key trends and themes found in the meeting minutes.

9.3. Presentation

Emily Ott, SEDAR staff
Christina Curtis, SAFMC staff

9.4. ACTIONS

Discuss and make recommendations as appropriate.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Who should determine lexicon? (ex. Council? SEP? Advisory Panels?)
- 2) What additional text analyses should be explored?
- 3) Where should these results be presented? SSC? SEP? Council?
- 4) When should these results be presented during the SEDAR process? Data scoping? Data Workshop?
- 5) What are some future uses for these text analyses? Public comment?
- 6) What are some solutions to obstacles mentioned (AI algorithm bias, FPR standardized questions)?

SEP RECOMMENDATIONS:

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10. Introduction to Social Science and Economics for Fishermen

10.1. Documents

- **Attachment 10:** Introduction to Social Science and Economics for Fishermen Outline

10.2. Overview

Council staff are developing an introductory presentation on the role of social science and economics in the fisheries management process. The presentation is intended for use during MREP workshops, Lines of Communication, and other outreach opportunities. The SEP is asked to review and provide feedback on the presentation outline, considering what core topics should be included, how complex concepts can be communicated in a clear and practical way.

10.3. Presentation

Christina Curtis and John Hadley, SAFMC staff

10.4. ACTIONS

Discuss and make recommendations as appropriate.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Given the intended lay audience and limited presentation time, does the SEP suggest any additional topics or concepts that should be included in the presentation?
- 2) Is the material appropriate and accessible for fishermen? Does it properly convey why understanding social and economic analyses is important for fishermen? Does the SEP have any pointers on how to present complex topics?
- 3) Does it properly convey the value of social and economic information to the process and motivate participation in data collection efforts?
- 4) Are there any management examples or visuals that could strengthen this presentation?

11. Other Business

12. Report and Recommendations Review

13. Next SEP Meeting