

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PANEL OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE



SEP Meeting Overview

February 17, 2026

Held via Webinar

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:

- Recreational Angler Attitudes and Preferences in the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Fishery

CONTENTS

1.	Introduction.....	2
2.	Recreational Angler Attitudes and Preferences in the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Fishery	2
3.	Other Business	6
4.	Next SEP Meeting.....	6

DOCUMENTS

Attachment 1: Social and Economic Panel Agenda Overview

Attachment 2a. Presentation on Recreational Angler Attitudes and Preferences in the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Fishery

Attachment 2b: Draft report on Recreational Angler Attitudes and Preferences in the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Fishery

1. Introduction

1.1. Documents

- **Attachment 1.** Social and Economic Panel Agenda Overview

1.2. ACTIONS

- Introductions
- Review and approve the agenda
- Opportunity for public comment
There were no public comments.

2. Recreational Angler Attitudes and Preferences in the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Fishery

2.1. Document

- **Attachment 2a.** Presentation on Recreational Angler Attitudes and Preferences in the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Fishery

- **Attachment 2b:** Draft report on Recreational Angler Attitudes and Preferences in the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Fishery

2.2. Overview

As part of the ongoing South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE), research has recently been conducted assessing angler preferences to better understand attitudes and fishing behavior in the recreational fishery. This research is intended to be used to enhance the Snapper Grouper MSE and aid the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council in future decision making.

2.3. Presentation and Discussion

Kai Lorenzen, University of Florida

2.4. ACTIONS

Discuss and make recommendations as appropriate. Discussion questions were offered to help facilitate responses from the SEP.

SEP RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Does the SEP have comments on the survey instrument or methods?

- SEP members felt that the study was well constructed, and the methods of analysis were generally sound. The SEP welcomed work such as this being conducted in the region and noted that the study will be helpful when the Council considers management options for the Snapper Grouper fishery and for gaining information on a fishing population for which data and knowledge on preferences are often sparse.
- There was some concern amongst SEP members over reliance on recruiting of survey participants using reef fish permits for anglers in Florida, while third party panel data were relied upon for other states. To address this, it would be helpful to know if responses from Florida anglers differed from anglers in other states and the general number of survey respondents by state. This additional information would help build further confidence in the results and potentially lead to improved state-specific management measures.
- The panel description (described in Section 4 - "Survey Distribution") could benefit from additional detail describing the panel method and what it entails. Expanding on how these individuals are recruited and what they take part in, if anything else, would be helpful to understand. Also, it would be great to expand on the statement about the likelihood of participating in panel surveys by gender. Overall, elaborating on the panel method and recruitment process would further clarify the data's representativeness and help determine the appropriate capacity for its use.

- Additionally, SEP members would have liked to have seen a version of the survey instrument in the report or presentation, but felt that the overall methodology was clearly described in the report.

2. Are the key uncertainties adequately covered?

- The authors of the report duly noted that often the management process will receive more input from those likely to be more avid fishers, or more outspoken participants in the fishery. It is critical to understand how those sampled here may actually represent the at-large participants, which would be helpful to crafting management policies in the future.
- In the spatial management portion of the survey, respondents were told that 50% of waters would remain open year-round while the other 50% would rotate through 9-month closures. Based on the presentation and Q&A session, it appears that the authors could further expand on the hypothetical closures in the spatial management. SEP members noted that there is strong heterogeneity of each state's coastline in the South Atlantic and were curious if the high favorability (~ 70%) for spatial management and education could be driven by the notion that respondents assume their personal fishing spots would be open and easily accessible in this situation. The size of the coastlines and thus potential fishing areas that would remain open vary considerably. Specifically, research could analyze whether state residency has any specific effect on support for this spatial management.
- As noted previously, SEP members raised some questions on the validity of the representativeness for panel data. The report notes that the panel skewed more female (40%) than anglers in the Snapper Grouper fishery as a whole (noted as likely closer to 20%). However, the author addressed these questions and noted that the representation of the various classes (harvest-oriented, conservation-oriented) used was not influenced by gender. Nevertheless, if a group is over-represented in a sample it can bias the results. If there are differences between how different genders rated scenarios, then the data may be biased towards that groups' responses. To address this, the researchers could examine survey results by gender.

3. Does the SEP have any additional comments on the research presented?

- The authors noted that they ended the survey with an open-ended response question. SEP members were curious to know what that question was. Why did they include it? Has that question been analyzed or will it be analyzed for the final report?
- The high level agreement regarding spatial management and closing of areas is interesting and contrary to the feedback that has previously been provided to the Council and NMFS when similar measures were considered, such as in Amendment 59. Although the individuals who commented were likely avid fishers and those most involved in fishing, it is intriguing that the response to closing areas for extended periods was positive. It might be beneficial for the authors to examine when this information was gathered compared to when information on Amendment 59 became publicly available. Mentioning this

comparison in the report and noting that this approach was considered in management could be helpful.

- In the discrete choice experiments, particularly the random parameters logit (RPL) model, the cost attribute (permit fee) is treated as variable rather than fixed. It would be helpful for the authors to elaborate on the policy implications of this specification. For instance, does it suggest that different anglers should be charged different permit fees (i.e., price discrimination)?
- In the RPL model for gag grouper, SEP members wondered whether the statistical significance of some parameters might change if the authors account for attribute non-attendance.
- The statement "the results indicate the red snapper mixed logit model performed generally well. This is assessed by the statistical significance of most of the parameters and the negative permit" is not clear. Is this model compared to the gag grouper RPL model or the red snapper latent class model? It will also be useful if the authors provide Akaike Information Criterion/ Bayesian Information Criterion for model comparison where appropriate.
- The title of the report/presentation is "Snapper-Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation: Recreational Angler Attitudes and Preferences". The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) manages these species as the "Snapper Grouper" complex, however, the body of the report and the survey questions themselves almost exclusively use the term "reef fish" which is a Gulf-centric term. The report notes that 32.6% of respondents are primarily shore-based. Despite the report mentioning targeting species such as black sea bass or mangrove snapper from shore, the use of "reef-fish" in the report and survey (especially in the South Atlantic Region) may be confusing. Snapper grouper and reef-fish can be used interchangeably by anglers, however, "reef-fishing" is a common term for a specific type of fishing modality (bottom fishing, from a vessel, over a reef). Therefore, by using the term "reef-fish", there is the possibility of survey respondents or the audience reading the report thinking of "reef-fishing" (species caught from ocean reef-structures). Snapper grouper would be more consistent with SAFMC regulations, and could broaden the scope of species covered by the survey.
- SEP members recommended potentially excluding respondents that reported harvesting reef fish from shore in the Red Snapper analyses. There was concern that fishers that have more investment in the Red Snapper fishery have different preferences than shore anglers. It would also be interesting to know if the willingness to pay estimates are underestimated by including shore anglers. Authors could consider splitting the results with and without inclusion of shore anglers.
- SEP members suggested listing management options by preferences for managers. It would be helpful to include that ranking in the final report as well.

- The SEP suggested looking at regional responses to the choice experiment on targeting closures. The reason for this was a concern that respondents near high pressure areas or high catch areas may respond differently than respondents relatively further from high catch areas. The research team suggested they would look at this at the state level but it would be interesting to examine at a finer spatial scale.
- The SEP did not discuss the three latent classes in the Gag Grouper results, however, based on the paper and presentation, more discussion with the researchers or more description in the report would better confirm that these groups exist as described.

3. Other Business

There was no other business.

4. Next SEP Meeting

The next SEP meeting will be held April 13-14, 2026 in Charleston, SC.