

Joint Blueline Tilefish Subcommittee Summary Report

May 1, 2026

Via Webinar

Attendees:

MAFMC: Michelle Duval, Mike Luisi, Jim Gilmore, Sara Gaichas (SSC)

SAFMC: Dewey Hemilright, Amy Dukes, Kerry Marhefka, Tom Roller

SAFMC Staff: Myra Brouwer, Chip Collier, Judd Curtis, Mike Schmidtke

MAFMC staff: Hannah Hart, Brandon Muffley, Jose Montanez, Kiley Dancy

Other Attendees: Jay Hermsen (GARFO), Doug Potts (GARFO), Matt Rigdon (GARFO), Paul Nitschke (NEFSC), Alan Bianchi (NC DEQ)

Background

The Mid-Atlantic (MAFMC) and South Atlantic (SAFMC) Fishery Management Councils agreed to establish a joint subcommittee (subcommittee) to address the jurisdictional allocation of the blueline tilefish Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) north of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.

The subcommittee is tasked with developing a jurisdictional allocation framework and recommendation. The primary goals and objectives are to:

- Review past and current ABC allocation decisions and discuss information available that could be used to inform future decisions
- Recommend a jurisdictional allocation of the ABC for the stock north of Cape Hatteras, NC
- Identify a management process for setting the blueline tilefish jurisdictional allocation and any future potential modifications

The subcommittee includes 3 Council members and 1 SSC member from each Council:

MAFMC – Mike Luisi, Michelle Duval, Jim Gilmore, Sarah Gaichas (SSC)

SAFMC – Dewey Hemilright, Tom Roller, Amy Dukes, Kerry Marhefka (alternate), Jim Gartland (SSC)

Meeting Objectives

The purpose of the initial meeting was to: 1) review the allocation approach that was used to establish the current apportionment of the ABC, including fishery-independent survey information and past blueline tilefish ABC allocation decisions, 2) examine approaches

that have been used to address jurisdictional allocation for other stocks, and 3) identify additional information to consider for accomplishing the subcommittee's charge.

Previous and Current ABC Apportionment

The subcommittee received an overview on how the ABC for the portion of the blueline tilefish stock north of Cape Hatteras has been set and apportioned between the MAFMC and SAFMC jurisdictions. Because the stock is assessed as a continuous unit but is managed across two council jurisdictions, a joint subgroup of the two SSCs has twice been convened to develop the ABC and recommend a proportional split between the two regions. See the presentation [HERE](#).

- 2018 process (Post SEDAR 50) – was informed by the 2017 Tilefish Pilot Survey¹ (funded by the MAFMC and intended to sample blueline and golden tilefish). This resulted in an allocation of 56% to the MAFMC and 44% to the SAFMC (for the area between Cape Hatteras and the NC/VA border, or “sliver”)
- 2025 process (Post SEDAR 92) – used the combined 2023-2024 South Atlantic Deepwater Longline (SADL) survey data from Cape Hatteras, NC through the expanded region north. This resulted in the current allocation of 70% to the MAFMC and 30% to the SAFMC (“sliver”).

Key Takeaways:

- Most of the sampling stations in the 2017 pilot survey were in depths that are not ideal for blueline tilefish. The survey was intended to sample both blueline and golden tilefish habitat. The majority of blueline tilefish are between 40 and 60 fathoms (240-360 ft, 73-110 m).
- Survey strata could be refined with information on bottom temperatures to better reflect potential blueline habitat, but the availability of bottom temperature data throughout the survey range is incomplete. The SSC sub-groups noted that they would benefit from more data to inform the apportionment. Using catch alone would not have been a very defensible way to apportion.
- SADL survey samples deeper depths than the 2017 pilot survey and most of the blueline tilefish catch occurs in the shallow strata. It was noted that SADL is an improvement over the original pilot that shifted to later be a golden tilefish specific survey.
- One of the key difference between the two surveys is that the number of stations SADL samples is fixed with a total of 6 stations (3 in each depth strata) per half latitudinal area; whereas the number of stations per strata in the 2017 pilot survey did not consist of a fixed number and instead the total number of stations per strata

¹ 2017 Tilefish Pilot Survey Final Report: https://www.mafmc.org/s/FRISK_TILEFISH_MAFMC_finalreport_jan2018.pdf

were proportional to the area of a given strata. However, for the smaller strata there was a minimum rule of at least 3 stations per strata.

- Because there was a difference in how stratification was applied in the two surveys, the SSC sub-groups did not consider combining them.
- Based on the survey information as well as some subcommittee member comments related to commercial catch, the area between Cape Hatteras and the NC/VA border (SAFMC “sliver”) yields relatively large catches of blueline tilefish and the jurisdictional allocation may not reflect this.
- The subcommittee questioned:
 - If there are weighting schemes that could be considered.
 - The potential of including bottom temperature data available in this type of approach.
 - If a more coastwide approach would be feasible in the future?
- The subcommittee requested for the next meeting the 2025 SADL data be available as well as bottom temperature information, and questioned if the two sets of information could be combined to help inform future allocation decisions.
- **Subcommittee members agreed that exploring a rubric design with a weighting method to utilize more information may be useful.**
 - It was noted that MRIP data for this species should be used with caution (or not at all) due to high percent standard errors (PSE).
 - The subcommittee also requested staff look into the available observer data to see if such information could be incorporated in a rubric design approach.

Other Examples of Allocation Approaches

Staff from both Councils provided an overview of how jurisdictional or sector allocations have been established for other stocks and the governance approaches that are used where there is not discrete allocation of the ABC. The presentation can be accessed [HERE](#).

Key Takeaways:

- Discrete allocation of an ABC has not been done based on surveys alone. However, ABC specification has been informed by survey trends (e.g., red snapper in the SA)
- Blueline tilefish is a unique challenge given the lack of information north of Cape Hatteras.
- US/Canada cod, haddock, and yellowtail flounder allocation are based 90% on survey data available and 10% historical landings between the two countries. The survey information includes three separate surveys as opposed to just one and

therefore the design for how the survey information is incorporated is complicated and may not be an appropriate approach for the blue-line tilefish stock.

- An allocation decision needs to consider many factors. The SAFMC has an allocation tool to assist the Council in developing rationale for whether current sector allocations are appropriate and if data (landings, stock assessment, economic, or social) support allocating more of the quota to one sector than another. The subcommittee may benefit from a similar deliberative approach that also considers economic and social factors.

Discussion of Potential Additional Sources of Information

- 2025 SADL survey data would be very informative for the subcommittee and well as economic information and community-level indicators in both regions. Fishery Performance Reports would also be helpful. All of this information would be complementary.
- Look at locations of processing infrastructure and major landing ports.
- Explore uncertainty (e.g., CVs) in survey data - are there additional examples of when a CV is above a certain threshold that prompts a change in the survey. One subcommittee member noted that the Mid-Atlantic currently has a Request For Proposals out to evaluate how confidence intervals are being used with the Recreational Demand Model - thinking about uncertainty and how to temper that through these types of mechanisms. Such conversations and work could serve as a valuable exercise for blue-line tilefish.
- Consider accountability measures and management measures currently in place when looking at fishery-dependent data and the multiple caveats that type of information entails, particularly for the commercial fishery.
- Consider that in some regions and even at times across regions blue-line tilefish are being caught from the same area but are landed and sold in different ports.
- Consider the mismatch in recreational regulations in adjacent areas.
- Explore price per pound data over time for commercial fisheries.
- On the recreational side, MRIP information is what is currently available. Explore what proportion of trips have blue-line as a 1st or 2nd target species. In the Mid-Atlantic there is some private recreational reporting information; however, it may be challenging to extract information on blue-line tilefish as anglers are often targeting HMS and may stop to fish for tilefish.
- Present recreational (private recreational and for-hire) information by area – “sliver” vs. Mid-Atlantic region.

Public Comment

Opportunities for public comment were offered at the beginning and end of the meeting but no comments were received.

Next Steps

Staff noted that it would be helpful to designate co-chairs for the subcommittee, with one co-chair from each council. Given there were no volunteers during the meeting, staff indicated they would work with the Executive Directors of both councils to identify co-chairs prior to the next meeting.

The subcommittee will tentatively reconvene in July 2026 and review additional sources of information with the goal of recommending a potential approach to allocate a portion of the ABC north of Cape Hatteras between the two Council jurisdictions.