



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

**Introductory presentation for Snapper Grouper  
Amendment 61 (Evaluation of the Fishery  
Management Unit)**

**March 2026**





# Overview

- Review information requested by the Committee at the December 2025 meeting.
  - Information on ecosystem component (EC) species.
    - What are EC species and what is the path to designate EC species?
    - Actions taken by other Councils.
  - Past SAFMC actions to remove Snapper Grouper (SG) species from federal management or designate as EC species.
- Jump to the decision document.



# Background

- At the December 2025 meeting, the Committee requested:
  - A presentation on how the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) has designated EC species and implemented associated measures.
    - Also consider how other councils have designated EC species in their FMPs and associated measures.
  - Further examine past SAFMC actions regarding EC species and removal of species from the FMU in the SG FMP.
  - Provide additional information on the path for designating EC species.
  - Request information from the SEFSC on what a simplified approach to assessing species considered in AM 61 would entail, including the timeline and staff capacity to carry out these assessments.

# What are EC species?

- EC species are defined as “stocks that a Council or the Secretary has determined **do not require conservation and management, but desire to list in an FMP in order to achieve ecosystem management objectives.**”
- Under the National Standard (NS) General guidelines, “Councils may choose to identify stocks within their FMPs as ecosystem component (EC) species...if a Council determines that the **stocks do not require conservation and management** based on the considerations and factors in paragraph (c)(1) of this section. EC species may be identified at the species or stock level, and may be grouped into complexes...**management measures can be adopted in order to, for example, collect data on the EC species, minimize bycatch or bycatch mortality of EC species, protect the associated role of EC species in the ecosystem, and/or to address other ecosystem issues.**”



# Path for designating EC species

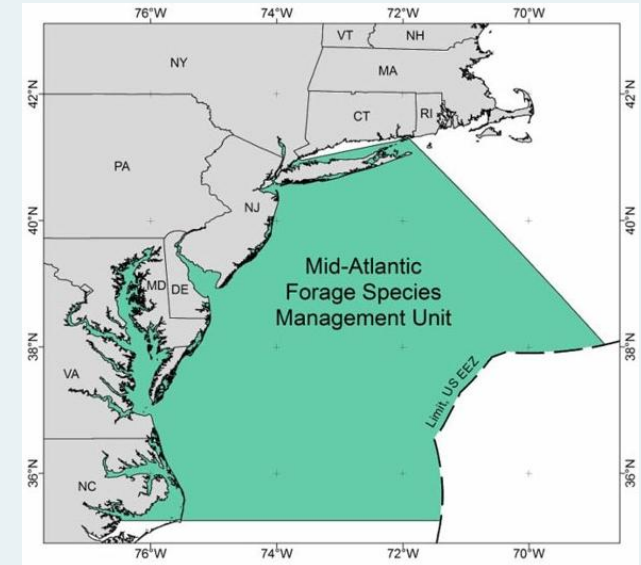
- The Council would work through the ten factors listed in the NS General Guidelines to determine the need for conservation and management for each species that is being considered in AM 61.
- Species that do not fit the need for federal conservation and management would be candidates for EC species designation.
- The Council already began this process at the June 2025 meeting, when the Committee began to develop rationale for considering changes to the number of species managed under the Snapper Grouper FMP.
- Upon completion of AM 61, species designated by the Council would then become EC species once the final rule for the amendment becomes effective.



# Actions of other Councils regarding EC species: MAFMC



- The MAFMC implemented an Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment that designated 16 species or species groups as EC species (2017). The amendment established:
- **Aggregate possession limit**: A 1,700-pound possession limit for all EC species combined.
- **Permit requirement**: Commercial vessels and operators that catch and/or possess EC species must be issued a commercial vessel and operator permit from NMFS.
- **Transit provisions**: Commercial vessels may transit the Mid-Atlantic Forage Species Management Unit with an amount of EC species onboard that exceeds the possession limit and may land in a port outside of the management unit provided that the fish were harvested outside of the management unit and that all gear is stowed and not available for immediate use while transiting.
- **Record keeping and reporting**: Vessel operators and seafood dealers must report the catch and sale of EC species on vessel trip and dealer reports.



PC: MAFMC

# Actions of other Councils regarding EC species: MAFMC (Continued)



## *Purpose statements*

- To advance an ecosystem approach to fisheries management in the Mid-Atlantic through the consideration of management alternatives that would afford protection to currently unmanaged forage species by regulating landings and/or possession of those species.
- Consider management alternatives to address data collection and reporting of landings of currently unmanaged forage species.
- Consider measures to establish a process for new fisheries for currently unmanaged forage species to develop or existing fisheries to expand.



PC: MAFMC

## *Need statement*

- To prohibit the development of new and expansion of existing directed commercial fisheries on unmanaged forage species in Mid-Atlantic Federal waters until the Council has had an adequate opportunity to assess the scientific information relating to any new or expanded directed fisheries and consider potential impacts to existing fisheries, fishing communities, and the marine ecosystem.

# Actions of other Councils regarding EC species: MAFMC (Continued)



## *Milestones and timeline for amendment development:*

- Forage Fish Workshop: April 2013
- Forage Fish Whitepaper: November 2014
- Initiation: December 2014.
- Scoping: Scoping meetings held across several states (from Rhode Island to North Carolina) in September and October 2015.
- Public Hearings: Public hearings held in May and June 2016.
- Final Action: The Council approved the amendment in August 2016.
- Implementation: NMFS partially approved and implemented the amendment with a final rule effective on September 27, 2017.
  - Disapproved the inclusion of bullet and frigate mackerel but later addressed by the SAFMC through Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 12.



PC: MAFMC

# Actions of other Councils regarding EC species: PFMC and NPFMC



The Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) developed Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1 (2016).

- Included **retention limit** (other species need to be onboard), **trip limit**, **annual limit per vessel**, and **at-sea processing limitation**.
  - Also trawl gear-specific trip and annual vessel limits.



The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) classified squids as EC species in their groundfish FMPs (2018).

- Included **record keeping and reporting requirements** and **trip retention limit** (EC species cannot be more than 20% of total landings).



# Information on SAFMC actions for EC species and species removal in the SG FMP



- The SAFMC has altered the composition of the Snapper Grouper FMU several times by removing species from the FMP or designating species as ECs.
  - **Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment (Amendment 25)**
  - **Amendment 27**
  - **Amendment 35**



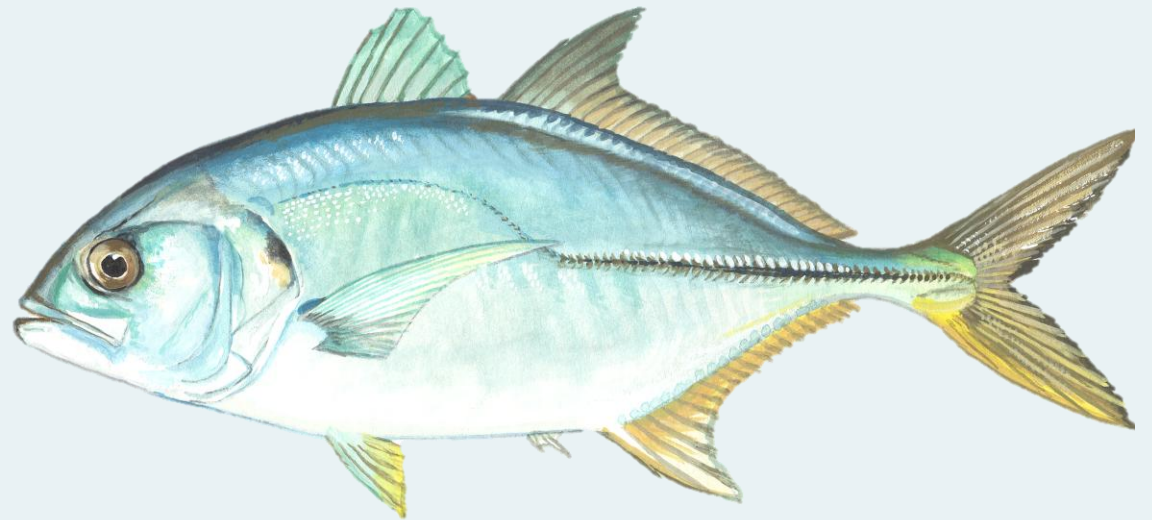
# Comprehensive Annual Catch Limit Amendment (Amendment 25)(2012)



- **Council Action:** Removed 13 species from the FMP.
- **Decision Criteria:**
  - Species with 95% or greater landings from state waters,
  - Species covered under the Florida Marine Life Species Rule, and
  - Species with no landings.
- **Council Action:** Designated six EC species.
  - The Council had considered removing these species from the FMP but changed course after receiving public comments in support of designating some species as ECs.
- **Decision Criteria:** When considering which species would qualify as EC species, the Council considered various landings categories (less than or equal to 1,000, 2,500, 5,000, or 10,000 lbs) and species that met NS 1 criteria for EC species at the time.

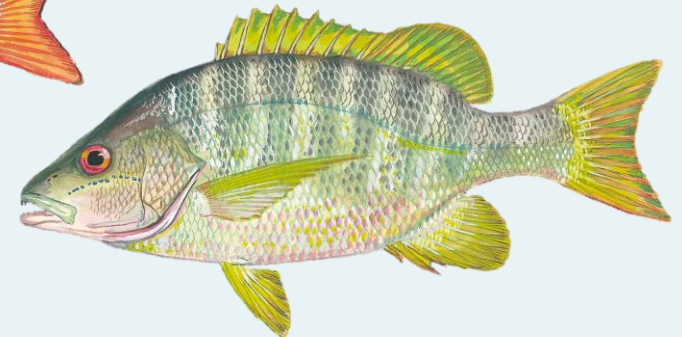
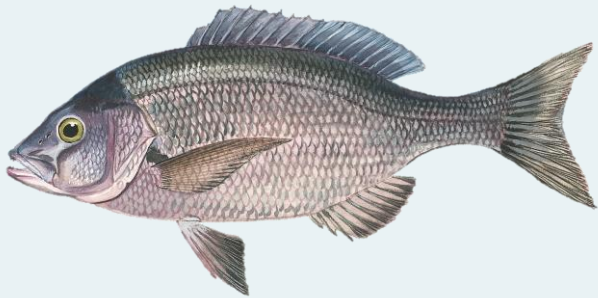
# Amendment 27 (2014)

- **Council Action:** Removed blue runner from the Snapper Grouper FMP.
- **Decision Criteria:** The Council noted that the majority of landings of blue runner (99%) were in waters off Florida and adequate management was already in place in Florida state waters.



# Amendment 35 (2016)

- **Council Action:** Removed black snapper, dog snapper, mahogany snapper, and schoolmaster (an EC species) from the Snapper Grouper FMP.
- **Decision Criteria:** Harvest of the four species was very low from federal waters and in state waters other than Florida. Also noted that species could be or already were adequately managed by the state of Florida.
  - The stated objective was to create a consistent regulatory environment for the subject species and ensure that only species requiring federal management are included in the Snapper Grouper FMP.





# Questions?

- Coming up in the discussion:
  - Summary of the December 2025 meeting
  - Draft purpose and need
  - Species and measures considered in the amendment
  
- But first: Any questions before jumping to the decision document?