



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

# Modifications to South Atlantic For-hire Reporting

Discussion Document

Spring 2025 Advisory Panel Meetings

## Background

The Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) Program was launched in 2021 with the implementation of the Comprehensive For-Hire Electronic Reporting Amendment ([SAFMC 2020](#)). The amendment put in place or modified reporting requirements for federally permitted charter vessels and headboats in the snapper grouper (SG), dolphin wahoo (DW), and coastal migratory pelagics (mackerels; CMP) fisheries. Reporting requirements through SEFHIER were effective for charter/for-hire vessels in January 2021.

Additional information on the intended outcomes of the Comprehensive For-Hire Electronic Reporting Amendment and recommendations of the related technical sub-committee were provided to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) at its [September 2024 meeting](#).

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) has continued to work on an [amendment](#) to re-implement for-hire electronic reporting after the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit set aside the Gulf's SEFHIER final rule in February 2023. This amendment includes actions that would establish the frequency and mechanism for data reporting from charter vessels, modify the existing reporting requirements for headboats,

establish trip notification and effort reporting requirements, and establish reporting of economic data. The Gulf Council’s amendment is tentatively scheduled to be approved for public hearings in April 2025 and approved for secretarial review in June 2025.

In January 2025, the Council submitted comments on NMFS Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) proposed rule to modify and/or expand reporting requirements. A summary presentation of the HMS proposed rule was provided to the Council’s at its [December 2024 meeting](#).

Also in January 2025, the *Ad Hoc* For-Hire Reporting Advisory Panel (AP) held its first meeting (via webinar) and [provided feedback](#) on potential modifications to current reporting requirements for federally permitted charter/headboat vessels participating in the SG, DW, and CMP fisheries. The Law Enforcement AP met in February 2025 to [provide feedback](#) on for-hire reporting requirements as well.

## Tentative Amendment Timing

Winter 2025	Obtain feedback from For-Hire Reporting and Law Enforcement APs
March 2025	Review suite of actions and alternatives and consider approving for public scoping
<b>Spring 2025</b>	<b>Obtain feedback from public scoping as well as the SG, DW, and CMP APs</b>
June 2025	Update amendment
September 2025	Update amendment
December 2025	Approve for public hearings
Winter 2026	Conduct public hearings
March 2026	Review public hearing comments and approve all actions
June 2026	Consider approval for formal review
2027/2028	Regulation changes become effective

## Draft Purpose and Need Statements

**Purpose:** The *purpose* of this amendment is to make modifications to the South Atlantic Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting Program and the Southeast Region Headboat Survey to **improve the accuracy, precision, and timeliness of landings, discards, fishing effort, and economic data** for South Atlantic permitted charter/headboat vessels participating in the snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, and dolphin wahoo fisheries.

**Need:** The need for this amendment is to **improve compliance, adjust reporting requirements, and allow for data validation** so the information collected can be used in managing the fisheries for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, and dolphin wahoo.

# Potential Draft Actions and Alternatives

## 1. Modify Reporting Frequency of Fishing Trips for For-Hire Vessels

***Purpose of Action:** Increase reporting frequency to improve monitoring and enforcement and increase the quality of reported data. This action would apply to vessels with a valid charter/headboat permit, regardless of whether they participate in the Southeast Region Headboat Survey, as the reporting frequency is currently the same for both headboats and charter vessels.*

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** The owner or operator of a charter vessel for which a charter vessel/headboat permit for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo has been issued, must record all fish harvested and discarded, regardless of where the fish are caught (state or federal waters), **for each trip, and submit an electronic fishing report weekly** (on Tuesday following each previous reporting week of Monday through Sunday) via NMFS-approved software. If the owner or operator has been issued a Federal permit that requires more restrictive reporting requirements, those more restrictive regulations apply.

**Alternative 2.** Require that the owner or operator of a charter vessel or headboat with a valid charter vessel/headboat permit for snapper grouper species, coastal migratory pelagics, dolphin, or wahoo submit trip, catch, and effort information **for each trip** via NMFS approved electronic software.

**Sub-alternative 2a.** An electronic logbook form must be submitted within 30 minutes of arriving at the dock, regardless of whether fish are harvested on a trip.

**Sub-alternative 2b.** An electronic logbook form must be submitted within 1 hour of arriving at the dock, regardless of whether fish are harvested on a trip.

**Sub-alternative 2c.** If fish are harvested during the trip, electronic reporting is required prior to arrival at the landing location. If no fish are retained on a for-hire fishing trip, an electronic logbook form must be submitted within 30 minutes of arriving at the landing location.

**Sub-alternative 2d.** If fish are harvested during the trip, electronic reporting is required prior to arrival at the landing location. If no fish are retained on a for-hire fishing trip, an electronic logbook form must be submitted within 1 hour of arriving at the landing location.

**Alternative 3.** Require that the owner or operator of a charter vessel or headboat with a valid charter vessel/headboat permit for snapper grouper species, coastal migratory pelagics, dolphin, or wahoo submit trip, catch, and effort information **for each trip daily** via NMFS approved electronic software.

**Sub-alternative 3a.** Electronic reporting is not required prior to arrival at the landing location.

**Sub-alternative 3b.** If fish are harvested during the trip, electronic reporting is required prior to arrival at the landing location.

**Discussion:**

The South Atlantic Council is looking to adopt similar measures being considered by the Gulf Council (i.e., trip level or daily reporting as well as a reporting requirement before offloading fish). Other than a no action alternative, the Gulf Council is considering two other alternatives. One that would require **submission of trip reports within 30 minutes** of arriving at the dock if no fish are harvested, or prior to offload if fish are harvested. The other would require **reporting for each trip daily** (i.e., within 24 hours of the end of the trip).

A summary comparison of existing and developing reporting requirements that may affect South Atlantic permitted for-hire vessels is in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Summary of existing and developing for-hire **reporting frequency** and timing requirements for the South Atlantic (SA), Southeast (SE) Headboat Survey, Gulf of Mexico (GOM), Greater Atlantic Region (GARFO) Vessel Trip Report (VTR), and Highly Migratory Species (HMS).

	SA SEFHIER and SE Headboat Survey	GOM SEFHIER	GARFO VTR	HMS
<b>Existing</b>	Weekly	N/A	Generally 48 hours after entering port. For recreational tilefish: 24 hours after end of trip.	Electronic report, telephone, or other means like catch cards.
<b>Proposed</b>	?	Prior to offload of catch, within 30 minutes of completion of the trip, or each trip daily.	No proposed changes.	Electronic report 24 hours after end of trip.

- Source: Information and concept based on HMS presentation to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council December 2, 2024. [https://safmc.net/documents/fc1\\_a3\\_hms\\_e-reporting-proposed-rule-presentation\\_safmc\\_202412-pdf/](https://safmc.net/documents/fc1_a3_hms_e-reporting-proposed-rule-presentation_safmc_202412-pdf/)

**AP Recommendations:**

## 2. Require Trip Notification for For-Hire Vessels

**Purpose of Action:** *This action would require federally permitted charter/headboat vessels to provide a notification to NMFS declaring the intent to initiate a for-hire or fishing trip, return from a for-hire or fishing trip, or both. This action would improve estimates of effort by providing a validation process that is not in place with the current MRIP survey (for charter vessels) or Southeast Regional Headboat Survey. This action would also alert law enforcement officers in advance of a trip thus improving their ability to address non-reporting or late reporting.*

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** There are currently no trip notification requirements for federally permitted charter/headboat vessels participating in the snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo fisheries.

**Alternative 2.** Require that the owner or operator of a charter vessel or headboat issued a valid charter vessel/headboat federal permit for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo submit a trip declaration for trips that will be engaging in any type of for-hire fishing and:

**Sub-alternative 2a.** Bait fishing.

**Sub-alternative 2b.** Private recreational fishing.

**Sub-alternative 2c.** Commercial fishing (applicable for properly permitted vessels).

**Sub-alternative 2d.** Non-fishing activity involving paying passengers (e.g., sunset cruises, dolphin watching, ecotours; when fish will not be targeted).

**Sub-alternative 2e.** Anytime the vessel leaves the dock.

COUNCIL GUIDANCE, MARCH 2025: it is important there is clarification to explain why there are various types of activities under this action. Consider focusing the language on whether passengers are onboard. Look to consolidate sub-alternatives like the Gulf's draft amendment.

### Discussion:

- This action would implement a trip notification requirement that may include the initiation of a trip, return from a trip, or both.
- The sub-alternatives allow flexibility for **which activity in addition to for-hire fishing** would require a trip notification. The Council could select more than one sub-alternative.
- The Gulf Council is considering requiring a declaration for trips that will be engaged in any type of fishing (e.g., charter, bait fishing, private trips, commercial trips) or for-hire activity (non-fishing activities involving paying passengers) or only for trips that will be engaging in any type of fishing activity. The trip notification measures may also vary between charter vessels and headboat vessels in the Gulf Council's amendment.

### AP Recommendations:

### 3. Establish Approved Landing Locations for For-Hire Vessels

**Purpose of Action:** *Establishing approved landing locations for offload support enforcement and monitoring for compliance with reporting. It would also improve sampling intercepts and facilitate conducting a validation survey (as proposed under Action 4).*

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** There is no requirement for federally permitted charter or headboat vessels participating in the snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo fisheries to offload clients or harvested catch at pre-approved landing locations.

**Alternative 2.** Require that a charter vessel or headboat issued a valid charter vessel/headboat federal permit for snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo only land at pre-approved locations.

#### Discussion

- A landing location is the street address location where fish and passengers are expected to be offloaded.
- Can be public locations, private residences, or dock slip in a large marina.
- Landing locations supply law enforcement with an exact location where a for-hire trip will offload fish and passengers.
- Landing locations provide information to validate the information collected through the program.
- The Gulf Council is considering a similar action.

#### AP Recommendations:

## 4. Require Participation in a Validation and Estimation Survey

**Purpose of Action:** *Independent validation of the electronic vessel reports would improve the usefulness of the catch information for estimation. A validation survey, in addition to requiring that catch be reported prior to offloading as proposed under Action 2, would meet the SEFSC's requirements for data obtained through SEFHIER to be used in management decisions.*

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** There is no mandatory participation in a validation and estimation survey for federally permitted charter/headboat vessels participating in the snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo fisheries.

**Alternative 2.** Mandate participation in a validation and estimation survey for federally permitted charter/headboat vessels participating in the snapper grouper, coastal migratory pelagics, or dolphin wahoo fisheries.

### Discussion:

- Currently there is no measure in place that would mandate participation in a validation and estimation survey (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**). While such a survey could take place, for-hire captains can refuse to participate in the survey.
- **Alternative 2** would make participation in a validation and estimation survey *mandatory* for federally permitted charter/headboat vessel owners or operators if selected to participate in the survey.

### AP Recommendations:

## 5. Revise Reporting of Economic Data for Charter Vessels

**Purpose of Action:** *Reporting of economic information on the charter fee, fuel usage, and fuel price for each for-hire fishing trip is already required for each for-hire fishing trip taken by South Atlantic permitted charter vessels. This action may implement a stratified random sampling design that would require reporting of economic information from some, but not all South Atlantic permitted charter vessels. Charter vessels that would need to report economic information would change annually. Note that this action does not apply to vessels that participate in the NMFS Southeast Regional Headboat Survey.*

**Alternative 1 (No Action).** Federally permitted charter vessels with a valid charter vessel permit for snapper grouper species, coastal migratory pelagics, dolphin, or wahoo are required to economic information for each for-hire fishing trip.

**Alternative 2.** Require federally permitted charter vessels with a valid charter vessel permit for snapper grouper species, coastal migratory pelagics, dolphin, or wahoo to submit economic information for each for-hire fishing trip **only if selected**. Annually, a stratified random sampling design of permitted vessels will be used for selecting vessels that are required to report economic data. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center will determine the strata (based on previous years' data and minimum sample sizes by strata) sufficient for providing scientific and management advice.

### Discussion

- Currently all South Atlantic permitted charter vessels must provide charter fee, fuel usage, and fuel price for each for-hire fishing trip (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**). This is a census-based approach to data collection.
- **Alternative 2** would maintain the reporting requirement of economic information for charter vessels, but not all permitted vessels would be required to submit economic information each year. A stratified random sampling design of permitted vessels would be used for selecting vessels that are required to report economic data, and the vessels reporting would change annually.
  - A similar alternative is being considered by the Gulf Council.

### AP Recommendations:



## 6. Modify Requirement for “Did Not Fish” Reports

The [letter](#) from NMFS mentions the need for weekly submission of DNF reports. A DNF requirement is already in place where vessels must submit DNF reports by Tuesday following a fishing week and up to 30 days in advance.

A summary of existing and developing requirements for no fishing reports under the various programs is in Table 2. Currently, the Council has not specified the potential to remove or change the frequency of DNF report requirements but could do so in this amendment.

**Table 2.** Summary of existing and developing did not fish reports requirements for the South Atlantic (SA), Southeast (SE) Headboat Survey, Gulf of Mexico (GOM), Greater Atlantic Region (GAR) Vessel Trip Report (VTR), and Highly Migratory Species (HMS).

Topic	SA SEFHIER and SE Headboat Survey	GOM SEFHIER	GAR VTR	HMS
<b>Existing</b>	Weekly Limit to no more than 30 days in advance	N/A	Not required	Not required
<b>Proposed</b>	?	Monthly	Not required	Monthly. No limit to how far in advance.

Source: Information and concept based on HMS presentation to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council December 2, 2024. [https://safmc.net/documents/fc1\\_a3\\_hms\\_e-reporting-proposed-rule-presentation\\_safmc\\_202412-pdf/](https://safmc.net/documents/fc1_a3_hms_e-reporting-proposed-rule-presentation_safmc_202412-pdf/)

### AP Recommendations: