SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

SSC Meeting Overview

April 15-17, 2025

Town & Country Inn

2008 Savannah Highway

Charleston, SC

VERSION
FINAL
3/31/25

CONTENTS

TABLES AND FIGURES

DOCUMENTS

*Indicates materials not available for briefing book at time of posting. These materials will be added to the recent materials section when available.

SAFMC PUBLIC COMMENT PROCESS

Written comment:

Written comment on SSC agenda topics is provided to the Committee through an online form, similar to all other Council briefing materials. Written comment can be submitted at this link. For this meeting, the deadline for submission of written comment is 10:00 a.m., April 17, 2025.

Verbal comment:

Two opportunities for comment on agenda items will be provided at set times during SSC meetings. The first will be at the beginning of the meeting, and the second near the conclusion. Those wishing to comment should indicate such in the manner requested by the Chair, who will then recognize individuals to provide comment.

An opportunity for comment on specific agenda items will also be provided as each item comes up for discussion. Comments will be taken after all the initial presentations are given and questions from the SSC are answered, but before the SSC starts making recommendations to address the action items. As before, those wishing to comment should indicate such in the manner requested by the Chair, who will then recognize individuals to provide comment. All comments are part of the record of the meeting.

Meeting Format:

This meeting will be held in-person at the Town and Country Inn, Charleston, SC. Online registration for the meeting can be found at the Council's website: https://safmc.net/scientific-and-statistical-committee-meeting/

1. INTRODUCTIONS

1.1 Documents

Attachment 1a. April 2025 SSC Agenda
Attachment 1b. October 2024 SSC Meeting Minutes
Attachment 1c. October 2024 Final Report - Revised

1.2 Action

- Introductions
- Review and approve agenda.
- Approve minutes from October meeting.
- Approve revised Oct 2024 final report
- Updates from SERO/SEFSC (SAFMC Staff)

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

The public is provided this comment period for any general comments pertaining to any items on the agenda. There will also be time provided for public comment during each specific agenda item as they are discussed. Those wishing to make comment should indicate their desire to do so to the Committee Chair.

3. SEDAR 92: ATLANTIC BLUELINE TILEFISH SOUTHERN REGION MODEL

3.1 Documents

Attachment 3a. Summary of Stock Assessment Review Plan
Attachment 3b. SEDAR 92: Terms of Reference
*Attachment 3c. Blueline Tilefish Production Model Presentation
Attachment 3d. SEDAR 92 (2025): Atlantic Blueline Tilefish SAR
Attachment 3e. South Atlantic ABC-CR Tables
Attachment 3f. SEDAR 50 (2017) Atlantic Blueline Tilefish SAR (*supplementary*)

3.2 Presentation

Dr. Nikolai Klibansky, SEFSC and Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff

3.3 Overview

The SEDAR 92 Operational Assessment process updated the previous SEDAR 50 Atlantic Blueline Tilefish stock assessment. The assessment was conducted by the SEFSC within the SEDAR process with a terminal year of 2023. Two Topical Working Groups (TWG) were convened by SEDAR to review and provide recommendations on data to use in SEDAR 92. The Landing Streams TWG focused on landings and discards north of Cape Hatteras and met five

times via webinar between April and September 2024. The Life History TWG focused its discussion on age data and met three times via webinar between October and December 2024.

Following SEDAR 50, stock assessment of blueline tilefish in the Atlantic was divided into southern and northern regions, separated at Cape Hatteras, NC. The assessment was split largely because fishing effort north of Cape Hatteras increased substantially after 2005, while the available indices of abundance did not adequately represent that area. More detailed explanation is provided in the Stock Structure section of the SEDAR 50 Assessment Report (SEDAR 2017) and the preceding Stock ID Workshop Report (SEDAR 50 Stock ID Work Group 2016). The southern region extends from Cape Hatteras, NC, south to the Council boundary at Key West, FL. The northern region extends north of Cape Hatteras to the northern extent of the blueline tilefish range (i.e. waters off of Massachusetts).

For the northern region, the analytical team applied a data limited methods (DLM) model using R package DLM tool (Carruthers et al. 2022). A subgroup of SSC members from the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Councils will review the northern model in late April. Additional discussions at the South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic SSCs will occur to determine OFL and ABC recommendations.

For the southern region, the analytical team applied an age-aggregated logistic surplus production model (AAPM) using ASPIC software to estimate stock status of blueline tilefish south of Cape Hatteras. This model focuses on the dynamics of the removals as they relate to the indices of abundance, without incorporating any age data or age-structure when modeling the population. Data sources supplied to an AAPM include a time series of removals (i.e. landings plus dead discards) and one or more indices of abundance (i.e. catch per unit of effort). These inputs are in units of biomass (i.e. weight). Biological reference points (benchmarks) were calculated based on maximum sustainable yield (MSY). Computed benchmarks included MSY, fishing mortality rate at MSY (F_{MSY}), and total biomass at MSY (B_{MSY}).

Time series of estimated stock status (B_{2023}/MSST) showed a nearly unexploited stock until the early 1980s when stock status dropped from > 2.5**MSST* to below 0.5**MSST* by 1987. Biomass subsequently remained below the current estimate of *MSST* until 2010. Biomass has continued to increase in recent years and remains well above *MSST* in 2023 and is not currently overfished (B_{2023}/MSST = 1.98). Although bootstrapping shows there is a wide range of B_{2023}/MSST values, there is little statistical uncertainty in the status estimate, with more than 95% of bootstrap runs showing B_{2023}/MSST > 1.0. The time series of estimated F/F_{MSY} suggests that fishing mortality of blueline tilefish in the US South Atlantic had been above the current estimate of F_{MSY} for most years between 1981 and 2003, a period of over 20 years. Since then, F has been below F_{MSY} in all years except 2013. Based on the three most recent years, $F_{current} < F_{MSY}$, overfishing is not currently occurring ($F_{2021–2023}/F_{MSY}$ = 0.28). The range in $F_{2021–2023}/F_{MSY}$ from the bootstrap runs is fairly narrow and there is little statistical uncertainty in the fishing status, with > 95% of estimates of $F_{2021–2023}/F_{MSY} < 1.0$.

The SSC is tasked with recommending whether the assessment adequately met the terms of reference, are consistent with the Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA), and whether the

results presented in the SARs are useful for providing management advice and developing fishing level recommendations for the Council. The SSC may request additional analyses be conducted or may use the information provided in the SAR as the basis for their Fishing Level Recommendations (e.g., Overfishing Limit and Acceptable Biological Catch). The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's SSC will review the southern assessment model at its April 2025 meeting and make recommendations for the Council to review during their June 2025 council meeting.

3.4 Public Comment

3.5 Action

- **Review assessment**
  - Does the assessment address the ToRs to the SSCs satisfaction?
  - Is the assessment consistent with BSIA guidance and practices?
  - Does the assessment reliably capture past trends in the fishery and population?
  - Does the assessment provide a reliable, quantitative estimate of current stock status?
  - Does the assessment provide reliable predictions of future conditions to support fishing level recommendations?

- **Identify, summarize, and discuss assessment uncertainties.**
  - Review, summarize, and discuss the factors of this assessment that affect the reliability of estimates of stock status and fishing level recommendations.
  - Describe the risks and consequences of the assessment uncertainties with regard to status and fishing level recommendations.
  - Are methods of addressing uncertainty consistent with SSC expectations and the available information?
  - List (in order of the greatest contribution to risk and overall assessment uncertainty) and comment on the effects of those assessment factors that most contribute to risk and impact status determinations and future yield predictions.

- **Provide fishing level recommendations.**
  - Apply the South Atlantic ABC Control Rule and complete the fishing level recommendations (Table 2).
  - Comment on any difficulties encountered in applying the Control Rule, including any required information that is not available.

- **Provide advice on monitoring the stock until the next assessment.**

- What indicators or metrics should be included in the SAFE Report to monitor and evaluate the stock until the next assessment? Current data will be included:
  - Total Landings relative to ABC from the previous assessment until values from SEDAR 92 are adopted.
  - Recreational (CHTS and FES values) and Commercial Landings
  - Trends in abundance included in SEDAR 92
  - Economic trends
    - Recreational – MRIP Directed Trips
    - Commercial – Ex-Vessel Value
  - Social trends
    - Observations of Closures
    - Comments from Fishery Performance Report
  - Recent management actions
  - Other?
- Is there a recommended trigger level for these metrics? How should the Council respond if a trigger is activated?

➢ **Provide research recommendations and guidance on the next assessment.**
- Review the included research recommendations and indicate those most likely to reduce risk and uncertainty in the next assessment.
- Provide any additional research recommendations the SSC believes will improve future stock assessments.
- Provide guidance on the next assessment, addressing its timing and type.

Table 1. SEDAR 92: Atlantic Blueline Tilefish Stock Assessment Output

Table 4. Estimated status indicators, benchmarks, and related quantities from ASPIC, averaged between the handline and longline models for the Atlantic south of Cape Hatteras. Also presented are median values and measures of precision (standard errors, SE) from the bootstrap analysis. Rate estimates (F) are in units of y^{-1}; status indicators are dimensionless; and biomass estimates are in units of 1000 pounds, as indicated.

Quantity	Units	Estimate	Median	SE
F_{MSY}	y^{-1}	0.189	0.178	0.099
$85\%F_{MSY}$	y^{-1}	0.160	0.151	0.084
$75\%F_{MSY}$	y^{-1}	0.142	0.134	0.074
$65\%F_{MSY}$	y^{-1}	0.123	0.116	0.064
B_{MSY}	1000 lb	1337	1352	307
MSST	1000 lb	1003	1014	230
MSY	1000 lb	247	242	60
$L_{85\%MSY}$	1000 lb	242	236	58
$L_{75\%MSY}$	1000 lb	232	226	56
$L_{65\%MSY}$	1000 lb	217	212	52
$F_{2021-2023}/F_{MSY}$	—	0.28	0.29	1.00
$B_{2023}/MSST$	—	1.98	2.03	0.48
B_{2023}/B_{MSY}	—	1.48	1.52	0.36

Table 2. SSC's Atlantic Blueline Tilefish Catch Level Recommendations

ABC-CR Criteria	**Value**
Stock Risk Rating	High
Relative Stock Biomass Level	High
Category	
P-Star	
OFL RECOMMENDATIONS	
Year	Yield (lbs ww)
2024	
2025	
2026	
2027	
2028	
ABC RECOMMENDATIONS	
Year	Yield (lbs ww)
2024	
2025	
2026	
2027	
2028	

*Yield = Landings + Dead Discards (lbs, ww)

4. SMILE METHODS AND DATA PRODUCTS UPDATE

4.1 Documents

Attachment 4a. SMILE Presentation
Attachment 4b. SMILE Report

4.2 Presentation

Dr. Jen Loch, REEF

4.3 Overview

Length-frequency estimation is a common source of demographic data for fisheries assessments, as these data can inform length-at-age, population age structure, biomass, population change, and length-based spawning potential ratio. Traditional length estimation methods require handling or harvesting the fish, which can impact local fish populations, and may represent a limited distribution of fish sizes and species due to harvest restrictions, thus creating a knowledge gap for underrepresented fishes and lengths. Non-traditional data sources, like citizen science data streams, can be used to affordably help fill data gaps and supplement existing data collection programs. Citizen science programs such as Reef Environmental Education Foundation's (REEF) Volunteer Fish Survey Project empower the public to generate monitoring data and promote active participation in resource management science. Roving diver surveys involving trained divers and snorkelers record observed fish for many reef species coupled with diver metadata (e.g. bottom time, current, visibility, depth, habitat) to produce relative abundance estimates.

While relative abundance is a key datum of REEF's visual surveys, length data have not been previously incorporated. Length frequency is an important metric for assessment of data-limited species and can help detect changes in reef fish population status. To address these needs, we are in the final year of the pilot study of the SMILE (Size Matters: Innovative Length Estimates) project which equips citizen scientists with a single laser-mounted, affordable, waterproof camera ("FishSenseLite", "FSL") to collect images in situ that are post-processed through an AI workflow to calculate fork length.

As a citizen science and fisheries ecology focused project, the primary goals and components of the SMILE project are to: (1) Produce a cost-effective tool to obtain high quality, high accuracy *in situ* length estimation of data-limited fish species; (2) Engage citizen scientists' involvement in fisheries science; and (3) Supplement fisheries stock assessments with reliable length data.

The SSC will receive a presentation on the data collection methodology and initial results of the pilot SMILE project, and should provide feedback on the sampling methodology, initial data collection and analytical products, and identify areas of uncertainty that need to be explored for inclusion of these data into the stock assessment process and management.

4.4 Public Comment

4.5 Action

Methodology

- Is the SMILE methodology appropriate for producing size data needed for stock assessments and/or management?
    - Are there any methodology suggestions or concerns, particularly to boost confidence in this data source?
- How to best handle potential repeat sightings of individual fish?

Data Suggestions

- Are the selected target species suitable?
- What additional data sources and products would be useful for assessors and managers? (e.g. metadata, citizen science experience)

5. SEFSC PRECISION THRESHOLD WORKGROUP UPDATE

5.1 Documents

Attachment 5. SEFSC Precision Threshold Workgroup Presentation

5.2 Presentation

Dr. Vivian Matter and Dr. Erik Williams, SEFSC

5.3 Overview

A joint NOAA Southeast Fishery Science Center (SEFSC) and NOAA Office of Science and Technology (OST) workgroup have continued work to analyze highly imprecise estimate scenarios that are impacting assessments and how to address these concerns. The workgroup is proposing a simple moving average wave-level catch rate estimation method that will increase precision and consistency across strata. The SSC will receive an update on the progress of this workgroup.

5.4 Public Comment

5.5 Action

- Receive update on the workgroup progress
- Provide feedback on the proposed method and identify possible scientific uncertainties in the approach.

6. SEDAR 76 UPDATE: BLACK SEA BASS STOCK ASSESSMENT UPDATE

6.1 Documents

Attachment 6a. SEDAR 76U: Black Sea Bass Update Presentation
Attachment 6b. SEDAR 76U (2025): Black Sea Bass Update SAR
Attachment 6c. SEDAR 76 (2023): Black Sea Bass SAR (*supplementary*)
*Attachment 6d. Stock Risk Ratings Matrix for Black Sea Bass
Attachment 3e. South Atlantic ABC-CR Tables

6.2 Presentation

Dr. Matt Vincent, SEFSC and Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff

6.3 Overview

This SEDAR 76 Update assessment evaluated the stock of black sea bass, Centropristis striata, off the southeastern United States. The primary objectives were to update and improve the 2022 SEDAR 76 assessment of black sea bass and to conduct new stock projections. Using data through 2021, SEDAR 76 had indicated that the stock was overfished, but not undergoing overfishing though there was considerable uncertainty in this metric. For this assessment, data compilation and assessment methods were guided by methodology of SEDAR 76, as well as by current SEDAR practices. The assessment period is 1978‑2023.

Available data on this stock included indices of abundance, landings, discards, and samples of annual length and age compositions from fishery dependent and fishery independent sources. Four indices of abundance were fitted by the model: one from the recreational headboat fleet, one from the commercial lines fleet, one from the MARMAP blackfish/snapper trap survey, and one from the SERFS that combined chevron trap and video sampling. Data on landings and discards were available from recreational and commercial fleets.

The primary model used in SEDAR 76 operational assessment and updated in this assessment was the Beaufort Assessment Model (BAM), a statistical catch-age formulation. A base run of BAM was configured to provide point estimates of key management quantities, such as stock and fishery status. Uncertainty in estimates from the base run was evaluated through a Monte-Carlo Bootstrap Ensemble (MCBE) procedure.

Results suggest that spawning stock declined until the early 1990s, increased slightly and remained stable until the late-2000s, with a large increase from 2009 to 2011, and then declined precipitously. The base run estimate of terminal year (2023) spawning stock is well below the MSST ($SSB_{2023}/MSST = 0.13$) indicating that the stock is overfished and the estimated fishing rate is above F_{MSY}. The terminal estimate, which is based on a three-year geometric mean, is well above F_{MSY} in the base run ($F_{2021–2023}/F_{MSY} = 4.69$). Thus, this assessment indicates that the stock is overfished and undergoing overfishing.

The MCBE analysis indicates that these estimates of stock and fishery status are robust, but with some uncertainty in the conclusions. Nearly all MCBE runs (99.7%) were in qualitative

agreement that the stock is overfished ($SSB_{2023}/MSST < 1.0$), and 89.3% of all models show that the stock is undergoing overfishing ($F_{2011–2023}/F_{MSY} > 1.0$).

The SSC is tasked with recommending whether the assessment adequately met the terms of reference, are consistent with the Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA), and whether the results presented in the SAR are useful for providing management advice and developing fishing level recommendations for the Council. The SSC may request additional analyses be conducted or may use the information provided in the SAR as the basis for their Fishing Level Recommendations (e.g., Overfishing Limit and Acceptable Biological Catch).

6.4 Public Comment

6.5 Action

- **Review assessment**
  - Does the assessment address the ToRs to the SSCs satisfaction?
  - Is the assessment consistent with BSIA guidance and practices?
  - Does the assessment reliably capture past trends in the fishery and population?
  - Does the assessment provide a reliable, quantitative estimate of current stock status?
  - Does the assessment provide reliable predictions of future conditions to support fishing level recommendations?

- **Identify, summarize, and discuss assessment uncertainties.**
  - Review, summarize, and discuss the factors of this assessment that affect the reliability of estimates of stock status and fishing level recommendations.
  - Describe the risks and consequences of the assessment uncertainties with regard to status and fishing level recommendations.
  - Are methods of addressing uncertainty consistent with SSC expectations and the available information?
  - List (in order of the greatest contribution to risk and overall assessment uncertainty) and comment on the effects of those assessment factors that most contribute to risk and impact status determinations and future yield predictions.

- **Provide fishing level recommendations.**
  - Apply the ABC control rule and complete the fishing level recommendations (Table 3).
  - Comment on any difficulties encountered in applying the Control Rule, including any required information that is not available.
  - Discuss and make recommendations on probability of rebuilding projections.

- **Provide advice on monitoring the stock until the next assessment.**
  - What indicators or metrics should be included in the SAFE Report to monitor and evaluate the stock until the next assessment? Current data will be included:
    - Total Landings relative to ABC from the previous assessment until values from SEDAR 76U are adopted.
    - Recreational (CHTS and FES values) and Commercial Landings
    - Trends in abundance included in SEDAR 76U
    - Economic trends
      - Recreational – MRIP Directed Trips
      - Commercial – Ex-Vessel Value
    - Social trends
      - Observations of Closures
      - Comments from Fishery Performance Report
    - Recent management actions
  - Is there a recommended trigger level for these metrics? How should the Council respond if a trigger is activated?

- **Provide research recommendations and guidance on the next assessment.**
  - Review the included research recommendations and indicate those most likely to reduce risk and uncertainty in the next assessment.
  - Provide any additional research recommendations the SSC believes will improve future stock assessments.
  - Provide guidance on the next assessment, addressing its timing and type.

Table 3. SEDAR 76 Update: Black Sea Bass Stock Assessment Output

Table 18. Estimated status indicators, benchmarks, and related quantities from the base run of the BAM, conditional on estimated current selectivities averaged across fleets. Also presented are median values and measures of precision (standard errors, SE) from the Monte Carlo/Bootstrap ensemble analysis. Rate estimates (F) are in units of y^{-1}; status indicators are dimensionless; biomass estimates are in units of thousands of pounds, as indicated; and recruits are in millions of age-0 fish. Spawning stock biomass (SSB) is measured as mature weight (1000 lbs). L_{current} and D_{current} are the average landings and discards from 2021–2023, respectively. Estimates of yield include landings and discards in weight; D_{MSY} represents discard mortalities expected when fishing at F_{MSY}; T_{MSY} represents total harvest (landings and discards) expected when fishing at F_{MSY}.

Quantity	Units	Estimate	Median	SE
F_{MSY}	y^{-1}	0.32	0.33	0.15
$75\%F_{\text{MSY}}$	y^{-1}	0.24	0.25	0.11
B_{MSY}	1000 lb	23946.38	31774.95	47522.56
SSB_{MSY}	1E10 eggs	14182.85	14546.38	37762.97
MSST	1E10 eggs	8864.28	7574.79	28417.79
MSY	1000 lb	1956.49	2148.97	3685.48
MSY	1000 dead fish	1154.26	1008.55	2130.65
$L_{75\%\text{MSY}}$	1000 lb	1308.81	1047.19	2875.41
L_{current}	1000 lb	508.00	509.39	67.39
D_{MSY}	1000 lb	685.83	1093.68	966.57
D_{MSY}	1000 dead fish	1485.11	2426.36	2078.38
T_{MSY}	1000 lb	2642.32	3249.55	4547.01
T_{MSY}	1000 dead fish	2639.36	3420.59	3896.09
$D_{75\%\text{MSY}}$	1000 dead fish	594.71	2127.04	1819.98
D_{current}	1000 dead fish	947.46	1255.76	540.76
R_{MSY}	millions fish	8.67	16.61	14.38
$F_{2021-2023}/F_{\text{MSY}}$	—	4.08	3.11	2.45
$\text{SSB}_{2023}/\text{MSST}$	—	0.16	0.27	0.22
$\text{SSB}_{2023}/\text{SSB}_{\text{MSY}}$	—	0.10	0.15	0.09

Table 4. SSC's Black Sea Bass Catch Level Recommendations

Criteria	Value
Stock Risk Rating	
Relative Stock Biomass Level	Low
Category	
P-Star	
SSC recommended $P_{Rebuild}$	

OFL RECOMMENDATIONS				
Year	Landed (lbs ww)	Discard (lbs ww)	Landed (number)	Discard (number)
2025				
2026				
2027				
2028				
2029				
ABC RECOMMENDATIONS				
Year	Landed (lbs ww)	Discard (lbs ww)	Landed (number)	Discard (number)
2025				
2026				
2027				
2028				
2029				

7. SERFS 2024 TRENDS REPORT

7.1 Documents

Attachment 7a. SERFS 2024 Trends Report
*Attachment 7b. SERFS 2024 Trends Presentation

7.2 Presentation

Dr. Tracey Smart, SC-DNR

7.3 Overview

The Southeast Reef Fish Survey (SERFS) annual trends report is intended to serve as an overview of catches and abundance trends of selected species from a collaborative fishery-independent survey using standardized gears. Abundance indices developed for this report are standardized to account for factors that may affect abundance and may have varied over the years such as temperature, depth of sampled stations, location, etc. This report presents a summary of the fishery-independent monitoring and analyses for 20 species in the region derived

from chevron-video trap (CVT) catch data collected from 1990 through 2024 by the three monitoring programs (MARMAP, SEAMAP-SA, and SEFIS) involved in SERFS. Specifically, it presents updated annual standardized abundance for CVTs (referred to as an index of abundance). Standardization is applied to account for the effects of potential covariates on abundance. Species distribution maps and annual length information of captured fish are also provided. Data presented in this report are based on a database maintained by SCDNR which houses data from all SERFS partners that was accessed in February 2025.

The SSC will receive an update on the sampling efforts and results of the SERFS sampling program through 2024.

7.4 Public Comment

7.5 Action

- Receive update on trends report.

8. ECOSPACE MODULE FOR REEF FISH ECOPATH WITH ECOSIM MODEL

8.1 Documents

Attachment 8a. Ecospace Model Presentation
Attachment 8b. Ecospace Model Report

8.2 Presentation

Dr. Dave Chagaris, UF and Lauren Gentry, FWCC-FWRI

8.3 Overview

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) tasked the model team with developing and parameterizing an Ecospace module for the South Atlantic Reef Fish (SARF) EwE Model. The immediate objective of the SARF EwE with Ecospace model will be to explore the most likely drivers of declining black sea bass availability.

The South Atlantic Region (SAR) EwE Model was adapted and refined from South Atlantic Bight models first developed in 2001. It has since been through 20 years of improvements and updates, with the current iteration reviewed and endorsed by the Scientific and Statistical Committee in 2020. This high complexity model serves as the primary source of data for the intermediate South Atlantic Reef Fish (SARF) Model.

The SARF model is a model of intermediate complexity (MICE) built from the primary SAR EwE Model to address specific ecological questions. The model contains 41 functional groups and emphasizes species in the Snapper Grouper Complex which are represented by 31 of those biomass pools. The Ecopath and Ecosim components were reviewed by the SAFMC SSC Model

Workgroup and refined via a multi-day workshop. The results were presented to the SSC and Council in 2021. The FWRI EwE Modeling Team has been collaborating with the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) Modeling Workgroup and SAFMC staff via webinars to create an Ecospace module of the SARF model and make other modifications to address questions related to black sea bass spatial dynamics. The FWRI Modeling Team has also been adding any available updated data from stock assessments, diet studies, or other literature.

The SARF model will explore possible drivers of shifting black sea bass distributions, which may include changes in habitat, productivity, competition, and predator-prey dynamics. This effort will provide the SAFMC with a tool capable of evaluating the most likely drivers of declining black sea bass availability that can easily be extended to other reef fish species that are currently experiencing declines.

8.4 Public Comment

8.5 Action

- Receive update on ongoing progress to the SARF model
- Provide feedback on data inputs, calibration procedures, Ecospace structure, and the modeling uncertainties.

9. DOLPHINFISH MANAGEMENT STRATEGY EVALUATION (MSE) UPDATE

9.1 Documents

Attachment 9. Dolphinfish MSE Update Presentation

9.2 Presentation

Dr. Cassidy Peterson, SEFSC

9.3 Overview

The purpose of the Dolphinfish Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) project is to develop an empirical management procedure for dolphin in the US Atlantic that can be used to set catch levels along with additional management actions. This procedure will be simulation tested to be robust to uncertainty and incorporate stakeholder participation to ensure the management procedure meets stakeholder-defined objectives.

This update represents the first opportunity for the SSC to provide feedback on the development of the operating model and its uncertainties, various performance metrics, and initial perspectives on select management procedures. There will be one more opportunity for SSC feedback before the management procedure undergoes CIE review during the fall SSC meeting.

9.4 Public Comment

9.5 Action

- Receive update on ongoing progress to the Dolphinfish Management Strategy Evaluation project.
- Provide feedback on the operating model, its uncertainties, and performance metrics.

10. SEDAR PROCESS UPDATE

10.1 Documents

*Attachment 10. SEDAR Process Update Presentation

10.2 Presentation

Dr. Shannon Cass-Calay, SEFSC and Dr. Julie Neer, SEDAR Staff

10.3 Overview

During the March Council meeting, Dr. Shannon Cass-Calay (SEFSC) gave a presentation on modifications to the SEDAR Process. The timeline for stock assessments had expanded under the Research Track Process, and the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils wanted more timely assessments, resulting in the need to revise the SEDAR process. More timely assessments would be accomplished by having the SEFSC control scheduling during the assessment phase of the process. During this phase, the analysts could ask questions to a Council approved technical workgroup, if needed. Additionally, the analyst could provide updates on assessment progress to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and request input on certain issues identified during assessment development. The Council supported the revised process but wanted to get feedback from the SSC before approving the new process. The SSC should review the proposed changes to the SEDAR process and the reworked role the SSC would have in the assessment phase of the process and provide feedback for the Council to consider when they continue discussion on this topic at their June meeting.

10.4 Public Comment

10.5 Action

- Receive update on the SEDAR process changes.
- Comment on new proposed role of the SSC in the assessment phase.

11. SEDAR 92, SEDAR 76U: ADDITIONAL PROJECTIONS AND CATCH LEVELS

11.1 Documents

*Attachment 11a. Additional Projections for Blueline Tilefish (as needed)

*Attachment 11b. Additional Projections for Black Sea Bass (as needed)

11.2 Presentation

Dr. Nikolai Klibansky and Dr. Matt Vincent, SEFSC

11.3 Overview

Based upon SSC feedback on stock assessment reviews earlier in the meeting, the SSC should review the additional requested projection scenarios and make catch level recommendations to the Council.

11.4 Public Comment

11.5 Action

- Review additional requested projections and make catch level recommendations to Council for Golden Tilefish.
- Review additional requested projections and make catch level recommendations to Council for Black Sea Bass.

12. RESEARCH AND MONITORING PLAN REVIEW

12.1 Documents

*Attachment 12. Research and Monitoring Plan Draft

12.2 Presentation

Dr. Chip Collier, SAFMC Staff

12.3 Overview

The Council revises their research and monitoring plan every two years. The research and monitoring plan is used by the Council and NOAA Fisheries staff to identify and prioritize research needs for fisheries in the South Atlantic. These research needs are circulated to funding agencies to be included as research grant priorities and used by researchers during development of research proposals. The Committee is provided with an opportunity to review the South Atlantic Research and Monitoring plan. Additional feedback was also obtained at the April 2025 SEP meeting. The Council will consider the plan and recommendations made by the SSC and Advisory Panels at its June 2025 meeting.

12.4 Public Comment

12.5 Action

- Review draft Research and Monitoring Plan
- Make recommendations on additional items as needed.

13. FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT UPDATES

13.1 Documents

Attachment 13. FMP Amendments Summary

13.2 Presentation

Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff

13.3 Overview

The SSC will receive updates on several ongoing fishery management plan amendments in progress or completed where SSC review was involved. The entire list of ongoing amendments is provided in Attachment 13, but the focus for this update will be on highlighted amendments. The goal for this agenda topic is to update the SSC on the current status of these amendments and potential future involvement in the development of these fishery management plan amendments with scientific input and recommendations

13.4 Public Comment

13.5 Action

- Receive updates on fishery management plan amendments.

14. SEP REPORT SUMMARY

14.1 Documents

*Attachment 14. SEP meeting draft report (when available)

14.2 Presentation

Dr. Jennifer Sweeney-Tookes, SEP Chair

14.3 Overview

The SSC will receive a summary of topics discussed at the SEP meeting. The SEP meeting summary and report will be added to the final SSC report.

14.4 Public Comment

14.5 Action

- Receive update on business conducted at the SEP meeting.

15. SSC WORKGROUP AND SEDAR PANELS

15.1 Documents

Attachment 15a. SSC Workgroup and SEDAR Appointments
Attachment 15b. February 2025 Joint SSC Final Report

15.2 Presentation

Dr. Marcel Reichert, SSC Chair and Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff

15.3 Overview

Council staff will review the list of SSC workgroups and SEDAR panel membership and provide any updates from recent work accomplished by the workgroups or SEDAR panels. SSC Chair and Staff will provide a summary of the Joint Gulf/SA SSC review of the Mutton and Yellowtail Snapper Stock Assessments that occurred in February 2025.

15.4 Public Comment

15.5 Action

- Receive update on SSC Workgroup and SEDAR panel appointments.
- Receive summary on the Joint SSC stock assessment reviews.

16. SCIENTIFIC COORDINATION SUBCOMMITTEE

16.1 Documents

Attachment 16. SCS8 Final Report

16.2 Presentation

Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff

16.3 Overview

The Scientific Coordination Subcommittee final report for the 8th annual meeting (SCS8) is now available. Planning is underway for the 9th annual meeting (SCS9) that will be hosted by the Gulf Fishery Management Council in summer/fall 2026. The planning team is soliciting ideas for a general meeting theme and sub-theme topic areas. The SSC should discuss and provide any ideas to pass onto the planning team.

16.4 Public Comment

16.5 Action

- Provide potential ideas for SCS9 meeting theme and sub-theme areas.

17. OTHER BUSINESS

18. PUBLIC COMMENT

The public is provided with one final opportunity to comment on SSC recommendations and agenda items.

19. CONSENSUS STATEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is provided with an opportunity to review its report, final consensus statements, and final recommendations.

The Final SSC report will be provided to the Council by noon on Friday, May 9, 2025 (approximately 3 weeks from the end of the meeting) for inclusion in the briefing book for the June 2025 Council meeting.

20. NEXT MEETINGS

20.1 Scientific and Statistical Committee Meetings

- April 21 and 23, 1-4pm (BLT sub-group review)
- Week of May 26 (Webinar)
- October 21-23, 2025 in Charleston, SC

20.2 South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meetings

- June 9-13, 2024 in Cape Canaveral, FL
- September 15-19, 2025 in North Charleston, SC
- December 8-12, 2025 in Kitty Hawk, NC

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