

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE



SSC Meeting Overview
April 14-16, 2026

Town & Country Inn
2008 Savannah Highway
Charleston, SC

VERSION
FINAL - REVISED
4/8/26

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*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 16, 2026.

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 2026 SSC Agenda

Attachment 1b. October 2025 SSC Meeting Minutes

1.2 Action

- Introductions
- Review and approve agenda.
- Approve minutes from October meeting.

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. FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT AND COUNCIL ACTIVITY UPDATES

3.1 Documents

Attachment 3. FMP Amendment and Council Activity Updates

3.2 Presentation

SAFMC Staff

3.3 Overview

The SSC will receive updates on several ongoing fishery management plan amendments in progress or completed where SSC review was involved. The goal for this agenda topic is to update the SSC on the current and upcoming fishery management plan amendments and discuss potential future involvement in the development of fishery management plan amendments with scientific input and recommendations. Specific updates will focus on the Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation, Spawning Special Management Zones, Blueline Tilefish Abbreviated Framework, and the upcoming Standardized Bycatch Reduction Methodology 5-year Review.

3.4 Public Comment

3.5 Action

- No committee action needed.

4. SEDAR ACTIVITY AND ASSESSMENT UPDATES

4.1 Documents

Attachment 4a. Upcoming Assessment Updates
Attachment 4b. SEDAR New Infographics

4.2 Presentation

Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff

4.3 Overview

Council staff will provide updates on various SEDAR projects currently ongoing and scheduled, including timelines for review, and other projects relevant to SSC meeting business. The Committee will also receive an update on materials SEDAR staff has developed including new infographics to assist in tracking and scheduling of various assessment components.

4.4 Public Comment

4.5 Action

➤ No committee action needed.

5. RESILIENT FISHERIES: ECOSYSTEM INFORMATION REVIEW

5.1 Documents

Attachment 5a. Resilient Fisheries: Ecosystem Review Project Summary
[Attachment 5b. Ecosystem Information Review Preliminary Report](#)
[Attachment 5c. Ecosystem Information Review Presentation](#)
[*Attachment 5d. Project Summary with SSC Questions](#)

5.2 Presentation

Dr. Sarah Gaichas, Hydra Scientific LLC

5.3 Overview

The Resilient Fisheries: Ecosystem Information Review project aims to strengthen management outcomes by expanding the use of ecosystem information and collaborative research within the South Atlantic region. It will assess how all U.S. regional fisheries management councils utilize ecosystem data products and decision support tools, provide comparative insights, and identify best practices and develop strategies for integration into SAFMC management processes. The project will also address practical implementation requirements, evaluate opportunities for cooperative data collection, and develop prototype ecosystem indicators tailored to regional needs. The SSC will receive an update on the progress of this project and provide feedback as needed to assist with project development and implementation.

5.4 Public Comment

5.5 Action

- Receive preliminary report on the Resilient Fisheries Project: Ecosystem Information Review.
- Comment on the mechanisms for including ecosystem information in the ABC setting processes in other Councils.
- Provide feedback on the potential for inclusion of ecosystem information through similar or different mechanisms for the South Atlantic region.

6. DOLPHIN MANAGEMENT STRATEGY EVALUATION (MSE) OPERATING MODEL REVIEW

6.1 Documents

Attachment 6. Dolphin MSE Presentation

6.2 Presentation

Dr. Cassidy Peterson, SEFSC and Dr. Tom Carruthers, Blue Matter Science

6.3 Overview

The purpose of the Dolphin 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.

The SSC will receive an update to the Dolphin MSE and have the opportunity to provide feedback on the development of the operating model and its uncertainties, various performance metrics, and initial perspectives on select management procedures and parameterizations. They should also make any recommendations to the review panel on specific model components to evaluate, as needed. A review panel consisting of three CIE reviewers and two SSC reviewers will convene this summer to review the final operating model. SSC members interested in serving as a reviewer or as chair of the review panel should consider volunteering.

6.4 Public Comment

6.5 Action

- Review the operating model, its uncertainties, and performance metrics.
 - Consider operating model as consistent with BSIA determination.
- Advise on the management procedure structure and parameterization.
 - Provide feedback on the potential scientific uncertainties and implications of regulatory amendment 3 scoping options.

- Identify and make recommendations to the review panel on specific model components and uncertainties to evaluate, as needed.
 - Recruit SSC members for the review panel (2 reviewers, 1 chair).

7. NMFS FRAMEWORK FOR NARROWING SCOPE OF MANAGEMENT AND SCIENCE

7.1 Documents

Attachment 7a. NMFS Risk Value Prioritization Framework

Attachment 7b. CCC Response Letter on Risk Value Matrix

Attachment 7c. SAFMC Comment Letter on Risk Value Matrix

*Attachment 7d. SEFSC Risk Value Matrix Calculations

7.2 Presentation

SEFSC Staff (TBD)

7.3 Overview

At the May 2025 CCC meeting, NMFS discussed the need to “narrow the scope of NMFS management and science” to accommodate future agency resources and capabilities. In March 2026 the Council was provided with an update on progress by the SEFSC to further develop tools to assist decision making related to narrowing the scope of management (Attachment 7a). Additional information on management alternatives that could be considered for the risk/value categories was provided, along with progress on compiling the value and risk information necessary to assign stocks to risk/value categories. A national approach has been developed to support comparisons across regions. SEFSC staff will provide an overview of the risk value effort and details on the analyses being used to populate the various data components of the priority matrix. The SEP will review analyses specific to the economic and social criteria used in the priority matrix.

7.4 Public Comment

7.5 Action

- Evaluate the biological and environmental sources used for risk/value categorization and assessment.
 - Climate Vulnerability Analysis (CVA) for susceptibility to the environment
 - Productivity and Susceptibility Analysis (PSA) for susceptibility to fishing scores.
 - Ecosystem importance scores using SURF index method (Plagányi and Essington 2014).

- Will results of the biological/environmental component of this effort, as designed, be useful in helping to guide decisions on the scope of science and management?

8. WRECKFISH STOCK ASSESSMENT MODEL

8.1 Documents

Attachment 8a. Wreckfish AIM Project Summary

*Attachment 8b. Wreckfish Preliminary Stock Assessment Report

*Attachment 8c. Wreckfish Stock Assessment and MSE Presentation

8.2 Presentation

Dr. Jeremy Collie, URI and Dr. Josh Nowlis, Lynker

8.3 Overview

The Council has contracted with Lynker to develop a management procedure for the Wreckfish fishery. This project will apply an adaptive management technique called Adaptive Implementable Management (AIM) to guide a stakeholder-driven management development process for the South Atlantic Wreckfish fishery. During this process, contractors will work directly with managers and stakeholders to develop management recommendations more robust to future uncertainty. Stakeholder engagement is being prioritized throughout the AIM process, with interviews and stakeholder workshops planned throughout the project period. The resulting management recommendations will be provided to the Council for their consideration and action.

As part of the Management Procedure framework, an updated stock assessment model is being developed to inform the management procedures. The last stock assessment for Wreckfish was completed in 2014 with a terminal year of 2010 and reviewed by the SSC in April 2014. The primary assessment tool was a statistical age/length model, with a dynamic production model used as a secondary tool. The current modeling framework identifies several candidate operating models to consider.

The SSC should review the various candidate models and evaluate the proposed assessment methodologies, data inputs, identify potential modeling uncertainties, and provide guidance to model development.

8.4 Public Comment

8.5 Action

- Evaluate the proposed candidate stock assessment model methodology and data inputs.
- Identify model uncertainties and provide feedback for further model development.

9. SOUTH ATLANTIC RED SNAPPER RESEARCH PROGRAM

9.1 Documents

- *Attachment 9a. SARSRP Presentations and CIE Review Workshop Summary
- *Attachment 9b. Response to CIE Reviewer Requests
- *Attachment 9c. Final SARSRP Report
- Attachment 9d. (Supplementary) Individual CIE and Review Panel Reports
- *Attachment 9e. CIE Review Panel Summary

9.2 Presentation

Dr. Will Patterson, UF and Dr. Dave Portnoy, TAMU-CC

9.3 Overview

The South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program (SARSRP) underwent a comprehensive review from January 13–15, 2026 (<https://sarsrp.scseagrant.org/report/>). The review panel included three subject matter experts from the Center for Independent Experts (CIE) and two representatives from the South Atlantic Scientific and Statistical Committee. The project team comprised more than thirty collaborators representing seven universities and agencies. During the review workshop, the project team delivered four presentations to supplement the preliminary report submitted to Sea Grant at the end of 2025. The review panel evaluated data inputs, sampling methodologies, analytical modeling, and sources of scientific uncertainty, and provided critical feedback in each of these areas. Independent reports from the CIE reviewers as well as a consensus review panel report were completed following the review workshop and circulated to the SARSRP project team. The project team addressed the review panel's concerns and comments, and these have been integrated into the final report to refine the final abundance estimates and quantified uncertainty.

Results from this project will be incorporated into the SEDAR 90: South Atlantic Red Snapper stock assessment. The Assessment Panel has already been meeting to provide guidance on model development and the integration of the SARSRP results into the stock assessment. A CIE review workshop for SEDAR 90 is scheduled for December 2026 in Beaufort, NC.

9.4 Public Comment

9.5 Action

- Evaluate the response to CIE and Review Panel recommendations from the review workshop.
 - Did the project team sufficiently address the review panel concerns?
 - Are there other concerns not identified that could contribute to the uncertainty in the modeling approach and resulting estimates?

10. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR UPCOMING ASSESSMENTS

10.1 Documents

Attachment 10a. Black Sea Bass Terms of Reference

Attachment 10b. Vermilion Snapper Terms of Reference

10.2 Presentation

Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff

10.3 Overview

The proposed SEDAR stock assessment schedule for South Atlantic species includes an update to Black Sea Bass in 2026 and Vermilion Snapper in 2027. Both assessments are being conducted internally by the Southeast Fishery Science Center. The SSC will review the Terms of Reference for the South Atlantic Black Sea Bass and South Atlantic Vermilion Snapper stock assessments. Comments and recommendations will be passed along to the SEFSC for negotiation and then onto the Council for final approval. Terms of Reference are drafted by SAFMC Staff using recommendations from the approved Statements of Work, SAFMC Research and Monitoring Plan, prior assessment panel recommendations, and SSC review of the prior stock assessment.

10.4 Public Comment

10.5 Action

- Review Terms of Reference for South Atlantic Black Sea Bass
- Review Terms of Reference for South Atlantic Vermilion Snapper

11. SERFS 2025 TRENDS REPORT

11.1 Documents

Attachment 11a. SERFS 2025 Trends Report

*Attachment 11b. SERFS 2025 Trends Presentation

11.2 Presentation

Dr. Tracey Smart, SC-DNR

11.3 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 2025 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 2026.

The SSC will receive an update on the sampling efforts and results of the SERFS sampling program through 2025.

11.4 Public Comment

11.5 Action

- Receive update on trends report.

12. SEP REPORT SUMMARY

12.1 Documents

*Attachment 12. SEP Meeting Draft Report (when available)

12.2 Presentation

Dr. Jennifer Sweeney-Tookes, SEP Chair

12.3 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.

12.4 Public Comment

12.5 Action

- Receive update on business conducted at the SEP meeting.

13. SSC WORKGROUP AND SECAD PANELS

13.1 Documents

Attachment 13a. SSC SEDAR Appointments

Attachment 13b. SSC Workgroup Appointments

13.2 Presentation

Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff

13.3 Overview

Council staff will review the list of SSC workgroups and SECAD (SEDAR, Catch Advice, and Data) panel membership and provide any updates from recent work accomplished by the workgroups or SECAD panels, as well as upcoming needs including populating panels with SSC members.

13.4 Public Comment

13.5 Action

- Receive update on SSC Workgroup and SECAD panel appointments.

14. OTHER BUSINESS

15. PUBLIC COMMENT

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

16. 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 15, 2026 (approximately 3 weeks from the end of the meeting) for inclusion in the briefing book for the June 2026 Council meeting.

17. ELECTIONS

18. NEXT MEETINGS

18.1 Scientific and Statistical Committee Meetings

- Summer Webinar (TBD, if needed)
- October 20-22, 2026 in Charleston, SC
- April 19-22, 2027 in Charleston, SC (SEP/SSC)
- October 26-28, 2027 in Charleston, SC

18.2 South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meetings

- June 8-12, 2026 in St. Augustine, FL
- September 14-18, 2026 in North Charleston, SC
- December 7-11, 2026 in Beaufort, NC

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