

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE



SSC Meeting Overview
August 12, 2026

Webinar Meeting

VERSION
FINAL
7/29/26

CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTIONS	5
2.	PUBLIC COMMENT	5
3.	SPAWNING SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ZONES: EVALUATION	5
4.	SPAWNING SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ZONES: AMENDMENT DEVELOPMENT	6
5.	TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR UPCOMING ASSESSMENTS	7
6.	ABC-CR STOCK RISK RATINGS	7
7.	SSC WORKGROUP AND SEDAR PANELS	8
8.	OTHER BUSINESS	9
9.	PUBLIC COMMENT	9
10.	CONSENSUS STATEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS	9
11.	NEXT MEETINGS	9

DOCUMENTS

Attachment 1a. August 2026 SSC Agenda	5
Attachment 1b. April 2026 SSC Meeting Minutes	5
Attachment 3a. SSMZ System Management Plan Update	5
Attachment 3b. Evaluation Background Presentation	5
Attachment 3c. Pre-Meeting Survey Link	5
*Attachment 3d. Survey Results (provided at meeting)	5
Attachment 4. SSMZ Amendment Overview Presentation	6
Attachment 5a. Vermilion Snapper Terms of Reference.....	7
Attachment 5b. Snowy Grouper Terms of Reference.....	7
*Attachment 5c. Red Grouper Terms of Reference.....	7
Attachment 6a. ABC-CR Stock Risk Rating Summary.....	7
Attachment 6b. Stock Risk Ratings Tables.....	7
Attachment 7a. SSC SEDAR Appointments	8
Attachment 7b. SSC Workgroup Appointments.....	8

*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 12 p.m., August 12, 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. August 2026 SSC Agenda
Attachment 1b. April 2026 SSC Meeting Minutes

1.2 Action

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

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

The public is provided with 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 public comment should indicate their desire to do so to the Committee Chair.

3. SPAWNING SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ZONES: EVALUATION

3.1 Documents

Attachment 3a. SSMZ System Management Plan Update
Attachment 3b. Evaluation Background Presentation
Attachment 3c. [Pre-Meeting Survey Link](#)
*Attachment 3d. Survey Results (provided at meeting)

3.2 Presentation

Dr. Chip Collier, SAFMC Staff

3.3 Overview

The Council established Spawning Special Management Zones (SSMZs) in 2017 to protect spawning snapper grouper species by prohibiting the fishing for, harvest of, and/or possession of snapper grouper species within these areas. During development of the SSMZs, the Council also approved a System Management Plan to guide the evaluation of the areas over time and System Management Plan Workgroup to develop a report on the areas. The System Management Plan Update (Attachment 3a) summarizes activities conducted since 2017, highlights research and monitoring completed within each SSMZ, and documents progress toward the objectives and action items identified in the System Management Plan.

Based on the information in the System Management Plan Update and the supporting materials, the SSC is asked to review the available scientific information and complete the Evaluation Tool to facilitate discussion of the effectiveness of the SSMZs. The Evaluation Tool includes questions

addressing the SSMZ program as a whole as well as questions specific to each of the five SSMZs. The tool is intended to provide a structured framework for discussion and to help identify the strengths, limitations, and remaining scientific uncertainties associated with the evaluation of each area.

3.4 Public Comment

3.5 Action

- Review information summarized in the SSMZ System Management Plan Update and identify any gaps and improvements for the report.
- Complete the SSMZ Evaluation Tool and discuss the strengths, limitations, and uncertainties associated with available information.
- Provide comments on whether the available scientific information indicates that the SSMZs are meeting the objective of protecting spawning snapper grouper species and identify important information gaps.
- Provide guidance on the scientific considerations for future evaluations of the SSMZs.

4. SPAWNING SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ZONES: AMENDMENT DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Documents

Attachment 4. SSMZ Amendment Overview Presentation

4.2 Presentation

Allie Iberle, SAFMC Staff

4.3 Overview

The Council established five Spawning Special Management Zones (SSMZs) in 2017, where fishing for, harvest of, and/or possession of snapper grouper species is prohibited. Three of these SSMZs (South Cape Lookout, Devil's/Georgetown Hole, and Warsaw Hole) are natural sites with a sunset provision on regulations after 10 years, while two artificial-reef SSMZs did not have the sunset provision (Area 51 and Area 53). The Council intended to use the 10-year period to gather additional information to determine whether the natural sites are functioning as effective spawning areas for the focal species listed in the System Management Plan for the SSMZs. In March, the Council initiated work on a framework amendment to modify the sunset provision for those SSMZs that have the provision. In June, the Council reviewed an initial set of actions and alternatives that would extend the sunset provision by 7, 10, or 20 years or remove it all together, making the areas and applicable regulations permanent.

4.4 Public Comment

4.5 Action

- Comment on the range of alternatives the Council is considering for extending or removing the sunset provision for the three natural SSMZs which currently have them.
- Discuss options for an adequate length of time to collect scientific information to establish whether these areas are meeting the goal of protecting spawning snapper grouper species.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR UPCOMING ASSESSMENTS

5.1 Documents

Attachment 5a. Vermilion Snapper Terms of Reference

Attachment 5b. Snowy Grouper Terms of Reference

*Attachment 5c. Red Grouper Terms of Reference

5.2 Presentation

Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff

5.3 Overview

The upcoming SEDAR stock assessment schedule for South Atlantic species includes Red Grouper, Snowy Grouper, and Vermilion Snapper. Vermilion Snapper is being conducted internally by the NOAA Southeast Fishery Science Center. Snowy and Red Grouper will be conducted through the SEDAR process. Snowy Grouper will include a Topical Working Group to integrate the South Atlantic Deepwater Longline Survey (SADL) as an index of abundance. Red Grouper will include a Stock Identification workshop followed by Data and Review Workshops. The SSC will review and make recommendations on the three Terms of Reference for the upcoming South Atlantic 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.

5.4 Public Comment

5.5 Action

- Review Terms of Reference for South Atlantic Vermilion Snapper
- Review Terms of Reference for South Atlantic Snowy Grouper
- Review Terms of Reference for South Atlantic Red Grouper

6. ABC-CR STOCK RISK RATINGS

6.1 Documents

Attachment 6a. ABC-CR Stock Risk Rating Summary

Attachment 6b. Stock Risk Ratings Tables

6.2 Presentation

Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff

6.3 Overview

The new Acceptable Biological Catch Control Rule (ABC-CR) categorizes stocks based on the available information and scientific uncertainty evaluation and incorporates the Council's risk tolerance policy through an accepted probability of overfishing (P*). The Council will specify the P* based on the relative stock biomass output from an updated stock assessment and a stock risk rating that is developed using a variety of biological, social, economic, and environmental indicators. The new ABC-CR was developed to increase flexibility and adaptability in accounting for uncertainty through both the scientific and management process, to incorporate phase-in and carry-over provisions, and to provide a mechanism for categorizing uncertainty in data-limited and unassessed stocks.

The stock risk rating matrix is compiled from SSC and Advisory Panel input based on available information from SEDAR stock assessment reports, commercial and recreational databases, fishery performance reports, and social and economic indicators. The scoring matrix from the SSC and AP is aggregated and approved by the Council before the completion of a new stock assessment and along with the relative stock biomass estimate provides the accepted probability of overfishing (P*) to inform the ABC.

The SSC will receive a refresher on the stock risk ratings process under the new ABC-CR and provide input on the biological and environmental stock risk rating metrics for Florida Hogfish (FLK/EFL), Black Grouper, and Gag Grouper.

6.4 Public Comment

6.5 Action

- Update biological and environmental stock risk ratings for Florida Hogfish (FLK/EFL), Black Grouper, and Gag Grouper.

7. **SSC WORKGROUP AND SEDAR PANELS**

7.1 Documents

Attachment 7a. SSC SEDAR Appointments
Attachment 7b. SSC Workgroup Appointments

7.2 Presentation

Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff

7.3 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, as well as upcoming needs including populating panels with SSC members. Prior to the October 20-22 SA-SSC meeting on

Tuesday morning, a review of the Black Grouper Management Procedure will be conducted comprised of a joint sub-group of Gulf and South Atlantic SSC members.

7.4 Public Comment

7.5 Action

- Review appointments to SSC Workgroups and SEDAR panels.
- Recruit SSC members for upcoming SEDAR panels.
- Recruit members for Joint Review of Black Grouper Management Procedure

8. OTHER BUSINESS

9. PUBLIC COMMENT

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

10. 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, August 28, 2026 for inclusion in the briefing book for the September 2026 Council meeting.

11. NEXT MEETINGS

11.1 Scientific and Statistical Committee Meetings

- October 20-22, 2026 in Charleston, SC
- April 19-22, 2027 in Charleston, SC (SEP/SSC)
- October 26-28, 2027 in Charleston, SC

11.2 South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meetings

- September 14-18, 2026 in North Charleston, SC
- December 7-11, 2026 in Beaufort, NC
- March 8-12, 2027 in Jekyll Island, GA
- June 7-11, 2027 in Daytona Beach, FL

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