

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE



SSC Meeting Overview
May 28, 2025

via Webinar

VERSION
FINAL
5/16/25

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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., May 28, 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 via webinar. 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. May 2025 SSC Agenda
Attachment 1b. April 2025 SSC Meeting Minutes
*Attachment 1c. April 2025 Final Report

1.2 Action

- Introductions
- Review and approve agenda.
- Approve minutes from May 2025 meeting.
- Approve May 2025 final report

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 NORTHERN REGION (DLM) MODEL

3.1 Documents

Attachment 3a. SEDAR 92: Atlantic Blueline Tilefish SAR (northern region)
Attachment 3b. Blueline Tilefish Northern Region Presentation
Attachment 3c. SADL Survey Presentation
Attachment 3d. Proportional Estimation Methodology Presentation
Attachment 3e. Joint Sub-Group Final Report
Attachment 3f. Joint Sub-Group Presentation

3.2 Presentation

Dr. Nikolai Klibansky, SEFSC; Dr. Kevin Craig, SEFSC; Dr. Paul Nitschke, NEFSC; Dr. Jim Gartland, SA-SSC

3.3 Overview

The SEDAR 92 Operational Assessment 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 the R package *DLM tool* (Carruthers et al. 2022). A subgroup of SSC members from the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Councils reviewed the northern model DLM assessment in late April and produced a summary report with their recommendations. The committee will also receive a presentation on the SADL survey and proportional estimation methodology, which was utilized to apportion the catch recommendations between the Mid and South Atlantic Council jurisdictions for the northern region.

Note that because the northern model ABC recommendations span the jurisdiction of the Mid and South Atlantic Councils, the South Atlantic SSC will need to determine the apportioned ABC to the sub-area under the South Atlantic Councils jurisdiction (i.e. Cape Hatteras north to NC-VA border), following the ABC recommendation for the entire northern region. The sub-area ABC will be added to the ABC recommendations for the southern region (Cape Hatteras south to FL Keys) to provide an ABC recommendation for the entire South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction.

The SSC is tasked with recommending whether the assessment adequately met the terms of reference (*or latest requests from the SSC*), are consistent with the Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA), and useful for providing management advice and developing fishing level recommendations for the Council. The SSC should identify and discuss the scientific uncertainties within the assessment and describe the consequences of these uncertainties in regard to setting catch level recommendations.

3.4 Public Comment

3.5 Action

➤ **Review assessment**

- Does the assessment address the ToRs or other requests to the SSCs satisfaction?
- 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.
 - 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.**
 - Is the assessment consistent with BSIA guidance and principles, and acceptable for use in management?
 - Apply the South Atlantic ABC Control Rule, if possible, and complete the fishing level recommendations table.
 - 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 that 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?
- **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. SSC's Atlantic Blueline Tilefish (Northern Model) Catch Level Recommendations (North of Cape Hatteras to NC-VA border)

ABC-CR Criteria		Value
Stock Risk Rating		High
Relative Stock Biomass Level		n/a
Category		4
P-Star		n/a
OFL RECOMMENDATIONS		
Year	Yield (lbs ww)	
2025		
2026		
2027		
2028		
ABC RECOMMENDATIONS		
Year	Yield (lbs ww)	
2025		
2026		
2027		
2028		

4. SEDAR 92: ATLANTIC BLUELINE TILEFISH SOUTHERN REGION (DLM) MODEL

4.1 Documents

- *Attachment 4a. Blueline Tilefish (Southern Region) DLM SAR
- *Attachment 4b. Blueline Tilefish Southern Region Presentation
- Attachment 4c. South Atlantic ABC-CR Tables

4.2 Presentation

Dr. Nikolai Klibansky, SEFSC

4.3 Overview

The SEDAR 92 Operational Assessment 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 southern region, the analytical team applied an age-aggregated logistic surplus production model using ASPIC software to estimate stock status of blueline tilefish south of Cape Hatteras. During the April 2025 review, the SSC determined that this assessment was not consistent with BSIA: *Data are inadequate to support use of the current ASPIC model and provide defensible scientific conclusions; not consistent with BSIA guidance and practices and not suitable for use in making management decisions. The SSC was very skeptical of the surplus production model results because of the large number of years at the end of the time series (>10 years) without any effort data. Landings data are not enough for surplus production models to provide robust results. The lack of effort and index data at the end of the time series led to the SSC's rejection of the blueline operational assessment for management. Additionally, there were no other data sources that supported the large, predicted increase in biomass of blueline tilefish in the most recent years by the model.*

The SSC requested that a data-limited methods (DLM) model be applied to the southern region, similar to the approach used for the DLM model run for the northern region, in order to address the deficiencies in the ASPIC production model to provide scientifically justifiable catch level recommendations for use in management.

The SSC is tasked with recommending whether the assessment adequately met the terms of reference (*or latest requests from the SSC*), are consistent with the Best Scientific Information Available (BSIA), and useful for providing management advice and developing fishing level recommendations for the Council. The SSC should identify and discuss the scientific uncertainties within the assessment and describe the consequences of these uncertainties in regard to setting catch level recommendations.

4.4 Public Comment

4.5 Action

➤ **Review assessment**

- Does the assessment address the ToRs or other requests to the SSCs satisfaction?
- 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.
- 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.**

- Is the assessment consistent with BSIA guidance and principles, and acceptable for use in management?
- Apply the South Atlantic ABC Control Rule, if possible, and complete the fishing level recommendations table.
- 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 that 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?
- **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 2. SSC's Atlantic Blueline Tilefish (Southern Model) Catch Level Recommendations (South of Cape Hatteras to FL Keys)

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

Table 3. SSC's Atlantic Blueline Tilefish Catch Level Recommendations for **Entire South Atlantic Council Jurisdiction**.

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

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

5.1 Documents

Attachment 5a. SEDAR 76U: Updated Catch Level Projections Report
Attachment 5b. SEDAR 76U: Presentation of Updated Projections

5.2 Presentation

Dr. Matt Vincent, SEFSC

5.3 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. 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.

During the April 2025 SSC meeting, the SSC made additional requests for projection runs based on the SEDAR 76 Update assessment. These projection scenarios included:

- Scenario 1: $F = F_{\text{MSY}}$ with interim $F(2021-2023)$
- Scenario 2: $F = P^*_{20\%}F_{\text{MSY}}$ with interim $F(2021-2023)$
- Scenario 3: $F = F_{\text{MSY}}$ with interim $F(2020-2022)$
- Scenario 4: $F = P^*_{20\%}F_{\text{MSY}}$ with interim $F(2020-2022)$

The SSC is tasked with reviewing the new projection scenarios, identifying the scientific uncertainties in the projections, and making catch level recommendations to the Council to consider for management.

5.4 Public Comment

5.5 Action

➤ **Review assessment**

- Did the projections presented address the requests to the SSCs satisfaction?
- 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 the projections and fishing level recommendations.

➤ **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.

Table 4. 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
$L_{75\%MSY}$	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
$D_{75\%MSY}$	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
$SSB_{2023}/MSST$	—	0.16	0.27	0.22
$SSB_{2023}/SSB_{\text{MSY}}$	—	0.10	0.15	0.09

Table 5. SSC's Black Sea Bass Catch Level Recommendations

Criteria			Value	
Stock Risk Rating			High	
Relative Stock Biomass Level			Low	
Category			Category 1	
P-Star			20%	
OFL RECOMMENDATIONS				
Year	Landed (lbs ww)	Discard (lbs ww)	Landed (number)	Discard (number)
2024				
2025				
2026				
2027				
2028				
ABC RECOMMENDATIONS				
Year	Landed (lbs ww)	Discard (lbs ww)	Landed (number)	Discard (number)
2024				
2025				
2026				
2027				
2028				

6. SEDAR PROCESS UPDATE

6.1 Documents

Attachment 6a. SEDAR Process Update Presentation

Attachment 6b. (Background) Proposed SEDAR modifications, Oct 2024 SSC presentation

Attachment 6c. (Background) SEDAR Steering Committee Report, Feb 2025

6.2 Presentation

Dr. Julie Neer, SEDAR Staff

6.3 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.

6.4 Public Comment

6.5 Action

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

7. SEDAR: TERMS OF REFERENCE – GAG GROUPE

7.1 Documents

Attachment 7a. Terms of Reference for 2026 Gag Grouper Stock Assessment

Attachment 7b. (Background) Scope of Work for Gag Grouper

7.2 Presentation

Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff

7.3 Overview

Terms of Reference for the planned 2026 stock assessment of Gag Grouper will be reviewed and recommended to the Council. The previous SEDAR 71 stock assessment was an operational assessment with a terminal year of 2019. The SSC reviewed a scope of work at a previous meeting that along with information from the research and monitoring plan was used to craft the terms of reference for the next assessment.

7.4 Public Comment

7.5 Action

- Review the Terms of Reference for the 2026 Gag Grouper stock assessment.

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 as soon as possible for inclusion in the briefing book for the June 2025 Council meeting.

11. **NEXT MEETINGS**

11.1 Scientific and Statistical Committee Meetings

- October 21-23, 2025 in Charleston, SC

11.2 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

ADJOURN