

**SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

**SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE**



**SSC Meeting Overview**  
**FINAL - REVISED**  
**October 21-23, 2025**

**Town & Country Inn**  
**2008 Savannah Highway**  
**Charleston, SC**

VERSION  
FINAL-REVISED  
10/21/25

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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., October 23, 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. October 2025 SSC Agenda Revised  
Attachment 1b. May 2025 SSC Meeting Minutes

### 1.2 Action

- Introduction of new Committee members
- Review and approve revised 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. COUNCIL FMP AMENDMENT AND SEFSC UPDATES

### 3.1 Documents

Attachment 3. FMP Amendment Updates

### 3.2 Presentation

Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff; ~~Dr. Erik Williams, SEFSC~~

### 3.3 Overview

The SSC will receive updates on ongoing fishery management plan amendments in progress or completed where SSC review was involved. The entire list of ongoing amendments is provided in Attachment 3, 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 as needed.

~~The Southeast Fishery Science Center (SEFSC) will provide a verbal update on the current capacity of the stock assessment enterprise and plans for upcoming stock assessments and strategies for increasing ABC advice throughput.~~

### 3.4 Public Comment

### 3.5 Action

- Receive updates on recent Fishery Management Plan Amendments and Council actions.
- ~~Receive update from the Southeast Fishery Science Center on stock assessment capacity changes.~~

## 4. SEDAR PROCESS MODIFICATIONS

### 4.1 Documents

Attachment 4a. SEDAR Process Modifications Presentation

Attachment 4b. SEDAR Component Highlights

Attachment 4c. (Background) Feb2025 Steering Committee Summary

Attachment 4d. (Background) Aug2025 Steering Committee Summary

Attachment 4e. (Background) Update to proposed SEDAR process May 2025

Attachment 4f. (Background) Proposed modification to SEDAR SSC Oct 2024

### 4.2 Presentation

SEDAR Staff

### 4.3 Overview

The Committee will receive an update on the new modifications to the SEDAR process. The previous research track/operational assessment framework has struggled to achieve the desired goals of increased assessment throughput and improved efficiency for data provisioning and has resulted in overall decreases in productivity since its implementation. These new modifications aim to increase timeliness and throughput of fisheries management advice while considering static or potentially decreased capacity and resources in the future.

In this new approach, the SEDAR process will be limited to those assessments with sufficient new information to require external participation and/or review. Update assessments and interim assessment approaches will be conducted internally by the SEFSC and reviewed by the SSC. The SEFSC will take responsibility for the assessment component of the SEDAR process, while the data and review components remain unchanged. Within the new assessment phase, Cooperators (i.e. SAFMC) will appoint an ‘Assessment Technical Team’ with diverse scientific expertise and fishing experience to assist in assessment development. The composition of this assessment technical team will include SSC members, other assessment analysts, and fishery stakeholders as necessary to provide guidance in the development of the assessment. Final review of assessment products and recommended management decisions (i.e. OFL and ABC recommendations) will still be reviewed by the SSC in a public meeting.

Attachments 4a & 4b highlight the new SEDAR process modifications. Attachments 4c-4f are supplementary documents to provide additional background information as necessary. SSC members interested in participating in the Assessment Technical Team will have an opportunity to volunteer during this agenda item or later in the meeting during the recruitment for various SSC workgroups.

#### 4.4 Public Comment

#### 4.5 Action

- Receive update on the modifications to the SEDAR process, including the new roles of SSC members.

### **5. SSC WORKGROUPS AND SEDAR PANELS**

#### 5.1 Documents

- Attachment 5a. SSC Workgroup and SEDAR panel rosters
- Attachment 5b. SEDAR 106: Gag Grouper Schedule

#### 5.2 Presentation

Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff

#### 5.3 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. Numerous SSC workgroups and SEDAR panels that will need to be appointed later in the meeting agenda are indicated by the highlighted cells in attachment 5a. SSC members should consider interest in serving on these workgroups and/or SEDAR panels.

#### 5.4 Public Comment

#### 5.5 Action

- Receive updates on any recent workgroup and SEDAR panel business.

### **6. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR 2026-2027 ASSESSMENTS**

#### 6.1 Documents

- Attachment 6a. King Mackerel Terms of Reference
- Attachment 6b. Spanish Mackerel Terms of Reference
- Attachment 6c. (Background) Statement of Work Spanish Mackerel
- Attachment 6d. Red Grouper Terms of Reference
- Attachment 6e. Snowy Grouper Terms of Reference
- Attachment 6f. (Background) Supplementary Assessment Information

#### 6.2 Presentation

Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff

#### 6.3 Overview

The SSC will review the Terms of Reference for the upcoming South Atlantic King Mackerel and Atlantic Spanish Mackerel assessments. Comments and recommendations will be passed along to the Council before final approval in Dec 2025. 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.

#### 6.4 Public Comment

#### 6.5 Action

- Review Terms of Reference for South Atlantic King Mackerel
- Review Terms of Reference for Atlantic Spanish Mackerel
- Review Terms of Reference for South Atlantic Red Grouper
- Review Terms of Reference for South Atlantic Snowy Grouper

## 7. **SEDAR 89 REVISED: SOUTH ATLANTIC TILEFISH**

### 7.1 Documents

Attachment 7a. SEDAR 89 Tilefish (Revised) Stock Assessment Report

Attachment 7b. SEDAR 89 Tilefish (Revised) Presentation

Attachment 7c. (Background) Oct 2024 SSC Report Excerpt – Tilefish Review

### 7.2 Presentation

~~Dr. Matthew Vincent, SEFSC~~ Dr. Chip Collier, SAFMC Staff

### 7.3 Overview

The SEDAR 89: South Atlantic Tilefish stock assessment was reviewed by the SSC in October 2024 and catch levels were recommended to the Council during the December Council meeting. However, during amendment development it was discovered that commercial landings used in the assessment were much higher than quota monitoring estimates for 2018-2022, which affected the base model run and projection estimates. Revised commercial landings estimates were provided and the assessment model was re-analyzed with the corrected data. Only one other model parameter was changed from the original model run -  $F_{init}$  was modeled as a multiplier of the average of the first 3 years of fishing mortality and fixed at 1.0. The previous assessment used a fixed value of 0.01. All other data inputs and modeling parameters remained unchanged from SEDAR 89.

The SSC should review the revised stock assessment report and presentation (attachments 7a and 7b). The Committee should also review the background document (attachment 7c) that outlines the discussions and recommendations made during the review of the original assessment during the Oct 2024 meeting, in order to focus on the changes made in the revised assessment model.

Revised projection scenarios include OFL projection results with the fishing mortality rate fixed at  $F = F_{MSY}$  starting in 2026. The ABC Control Rule applied during the initial review remains unchanged and was specified at  $P^* = 30\%$ . ABC projection results with the fishing mortality rate fixed at  $F$  that provides  $P^* = 30\%$  is provided for years starting in 2026.

The SSC is asked to review, discuss, and provide feedback on the SEDAR 89 (revised): South Atlantic Tilefish model configurations, projections, and uncertainties, focusing on the changes made in the revised assessment model. If the assessment is determined to be suitable for providing management advice, the SSC will make new catch-level recommendations to the Council based on the revised assessment.

#### 7.4 Public Comment

#### 7.5 Action

- **Review Revised Assessment**
  - Is the revised assessment consistent with BSIA guidance and practices?
  - 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 (i.e. projections)?
- **Identify, summarize, and discuss revised assessment uncertainties.**
  - Change of  $F_{init}$  value
  - Discuss the factors of this assessment that affect the reliability of estimates of stock status and fishing level recommendations.
- **Provide OFL and ABC catch level recommendations**
  - Apply the South Atlantic ABC-CR (complete)
    - Stock risk rating: High
    - Current biomass status: Moderate
    - $P^* = 30\%$
  - Fill out Table 2: Catch level recommendations below.

Table 1. SEDAR 89 (revised) status indicators, benchmarks, and related quantities from model output in the stock assessment report.

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-1 fish. Spawning stock biomass (SSB) is measured as fecundity of mature females (trillion eggs).  $L_{\text{current}}$  is the average landings from 2020–2022.

Quantity	Units	Estimate	Median	SE
$F_{\text{MSY}}$	$y^{-1}$	0.20	0.21	0.06
$75\%F_{\text{MSY}}$	$y^{-1}$	0.15	0.16	0.05
$B_{\text{MSY}}$	1000 lb whole	6158.52	5856.66	997.99
$\text{SSB}_{\text{MSY}}$	Trillions of Eggs	515.42	485.07	1165.03
MSST	Trillions of Eggs	386.57	363.80	873.77
MSY	1000 lb gutted	523.31	521.82	66.82
$L_{75\%\text{MSY}}$	1000 lb gutted	502.45	501.52	67.16
$L_{\text{current}}$	1000 lb gutted	373.42	371.24	16.91
$R_{\text{MSY}}$	millions fish	0.05	0.04	0.01
$F_{2020-2022}/F_{\text{MSY}}$	—	0.72	0.71	0.31
$\text{SSB}_{2022}/\text{MSST}$	—	1.31	1.33	0.48
$\text{SSB}_{2022}/\text{SSB}_{\text{MSY}}$	—	0.98	1.00	0.36

Table 2. South Atlantic SSC Tilefish Catch Level Recommendations

Criteria		Value
Stock Risk Rating		High
Relative Stock Biomass Level		Moderate
P-Star		30%
SSC recommended $P_{\text{Rebuild}}$		N/A
OFL RECOMMENDATIONS		
Year	Landed (lbs, gutted weight)	Landed (number)
2023	368,000	53,000
2024	376,000	55,000
2025	389,000	58,000
<b>2026</b>	<b>546,000</b>	<b>81,000</b>
<b>2027</b>	<b>540,000</b>	<b>80,000</b>
ABC RECOMMENDATIONS		
Year	Landed (lbs, gutted weight)	Landed (number)
2023	368,000	53,000
2024	376,000	55,000
2025	389,000	58,000
<b>2026</b>	<b>459,000</b>	<b>68,000</b>
<b>2027</b>	<b>465,000</b>	<b>69,000</b>

## **8. MRIP-FES REVISED SURVEY RESULTS AND CALIBRATION METHODS**

### 8.1 Documents

Attachment 8. MRIP-FES Updates Presentation

### 8.2 Presentation

Dr. Katherine Papacostas, NOAA-OST (Recorded Presentation)

### 8.3 Overview

The NOAA Office of Science and Technology (OST) has concluded data collection and are wrapping up data analysis as part of a large-scale study conducted throughout 2024 to test improvements to the Fishing Effort Survey (based on results from prior studies). The preliminary study completed in 2023 indicated the order of fishing questions had an impact on the overall estimates of recreational effort, but further intensive study would be necessary to evaluate the impacts to each individual species and associated stock assessment. The more comprehensive study just completed has recently undergone a peer review process to help fine-tune the new methods for obtaining recreational catch and effort estimates and calibrate model development and implementation. The SSC will receive an update on the progress of the follow-up study, peer review process, and plans for calibration and integration.

Note: This will be a recorded presentation delivered by NOAA-OST during the September 2025 Mid-Atlantic SSC meeting.

### 8.4 Public Comment

### 8.5 Action

- Receive update on the revised methods for MRIP-FES estimates and timeline for calibrations for South Atlantic stock assessments.

## ~~**9. DOLPHINFISH MANAGEMENT STRATEGY EVALUATION (MSE) UPDATE**~~

### ~~9.1 Documents~~

~~\*Attachment 9. Dolphinfish MSE Presentation~~

### ~~9.2 Presentation~~

~~Dr. Cassidy Peterson, SEFSC; Tom Carruthers, Blue Matter Science~~

### 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.~~

~~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. They should also review the Terms of Reference for the review workshop of the Dolphin MSE and make recommendations to the Council for their Dec 2025 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.~~
- ~~➤ Review Terms of Reference for review workshop.~~

## 10. **MSY PROXIES IN SOUTH ATLANTIC STOCK ASSESSMENTS**

### 10.1 Documents

Attachment 10a. SEFSC Presentation

Attachment 10b. Draft Workplan for Joint MSY Workgroup

### 10.2 Presentation

~~Dr. Erik Williams, SEFSC; Dr. Judd Curtis, SAFMC Staff~~

### 10.3 Overview

The SAFMC has requested the SSC review scientific information and provide thorough rationale for using the recommended spawning potential ratio (SPR) proxies for maximum sustainable yield (MSY) in South Atlantic stocks as status determination criteria. For most current South Atlantic fishery management plans, the MSY proxy had historically been set at F30%SPR (Comprehensive Amendment, 1998), but recent technical guidance on National Standard 1 from NMFS has indicated that the SPR proxy should be re-evaluated with each new stock assessment as scientific information has evolved over time. The SEFSC will provide a presentation on SPR proxies that outlines various population dynamics, summary of existing research, and other factors that affect SPR decisions.

As part of this charge, the Council supported the formation of a joint SA/Gulf SSC workgroup to develop a Best Practices Guidance document with an associated decision matrix to recommend a standardized approach to the development of MSY proxy (i.e. SPR) values for completed and upcoming stock assessments for the Southeast region. The draft workplan is provided and SSC members should review this workplan and consider volunteering for the joint workgroup.

#### 10.4 Public Comment

#### 10.5 Action

- ~~Receive SEFSC presentation on MSY proxies in the South Atlantic.~~
- Review Draft Workplan and Schedule for the MSY proxies joint workgroup.
- Populate workgroup.

## **11. BLACK SEA BASS GENETICS AND STOCK STRUCTURE**

#### 11.1 Documents

Attachment 11a. Black Sea Bass Genetics Report

\*Attachment 11b. Black Sea Bass Genetics Presentation

#### 11.2 Presentation

Rich Harrington, SC-DNR

#### 11.3 Overview

Black Sea Bass has historically been managed as two stocks along the east coast of the United States, with a genetically and life history defined divide at Cape Hatteras, NC. This divide in stock structure has previously been supported by life history, morphometric, and genetic studies. Given recent changes in population dynamics of Black Sea Bass in both the South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic regions this study was designed to re-assess the genetic structure of Black Sea Bass along the U.S. Atlantic coast from Florida to Maine using contemporary samples and a nuclear genetic panel. Partner surveys provided genetic materials along the coast in 2024 that enabled the determination of the recent genetic structure following and during observed changes in distribution, stock size, and regional conditions.

#### 11.4 Public Comment

#### 11.5 Action

- Review the Black Sea Bass East Coast Genetics Structure Summary Report.
- Evaluate conclusions and implications for the next Black Sea Bass stock assessment.

## **12. WRECKFISH MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE UPDATE**

### 12.1 Documents

Attachment 12a. Wreckfish Preliminary Stock Assessment Report  
\*Attachment 12b. Wreckfish Stock Assessment and MSE Presentation  
Attachment 12c. (Background) Wreckfish 2015 Stock Assessment Report  
Attachment 12d. (Background) SSC Report 2014 Wreckfish Review

### 12.2 Presentation

Dr. Jeremy Collie and Dr. Josh Nowlis, Lynker

### 12.3 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 (attachment 12c) and reviewed by the SSC in April 2014 (attachment 12d). The primary assessment tool was a statistical age/length model, with a dynamic production model used as a secondary tool. The current assessment will provide an update with 13 years of additional data.

The SSC should review the preliminary stock assessment report and evaluate the proposed assessment methodologies, data inputs, identify potential modeling uncertainties, and provide guidance to model development. The SSC will continue to be involved in the development of this management procedure as it progresses.

### 12.4 Public Comment

### 12.5 Action

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

## **13. SNAPPER GROUPER MANAGEMENT STRATEGY EVALUATION UPDATE**

### 13.1 Documents

Attachment 13. Snapper Grouper MSE Update Presentation

## 13.2 Presentation

Dr. Chip Collier, SAFMC Staff; Dr. Adrian Hordyk, Blue Matter Science

## 13.3 Overview

The Council has started a management strategy evaluation (MSE) for the snapper grouper fishery focusing on strategies to reduce the number of released fish to improve yield throughout the fishery. The management strategy will also consider the need for fishery access and resource use while preventing overfishing and rebuilding overfished stocks. The MSE is part of the Council's approach to address the overfishing of snapper grouper species while considering access, yield, and sustainability of species in the snapper grouper complex. Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) is a method for evaluating the performance of alternative management approaches and identifying the mode of management that is most likely to meet the various management objectives of a fishery. The MSE process is designed to support evidence-based decision-making in the face of uncertainty on the status and dynamics of a fishery system.

Council and Blue Matter Staff will provide an overview of the Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation, which is being designed to compare different management scenarios to reduce the number of discards in the recreational fishery. Staff will summarize the previous modeling framework developed by Blue Matter Science, including 132 management scenarios previously evaluated across species (Red Snapper, Gag, Black Sea Bass) and spatial zones. It highlights key results from trade-off analyses comparing spawning biomass, landings, and discard outcomes across management options such as status quo, full retention, and spatial closures. Staff will describe changes to the modeling framework, management objectives, incorporating stakeholder input, and expanding species. The SSC is requested to provide feedback on modeling approaches, diagnostic outputs, and evaluation metrics to guide the next phase of MSE development.

## 13.4 Public Comment

## 13.5 Action

- Use of Assessment Inputs:
  - Are there any concerns with using outputs from past SEDAR assessments or the rapid conditioning model (for unassessed species) to parameterize the MSE? Are there specific diagnostics or validation steps the SSC would like to see applied to ensure model credibility and consistency across species?
- Aggregate Bag Limit Analysis:
  - Given the complexity of modeling multi-species aggregate bag limits, can the SSC suggest examples or analytical approaches from other regions or fisheries that could inform the development of this management scenario?
- Compliance and Behavior Modeling:

- Incorporating “mandatory stopping” provisions will require assumptions about angler behavior and compliance. Are there comparable management strategies or empirical data sources the SSC recommends drawing upon to develop realistic compliance scenarios for robustness testing?
- Spatial Structure in Scenarios:
  - The Council has requested that spatial dynamics be incorporated into the aggregate bag limit scenario. What level of spatial resolution or population structure does the SSC view as most appropriate to balance realism with model tractability?

## **14. ADDITIONAL MODEL RUNS, SENSITIVITIES, AND CATCH LEVELS**

### 14.1 Documents

none

### 14.2 Presentation

none

### 14.3 Overview

After reviewing base models and/or projection scenarios, the SSC will have the opportunity to review additional projection runs, sensitivities, and catch levels recommendations that were requested from agenda items above (if necessary).

### 14.4 Public Comment

### 14.5 Action

- As needed.

## **15. SSC WORKGROUP AND SEDAR PANELS**

### 15.1 Documents

Attachment 5a. SSC Workgroup and SEDAR panel rosters  
Attachment 5b. SEDAR 106: Gag Grouper Schedule

### 15.2 Presentation

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. Numerous SSC workgroups and SEDAR panels that will need to be appointed later in the meeting agenda are indicated by the highlighted cells in attachment 5a. SSC members should consider interest in serving on these workgroups and/or SEDAR panels.

#### 15.4 Public Comment

#### 15.5 Action

- Populate forthcoming workgroups and SEDAR panels.

## **16. OTHER BUSINESS**

## **17. PUBLIC COMMENT**

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

## **18. 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, November 14, 2025 (approximately 3 weeks from the end of the meeting) for inclusion in the briefing book for the December 2025 Council meeting.

## **19. NEXT MEETINGS**

### 19.1 Scientific and Statistical Committee Meetings

- Webinar (Jan/Feb): TBD
- SEP: April 13-14, 2026 in Charleston, SC
- SSC: April 14-16, 2026 in Charleston, SC
- Webinar (Jul/Aug): TBD
- October 20-22, 2026 in Charleston, SC

### 19.2 South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meetings

- December 8-12, 2025 in Kitty Hawk, NC
- March 2-6, 2026 in Jekyll Island, GA
- June 8-12, 2026 in St. Augustine, FL
- September 14-18, 2026 in Charleston, SC

**ADJOURN**