



## SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Jessica McCawley, Chair | Mel Bell, Vice Chair  
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### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT MARCH 2019

The Council's priorities for 2019 are included as Attachment 5a in TAB 7, Executive Finance Committee. Detailed information on the status of each FMP/Amendment and upcoming meetings is contained in the Council Follow-Up (Attachment 5c in TAB 7, Executive Finance Committee). There will be a number of new items and potential modifications to timing that need to be accommodated within our list of priorities, so we will need to discuss them and get guidance on modifications to the Council's priorities.

Also, in Executive Finance we will be approving the draft 2019 Calendar Year (January – December) Operational Budget (Attachment 4a in TAB 7, Executive Finance Committee). The Council will review and approve the 2019 draft operational budget at the March 2019 meeting; final approval will occur once we know our final 2019 funding level (likely June).

Once again, this has been a very busy time since our December 2018 Council meeting. The government closure resulted in lots of work rescheduling meetings. The Council office remained open and we were working. But many of our federal partners, including those at NOAA Fisheries' Southeastern Regional Office in St. Petersburg and the Southeast Fishery Science Centers in Miami and Beaufort, NC were furloughed since December 22, 2018, making it very difficult if not impossible to move forward with many fishery management needs. Here are a few of the impacts affecting us at the regional level thus far (Attachment 5d in TAB 7, Executive Finance Committee contains details on impacts to fishery management plans.):

1. **Interdisciplinary Plan Teams (IPT) work** – IPTs are comprised of Council and NOAA Fisheries staff and prepare documents/analyses for fishery management plans and amendments. All IPT conference calls were postponed as our federal partners were not allowed to work.
2. **Scientific and Statistical Committee** – NOAA Fisheries scientists were unable to participate in a scheduled meeting (via webinar) on January 25<sup>th</sup>. As a result, the meeting was rescheduled to February 25<sup>th</sup>. The SSC was to review updated stock assessments that may provide some increase in catches for fishermen.
3. **Southeast Data and Assessment Review (SEDAR)** – stock assessments:
  - a. Webinars in January for Cobia, Red Grouper, and Red Porgy – postponed
  - b. Atlantic Cobia Data Workshop (1/14-18) and South Atlantic Red Porgy Assessment Workshop (2/2-7) – postponed. These two species are part of a multi-species commercial and recreational fishery that contribute to a \$21 billion industry and support 113,000 jobs.
  - c. Strategic Planning Workshop for the Southeast Region (1/22-25) – postponed. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center and Southeast Regional Office were meeting to jointly develop a strategic plan for the region and improve collaborations as we move towards improving science advice. The Southeast is arguably the most complex (with

respect to fisheries) in the Nation. Developing a joint strategic plan and improving efficiency is critical to improving services in the region.

4. **Amendments Under Review** –
  - a. Snapper Grouper Abbreviated Framework 2, currently under Secretarial Review, would increase the commercial vermilion snapper Annual Catch Limit (ACL) by 210,800 pounds (whole weight) and the recreational ACL by 99,200 pounds (ww). Implementation of these increases will be delayed.
  - b. The Final Rule implementing electronic reporting requirements for federally permitted charter vessels will be delayed which will delay improvements to recreational catch data.
5. **Permits** – There are significant consequences as personnel at the NOAA Fisheries Permit Office were furloughed and federal permits continued to expire. Many commercial fishermen and federal for-hire permit holders contacted the Council office to determine if anything could be done to allow them to renew their permits, which is critical to their ability to fish and make a living. NOAA Fisheries is aware of the problem and is seeking a solution until they are able to issue permit renewals.
6. **Quota Tracking** – quotas were still being monitoring during the closure and NOAA Fisheries was able to prepare closure notices if quotas were met.
7. **Impacts on 2020** – the delays in all SEDAR stock assessments and related activities will likely delay results scheduled for presentation to the Council during its December 2019 meeting. Of much greater concern is how far into 2020 will assessments be delayed and how much lost revenue to both the commercial and recreational sectors will result. Talks are underway with the SEFSC to determine how much of a delay there will be to items in 2019 and 2020.
8. **March 2019 Council meeting** – the South Atlantic Council meeting will take place as scheduled and the Federal Register notice was published very quickly once the government reopened. The NMFS HQ staff did a super job getting notices processed and published very quickly.

We here at the Council office are the lucky ones. Many others, including our federal fishery partners, were furloughed and some continued to work without pay; measures are in the works to restore the back pay for federal employees. However, there are a number of contractors that perform critical functions and they have not received back pay in the past. We asked that our constituents remain patient with our office and with those that returned to a backlog of work. And that they continue to support those who worked during the closure without pay, including the men and women of the USCG, and do your part to help conserve marine resources.

Since the government reopened, staff at the Southeast Regional Office, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, NOAA GC, and NMFS Headquarters have done a super job to get things back on track as quickly as possible. We are very grateful for the positive attitude and excellent work ethic exhibited after a very frustrating experience.

In the Council office, we continued to work on amendments, rescheduling meetings/workshops, and administrative changes. Work on MyFishCount and Citizen Science continued. Outreach work continued to prepare for the expected mandatory charter vessel reporting on April 1, 2019. We also produced our first electronic newsletter; congratulations to our super Outreach Staff.

Finally, as you know Amber Von Harten accepted another position and we will miss her input and participation on our team. Amber leaves the Citizen Science Program in great shape and we are very grateful for her 7 and 1/2 years of service and we wish her well in her new adventure. We are working to have a new Citizen Science Director onboard prior to the March meeting.