



# South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

## News Release

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### **Citizen Science Project Expansion Provides Fishermen the Opportunity to Assist in Data Collection for Shallow Water Grouper**

We need better data. It's a phrase that fisheries managers are all too familiar with, including members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Acknowledging the challenges facing data collection, including long-term funding, the Council's Citizen Science Program engages fishermen, scientists, and managers in creating projects to address research needs and help fill data gaps. The program allows fishermen and others the opportunity to contribute information valuable to fisheries science and management. The Council's first Citizen Science Project "SAFMC Release" is expanding to allow private recreational anglers as well as charter captains and commercial fishermen the opportunity to provide details via a mobile app about shallow water grouper species that are released. In addition, the SAFMC Release project will now be housed under the new customizable citizen science app, SciFish.

The number of released fish is growing along the South Atlantic coast due to increasing fishing pressure and regulations. While dockside intercepts and other traditional data collection efforts provide information about species that are landed, limited data are available on released fish. In June of 2019, the Council's Citizen Science Program began SAFMC Release as a pilot project, encouraging fishermen to voluntarily collect information on the release of Scamp grouper via a mobile app. A partnership with the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) helps ensure data quality and standards are met, making the data available for consideration in upcoming stock assessments and relevant management action.



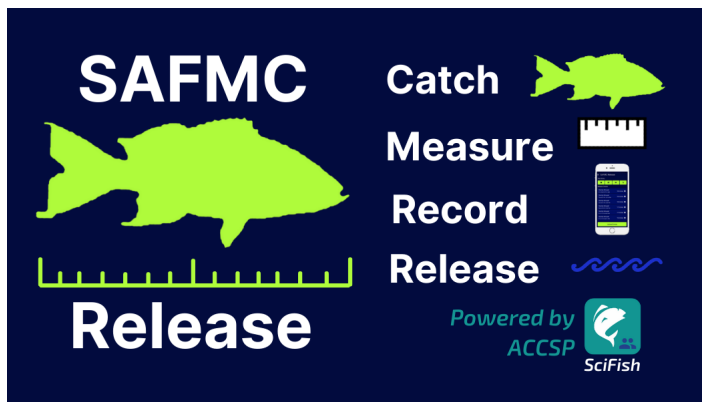
Photo credit: Shore Thang Charters

"Fishermen consistently express a desire to report to scientists and managers what they see on the water," said Council Chair, Mel Bell. "Grouper are highly valued by both recreational and commercial fishermen here in the South Atlantic region. Now fishermen can be directly involved in helping scientists better understand what species of shallow water grouper are caught, as well as providing important details related to their release. Such data are very important in allowing for better estimations of how many of the released fish potentially survive after capture."

*(Continued)*

## **Citizen Science Project Expansion** (continued)

The SAFMC Release project allows for data collection on all shallow water grouper managed by the Council. In addition to Scamp, fishermen can use the SciFish mobile app to provide information on Black Grouper, Coney, Gag, Graysby, Red Grouper, Red Hind, Rock Hind, Yellowfin Grouper and Yellowmouth Grouper. Data collected through the SAFMC Release project include length of the fish, depth of release, release condition, observed shark predation, and release treatment (e.g., use of a descending device or venting tool).



**SAFMC Release is now housed under the new  
SciFish Citizen Science mobile app.**

With its expansion, SAFMC Release will no longer be a stand-alone mobile app but a project under the new citizen science mobile app, “SciFish”. Powered by ACCSP, SciFish is a customizable citizen science mobile app that will eventually house multiple projects developed by ACCSP partners including state and federal marine resource agencies and regional fishery management councils. SciFish is also designed to act as a citizen science hub, allowing users the ability to participate in multiple citizen science projects along the entire east coast through a single mobile app.

“It has always been my feeling that anglers, as a user group, have a lot of useful information for managers,” said Rip Cunningham, Conservation Editor for Salt Water Sportsman magazine in a recent column. “How to get that information in a format that is usable for resource management has always been the issue. It now looks like more-universal citizen science is getting closer.”

To participate in SAFMC Release and begin sharing data, fishermen can visit the [SAFMC Release project webpage](#) for additional details or contact Julia Byrd, Citizen Science Program Manager at [Julia.byrd@safmc.net](mailto:Julia.byrd@safmc.net) or 843-302-8493.

**The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, one of eight regional councils, conserves and manages fish stocks from three to 200 miles offshore of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and east Florida.**