

Director's Report

August 2026 Quarterly Business Meeting

Documents

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
June 2026 Meeting Report

South Atlantic Fishery Management
Council June 2026 Meeting Report

Rule Suspensions Memo

June 2026 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met June 16-18, 2026 in Alexandria, VA. This document summarizes key actions taken and issues considered during the meeting. Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings are available on the Council's [June 2026 meeting page](#).

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Reviewed and provided feedback on a draft range of alternatives for the Scup Winter I Framework
- Adopted 2027-2029 specifications for blueline tilefish
- Reviewed previously adopted 2027 specifications for golden tilefish and recommended no changes
- Received an update on the joint Mid-Atlantic and New England Councils' evaluation of vessel baseline restrictions
- Reviewed the 2026 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem Report and the EAFM risk assessment summary report
- Reviewed an [annual report](#) on commercial landings of unmanaged species
- Received a presentation on upcoming Atlantic mackerel cooperative research
- Received updates on a variety of topics from the Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Fishery Monitoring and Research Division

Scup Winter I Framework

The Council reviewed a draft range of alternatives for the Commercial Scup Winter I Framework. This action considers options to provide additional management flexibility to the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) during the Winter I quota period, and to preserve harvest opportunities across all three quota periods (Winter I, Summer, and Winter II) when practicable.

Currently, the Winter I possession limit is reduced from 50,000 pounds to 1,000 pounds once 80 percent of the Winter I quota is landed. This system was designed to distribute landings more evenly across the period and prevent quota overages. An analysis presented at the [April 2026](#) Council meeting highlighted how certain factors prevented timely implementation of the trip limit reduction in recent years (2023-2026), and 2026 experienced an unprecedented overage of the Winter I quota. Under current Accountability Measures (AMs), this overage must be deducted from the 2027 Winter I quota.

The range of alternatives presented to the Council included options that would modify 1) Winter I trip limit requirements, 2) catch reporting requirements for limited access scup permits and/or dealers, and 3) landings-based AMs for the commercial scup fishery. To streamline the framework for expedient implementation, the Council agreed to remove two reporting alternatives from further consideration. Alternative 2D, which would require federally permitted commercial vessels to report scup catch through the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system, was removed because it would be duplicative with Alternative 2C, which would require reporting through the Vessel Monitoring System. The Council also removed Alternative 2B, which would require vessels and/or dealers to report scup catch on a shortened timeline, noting that other alternatives under consideration would provide the tools and information needed to avoid future Winter I quota overages.

The Council also requested that staff add language to the framework document emphasizing that the combined use of alternatives 1B and 1C would provide the Regional Administrator with the greatest level of flexibility to manage the Winter I quota.

The modified range of alternatives will be further developed, with final action tentatively scheduled for August 2026. Updates on this action can be found [here](#).

2027-2029 Blueline Tilefish Specifications

The Council reviewed the stock status and performance of the blueline tilefish fishery and adopted multi-year specifications (catch and landings limits) for 2027-2029, as summarized in the table below.

Blueline tilefish are considered a single stock along the U.S. Atlantic Coast, and the assessment is conducted through the Southeast Data and Assessment Review (SEDAR) process; however, due to limited data for the portion of the stock north of Cape Hatteras, NC, the assessment evaluates areas north and south of Cape Hatteras separately. The stock was last assessed in 2025 (SEDAR 92) using the data limited methods (DLM) toolkit. The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) concluded that new information was insufficient to alter the previous Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) and therefore recommended maintaining the ABC at 205 metric tons for 2027-2029. The Council endorsed this recommendation and agreed to maintain the previously approved catch and landing limits with the updated estimates of dead discards for 2027-2029. The Council recommended no changes to commercial or recreational management measures.

During the discussion, the Council noted several sources of uncertainty, including the lack of stock status information and the high uncertainty in private recreational catch estimates. The Council agreed to write a letter to NOAA's Highly Migratory Species (HMS) requesting they add a short description related to the private recreational tilefish permit and reporting on their HMS permit webpage, given the high overlap between the two fisheries.

Summary of Blueline Tilefish 2027-2029 Specifications	
Acceptable Biological Catch	452,200 pounds
Recreational Total Allowable Landings	313,601 pounds
Recreational Trip Limits	Private vessel: 3 fish USCG uninspected for-hire vessel: 5 fish USCG inspected for-hire vessel: 7 fish
Commercial Total Allowable Landings	109,885 pounds
Commercial Trip Limits	500 pounds (reduced to 300 pounds once 70% of the quota has been landed)

2027 Golden Tilefish Specifications

In 2027, golden tilefish will be in year 3 of multiyear specifications previously adopted for the 2025-2027 fishing years. After reviewing updated fishery information and considering recommendations from its SSC, Tilefish Monitoring Committee, Advisory Panel, and staff, the Council recommended no changes to the 2027 specifications. Additional details about these specifications are provided in the [August 2024 Meeting Summary](#).

Vessel Baseline Evaluation

The Council received an update on the joint Mid-Atlantic and New England Council evaluation of vessel baseline restrictions, including a summary of permit data and input received during three recent Advisory Panel meetings

and an associated comment period. Council members shared differing opinions on the costs and benefits of vessel baseline restrictions and discussed how considerations vary by fishery and gear type.

Current regulations require that, for most limited access fisheries managed by the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils, a vessel or engine replacement or upgrade cannot exceed 10% of the length and 20% of the horsepower of the permit's baseline specifications. The evaluation is intended to inform whether the Councils should consider initiating a management action to revise these restrictions.

The evaluation is expected to be completed in time for the October Council meeting, when the Council will discuss its draft priorities for 2027.

2026 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem Report

Dr. Abby Tyrell, Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC), presented key findings from the [2026 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem \(SOE\) report](#). This report gives information on the status and trends of relevant ecological, environmental, economic, and social components of the Mid-Atlantic Bight ecosystem. The report evaluates the performance of different ecosystem indicators relative to management objectives and the potential climate and ecosystem risks to meeting management objectives. For the first time, the 2026 report included seasonal bottom temperature forecasts that are predicting normal to below average temperatures throughout most of the Northeast shelf in 2026. Other highlights from the 2026 report include:

- Globally, 2025 was the third warmest year on record but the seasonal surface and bottom temperatures for the Northeast shelf were similar to or cooler than the long-term average.
- The Cold Pool, an important oceanographic feature in the Mid-Atlantic for fish spawning and nursery habitat, had been getting warmer and shrinking but saw a return to near normal conditions in 2025.
- Commercial landings in 2024 were at a historic low and total commercial revenue continues to decline and near an all-time low.
- Recreational landings continued to decline in 2024, while recreational effort was near average.
- There are long-term changes in zooplankton biomass and composition, fish community composition, and reduced fish productivity for many managed stocks suggests a potential change in the ecosystem to faster growing and lower trophic level species.

The NEFSC continues to look for fishing industry input to help inform future SOE reports. Fishing community observations on unusual events, including high/low abundance or differences from recent conditions, are encouraged and can be provided at northeast.ecosystem.highlights@noaa.gov.

Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) Risk Assessment Report

The Council reviewed the [2026 EAFM risk assessment summary report](#). The risk assessment is updated annually and is a tool that allows the Council to look across all species and sectors to identify high risk interactions in which to prioritize for further consideration and evaluation. The 2026 risk assessment utilizes the most recent information, new analyses, and updated indicators to inform the level of risk for 28 risk elements across ecological, socioeconomic, and management factors. Nearly 79% of all risk elements are low or low-moderate risk, an increase by over 6% from 2025 indicating lower risk, in general, across all Council managed stocks relative to the previous year. Both the State of the Ecosystem and risk assessment reports indicate that conditions and risk at the species/stock level are generally positive, but when looking at broader ecosystem both reports show declining trends and higher risk and there may be some underlying dynamics at play that may be worth investigating.

Unmanaged Commercial Landings Report

The Council reviewed an [annual report](#) that summarizes commercial landings of species in locations where they are not managed at the state or federal level with a possession limit, size limit, seasonal closure, or limited access. The report also summarizes commercial landings of the species designated as Ecosystem Components through the Council's Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment. The goal of this report is to look for signs of developing commercial fisheries. This year's report included new data visualizations and statistical analyses. Unmanaged commercial landings have been generally declining in recent years; however, a few species had statistically significant increases in landings in the most recent 5 years (2021-2025) compared to the prior 15 years (2006-2020), including Atlantic cutlassfish, ribbonfish, silversides, and mantis shrimps. The Council did not express any concerns with the landings trends shown in this year's report.

NEFSC Atlantic Mackerel Cooperative Research Initiative ("MackPack")

Dr. Anna Mercer, NEFSC Cooperative Research Branch Chief, [provided an overview](#) of upcoming Atlantic mackerel cooperative research to be conducted in 2026, 2027, and 2028. The results of the research are expected to inform future mackerel assessments, possibly in 2029 (results would likely not be available soon enough to inform the scheduled 2027 assessment). Key research elements include acoustic detection, egg survey uncertainty/spawning timing refinements, U.S. - Canada movement/mixing, and ecosystem drivers. Industry collaboration will occur across all elements. For more information, contact Dr. Mercer at anna.mercer@noaa.gov.

NEFSC Fisheries Monitoring and Research Division (FMRD) Programs

KB McArdle, NEFSC Fishery Monitoring Research Division Director, [provided an update](#) on the NEFSC Fishery Monitoring and Research Division, including FMRD's role in collecting commercial fishery information for use in fisheries science and management. The presentation covered the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology, 2025 NEFOP and Industry-Funded Scallop coverage accomplishments, biological port sampling, and the NEFOP/NEPBSP contract merge. Key updates included the upcoming 2026 SBRM 3-year review, observer coverage accomplishments, spiny dogfish sampling changes, expanded biological port sampling coordination, and future efforts to improve sampling efficiency and flexibility. For more information, contact KB at Katherine.McArdle@noaa.gov.

Other Business

Departing Council Members

The Council bid farewell to two Mid-Atlantic Council members, Sonny Gwin (Maryland) and Michelle Duval (Pennsylvania). Mr. Gwin completed nine years of service on the Council after his appointment in 2017. He chaired the Spiny Dogfish Committee for the past six years, helping guide discussions on dogfish specifications and the development of revised accountability measures intended to provide greater stability for the fishery. He also served as the Council's liaison to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council for three years. Dr. Duval completed six years of service on the Council after being appointed in 2020. During her tenure, she chaired both the Research Steering Committee and the Ecosystem and Ocean Planning Committee, helping advance several important ecosystem initiatives, including reviews of ecosystem risk assessment processes, exempted fishing permit policies, and the Essential Fish Habitat review process. The Council thanked both members for their years of dedicated service to the Council.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service "Shellfish" Definition

Dr. Jenifer Chatfield, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, announced that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would soon be publishing a final rule to amend the definition of "shellfish" in the Code of Federal Regulations by removing the phrase "having a shell" and adding specific taxa. This change would clarify

that squid and other cephalopods are included within the regulatory definition of shellfish. This change brings the definition in line with current biological understanding and addresses a long-standing concern of the Mid-Atlantic Council and the U.S. squid industry.

Next Council Meeting

The next Council meeting will be held **August 11-13, 2026**, in Philadelphia, PA. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.



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Commercial Management, Headboats, Black Sea Bass, and Dolphin

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June Council Meeting Addresses Commercial Management, Headboats, Black Sea Bass, and Dolphin



June 15, 2026

The [South Atlantic Fishery Management Council met June 8-12, 2026](#), in St. Augustine, Florida. Below are some of the notable topics that were covered throughout the week.

During the first Full Council session, members received a series of reports and updates. Among the updates was a presentation by NOAA Fisheries' Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) on the newly announced [Recreational Angler Partnership Improvement Directive \(RAPID\)](#), a national initiative to modernize recreational fishing data collection through stronger collaboration among NOAA Fisheries, states, and regional partners.

Commercial Management Measures (Amendment 60)

On Tuesday, the Council continued development of [Amendment 60](#), which addresses commercial management measures in the snapper grouper fishery. The amendment is intended to increase flexibility and adaptability in the commercial sector by revising permit accessibility, trip limits, and bottom longline gear stowage requirements to allow fishermen to switch to or from bottom longline gear during a trip. The amendment also considers changes to the commercial snapper grouper (SG1) permit program, including eliminating the current “2-for-1” permit requirement, increasing trip limits for several species, and requiring that all snapper grouper harvested on vessels with commercial SG permits be sold.



The Council reviewed additional trip limit analyses conducted by NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office (SERO), selected preferred alternatives for several actions, and approved the amendment for public hearings. Public hearings will be held in August 2026 and during the [Council's September 2026 meeting](#) in North Charleston, South Carolina. Feedback received during the public comment period will be used to further refine the amendment before the Council takes final action, so if you are interested, be sure to provide your comment during this period.

Headboat Vessel Limits

The Council continued discussions on measures intended to address the needs of the South Atlantic headboat fleet by adjusting possession limits for vessels that carry large numbers of passengers. Under regulations that will go into effect soon, being considered through [Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 36](#), a vessel carrying 40 passengers would be subject to the same vessel limit for [gag](#) and [black grouper](#) as a vessel carrying six passengers. To address



this issue, the Council is evaluating a six-passenger-based vessel limit that would allow federally permitted headboats to retain additional gag and black grouper.

After further deliberation, the Council decided to continue looking at a “per six passengers” vessel limit for gag and black grouper. However, the Council removed [scamp](#) and [yellowmouth grouper](#) from further consideration after learning that a vessel limit for those species would be more restrictive than the current per-person bag limit. The amendment will return for further discussion in September, with the Council expected to approve it for public hearings in December 2026.

Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision (Amendment 61)

On Wednesday, the Council proceeded with work on [Snapper Grouper Amendment 61](#), which would reduce the number of species included in the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU). The Council is evaluating a subset of species to determine whether they continue to require federal conservation and management under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Potential changes include removing species from the FMU or designating them as Ecosystem Component (EC) species, which remain in the Fishery Management Plan to support ecosystem management goals but are not subject to management measures such as annual catch limits.



The Council reviewed feedback from the [Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel](#) (AP) and an updated decision document. The Council clarified its intent to maintain permitting requirements for EC species to support data collection, bycatch monitoring, and habitat protections in the multi-species snapper

grouper fishery. The Council also removed a proposed aggregate commercial trip limit for EC species while still considering a separate recreational aggregate bag limit. The amendment is on the agenda for September, with the Council expected to approve it for public hearings in December 2026.

Spawning Special Management Zones

The Council discussed three [Spawning Special Management Zones](#) (SSMZs) established to protect important spawning areas for snapper grouper species. While five SSMZs were created in 2017, regulations for three natural-bottom sites (South Cape Lookout, Georgetown Hole/Devils Hole, and Warsaw Hole) are scheduled to expire in August 2027 unless further action is taken. Through Regulatory Amendment 39, the Council will consider extending the sunset provision from 7 to 20 years or removing it entirely, making the protections permanent. The Council will continue reviewing this amendment at its next meeting and public hearings, which will likely be held this fall.

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Changes to Seasonal Closures for Black Sea Bass Pots

The Council advanced [Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 40](#), which would allow the [black sea bass](#) pots equipped with on-demand retrieval systems to be fished inside seasonal closed areas currently in place to protect North Atlantic right whales and other marine mammals from entanglement in vertical fishing lines. On-demand retrieval systems keep buoy lines stowed at depth and only deploy them “on-demand” when fishermen return to retrieve



their gear. The Council also considered reducing the trip limit for black sea bass pot gear in anticipation of lower catch limits soon to go into effect, but removed the measure after receiving opposition from advisors and the public who cited concerns about trip profitability. Additional changes to black sea bass management are expected to be addressed through [Snapper Grouper Amendment 56](#) following completion of the upcoming stock assessment.

Dolphin Management

On Thursday, the Council received an update on the ongoing [Dolphin Management Strategy Evaluation](#) (MSE), a tool designed to test potential management strategies before they are implemented in a fishery. The Council reviewed recent modeling results from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center and provided feedback on management scenarios that could be evaluated through the MSE, including measures previously considered in [Dolphin Wahoo Regulatory Amendment 3](#), such as changes to the minimum size limit and recreational retention limits for [dolphin](#).



Following the discussion, the Council voted to discontinue work on Regulatory Amendment 3. Council members noted that preliminary MSE results indicated the dolphin stock remains at a healthy biomass level and that the management measures under consideration were not expected to result in declines in spawning stock biomass. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center will continue developing and refining the MSE, which may serve as a tool for evaluating future management options in the dolphin fishery.

**South Atlantic Fishery
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July 29, 2026

MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission
FROM: Jason Rock, Fisheries Science Section Chief
SUBJECT: Temporary Rule Suspensions

Issue

In accordance with the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries Resource Management Policy Number 2014-2, Temporary Rule Suspension, the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission will vote on any new rule suspensions that have occurred since the last meeting of the commission.

Findings

There has been one new rule suspension since the May 2026 meeting. One previously suspended rule, 15A NCAC 03J .0103 (h) Gill Nets, Seines, Identification, Restrictions, was previously suspended to extend the small mesh gill net attendance requirements year-round in portions of the Tar-Pamlico and Neuse rivers. This action was taken as part of a department initiative to review existing small mesh gill net rules to limit yardage and address attendance requirements in certain areas of the state. However, in March 2026 the suspension was rescinded when the small mesh gill net fishery was temporarily closed to maintain compliance with the Incidental Take Permit for threatened and endangered sea turtles and endangered sturgeons. When the small mesh gill net fishery was reopened following the May 2026 MFC meeting, it was necessary to resuspend the rule.

Action Needed

****Vote to suspend section (h) of NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03J .0103 Gill Nets, Seines, Identification Restrictions for an indefinite period****

Overview

In accordance with policy, the division will report current rule suspensions previously approved by the commission as non-action items. They include:

NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03J .0501 (e)(2) DEFINITIONS AND STANDARDS FOR POUND NETS AND POUND NET SETS

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to increase the minimum mesh size of escape panels for flounder pound nets



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in accordance with Amendment 3 of the North Carolina Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan. This suspension was implemented in proclamation [M-34-2015](#) and continues in Proclamation [M-9-2024](#).

NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03L .0103 (a)(1) PROHIBITED NETS, MESH LENGTHS AND AREAS

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to adjust trawl net minimum mesh size requirements in accordance with Amendment 2 to the North Carolina Shrimp Fishery Management Plan. This suspension was implemented in Proclamation SH-3-2019 and continues in Proclamation [SH-1-2022](#).

NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03L .0105 (2) RECREATIONAL SHRIMP LIMITS

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to modify the recreational possession limit of shrimp by removing the four quarts heads on and two and a half quarts heads off prohibition from waters closed to shrimping in accordance with Amendment 2 to the North Carolina Shrimp Fishery Management Plan. This suspension was implemented in Proclamation [SH-4-2022](#).

NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03L .0205 (a) CRAB SPAWNING SANCTUARIES

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to close crab spawning sanctuaries year-round to the use of trawls in accordance with Amendment 2 to the North Carolina Shrimp Fishery Management Plan. This suspension was implemented in Proclamation [M-13-2024](#).

NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03M .0502 (a) MULLET

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to modify the recreational and for-hire possession limits of mullet in accordance with Amendment 2 to the North Carolina Striped Mullet Fishery Management Plan. This suspension was implemented in Proclamation [FF-27-2024](#).

NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03M .0515 (a)(2) DOLPHIN

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to adjust the recreational vessel limit to complement management of dolphin



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under the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Amendment 10 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic. This suspension was implemented in Proclamation [FF-30-2022](#).

NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03Q .0107 (4) SPECIAL REGULATIONS: JOINT WATERS

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to adjust the creel limit for American shad under the management framework of the North Carolina American Shad Sustainable Fishery Plan. This suspension was continued in Proclamation [FF-8-2026](#).