

Director's Report

February 2026 Quarterly Business Meeting

Documents

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management
Council December 2025 Meeting Report

South Atlantic Fishery Management
Council December 2025 Meeting Report

South Atlantic Fishery Management
Council January 2026 Meeting Report

Rule Suspensions Memo

December 2025 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met December 16-18, 2025, in Washington, D.C. The following is a summary of actions taken and issues considered during the meeting. Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings are available on the Council's [December 2025 meeting page](#).

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Adopted a revised rebuilding plan and 2026-2027 specifications for the Atlantic mackerel fishery
- Revised a component of previously proposed changes to spiny dogfish accountability measures to align with the New England Fishery Management Council's final action
- Adopted status quo recreational summer flounder management measures for 2026-2027*
- Adopted status quo recreational scup management measures for 2026-2027*
- Approved a 20% liberalization in recreational harvest of black sea bass in 2026-2027*
- Reviewed and provided guidance on revised draft alternatives for the Recreational Sector Separation Amendment*
- Reviewed a draft range of alternatives for the Recreational Tilefish Reporting Framework and recommended several modifications
- Approved a 2026 Implementation Plan
- Received an overview of governance-related IRA projects across the three East Coast Councils

** Items denoted with an asterisk (*) were undertaken during joint meetings with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass Management Board or Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board*

Atlantic Mackerel Rebuilding and Specifications Framework

The Council adopted a revised rebuilding plan and 2026-2027 specifications for the Atlantic mackerel fishery. Based on a 2025 assessment showing improved stock trends, the revised plan will allow higher catches while continuing to rebuild the stock by 2032. This action reflects the Council's efforts to expand fishing opportunities where stock conditions allow, consistent with the Executive Order on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness.

Under the modified rebuilding plan, commercial quotas would increase to 11,237 metric tons (24.8 million pounds) for 2026 and 13,210 metric tons (29.1 million pounds) for 2027. Once approved and implemented by NOAA Fisheries, the new commercial quotas will allow substantially higher initial Atlantic mackerel trip limits, including a 200,000-pound trip limit for Tier 1 permitted vessels. While the higher quota may be implemented relatively quickly, associated trip limit changes may take longer to clear various NOAA regulatory processes.

The Council also voted to increase the federal recreational possession limit to 25 fish for private boats and 50 fish for for-hire patrons (currently 20 fish for all). The higher for-hire possession limit responds to industry comments that customers are discouraged from booking trips at lower possession limits. States may or may not increase their possession limits, and boats are subject to state rules whenever in state waters.

Atlantic mackerel assessments have regularly overestimated the number of fish entering the population in the assessment's last year of data, referred to as the "terminal year recruitment." To ensure the stock remains on track to rebuild even if a future assessment concludes that 2024 recruitment was lower than initially estimated,

the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) replaced the assessment's very high estimate of 2024 recruitment (1.3 billion) with a much lower value based on the median recruitment from 2009 to 2023 (91 million).

The Council did not recommend any modifications to the existing 129-metric-ton (284,396 pounds) cap on incidental catch of river herring and shad (RH/S). To fully utilize the Atlantic mackerel quota, the fishery must stay below a combined RH/S bycatch rate of about 0.75% (i.e., less than one percent) on typical mackerel trips. From 2015 through 2023, this threshold was exceeded in 3 of 9 years, resulting in fishery closures in two of those years. Accordingly, the current cap continues to provide a strong incentive to avoid RH/S bycatch. The Council has also sponsored development of a [RH/S bycatch risk prediction tool](#) that will help industry identify areas where RH/S are more likely to be encountered. This tool will be available to the fleet starting in early 2026.

The Council will work with NOAA Fisheries to facilitate timely implementation of the revised quotas and trip limits. Details on pending trip limit changes and updates on the implementation process may be found on the [action page](#) for this framework.

Spiny Dogfish Accountability Measures and Specifications Framework

The Council revisited the joint spiny dogfish framework action following action taken by the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC). The spiny dogfish fishery is jointly managed by the two Councils, and any framework measures must be adopted by both.

The framework addresses modifications to fishery's accountability measures and sets 2026–2027 specifications for the fishery. The Mid-Atlantic Council selected preferred alternatives and approved the framework for submission to NOAA Fisheries at its October 2025 meeting. During that meeting, the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Administrator raised concerns that aspects of the combined accountability measure approach could result in insufficient catch accountability, particularly related to the treatment of commercial landings overages. Despite these concerns, the Mid-Atlantic Council concluded that the full suite of adopted measures was appropriate to conserve and manage the fishery.

At the NEFMC's December 2025 meeting, the Regional Administrator provided additional clarification, noting that the combination of not always paying back commercial landings overages and closing the fishery at 105 percent of the commercial quota could allow for repeated uncorrected overages. The Regional Administrator indicated that removing one of these two measures would alleviate major concerns. NEFMC ultimately adopted the same framework measures as the Mid-Atlantic Council with one exception: it did not adopt the 105 percent fishery closure provision, instead voting for no action on that measure.

Given NEFMC's action and the requirement for consistent measures under a joint framework, the Mid-Atlantic Council reconsidered the action at its December meeting. The Council voted to align with NEFMC by not adopting the 105 percent closure measure, thus allowing the remaining elements of the framework to move forward jointly. Additional information on the final joint action is available in the Councils' press release: [Mid-Atlantic and New England Councils Take Joint Action on Spiny Dogfish Framework](#).

2026-2027 Recreational Management Measures for Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass

The Council met jointly with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board (Board) to discuss 2026 and 2027 recreational management measures (i.e., bag, size, and season limits) for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. For all three species, the Council and Board followed the Percent Change Approach as outlined in [Framework 19/Addendum XXXVI](#). The first step of the Percent Change Approach is to compare the upcoming two-year average recreational harvest limit (RHL) to a

confidence interval around an estimate of expected harvest in the upcoming two years if the current measures were to remain in place. The Recreation Demand Model developed by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center was used to calculate the estimates of harvest under current measures and the associated confidence intervals. The Percent Change Approach also requires consideration of biomass compared to the target level when determining the required overall percent change in expected harvest.

Summer Flounder

The Council and Board agreed the Percent Change Approach requires no change in recreational harvest of summer flounder in 2026 and 2027. This is because the 2026-2027 RHL (8.79 million pounds) falls above the confidence interval around estimated harvest for these years, and stock biomass is greater than 50% but less than 90% of the target level.

The Council and Board approved the use of regional conservation equivalency in 2026 and 2027. Non-preferred coastwide measures, which are written into the federal regulations but waived in favor of state measures, include an 18.5-inch minimum size, 3 fish possession limit, and open season from May 8-September 30. Precautionary default measures include a 20-inch minimum size, 2 fish possession limit, and open season from July 1-August 31. These measures are only intended to be used for states/regions which do not comply with the conservation equivalency process.

Under the no change in harvest outcome, the [current measures](#) are expected to remain in place for states/regions in 2026. Measures for 2027 will be reviewed in 2026 but are expected to remain unchanged unless new information suggests a major change in the expected impacts of those measures on the stock or the fishery. If states/regions would like to make minor changes to their 2026 measures (e.g., to maintain a Saturday opening), those changes will need to be approved through the Commission process in early 2026.

Scup

The Council and Board agreed the Percent Change Approach requires no change in recreational harvest of scup in 2026 and 2027. This is because the average 2026-2027 RHL (12.38 million pounds) falls below the confidence interval around estimated harvest for these years, and the stock is greater than 150% of the target level.

Under the no change in harvest outcome, the Council and Board agreed to status quo federal water measures. [Status quo state water measures](#) are also expected to remain in place in 2026. Measures for 2027 will be reviewed in 2026 but are expected to remain unchanged unless new information suggests a major change in the expected impacts of those measures on the stock or the fishery. If states would like to make minor changes to their 2026 measures (e.g., to maintain a Saturday opening), those changes will need to be approved through the Commission process in early 2026.

Black Sea Bass

The Council and Board discussed application of the Percent Change Approach for setting 2026 and 2027 recreational measures for black sea bass, including consideration of the appropriate confidence interval. When viewed as a percentage range around the median, the updated confidence interval for black sea bass is much wider than those for summer flounder and scup. It is also wider than the confidence intervals used in the past for all three species. The degree of this difference was not anticipated prior to the availability of updated Recreation Demand Model results but can be explained by differences in the input data. Specifically, the black sea bass stock assessment recently transitioned to the Woods Hole Assessment Model (WHAM), which characterizes uncertainty differently than the assessment model structure used for black sea bass in the past and currently used for summer flounder and scup.

Council and Board members emphasized that Framework 19/Addendum XXXVI calls for consideration of the appropriate confidence interval methodology each specifications cycle. In addition, the Recreation Demand Model, as well as stock assessment models and projections, continue to evolve and improve over time. The Council and Board tasked staff to plan a more comprehensive review of confidence interval methods for all three species to better inform future decision-making.

The Council and Board discussed that use of the prior confidence interval method would have resulted in no liberalization for black sea bass in 2026 and 2027, while a slightly narrower interval would have resulted in a 39 percent liberalization. The Council and Board ultimately approved a 20 percent liberalization. They agreed this is appropriately precautionary, especially as harvest would still be expected to be below the 2026-2027 RHL and biomass has been increasing and has been well above the target level for more than a decade. Consistent with the Percent Change Approach, the 20 percent liberalization will be implemented in 2026, with 2027 measures remaining unchanged unless new information suggests a major change in the expected impacts of those measures on the stock or the fishery.

The Council and Board also agreed to waive federal waters measures in favor of state waters measures, as has been done for black sea bass since 2022. They adopted non-preferred coastwide measures consisting of a 14-inch minimum size, a 5-fish possession limit, and a May 15–September 30 open season. These measures are intended to be waived in favor of state waters measures. Precautionary default measures remain unchanged at a 16 inch minimum size, a 2-fish possession limit, and an open season of June 1 – August 31. These measures will only be implemented if needed for states/regions which do not follow the conservation equivalency process. Measures in individual states/regions will be determined in early 2026 through the Commission process.

Recreational Sector Separation Amendment

The Council met jointly with the Commission's Interstate Fisheries Management Program (ISFMP) Policy Board to review and provide guidance on revised draft alternatives for the Recreational Sector Separation Amendment for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. This amendment considers two main issues: 1) recreational mode management (separate for-hire and private mode management measures or strategies), and 2) for-hire permitting and reporting requirements.

The Council and Policy Board discussed [questions and areas of feedback](#) identified by the Fishery Management Action Team/Plan Development Team (FMAT/PDT). While some of these questions were addressed, the Council and Board recognized that additional stakeholder input and discussion among managers is needed in order to continue development of alternatives. The groups delayed development of a draft amendment/public hearing document in order to hold a workshop in 2026 to further refine the draft alternatives. Staff will prepare draft workshop objectives and logistics for review by the Council and Policy Board in early 2026.

In addition, the Council and Policy Board removed from consideration an option that would have required states to consider or implement state-level mode management during the recreational measures setting process. This option was removed due to concerns about potential administrative burden and stakeholder confusion. However, they intend to further explore an option that would adopt uniform guidelines and best practices for implementing mode management at the state and/or federal levels. Additional guidance is needed on guidelines and best practices that may be included, which will receive further discussion at the workshop. The workshop will also cover the remaining options related to a for-hire Letter of Authorization (LOA) program, as well as for-hire permitting and reporting requirements.

The groups also discussed, but did not approve, removing bluefish from the amendment and pursuing further development of the LOA options only for summer flounder and black sea bass. Some members also expressed concern that mode management approaches using separate allocations had been removed from the document

in August and discussed whether these types of options should be discussed at the planned workshop, but rejected a motion to do so.

Recreational Tilefish Reporting Framework

The Council reviewed a modified range of alternatives for the Recreational Tilefish Reporting Framework. This action considers options to modify or eliminate the permitting and reporting requirements for private recreational tilefish anglers with the goals of reducing the reporting burden, increasing enforceability of regulations, and improving the accuracy and reliability of self-reported data.

The range of alternatives presented to the Council includes options that would either 1) eliminate the current permit and/or reporting requirements or (2) modify the required reporting fields and/or submission timeframe. An initial range of alternatives was presented to the Council during the October 2025 meeting and further refined based on Council discussion.

The Council discussed the importance of the reporting program given the current data limitations for both blueline and golden tilefish, noting that improved recreational catch data remains a major data gap. However, the Council acknowledged that the existing reporting program has not functioned as intended and that the complexity of the requirements has likely contributed to low participation and poor data quality. As a result, the Council emphasized the need to simplify reporting requirements to improve compliance and increase the likelihood of obtaining usable catch data. The Council also discussed enforceability as a key consideration, recognizing that reporting requirements that are easier to understand and enforce may improve program performance.

Several Council members expressed continued interest in obtaining tilefish length data as well as information on fishing location; however, Council members agreed that the mandatory reporting fields need to be made as simple as possible. To avoid adding complexity, the Council agreed to consider making these fields optional rather than required. The Council noted that optional reporting fields could provide opportunities to collect additional biological or spatial information without increasing the regulatory burden.

Final action by the Council is tentatively planned for April 2026. Updates on this action can be found [here](#).

2026 Implementation Plan

The Council approved a draft 2026 Implementation Plan after making several revisions. The plan outlines anticipated work for the upcoming year in the context of the Council's 5-year strategic plan. First, the Council added an action to evaluate and provide guidance on the use of confidence intervals and the role of uncertainty in the Percent Change Approach. The Council also agreed to add development and implementation of a mesh selectivity study for the directed Atlantic mackerel fishery to the "Possible Additions" section of the plan, which includes tasks the Council may work on if time and resources allow. In addition, the Council moved review of revised MRIP Fishing Effort Survey data (including associated allocation changes) to the Possible Additions section. Finally, the Council removed a potential action related to development of an omnibus framework for ACL specification regulations and instead requested that the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office Regional Administrator address this issue through Magnuson-Stevens Act Section 305(d) rulemaking.

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Governance Projects

The Council received an overview of the governance-related IRA projects across the three East Coast Councils. The New England, Mid-Atlantic, and South Atlantic Councils all have at least one IRA project that will review, evaluate, and potentially recommend modifications to cross-jurisdictional governance processes, advisory body structure and use, and cooperative management agreements. Many of these projects are underway with

contractors conducting the work on most project components. A significant amount of work is anticipated in 2026 and Council members, advisors, and staff will be involved in a variety of activities throughout the year to offer their feedback and perspectives to help address the project objectives.

Next Council Meeting

The next Council meeting will be held by webinar **February 10-11, 2026**. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.

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Council Receives Updates on Red Snapper State Management Efforts; Approves Black Sea Bass and Blueline Tilefish Measures During December Meeting

December 18, 2025



Council meeting planned in January for Oculina Shrimp Access Area

Cold winds continued to blow across the Outer Banks as members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council met this past week in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The Council addressed federal fishery management issues in the South Atlantic region, including measures to reduce the harvest of Black Sea Bass and changes to catch limits for Blueline Tilefish. Council members also received updates on Exempted Fishing Permit applications designed to test state management of Red Snapper in Federal waters.

The Council discussed options for approval of a joint amendment to establish a Shrimp Fishery Access Area in the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Concern off the east coast of Florida, continued working on measures affecting species managed within the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit, and provided guidance for its Citizen Science Program, including research priorities.

State Management of Recreational Red Snapper

Representatives from each of the South Atlantic states presented information to the Council on their Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) applications for Red Snapper. The applications, submitted to the Secretary of Commerce on November 10, 2025, would explore state management of the recreational (private angler and for-hire) Red Snapper fishery. Copies of the individual EFPs are available in the December meeting briefing book materials.

The Council also received a presentation summarizing results of Year 1 of the Red Snapper EFP that was awarded to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in 2024. Following discussion, Council members drafted comments that



will be used to develop a Council letter providing recommendations in response to the Red Snapper EFPs. NOAA Fisheries and the Secretary determines the approval or disapproval of all EFPs after taking public comment. Public comment on the Red Snapper EFPs will be solicited by NOAA Fisheries in 2026, after the EFPs are determined complete, according to Andy Strelchek, NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator.

Black Sea Bass Reductions

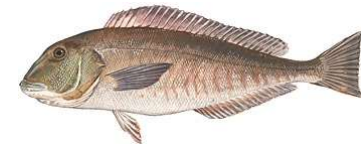
After reviewing public comment and recommendations from its Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel, the Council approved Regulatory Amendment 37 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the Amendment would implement measures to reduce harvest and address the continuing decline in the Black Sea Bass stock in the South Atlantic.

The regulatory amendment would reduce the recreational bag limit from 7 fish per person per day to 3 fish per person per day and establish an annual two-month spawning season closure (February 1 – March 31) for both commercial and recreational sectors. No changes to the minimum size limit are being proposed. Regulatory Amendment 37 would establish recreational and commercial annual catch targets (ACTs) equal to 50% of the average landings from 2019–2023. The Council would reconsider the ACTs and associated measures two years after implementation. Additional actions will be considered through Amendment 56 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.



Blueline Tilefish Catch Limits

The Council approved Abbreviated Framework Amendment 5 to update the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) for Blueline Tilefish in the South Atlantic region. The amendment was developed following the latest stock assessment for Atlantic Blueline Tilefish (SEDAR 92), completed in March 2025, and recommendations from the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee. The stock assessment includes Blueline Tilefish found within both the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils' jurisdictions.



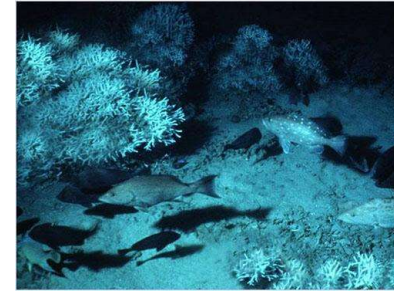
The Council's intent is to implement the new catch limits for Blueline Tilefish for the 2026 fishing season. The total ACL will be equal to 314,058 pounds whole weight upon approval of the Framework Amendment by the Secretary of Commerce. In the South Atlantic region, the fishery is divided between sectors with the commercial fishery allocated 50.07% and the recreational sector 49.93% of the catch limit. The recreational fishery opens annually May 1st, with NOAA Fisheries determining the length of the season based on the recreational ACL. The commercial fishing year begins January 1st, with a trip limit of 100 pounds, and closes once the commercial ALC is projected to be met.

Jurisdictional apportionment between the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic regions and other management measures will be addressed in a future amendment.

Shrimp Fishery Access Area – Oculina Bank HAPC

The Council reviewed the final draft amendment (Coral Amendment 11 and Shrimp Amendment 12) that would create a Shrimp Fishery Access Area along the eastern boundary of the northern extension of the Oculina Habitat Area of Particular Concern. The area is where the rock shrimp fishery historically operated. The Council was not able to approve the amendment at this meeting because several sections were not updated as planned due to the government shutdown earlier this fall.

The Council will hold a meeting via webinar on Friday, January 23, 2026 from 10 a.m. until 12 p.m. to address the necessary updates to the amendment before approving it for consideration by the Secretary of Commerce. Public comment will be accepted. Meeting materials, including an online public comment form, will be available one week prior to the January meeting.



Additional Information

Additional information about the Council's December 2025 meeting, including individual reports from committee meetings and meetings of the Full Council, are available from the Council's website at: <https://safmc.net/events/december-2025-council-meeting/>. The next meeting of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is scheduled for March 2-6, 2026, in Jekyll Island, GA.

South Atlantic Fishery
Management Council



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South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Full Council and Committee
SUMMARY MOTIONS
December 8-12, 2025

This is a summary of the motions approved by the Council. Motions addressing actions and alternatives for FMP amendments are followed by text showing the result of the approved motion. Complete details on motions and other committee recommendations are provided in the Committee Reports available on the SAFMC website.

Executive Committee

MOTION 1: APPROVE THE UPDATES TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE HANDBOOK AS PRESENTED AND MODIFIED.

MOTION 2: APPROVE THE UPDATES TO THE STATEMENT OF ORGANIZATION PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES (SOPP) AS PRESENTED AND MODIFIED.

MOTION 3: APPROVE THE DRAFT 2026 OPERATIONAL BUDGET AS PRESENTED AND MODIFIED.

Appointments (Full Council)

MOTION 4: APPOINT BOB ZALES TO THE LAW ENFORCEMENT ADVISORY PANEL.

MOTION 5: REAPPOINT CHARLES LOCKE AND THOMAS NEWMAN AND APPOINT LYNN GOKEY TO THE MACKEREL COBIA ADVISORY PANEL

MOTION 6: APPOINT NATHAN EVERETT AND CORY GWINN AS THE MAFMC REPRESENTATIVES ON THE MACKEREL COBIA ADVISORY PANEL.

MOTION 7: REAPPOINT SEAN ESPENSHIP, GARY NICHOLS, JUSTIN SMITH, AND MIMI STAFFORD AND APPOINT JOHN GRECO III TO THE SPINY LOBSTER ADVISORY PANEL. READVERTISE AN OPEN SEAT ON THE AP (WITH THE INTENT OF APPOINTING A REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE CAROLINAS).

MOTION 8: APPOINT DANIEL ROYSER AS THE NCDMF REPRESENTATIVE ON THE HABITAT AND ECOSYSTEM ADVISORY PANEL.

MOTION 9: APPOINT TRACEY DUNN AS THE LAW ENFORCEMENT ADVISORY PANEL REPRESENTATIVE AND VINCENT BONURA AS THE SNAPPER GROUPER ADVISORY PANEL REPRESENTATIVE ON THE WRECKFISH ADVISORY PANEL.9

MOTION 10: APPOINT WALTER BUBLEY, FRED SCHARF, AND LUIZ BARBIERI TO THE SEDAR 106: SOUTH ATLANTIC GAG GROUPER TOPICAL WORKING GROUP.

MOTION 11: APPOINT GENNY NESSLAGE AS CHAIR (WITH MARCEL REICHERT AS ALTERNATE), AND CHRIS DUMAS AND ALEXEI SHAROV AS SSC REVIEWERS TO THE SEDAR 90: SOUTH ATLANTIC RED SNAPPER REVIEW PANEL.

MOTION 12: APPOINT KAI LORENZEN, ALEXEI SHAROV, AND JIE CAO TO THE (JOINT WITH GULF) MSY PROXIES WORKGROUP.

MOTION 13: APPOINT MARCEL REICHERT AS CHAIR AND LUIZ BARBIERI AS SSC REVIEWER FOR THE SOUTH ATLANTIC RED SNAPPER RESEARCH PROJECT REVIEW PANEL.

MOTION 14: APPOINT LUIZ BARBIERI AS CHAIR AND STEVE TURNER AND MARCEL REICHERT AS SSC REVIEWERS FOR THE GREATER AMBERJACK INDEPENDENT ESTIMATE PROJECT REVIEW PANEL.

MOTION 15: APPOINT THOSE IN THE TABLE BELOW TO THE ESA SECTION 7 SHRIMP WORKGROUP. ALSO APPOINT SOMEONE FROM THE SEFSC TO THIS WORKGROUP (NAME WILL BE PROVIDED AT A LATER DATE).

Name	Affiliation	State
Carolyn Belcher	SAFMC	GA
Charlie Phillips	SAFMC	GA
Allie Iberle	SAFMC Staff	
Christina Curtis	SAFMC Staff	
Chip Collier	SAFMC Staff	
Jennifer Lee	NOAA	
Sarah Roberts	NOAA	
Robert (Bob) Zales	Industry	FL
Mike Merrifield	Industry	FL
Laurilee Thompson	Industry	FL
Gregg Poulakis	FL-FWCC	FL
Jared Flowers	GA-DNR, SSC	GA
Bryan Fluech	GA-SeaGrant	GA
Graham Wagner	SC-DNR	SC
Chris Stewart	NC-DMF	NC
Chuck Bangley	NC-DMF	NC
Blake Price	Southern Shrimp Alliance	
Jessica Pate	Marine Megafauna Foundation	

MOTION 16: APPOINT MATTHEW DAMIANO TO THE NORTH CAROLINA STATE AGENCY DESIGNATED SEAT OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE.

Citizen Science Committee

MOTION 17: ADOPT THE UPDATED CITIZEN SCIENCE RESEARCH PRIORITIES WITH MODIFICATIONS AS SUGGESTED.

MOTION 18: REMOVE THE ‘CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAM ADVISORY PANEL’ FROM THE CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAM’S STANDARD OPERATING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES (SOPPS).

MOTION 19: ADD AN AP SEAT FOR AN ACCSP REPRESENTATIVE TO THE CITIZEN SCIENCE OPERATIONS ADVISORY PANEL.

MOTION 20: APPOINT JULIE SIMPSON (ACCSP) TO THE CITIZEN SCIENCE POOL AND TO THE ACCSP SEAT ON THE CITIZEN SCIENCE OPERATIONS AP.

Habitat Ecosystem & Shrimp Committees

Coral Amendment 11/Shrimp Amendment 12

MOTION 21: APPROVE MODIFICATIONS TO THE NEED STATEMENT.

Need for Action

The need for this amendment is to optimize yield in the rock shrimp fishery by expanding access to fishing grounds while minimizing negative impacts to deepwater coral in the Council’s jurisdiction.

Timing and Tasks

MOTION 22: ADOPT THE FOLLOWING TIMING AND TASKS:

Update the economic and social environment sections (chapters 3.3 and 3.4) of the draft amendment and organize an ad-hoc webinar Council meeting to review updates and approve for submission to be held on January 23, 2026, at 10:00 am.

Snapper Grouper Committee

Regulatory Amendment 37 (Black Sea Bass)

MOTION 23: DE-SELECT ALTERNATIVE 3 (2 FISH) AND SELECT ALTERNATIVE 4 (3 FISH) AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 3 (BAG LIMIT).

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Action 3. Reduce the recreational bag limit for South Atlantic black sea bass

Alternative 3. Reduce the recreational bag limit for South Atlantic black sea bass to 2 fish per person per day.

Preferred Alternative 4. Reduce the recreational bag limit for South Atlantic black sea bass to 3 fish per person per day.

MOTION 24: MOVE ACTION 4 (SIZE LIMIT) TO THE CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED APPENDIX

Action 4. Reduce the recreational minimum size limit for South Atlantic black sea bass

MOTION 25: APPROVE REGULATORY AMENDMENT 37 TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE SNAPPER GROUPER FISHERY OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION FOR FORMAL SECRETARIAL REVIEW AND DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT AS NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE. GIVE STAFF EDITORIAL LICENSE TO MAKE ANY NECESSARY EDITORIAL CHANGES TO THE DOCUMENT/CODIFIED TEXT AND GIVE THE COUNCIL CHAIR AUTHORITY TO APPROVE THE REVISIONS AND RE-DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT.

Abbreviated Framework 5 (Blueline Tilefish)

MOTION 26: APPROVE ABBREVIATED FRAMEWORK 5 TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE SNAPPER GROUPER FISHERY OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION FOR FORMAL SECRETARIAL REVIEW AND DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT AS NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE. GIVE STAFF EDITORIAL LICENSE TO MAKE ANY NECESSARY EDITORIAL CHANGES TO THE DOCUMENT/CODIFIED TEXT AND GIVE THE COUNCIL CHAIR AUTHORITY TO APPROVE THE REVISIONS AND REDEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT.

Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper & Mutton Snapper)

MOTION 27: APPROVE THE PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT FOR SNAPPER GROUPER AMENDMENT 44.

The purpose of these fishery management plan amendments is to revise the southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper stock overfishing limit, and stock acceptable biological catch, based on the results of the SEDAR 79 and SEDAR 96 stock assessments, respectively. The amendments would also revise the jurisdictional apportionment between the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils, the regional annual catch limits, and the South Atlantic sector allocations.

The need for these fishery management plan amendments is to update existing catch limits, jurisdictional apportionments of the ABCs, and South Atlantic sector allocations for southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper to be consistent with the best scientific information available, and achieve optimum yield while minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse social and economic effects.

Golden Tilefish

MOTION 28: ADD UPDATING THE ABC AND ACL FOR GOLDEN TILEFISH IN A SNAPPER GROUPER FMP AMENDMENT BASED ON THE SSC RECOMMENDATION.

Timing and Tasks

MOTION 29: DIRECT STAFF TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- Continue development of Amendment 60 (Commercial Permit and Trip Efficiency) via subcommittee for Council approval for public hearings in June 2026.

- Prepare information for Council discussion of the headboat vessel limits to bring to the March Council meeting.
- Continue development of the Snapper Grouper Management Strategy Evaluation.
- Prepare and submit Regulatory Amendment 37 (Black Sea Bass) and Abbreviated Framework 5 (Blueline Tilefish) to the Secretary of Commerce.
- Develop a report of landings for unmanaged and ecosystem component species in the region with the intent that this report be updated and provided to the Council annually (in the second half of the year by Council and NMFS staff).
- Continue development of Amendment 44 (Yellowtail Snapper and Mutton Snapper), including a preliminary analysis.
- Continue development of Amendment 61 (Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision), including requested additional information and presentations, for review at the March 2026 meeting.
- Prepare list of topics for the Spring meeting of the Snapper Grouper AP to bring to the March 2026 meeting. Include on the list of topics discussion of changing the opening of the recreational golden tilefish season.
- Include time on the March 2026 agenda to finalize the SG Innovation Plan.
- Prepare a letter to send to NOAA Fisheries on the black sea bass EFP.
- Prepare a letter to send to NOAA Fisheries on the state management EFPs submitted by FL, GA, SC, and NC.
- Add updating the ABC and ACL for golden tilefish based on the SSC recommendation in a snapper grouper FMP amendment.

SUMMARY REPORT
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Via Webinar
January 23, 2026

The Council approved the agenda and the Joint Habitat and Ecosystem and Shrimp Committee Minutes from December 2025.

NOAA General Counsel provided a refresher on the rules and regulations regarding financial conflicts of interest, disclosure, and recusal under the Magnuson Stevens Act. The Council had no questions regarding the topic.

Coral Amendment 11 and Shrimp Amendment 12

Staff reviewed the final draft amendment, including the updated economic and social description of the rock shrimp fishery.. Staff explained that the updated information did not result in changes to the expected biological, economic, social or administrative effects of the proposed action. The Council had no questions regarding the amendment updates.

The Council received to public comments during the public comment session. As during in-person meetings, commenters were given 3 minutes to provide comments to the Council. Those unable to comment or wanting to provide additional input not covered during the allotted 3 minutes were informed that written comments are also accepted.

During subsequent discussion of the proposed action, Council members noted the long history of Council attention to the proposed action, which began during the final phase of Coral Amendment 8 in 2014. Coral Amendment 8 implemented the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern, erroneously encompassing an area that had been previously accessible to the rock shrimp fishery. Since that time, the Council has attempted to correct the error, developing and submitting Coral Amendment 10. The National Marine Fisheries Service did not approve Coral Amendment 10 due to insufficient information (see disapproval letter [HERE](#) for more detail). Council members reiterated their intent to return access to a historic fishing area to the rock shrimp fishery noting that recent studies have shown no coral (standing, dead, or coral rubble) present in the proposed Shrimp Fishery Access Area (SFAA) and there is enough distance between known coral pinnacles and the SFAA to prevent damage to living coral from sediment deposition caused by trawling activity. Council members maintained that recommending implementation of the SFAA is the best compromise to balance the shrimpers' need for access with protection of areas where deepwater coral is known to exist.

MOTION 1: APPROVE CORAL AMENDMENT 11 SHRIMP AMENDMENT 12 TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE CORAL AND LIVE HARDBOTTOM HABITAT OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION AND THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE SHRIMP FISHERY OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION, RESPECTIVELY, FOR FORMAL SECRETARIAL REVIEW AND DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT AS NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE. GIVE STAFF EDITORIAL LICENSE TO MAKE ANY NECESSARY EDITORIAL CHANGES TO THE DOCUMENT/CODIFIED TEXT AND GIVE THE COUNCIL CHAIR AUTHORITY TO APPROVE THE REVISIONS AND REDEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT.
APPROVED BY COUNCIL



JOSH STEIN
Governor

D. REID WILSON
Secretary

KATHY B. RAWLS
Director

February 3, 2026

MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission
FROM: Jason Rock, Fisheries Management 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 have been no new rule suspensions since the November 2025 meeting.

Action Needed

No action is needed.

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 .0103 (h) GILL NETS, SEINES, IDENTIFICATION, RESTRICTIONS

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to implement year-round small mesh gill net attendance requirements in certain areas of the Tar-Pamlico and Neuse rivers systems. 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. This suspension continues in Proclamation [M-29-2025](#).

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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Director

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 under the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Amendment 10 to the Fishery



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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](#).