

# Director's Report

March 2025 Quarterly Business Meeting

## Documents

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Spotted Seatrout Cold Stun Memo

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries  
Commission Meeting Report

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management  
Council Meeting Summary Report

South Atlantic Fishery Management  
Council Meeting Report



JOSH STEIN  
*Governor*

D. REID WILSON  
*Secretary*

KATHY B. RAWLS  
*Director*

February 5, 2025

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission

**FROM:** Lucas Pensinger and Melinda Lambert  
Spotted Seatrout Species Co-Leads

**SUBJECT:** January 2025 Cold Stun

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### Issue

The Division of Marine Fisheries (the Division) began receiving reports of cold stunned spotted seatrout on January 13, 2025, following six nights of below freezing temperatures and six days of near freezing temperatures and continued to receive additional cold stun reports over the next eight days.

### Background

By January 22, 2025, the Division had received reports of 10 distinct cold stun events from the Little Alligator River (Tyrrell County) to Queen's Creek near Swansboro (Onslow County). Division staff responded and confirmed multiple cold stuns of spotted seatrout, red drum, and striped mullet occurred across this range. Water temperature data loggers near areas of observed cold stunned fish confirmed temperatures fell below temperature thresholds and exceeded time limits established by the Division's Guidelines for Adaptive Management for Cold Stun Closures.

### Discussion

The Division Director issued [Proclamation FF-11-2025](#) on January 22, 2025, to close the commercial and recreational spotted seatrout fishery in Coastal and Joint Fishing Waters effective at 5:00 p.m. on January 24 extending to 11:59 p.m. on June 15, 2025 unless the reopening date is modified by the adoption of Amendment 1 to the Spotted Seatrout Fishery Management Plan. The closure follows the Marine Fisheries Commission's (MFC) management strategy in the [Spotted Seatrout Fishery Management Plan](#), which instructed the Director to close the fishery in the event of a significant cold stun.

With an extended cold period and 5+ inches of snowfall in most areas of coastal N.C. after the fishery closure, the potential of fish to succumb to low water temperatures still

exists. Since Proclamation FF-11-2025 was issued, the Division has received 13 additional reports of cold stunned spotted seatrout. Staff have confirmed cold stuns of thousands of spotted seatrout, thousands of weakfish, 10s of thousands of spot and Atlantic croaker, 100s of striped mullet, approximately 40 red drum, a few black drum, a few bluefish, a few sheepshead, and thousands of menhaden from the Little Alligator River to Topsail Island. Spotted seatrout cold stuns have also occurred in Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia. Additionally, analysis of water temperature data at 27 water temperature monitoring stations either adjacent to a confirmed cold stun or located deeper in the water column throughout the state showed loggers at 21 of these stations recorded temperatures below temperature thresholds and exceeding the time limits established in the Division's Guidance for Adaptive Management for Cold Stun Closures (Figure 1). An additional logger was downloaded one day prior to exceeding the time limit for temperature thresholds. Water temperature data from the remaining five stations showed clear signs of loggers being out of the water due to high winds and tidal ranges causing exceptionally shallow water at these stations. Staff are continuing to actively investigate reports of cold stuns and collect biological and environmental data from areas affected.



Figure 1. A map of North Carolina showing locations of HOBO water temperature logger stations where water temperatures below temperature thresholds and exceeding the time limits established in the Division's Guidance for Adaptive Management for Cold Stun Closures were recorded during the January 2025 cold stun.



# **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission**

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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*Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 17, 2024

PRESS CONTACT: Tina Berger  
703.842.0749

### **Atlantic Striped Bass Board Initiates Addendum to Consider 2026 Management Measures**

Arlington, VA – The Commission’s Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board has initiated Draft Addendum III to consider recreational and commercial management measures for 2026 to support rebuilding the stock by 2029. Options will consider a range of reductions for the recreational and commercial fisheries. Recreational reductions will consider season and size limits that take into account regional differences, including no-harvest and no-targeting closures. Final action is planned for no later than October 2025 with implementation in early 2026.

“We want to thank the thousands of members of the public who took the time to provide thoughtful comments ahead of this Board meeting,” said Board Chair Megan Ware from Maine. “We understand that many will be disappointed in the Board’s decision to initiate an addendum versus taking immediate action. However, after deliberating for more than three hours about the path forward, the Board came to the conclusion that the best course of action is to proceed with an addendum which will allow for clarity on 2024 removals and additional analyses.”

The action responds to the results of the [2024 Stock Assessment Update](#), which indicates the resource remains overfished but is not experiencing overfishing. Short-term projections estimate an increase in fishing mortality in 2025 due to the above average 2018 year-class entering the current recreational ocean slot limit combined with the lack of strong year-classes behind it. This action is intended to increase the probability of rebuilding the stock by adjusting subsequent 2026 management measures to ensure the stock is on the necessary rebuilding trajectory.

At the meeting, the Board considered two possible paths forward. The first was to take immediate Board action to reduce fishing mortality in 2025. The second was a longer, more comprehensive process given one of the primary options being considered is seasonal closures, which represents a new management approach for the Board. Ultimately, the Board chose the second path by initiating an addendum that would provide the Board more time to develop a fuller suite of management options, allow for the incorporation of full 2024 fishery removals data, and afford the public with a more robust opportunity to provide input. The Board noted preliminary data indicate the current measures

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The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.

implemented through Addendum II are on track to reduce 2024 removals from 2023 and 2022 levels. The Board also recognized the importance of the thousands of public comments submitted for this meeting and the upcoming public input through the addendum process on 2026 management measures.

For more information, please contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at [efranke@asmfc.org](mailto:efranke@asmfc.org).

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PR24-40

## **Motions**

### **Main Motion**

**Move to initiate an addendum to support striped bass rebuilding by 2029 in consideration of 2024 recreational and commercial mortality while balancing socioeconomic impacts. Options should include, if needed, a range of overall reductions, consideration of recreational versus commercial contributions to the reductions, recreational season and size changes taking into account regional variability of availability, and no harvest vs no target closures. Final action shall be taken at the Summer 2025 meeting to be in place for the 2026 recreational and commercial fisheries.**

Motion made by Mr. Nowalsky and seconded by Mr. Clark

### **Motion to Amend**

**Motion to amend to replace “at the summer” with “by the annual”**

Motion made by Mr. Luisi and seconded by Mr. Geer. Motion passes (12 in favor, 2 opposed, 2 abstentions).

### **Main Motion as Amended**

**Move to initiate an addendum to support striped bass rebuilding by 2029 in consideration of 2024 recreational and commercial mortality while balancing socioeconomic impacts. Options should include, if needed, a range of overall reductions, consideration of recreational versus commercial contributions to the reductions, recreational season and size changes taking into account regional variability of availability, and no harvest vs no target closures. Final action shall be taken by the 2025 Annual Meeting to be in place for the 2026 recreational and commercial fisheries.**

### **Motion to Substitute**

**Move to substitute to take Board action to implement in 2025 recreational season closures to achieve a 9% reduction and decrease the commercial quotas by 9%. The recreational season closures will be implemented regionally, as follows:**

- **Maine–Rhode Island: no-harvest closures of 22 days in Wave 3 plus the number of days needed in Wave 5 to achieve a combined 9% reduction across both Waves, to be implemented in uniform dates across the region.**
- **Connecticut–North Carolina: no-harvest closures of the same number of days in Wave 2 and Wave 6 needed to achieve a combined 9% reduction across both Waves, to be implemented in uniform dates across the region.**
- **Chesapeake Bay: Maryland no-targeting closure of 22 days in Wave 4 to lengthen the existing closure [9% reduction as calculated with “striped bass only trips eliminated” assumption]. Virginia no-harvest closure of 18 days at the end of Wave 6 [9% reduction].**
- **New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware area-specific fisheries: seasonal closures to achieve 9% reductions.**

**The regions/states will submit implementation plans for Board approval at the Winter 2025 Meeting Week. If a region can't decide on uniform dates, the Board will make the selection. The implementation deadline is April 1, 2025.**

Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Ms. Patterson.

#### **Motion to Amend**

**Move to amend the commercial reduction by replacing 9% with 1%.**

Motion made by Mr. Kaelin and seconded by Mr. Hasbrouck. Motion fails (7 in favor, 7 opposed, 2 abstentions).

#### **Motion to Substitute**

**Move to substitute to take Board action to implement in 2025 recreational season closures to achieve a 9% reduction and decrease the commercial quotas by 9%. The recreational season closures will be implemented regionally, as follows:**

- **Maine–Rhode Island: no-harvest closures of 22 days in Wave 3 plus the number of days needed in Wave 5 to achieve a combined 9% reduction across both Waves, to be implemented in uniform dates across the region.**
- **Connecticut–North Carolina: no-harvest closures of the same number of days in Wave 2 and Wave 6 needed to achieve a combined 9% reduction across both Waves, to be implemented in uniform dates across the region.**
- **Chesapeake Bay: Maryland no-targeting closure of 22 days in Wave 4 to lengthen the existing closure [9% reduction as calculated with “striped bass only trips eliminated” assumption]. Virginia no-harvest closure of 18 days at the end of Wave 6 [9% reduction].**
- **New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware area-specific fisheries: seasonal closures to achieve 9% reductions.**

**The regions/states will submit implementation plans for Board approval at the Winter 2025 Meeting Week. If a region can't decide on uniform dates, the Board will make the selection. The implementation deadline is April 1, 2025.**

Motion made by Ms. Meserve and seconded by Ms. Patterson.

#### **Motion to Amend**

**Move to amend the commercial reduction by replacing 9% with 5%.**

Motion made by Mr. Hasbrouck and seconded by Mr. Kane. Motion passes (10 in favor, 4 opposed, 2 abstentions).

#### **Motion to Substitute as Amended**

**Move to substitute to take Board action to implement in 2025 recreational season closures to achieve a 9% reduction and decrease the commercial quotas by 5%. The recreational season closures will be implemented regionally, as follows:**

- **Maine–Rhode Island: no-harvest closures of 22 days in Wave 3 plus the number of days needed in Wave 5 to achieve a combined 9% reduction across both Waves, to be implemented in uniform dates across the region.**
- **Connecticut–North Carolina: no-harvest closures of the same number of days in Wave 2 and Wave 6 needed to achieve a combined 9% reduction across both Waves, to be implemented in uniform dates across the region.**

- **Chesapeake Bay:**  
Maryland no-targeting closure of 22 days in Wave 4 to lengthen the existing closure [9% reduction as calculated with “striped bass only trips eliminated” assumption]. Virginia no-harvest closure of 18 days at the end of Wave 6 [9% reduction].
- **New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware area-specific fisheries:** seasonal closures to achieve 9% reductions.

The regions/states will submit implementation plans for Board approval at the Winter 2025 Meeting Week. If a region can’t decide on uniform dates, the Board will make the selection. The implementation deadline is April 1, 2025.

#### **Motion to Amend**

**For the area specific fisheries, move to amend to add after seasonal closures “or size limit changes”**

Motion made by Mr. Clark and seconded by Ms. Meserve. Motion passes (13 in favor, 1 opposed, 2 abstentions).

#### **Motion to Substitute as Amended**

**Move to substitute to take Board action to implement in 2025 recreational season closures to achieve a 9% reduction and decrease the commercial quotas by 5%. The recreational season closures will be implemented regionally, as follows:**

- **Maine–Rhode Island:** no-harvest closures of 22 days in Wave 3 plus the number of days needed in Wave 5 to achieve a combined 9% reduction across both Waves, to be implemented in uniform dates across the region.
- **Connecticut–North Carolina:** no-harvest closures of the same number of days in Wave 2 and Wave 6 needed to achieve a combined 9% reduction across both Waves, to be implemented in uniform dates across the region.
- **Chesapeake Bay:**  
Maryland no-targeting closure of 22 days in Wave 4 to lengthen the existing closure [9% reduction as calculated with “striped bass only trips eliminated” assumption]. Virginia no-harvest closure of 18 days at the end of Wave 6 [9% reduction].
- **New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware area-specific fisheries:** seasonal closures or size limit changes to achieve 9% reductions.

The regions/states will submit implementation plans for Board approval at the Winter 2025 Meeting Week. If a region can’t decide on uniform dates, the Board will make the selection. The implementation deadline is April 1, 2025.

#### **Motion to Amend**

**Under Maryland Chesapeake Bay, move to amend to add “and or no harvest” and strike of 22 days.**

Motion made by Mr. Sikorski and seconded by Mr. Abbott. Motion approves by consent.

#### **Motion to Substitute as Amended**

**Move to substitute to take Board action to implement in 2025 recreational season closures to achieve a 9% reduction and decrease the commercial quotas by 5%. The recreational season closures will be implemented regionally, as follows:**

- **Maine–Rhode Island:** no-harvest closures of 22 days in Wave 3 plus the number of days needed in Wave 5 to achieve a combined 9% reduction across both waves, to be implemented in uniform dates across the region

- **Connecticut–North Carolina:** no-harvest closures of the same number of days in Wave 2 and Wave 6 needed to achieve a combined 9% reduction across both Waves, to be implemented in uniform dates across the region
- **Chesapeake Bay:** Maryland no-targeting closure and or no harvest in Wave 4 to lengthen the existing closure [9% reduction as calculated with “striped bass only trips eliminated” assumption]. VA no-harvest closure of 18 days at the end of Wave 6 [9% reduction].
- **New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware area-specific fisheries:** seasonal closures or size limit changes to achieve 9% reductions.

The regions/states will submit implementation plans for Board approval at the Winter 2025 Meeting Week. If a region can’t decide on uniform dates, the Board will make the selection. The implementation deadline is April 1, 2025.

#### **Motion to Amend**

For Maine—Rhode Island, Connecticut—North Carolina, and Virginia Chesapeake Bay, move to amend to add “and or no targeting closures” and strike “of 22 days,” and “of 18 days” and “of the same number of days.”

Motion made by Mr. Nowalsky and seconded by Mr. Hasbrouck. Motion passes (9 in favor, 5 opposed, 2 abstentions).

#### **Motion to Substitute as Amended**

Move to substitute to take Board action to implement in 2025 recreational season closures to achieve a 9% reduction and decrease the commercial quotas by 5%. The recreational season closures will be implemented regionally, as follows:

- **Maine–Rhode Island:** no-harvest closures and or no targeting closures in Wave 3 plus the number of days needed in Wave 5 to achieve a combined 9% reduction across both waves, to be implemented in uniform dates across the region
- **Connecticut–North Carolina:** no-harvest closures and or no targeting closures in Wave 2 and Wave 6 needed to achieve a combined 9% reduction across both Waves, to be implemented in uniform dates across the region
- **Chesapeake Bay:** Maryland no-targeting closure and or no harvest in Wave 4 to lengthen the existing closure [9% reduction as calculated with “striped bass only trips eliminated” assumption]. Virginia no-harvest closure and or no targeting closures at the end of Wave 6 [9% reduction].
- **New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware area-specific fisheries:** seasonal closures or size limit changes to achieve 9% reductions.

The regions/states will submit implementation plans for Board approval at the Winter 2025 Meeting Week. If a region can’t decide on uniform dates, the Board will make the selection. The implementation deadline is April 1, 2025.

Motion fails (4 in favor, 11 opposed, 1 null)

**Main Motion as Amended**

**Move to initiate an addendum to support striped bass rebuilding by 2029 in consideration of 2024 recreational and commercial mortality while balancing socioeconomic impacts. Options should include, if needed, a range of overall reductions, consideration of recreational versus commercial contributions to the reductions, recreational season and size changes taking into account regional variability of availability, and no harvest versus no target closures. Final action shall be taken by the annual 2025 meeting to be in place for the 2026 rec and comm fisheries.**

Motion passes (14 in favor, 2 opposed).



## December 2024 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met December 10-12, 2024, in Annapolis, Maryland. 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 2024 meeting page](#).

### HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Finalized an amendment to modify the species separation requirements for the Atlantic surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries
- Reviewed previously adopted recreational measures for summer flounder and scup and determined that no changes are needed for either species in 2025\*
- Adopted status quo recreational management measures for black sea bass in 2025\*
- Approved a scoping document for the Recreational Sector Separation and Data Collection Amendment\*
- Set the spiny dogfish acceptable biological catch for 2025 equal to the overfishing limit (the maximum legally possible), resulting in a commercial quota of about 9.3 million pounds
- Adopted a more flexible minimum mesh requirement for directed butterfish fishing
- Reviewed the final 2024 EAFM risk assessment report, which incorporates a number of recent updates and improvements
- Approved a Comprehensive Five-Year (2025-2029) Research Priorities document
- Approved the 2025 Implementation Plan
- Reviewed the results of a Council-funded project that has developed a hub for river herring and shad run data
- Endorsed recommendations from the Highly Migratory Species Committee regarding the NOAA Fisheries Atlantic HMS Proposed Rule for Electronic Reporting
- Presented the Ricks E Savage Award to former Council member Dewey Hemilright

*\* 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 Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Requirements Amendment

The Council [took final action](#) on the Atlantic Surfclam and Ocean Quahog Species Separation Requirements Amendment. After considering the outcomes from the October 2024 Species Separation Requirements Amendment Implementation Issues Workshop, the Council selected modified Alternative 5 (Increased Observer Coverage and Self-reported Discards; Mixed Trips Sort at Dealer with NOAA Catch Monitors) as the preferred alternative. Alternative 5 would allow for mixed surfclam and quahog species trips with sorting of mixed catch at the dealer, implement a new NOAA shoreside (dealer/processing plant-based) catch monitoring program, improve discard estimation via a combination of improved vessel reporting and increased observer coverage, and modify the allocation tracking and tagging system, among other changes to regulations. The Council will submit the amendment to the Secretary of Commerce for review and rulemaking.

## 2025 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 consider 2025 recreational management measures (i.e., bag, size, and season limits) for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass.

### ***Summer Flounder and Scup***

The Council and Board reviewed previously adopted recreational measures for summer flounder and scup and determined that no changes are needed for either species in 2025. Last year, the Council and Board adopted two-year recreational measures for summer flounder and scup following the Percent Change Approach implemented through Framework 17/Addendum XXXIV. For summer flounder, a 28% reduction in harvest was required, which was taken via adjustments to 2024-2025 state waters measures under conservation equivalency. For scup, a 10% reduction in harvest was required, which was taken via adjustments to 2024-2025 state waters measures. The intent of the Percent Change Approach is to hold measures constant across both years unless new data suggest a major change in the expected impacts of those measures on the stock or the fishery.

For summer flounder, state measures under regional conservation equivalency are expected to remain the same as in 2024, as described in the [staff memo](#) for recreational summer flounder measures. For scup, state and federal measures are expected to remain the same as in 2024, as described in the [staff memo](#) for recreational scup measures.

### ***Black Sea Bass***

Unlike summer flounder and scup, black sea bass recreational measures were not previously adopted for 2025. The Council and Board agreed to maintain status quo recreational measures in 2025 given that the recreational harvest limit (RHL) is unchanged compared to 2024, stock status remains positive, and an updated assessment will be available next year to inform the setting of 2026-2027 measures. Status quo includes continuing to waive the federal waters measures in favor of state waters measures through conservation equivalency. More details are provided in the [staff memo](#). If states wish to consider slight season adjustments under the status quo approach (e.g., to maintain a Saturday opening), those proposals must be approved by the Board.

## Recreational Sector Separation and Data Collection Amendment

The Council met jointly with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission’s Interstate Fishery Management Program Policy Board (Policy Board) to consider approval of a draft scoping document/Public Information Document (PID) for the [Recreational Sector Separation and Data Collection Amendment](#) to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass and Bluefish Fishery Management Plans. This action, previously referred to as the “Recreational Sector Separation and Catch Accounting Amendment,” was initiated in 2020 as part of the [Recreational Reform Initiative](#), but has been on hold since that time to prioritize other management actions. The amendment will (1) explore options for managing for-hire and private/rental recreational fisheries separately (referred to as sector separation), and (2) consider approaches to improve or supplement the collection and use of recreational data that support management decisions for these species.

The Council and Policy Board approved the scoping document/PID, with minor modifications, for public comment in early 2025. As the first step in the Council and Commission’s amendment process, scoping will provide an opportunity for the public to identify major issues and potential management approaches that should be explored during the development of this amendment. Following the initial phase of information gathering and public comment, the Council and Policy Board will identify categories of alternatives for further development.

The final scoping document will be available on the Council's [website](#) in early 2025, along with an announcement of the scoping hearing schedule and written comment instructions.

### 2025 Spiny Dogfish Specifications

The Council adopted 2025 specifications that would set the spiny dogfish acceptable biological catch (ABC) equal to the overfishing limit (OFL) for the 2025 fishing year. This is the highest catch legally allowed under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), and results in the highest quota possible. The resulting specifications, if implemented by NOAA Fisheries, would result in a commercial quota of about 9.3 million pounds (a 9% reduction from the 2024 quota but almost 10% higher than last year's (2023) landings). The Northeast Fisheries Science Center will conduct new projections in 2025 for the 2026 and 2027 fishing years, and a management track stock assessment will be conducted in 2027 for setting 2028-2031 specifications.

### Butterfish Mesh Requirements

After considering [recommendations](#) from its Law Enforcement Committee, the Council voted to modify the butterfish mesh regulations to allow square mesh greater than 2 5/8 inches for directed butterfish fishing. Current regulations require a minimum mesh size of 3-inch diamond or 3-inch square mesh to possess more than 5,000 pounds of butterfish. The proposed modification was supported by research conducted by the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County, NY and by input from industry about their experience with different mesh configurations, both indicating that the change would add flexibility for fishermen while still reducing the retention of juvenile butterfish. The Council did not recommend any changes to the 3-inch minimum mesh size for diamond mesh. If implemented by NOAA Fisheries, the change would apply to vessels with moratorium butterfish permits and could be effective in early to mid 2025.

### 2024 Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) Risk Assessment

The Council reviewed the final 2024 [EAFM risk assessment report](#). Risk assessment is the first step in the Council's EAFM structured decision process to incorporate species, fleet, habitat, and climate interactions into management. The risk assessment report is typically updated each spring to provide a snapshot of the current risks to meeting the management objectives and helps the Council decide where to focus limited resources to address priority ecosystem considerations in its science and management programs. The 2024 risk assessment report incorporates the changes and updates approved by the Council following the 2023 comprehensive review and recent recommendations provided by the Ecosystem and Ocean Planning (EOP) Committee and Advisory Panel on elements that needed further refinement and development. The 2025 EAFM risk assessment will be presented to the Council in April and will incorporate the latest information, including updated indicators from the 2025 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem report.

### 2025-2029 Research Priorities

The Council reviewed and approved the [Comprehensive Five-Year \(2025-2029\) Research Priorities](#) document. This is the Council's fourth research priorities document since the 2006 re-authorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act required each of the regional councils to identify five-year research priorities. The 2025-2029 research priorities document builds off the organizational and prioritization framework implemented during the development of the 2020-2024 document and has been updated to incorporate the extensive input received throughout 2024. The broad research themes and species-specific priorities included in the new document reflect the current state of scientific knowledge and the Council's management challenges and science needs.

## 2025 Implementation Plan

The Council approved the 2025 Implementation Plan after making several revisions. The plan lists activities and priorities for the coming year and is linked to the Council’s strategic plan. The Council agreed to add a new deliverable which will task the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) with development of a white paper on the scientific considerations of developing separate overfishing limits (OFLs) and Acceptable Biological Catches (ABCs) for the commercial and recreational sectors for the summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass fisheries. The Council also agreed to add the following items to the list of “Possible Additions” for 2025: (1) Develop guidance to address circumstances under which the Council could consider suspension of its Risk Policy, and (2) Develop a white paper to explore potential Council and NOAA Fisheries involvement in surfclam stock enhancement efforts in the New York Bight and Central Atlantic. The final implementation plan will be posted on the Council’s website at <https://www.mafmc.org/strategic-plan> once available.

## Manomet River Herring Portal

Staff from Manomet presented the results of a Council-funded project that has developed a hub for river herring and shad run data. Manomet is finalizing several features of the web-based portal and will be conducting outreach in 2025 to gather additional run data from east coast entities that would like their data to be available, as well as to make potential users aware of the portal’s features. Emily Farr of Manomet ([efarr@manomet.org](mailto:efarr@manomet.org)) can be contacted for more information.

## Highly Migratory Species

The Council reviewed [recommendations](#) from its Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Committee regarding the NOAA Fisheries Atlantic HMS [Proposed Rule for Electronic Reporting](#). The proposed action would modify and/or expand reporting requirements for Atlantic HMS, including reporting by commercial, for-hire, and private recreational vessel owners and dealers. The Committee supported some of the agency’s preferred alternatives but expressed substantial concern with the preferred alternatives identified for the HMS commercial and for-hire open access permits (i.e., Atlantic Tunas General and Harpoon Category, Swordfish General Commercial, and HMS Charter/Headboat Permits). The Council endorsed the Committee’s comments and directed staff to submit a comment letter before the comment deadline.

## Ricks E Savage Award

Captain Dewey Hemilright was presented with the Council’s [Ricks E Savage Award](#). The award is given each year to a person who has added value to the Council process and management goals through significant scientific, legislative, enforcement, or management activities. He was appointed to the Council in 2012 to fill a mid-term vacancy as an obligatory member from the state of North Carolina. He went on to serve three additional full terms, for a total of 11 years. With more than three decades of commercial fishing experience, Dewey brought valuable on-the-water perspective to Council discussions and helped managers understand how potential management decisions would affect people's lives and livelihoods. “Dewey asked great questions and was always willing to share his own knowledge and experience with the Council and others,” said Council Chair Wes Townsend. “While he often served as a voice for the U.S. fishing industry, he did an outstanding job of balancing the interests of commercial fisheries and the sustainable management of the resources as required under Magnuson.” Dewey served as chair of the Council’s Highly Migratory Species Committee for seven years and participated on most of the Council’s other committees at different times. He also served as liaison to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and as Council representative on the NMFS HMS Advisory Panel.

## Recreational Tilefish Permitting and Reporting – Enforcement Update

A representative from NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement reported that a New Jersey based recreational vessel operator was recently issued a \$500 fine for possession of a blueline tilefish without the required permit. As a reminder, recreational anglers fishing for golden and blueline tilefish north of the North Carolina/Virginia border are required to have a free recreational tilefish permit and submit a trip report within 24 hours of returning to port from any trip where tilefish were targeted (even if none were caught or kept). These requirements are intended to help improve our understanding of recreational tilefish catch and effort. Consistent and accurate reporting by recreational fishermen helps ensure the long-term sustainability of the tilefish fisheries. Additional information about private recreational tilefish permitting and reporting requirements is available on [the Council's website](#) or in [this flyer](#).

## Upcoming Meetings

The 2025 Council Meeting Schedule is available [here](#). Please note that the dates for the June and December meetings have been revised. The June meeting will be held June 3-5, 2025 (a week earlier than originally scheduled), and the December meeting will be held December 15-18, 2025 (a week later than originally scheduled). A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.

The next Council meeting will be held via webinar **February 11-12, 2025**.



# *South Atlantic Fishery Management Council*

## *News Release*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 10, 2024

CONTACT: Kim Iverson  
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### **Council Black Sea Bass Management Options Approved for Public Scoping; NOAA Fisheries Provides Red Snapper Update**

Discussions on management options for Black Sea Bass in federal waters continued last week during the meeting of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council in Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina. Due to low stock abundance, options are being considered to reduce allowable catch levels for Black Sea Bass. The Council reviewed input from its Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel and Scientific and Statistical Committee while considering management options to include in Amendment 56 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. The amendment currently includes options to review allocations between commercial and recreational sectors, changes to fishing year start dates, and to reopen nearshore areas to the use of on-demand (ropeless) black sea bass pot commercial gear.

Amendment 56 may also include options to reduce recreational discards of Black Sea Bass through actions such as the use of single-hook rigs, closed nearshore areas in federal waters, changes to recreational bag and size limits, and a recreational seasonal closure. Public scoping meetings to get input on the options being considered will be held via webinar prior to the Council's March 2025 meeting.

#### **Red Snapper**

NOAA Fisheries provided an update on the status of the Secretarial Amendment being developed by the agency to end overfishing of Red Snapper in the South Atlantic. During the Council meeting, a [Fishery Bulletin was released by NOAA Fisheries](#) that summarized actions being considered. The Council was informed that the Southeast Fisheries Science Center is conducting an update to the Red Snapper stock assessment to inform actions in the Secretarial Amendment. The Council will receive additional information from NOAA Fisheries during its March 2025 meeting.

Council members also received an [update](#) on the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's [Exempted Fishing Permit Project](#). The ongoing project, funded through NOAA Fisheries, collaborates with fishermen to obtain catch and discard data, test ways to reduce discards, and allow additional harvest of Red Snapper. Participants must complete an online education course, report their fishing trips via an app, and complete an angler satisfaction survey. The project is currently scheduled to last until July 2025.

#### **Dolphin**

The Council received a presentation on the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) being completed for the Dolphin fishery. Dolphin are managed by the Council in federal waters along the entire Atlantic coast. The Council is considering management options for Dolphin through Regulatory Amendment 3 to the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery Management Plan. The Dolphin MSE is intended to help the Council identify and evaluate management actions to ensure a sustainable fishery. The Council will hold a meeting of its Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel in the spring and continue to discuss management options during its June 9-13, 2025, meeting in Cape Canaveral, Florida.

## **For-Hire Reporting**

The Council continued discussions on the need to improve compliance from nearly 2000 federally permitted for-hire (charter) vessels in the South Atlantic required to report through the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting ([SEFHIER](#)) Program. SEFEIER is administered by NOAA Fisheries and designed to improve data collection in the for-hire fishery. The program was initiated in 2021, but there are concerns about the level of participation. Council members shared frustration from for-hire fishermen who have participated in the program for the past four years without having seen the results of those efforts. The Council reviewed input from its Social and Economic Panel during the meeting and is developing an amendment to improve the program. A new For-Hire Reporting Advisory Panel and the Council's Law Enforcement AP will meet prior to the Council's March 2025 meeting to provide recommendations.

## **Additional Information**

Additional information about the Council's December meeting, including individual committee reports and reports from meetings of the Full Council, is now available from the Council's website: <https://safmc.net/events/december-2024-council-meeting/>. The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for March 3-7, 2025, in Jekyll Island, Georgia.

**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.**