

Director's Report

May 2025 Quarterly Business Meeting

Documents

Spotted Seatrout Cold Stun Update Memo

Rule Suspensions

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

May 7, 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission

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

SUBJECT: January 2025 Cold Stun Update

Issue

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 following a severe cold stun event.

Background

At their March 2025 Business Meeting, the Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) voted to adopt Amendment 1 to the Spotted Seatrout Fishery Management Plan. The cold stun management in Amendment 1 included extending the fishery closure in the event of a cold stun through June 30 (previously through June 15) and a cold stun adaptive management framework allowing for additional adjustments of bag or trip limits, size limits, season closures, or gill net yardage restrictions.

Discussion

The Division Director issued [Proclamation FF-15-2025](#) on January 22, 2025, to extend the commercial and recreational spotted seatrout fishery closure in Coastal and Joint Fishing Waters to 11:59 p.m. on June 30, 2025. The closure follows the Marine Fisheries Commission's (MFC) management strategy in [Amendment 1 to the Spotted Seatrout Fishery Management Plan](#) which allows the Director to close the spotted seatrout fishery in the event of a significant cold stun.

Although the Division does not have a recommendation on any cold stun adaptive management measures at this time, Division staff will continue to analyze data from the January cold stun as well as other data sources such as independent sampling, length and age frequencies, and landings data to determine if further cold stun measures are warranted. Regardless of any additional cold stun measures recommended, Division staff will prepare a full cold stun report for the February 2026 MFC Business Meeting.



JOSH STEIN
Governor

D. REID WILSON
Secretary

KATHY B. RAWLS
Director

April 17, 2025

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 March 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-9-2025](#).

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 in accordance with Amendment 3 of the North Carolina Southern Flounder Fishery



JOSH STEIN
Governor

D. REID WILSON
Secretary

KATHY B. RAWLS
Director

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 Management Plan for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic. This suspension was implemented in Proclamation [FF-30-2022](#).



JOSH STEIN
Governor

D. REID WILSON
Secretary

KATHY B. RAWLS
Director

NCMFC Rule 15A NCAC 03O .0501 (e)(4) PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS TO OBTAIN PERMITS

Suspension of a portion of this rule for an indefinite period. Suspension of this rule allows the division to issue the Shellfish Relocation Permit to permittees already issued a Division of Coastal Management permit for development activity. This suspension was implemented in Proclamation [M-11-2023](#).

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-8-2025](#).

April 2025 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met by webinar April 8-10, 2025. 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 [April 2025 meeting page](#).

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Approved several changes to the recreational fisheries management programs for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish through the Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework/Addenda (joint action with the ASMFC's ISFMP Policy Board)
- Reviewed scoping comments received on the Recreational Sector Separation and Data Collection Amendment and agreed to address the issues of sector separation and data collection separately (joint action with the ASMFC's ISFMP Policy Board)
- Reviewed the 2025 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem Report and the 2025 EAFM risk assessment summary report
- Completed a required 5-year review of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) provisions for all fishery management plans
- Received an update on development of the Joint Mid-Atlantic and New England Omnibus Alternative Gear-Marking Framework Adjustment
- Presented the Ricks E Savage Award to Captain Adam Nowalsky
- Presented the James A. Ruhle Cooperative Research Award to Mr. Jack Casey

Recreational Measures Setting Process Framework/Addenda

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board (Policy Board) approved modifications to the process for setting recreational measures (bag, size, and season limits), as well as the recreational accountability measures, for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish. The Council recommended these changes through a framework action, and the Policy Board adopted these changes through Addendum XXXVI to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and Addendum III to the Bluefish FMP. These changes are part of a broader long-term effort by both the Council and Commission to improve recreational management of these jointly managed species.

The current process for setting recreational measures, referred to as the Percent Change Approach, was implemented in 2023 and will sunset at the end of 2025. During a joint meeting last week in Galloway, New Jersey, the Council and Policy Board discussed several options to improve or replace the Percent Change Approach for 2026 and beyond. After reviewing public comments and recommendations from technical committees and advisory panels, the Council and Policy Board agreed to maintain the current process with several modifications based on lessons learned over the past few years. These changes will be implemented in two phases.

The first phase of changes aims to better account for stock status when setting measures and will create more opportunities for stability in management measures. The current system uses three biomass categories to guide whether measures should change; the revised approach adds a fourth category for stocks near their biomass target and establishes a separate process for overfished stocks. These changes will take effect starting with the

2026 recreational measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. The Council and Policy Board delayed the implementation of these changes for bluefish until 2028 to allow time for development of an appropriate methodology for evaluating the impacts of measures on bluefish harvest and discards. The bluefish stock has been under a rebuilding plan since 2022, and recreational measures will continue to be set based on the rebuilding plan until the stock is declared rebuilt.

The second phase of modifications, which will be implemented for setting 2030 recreational measures and beyond, will update the process to use a catch-based target. Unlike the current process – which focuses on achieving a specific level of predicted harvest – a catch-based approach aims to achieve a target level of total dead catch, including both harvest and dead discards. This approach will allow for more explicit consideration of how measures affect discards. Some advisors and members of the public raised concerns about the potential for this change to create greater instability in management measures. After extensive discussion of each approach, the Council and Policy Board delayed the transition to a catch-based target until 2030 to allow time for additional analysis on the potential impacts to measures.

The Council and Policy Board also approved changes to the recreational accountability measures. These changes will be effective starting in 2026 for all four species. Under these revisions, when an accountability measure is triggered due to recent overages of the recreational annual catch limits, managers will also consider if those overages contributed to overfishing when determining the appropriate response.

The Council will submit the framework to the National Marine Fisheries Service for review and implementation, while the Commission's measures are final for state waters. Additional information about this action is available on the [Council](#) and [Commission](#) action pages.

Recreational Sector Separation and Data Collection Amendment

The Council and Policy Board reviewed scoping comments on the Recreational Sector Separation and Data Collection Amendment from public hearings and written comments, as well as input provided by the joint Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass and Bluefish Advisory Panels and the Fishery Management Action Team/Plan Development Team. Based on these comments, the Council and Policy Board agreed that recreational sector separation and recreational data collection should be addressed separately. Further development of the amendment will focus on management options for recreational sector separation, including mode management, as well as consideration of for-hire permitting and reporting requirements.

The Council and Policy Board separated out the recreational data collection and use issue from the amendment due to concerns that the complexity of this issue would cause significant delays in the amendment timeline. Council and Policy Board members also noted there is a need to more clearly define the objectives for recreational data collection improvement. This issue will be explored through a white paper which will consider the feasibility of various approaches and help the Council and Policy Board clarify goals for a potential future action. Additional information and updates are available on the [Council](#) and [Commission](#) action pages.

Ecosystem Updates

Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem Report

Dr. Sarah Gaichas presented key findings from the 2025 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem Report (SOE). This report has been provided annually to the Council since 2017 and 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 those management objectives. Highlights from the 2025 report include:

- The Council continues to meet many of its species/stock specific management objectives and most stocks are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.
- Many ecosystem level management objectives are concerning as seafood production continues to decline, commercial revenue is at historic lows, and the majority of commercial and recreational fishing communities rely on highly climate vulnerable stocks.
- The distribution, timing of migration and spawning, and stock productivity for many Mid-Atlantic stocks have changed as ocean conditions continue to change and increase in variability.
- Globally, 2024 was the warmest year on record but ocean temperatures in the Mid-Atlantic and New England were near normal and new ocean climate models suggest a pause in ocean warming for the next 6-7 years.

The public now has the opportunity to contribute to future SOE reports by sharing their observations from out on the water. Information such as record high or low observations, observations that may be different from recent conditions, events that might be affecting fishery operations, or really unique or newsworthy events. Observations can be submitted to northeast.ecosystem.highlights@noaa.gov.

Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) Risk Assessment

The Council reviewed the 2025 EAFM risk assessment summary report. The risk assessment report is updated each spring to provide the Council with a snapshot of the current risks to meeting its management objectives and helps the Council decide where to focus limited resources to address priority ecosystem considerations in its science and management programs. The risk assessment includes 28 risk elements that span biological, ecological, social, economic, and management issues. The updated report includes indicators from the 2025 State of the Ecosystem report and new analyses by NEFSC and Council staff for certain Ecological and Management elements to address feedback from the Council's Ecosystem and Ocean Planning (EOP) Committee and Advisory Panel. Nearly 73% of all risk rankings evaluated in the assessment were considered low or low-moderate risk; while risks associated with distribution shifts, regulatory complexity, discards, and many ecosystem level elements were considered moderate-high or high risk. After reviewing the risk assessment findings, the Council supported further evaluation and analyses to understand the factors driving the higher risks associated with commercial value and commercial fleet diversity.

Essential Fish Habitat 5-Year Review

At this meeting, the Council completed its Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) 5-year Review. This review has been ongoing since 2023 and summarized new and updated information on the 9 required EFH components in the Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) for all the Council's managed species. This review work was collaboratively conducted by the Council's EFH Fishery Management Action Team and the New England Fishery Management Council's Habitat Plan Development Team. The Council approved the EFH Review Summary Report, including its findings and recommendations, and supporting technical component reports. These reports and products will be posted on the Council's website, and a letter will be sent to NMFS transmitting the reports. The Council has already initiated an Omnibus ("all species and FMPs") EFH Amendment. Work on this Amendment to modify the FMPs based on this updated EFH information will begin, with final action expected in early 2026. With the review completed in 2025, the next EFH 5-year review would be scheduled for completion in 2030.

Omnibus Alternative Gear-Marking Framework

The Council received information on the development of the Joint Mid-Atlantic and New England Omnibus Alternative Gear-Marking Framework Adjustment. This action considers providing alternative surface-marking provisions for fixed-gear fisheries in the Greater Atlantic Region to allow the use of fixed gear without a persistent buoy line and reconcile fishery management plan regulations with recent and potential future changes to Marine Mammal Protection Act regulations. The Council initiated this action and discussed various

considerations for allowing the use of on-demand gear. The Regional Administrator clarified that while the Joint Framework Adjustment would create the option to use alternative gear-marking, on-demand gear could not be used unless approved by the National Marine Fisheries Service. Emphasis was placed on the need for alternative gear-marking technology that would be the functional equivalent of a buoy (i.e., providing vessels with information on where fixed gear is located). Additional information and updates on this action can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/actions/gear-marking-framework>.

Council Awards

Ricks E Savage Award

The Council recognized Captain Adam Nowalsky as the recipient of the 2024 Ricks E Savage award. The award is given annually to an individual who has made exceptional contributions to the management and conservation of fishery resources in the mid-Atlantic region.

Nowalsky was appointed to the Council in 2015 and served with distinction for nine years before terming out in 2024. During his tenure, he was one of the Council's most engaged and influential voices, known for his willingness to dive into complex management issues. "Adam's ability to see all sides, to think creatively, and to contribute constructively made him a trusted colleague and a valuable contributor," said Wes Townsend, Council Chair. "He consistently raised the bar for everyone involved in the Council process."

During his time on the Council, Nowalsky was particularly engaged in recreational fisheries management issues. With more than two decades of experience fishing South Jersey waters as a licensed charter operator, he brought practical knowledge and an understanding of anglers' concerns to the Council's decision-making process. Notably, he was a driving force behind the Recreational Reform Initiative, a joint effort launched in 2019 by the Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) which aims to improve management of recreational fisheries for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, and bluefish.

From 2016 to 2021, Nowalsky chaired the Council's Research Steering Committee, leading efforts to navigate complex decisions about the future of the Research Set-Aside program. His leadership extended beyond the Council as well, serving as New Jersey's Legislative Proxy to the ASMFC since 2010, where he has chaired numerous boards. He also played a central role in bringing the Marine Resource Education Program (MREP) to the Mid-Atlantic region and continues to serve on the MREP Steering Committee.

"Adam's legacy is one of dedication, integrity, and collaboration," said Townsend. "His contributions have left a lasting mark on the Council and the broader Mid-Atlantic fisheries community."



James A. Ruhle Cooperative Research Award

The Council presented the James A. Ruhle Cooperative Research Award to Mr. Jack Casey, in recognition of his pioneering work in cooperative fisheries research and his decades-long contributions to the scientific understanding of shark species along the East Coast. The award is named in memory of Captain Jimmy Ruhle – a commercial fisherman, former Council member, and trailblazer in cooperative fisheries research. The award celebrates individuals or groups who have made exceptional contributions to cooperative research in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Jack Casey's legacy is one of innovation, leadership, and collaboration. A U.S. Navy veteran who began his fisheries career in 1960 with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Casey quickly recognized the untapped potential of working directly with fishermen to advance scientific understanding. In 1962, he launched the Cooperative Shark Tagging Program with fewer than 100 volunteer fishermen. Under his leadership, the program expanded into one of the most successful and enduring partnerships between the scientific and fishing communities, resulting in hundreds of thousands of sharks tagged and an unparalleled body of data on shark movements, behavior, and biology. His efforts helped transform the public's perception of sharks and laid the groundwork for significant advancements in shark science. In addition to founding the tagging program, Casey played a leading role in establishing NOAA's marine fisheries laboratory in Narragansett, Rhode Island, where the Apex Predators Program continues his legacy of collaboration and innovation.

"This award is a fitting tribute to a man whose work helped define what cooperative research can achieve," said Council Chair Wes Townsend. "Jack inspired generations of scientists, many of whom continue to carry forward his commitment to collaboration and innovation."

Upcoming Meetings

The next Council meeting will be held **June 3-5, 2025**, in Virginia Beach, VA. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events>.



Jack Casey (left) with Council Chair Wes Townsend



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 13, 2025

CONTACT: Kim Iverson
Public Information Officer
Toll Free: 866/SAFMC-10 or 843/571-4366
kim.iverson@safmc.net

Council Addresses Broad Range of Federal Fisheries Issues During March Meeting

Mackerel port meetings; commercial snapper grouper fishery; budget cuts top agenda

Members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council began their week-long meeting in Jekyll Island, GA with a focused look at issues facing the federal commercial snapper grouper fishery and continued to discuss several federal fishery issues throughout the week. The impacts of recent reductions in workforce at NOAA Fisheries were acknowledged as the Council considers future management measures for species such as Black Sea Bass, Golden Tilefish, Atlantic King, and Spanish Mackerels.

Mackerel Port Meetings

A series of 16 in-person and six virtual port meetings were held along the Atlantic coast in 2024-25, focusing on the Atlantic King and Spanish Mackerel fisheries. The port meetings, held at the request of the Council's Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel, provided an opportunity for meeting attendees to discuss their perspectives with other fishery participants and local Council members. Council staff reviewed the comprehensive draft report from the port meetings and provided options for moving forward with the development of management actions.

The [overview of the draft report](#) divides the seven goals and objectives of the port meetings into three categories: 1) environmental conditions affecting the fisheries, for example, when and where the fish are available to fishermen; 2) any needed management changes; and 3) fishing dynamics. The report describes the fisheries by region and individual South Atlantic states, providing insight into the similarities and differences in these economically important fisheries. A total of 263 stakeholders, including private recreational, for-hire, and commercial fishermen participated in the meetings. "The idea of stakeholder meetings is something that was initiated by the advisory panel and has been a huge undertaking," explained Tom Roller, Chair of the Mackerel Cobia Committee and Council representative from North Carolina. "Thank you to all of the fishermen that participated and kudos to the staff, states, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and other councils for their assistance in making this effort a success."

Before determining how to move forward with management actions, the Council will consider input from its Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel during the June 2025 Council meeting in Port Canaveral, Florida. The Council will also receive information from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council on its coastal migratory pelagics stakeholder engagement efforts.

(Continued)

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Full Council and Committee
SUMMARY MOTIONS
March 3-7, 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.

Full Council Session I (CLOSED)

MOTION 1: Appoint the following individuals:

- **Shrimp Advisory Panel Liaisons**
Appoint Sonny Gwin (MD) and Pat Geer (VA) as liaisons to the Shrimp Advisory Panel.
- **Snapper Grouper Recreational Permitting and Reporting Technical Advisory Panel**
Appoint Sean Wilms with FWC's Florida Wildlife Research Institute to the advisory panel.
- **SEDAR 90 (South Atlantic Red Snapper) Appointments**
Appoint the following persons to the SEDAR 90 Data Workshop: Anna-Mai Christmas-Svajdlenka, Julie Simpson, Julie Dingle, and Paul McLaughlin.

MOTION 2: Remove representatives from other fishery management councils from SAFMC committees and create a liaison position for the Dolphin Wahoo Committee for the New England Fishery Management Council (non-voting), effective with the June 2025 Council meeting.

Full Council Session I

MOTION 3: Approve the For-Hire Reporting Improvement Amendment for scoping.

MOTION 4: Direct staff to do the following:

- Prepare a letter to support restoring the Beaufort, North Carolina, facility.
- Conduct scoping for the For-Hire Reporting Improvement Amendment prior to the June 2025 meeting.
- Provide comments on the draft MOA with the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary to Sanctuary staff.

Habitat and Shrimp Committees

Coral Amendment 11/Shrimp Amendment 12

MOTION 5: Move forward with Alternatives 1, 2, and 3.

- Alternative 1: No Action
- Alternative 2: Establish a SFAA with the area of 22 sq miles along the eastern edge of the northern OHAPC boundary
- Alternative 3: Establish a SFAA with the area of 32 sq miles along the eastern edge of the northern OHAPC boundary

MOTION 6: Adopt the following timing and tasks:

- Continue the development of Coral Amendment 11/Shrimp Amendment 12 and prepare a draft to consider approval for public hearings at the June 2025 meeting.

Habitat and Ecosystem

MOTION 7: Approve the EFH 5-year review letter as written for submission.

MOTION 8: Move that the Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel recommended definition of living shorelines be adopted for use by the SAFMC:

A living shoreline is a coastal management approach that stabilizes and protects the shoreline using a suite of options that promote the use of natural materials, such as native plants, sand, rocks, and oyster shells. The details of material usage and percentage of material type are determined by state management bodies.

Unlike traditional hard structures such as seawalls, living shorelines should maintain the natural connections between upland, intertidal, and aquatic environments.

This approach not only minimizes erosion and aims to reduce wave energy but also provides valuable wildlife habitat, maintains or improves water quality, and supports ecological resilience.

Living shorelines should be designed to spontaneously grow and adapt over time, making them a dynamic, nature-based solution for coastal protection and management.

MOTION 9: Approve the Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel agenda items listed for the July 2025 meeting:

- Review progress on the habitat website.
- Review progress on the habitat program communication strategy
- Essential Fish Habitat Consultations.
- Review of beneficial use projects and discussion on future impacts
- Revision of Alterations to Riverine, Estuarine and Nearshore Flows policy to address impacts from freshwater discharges and impediments to river flow.
- Space program impacts on habitat (if the information is available).
- Projects with Potential Habitat Impacts:
 - Central Virginia Offshore Wind (CVOW) update from Dominion Energy on habitat created by wind farms and fish mortality during construction.
 - Sea Optic fiber cables.
- Climate readiness projects overview and EFH project update.
- Climate and Ecosystem Fisheries Initiative (CEFI) Overview?
- Identify higher abundance locations and additional life stage information for EFH clarification in each fishery management plan (improving EFH tier structure).
- Integrate food web information from food web policy into EFH definitions.
- Work plan update.

MOTION 10: Direct staff to do the following:

- Request that the Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel discuss the goals and objectives for an Integrated Ecosystem Assessment for the South Atlantic region and bring those

back to the Council for consideration at the September Council meeting.

- Submit the EFH letter to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Mackerel Cobia Committee

MOTION 11: Adopt the following timing and tasks:

- Request Gulf Council staff provide a presentation to the Council on their coastal migratory pelagic stakeholder engagement efforts at the June 2025 meeting.
- Provide a summary of information provided during port meetings on each identified management topic at the June 2025 meeting.
- Provide a refresher on Atlantic Spanish mackerel catch level recommendations from the SSC based on SEDAR 78 at the June 2025 meeting.
- Convene a meeting of the mackerel cobia advisory panel in spring 2025.

Snapper Grouper Committee

MOTION 12: Initiate an amendment that will address commercial permit and trip efficiency issues.

MOTION 13: Initiate an amendment to consider options for snapper grouper aggregate recreational bag limits and other management actions to reduce recreational dead discards. (this could be included in another amendment already on the workplan).

MOTION 14: Direct staff to do the following:

- Update the Shiny tool to evaluate the need for conservation and management of snapper grouper species.
- Prepare golden tilefish amendment as an abbreviated framework to adjust golden tilefish catch levels only that would be approved at the June or September Council meeting.
- Request additional information on MSY proxies from Florida FWRI and the SEFSC.
- Draft and submit the Council's comment letter on Amendment 59 (secretarial amendment) and submit by the March 17 deadline.
- Develop draft actions and alternatives for Amendment 56, including the action to consider aligning the start date of the golden tilefish recreational season with that of other deepwater species.
- Conduct the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel meeting with approved agenda items.
- Plan and conduct the Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-Committee's June 2025 meeting.
- Continue work on Amendment 46. Prepare the amendment for approval for public hearings in June 2025.
- Begin development of the commercial amendment as soon as the abbreviated golden tilefish amendment is complete.

For-Hire Reporting Amendment

The Council received input from its For-Hire Reporting and Law Enforcement Advisory Panels on potential actions to improve for-hire reporting in the South Atlantic region. An amendment is under development with actions to address reporting frequency, trip declaration requirements, approved landing locations, collection of economic data, and a mandatory validation survey. Scoping on the amendment will be held prior to the Council's June 2025 meeting.

Commercial Snapper Grouper Fishery

After reviewing input from its Snapper Grouper Commercial Sub-committee, the Council expressed an intent to develop an amendment addressing Snapper Grouper federal commercial permits and trip efficiency issues. Permit issues to consider may include revising the current 2 for 1 permit requirements, permit transfers, leasing of permitted vessels, limits for the number of permits that can be owned by an entity, and income requirements for "use it or lose" it provisions. Options to increase trip efficiencies may include an allowance for incidental catch and trip limit increases if landings are below a threshold by a specified date in the season. The Sub-Committee will meet again prior to the Council's June meeting and continue discussion of commercial fishery issues.

Private Recreational Permit and Education Requirements

The Council continued discussion of Amendment 46 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan that would establish a federal private recreational permit in the Snapper Grouper Fishery. The permit system would help identify the universe of private anglers or vessels targeting those species and enhance the ability to collect recreational effort and catch data. The amendment also includes an education component associated with the permit to promote the use of best fishing practices. Public hearings on the amendment will be scheduled for later in 2025.

Red Snapper

After receiving a presentation from NOAA Fisheries on measures proposed in Secretarial Amendment 59 to end overfishing of Red Snapper and reduce dead discards, the Council discussed the proposed actions and will provide feedback and recommendations to NOAA Fisheries by March 17, 2025.

Additional Information

Additional information about the Council's March 2025 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/march-2025-council-meeting/> The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for June 9-13, 2025, in Cape Canaveral, Florida..

An online copy of this news release is available from the Council's website: <https://safmc.net/posts/council-addresses-broad-range-of-federal-fisheries-issues-during-march-meeting/>.

<p>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.</p>
--