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May 7, 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission

FROM: Jeffrey Dobbs, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator
Anne Markwith, Southern Flounder Co-Lead
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SUBJECT: Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan Amendment 4

Issue

Consider input received during the public comment period and Advisory Committee (AC) review of Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan (FMP) Amendment 4 and vote on preferred management options.

Supporting Documents

- [Draft Amendment 4 to the Southern Flounder FMP](#)
- [Northern, Southern, and Finfish Advisory Committee meeting minutes](#)
- [Public comments submitted online for Amendment 4 to the Southern Flounder FMP](#)

Action

Vote on preferred management options for Southern Flounder FMP Amendment 4.

Background

At their August 2024 business meeting the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) passed a motion “to ask the DMF Director to ask the DEQ Secretary to modify the Annual FMP Review Schedule to amend the Southern Flounder FMP for the review of the plan to begin in 2024. The intent is to allow for more recreational access while maintaining the rebuilding requirements of Amendment 3”. The Secretary subsequently approved this schedule change along with a request from the DMF to begin concurrent development of Amendment 5 to explore long-term solutions to the issue of recreational access while maintaining Amendment 3 rebuilding requirements. The primary purpose of Amendment 4 is to immediately address the August 2024 MFC motion by implementing the 50/50 sector allocation in 2025, instead of in 2026 as prescribed in Amendment 3 (Table 1). Expediting the shift to 50/50 reduces the possibility of recreational catch overages that may mitigate the need for future season closures, as the allocation shift will provide an additional buffer for catch. The shift in allocation will not increase the length of the recreational season.

Table 1. Amendment 3 annual allocations, in pounds, for the Southern Flounder commercial and recreational fisheries and associated sub-allocations for each sector that maintains a 72% overall reduction and the current pound net sub-allocation. An asterisk (*) indicates catch from Recreational Commercial Gear License holders is not included in the Total Allowable Landings.

Year	Allocation	Total Allowable Catch	Dead Discards	Total Allowable Landings	Commercial Fisheries			Recreational Fisheries*		
					Total Allowable Landings	Mobile Gears	Pound Nets	Total Allowable Landings	Hook and Line	Gigs
2021	70/30	548,034	15,682	532,352	372,646	186,188	186,458	159,706	142,206	17,500
2022	70/30	548,034	15,682	532,352	372,646	186,188	186,458	159,706	142,206	17,500
2023	70/30	548,034	15,682	532,352	372,646	186,188	186,458	159,706	142,206	17,500
2024	70/30	548,034	15,682	532,352	372,646	186,188	186,458	159,706	142,206	17,500
2025	60/40	548,034	15,682	532,352	319,411	132,953	186,458	212,941	189,608	23,333
2026	50/50	548,034	15,682	532,352	266,176	79,718	186,458	266,176	237,010	29,166

Following an accelerated timeline allows for adoption of Amendment 4 to the Southern Flounder FMP by the MFC in August 2025 at the earliest (Table 2). If any step in this timeline is not completed as shown, it will result in an implementation date after the allowed window for a recreational season (August 16–September 30) negating any possible gain in recreational access this amendment could provide.

Table 2. Timeline for development and adoption of Amendment 4 to the Southern Flounder FMP.

Milestones	Completion Date
DMF drafts FMP Amendment 4	October 31–December 20, 2024
AC review of draft FMP Amendment 4 (Finfish AC)	January 27, 2025
MFC votes to send draft FMP for AC review and public comment	March 21–23, 2025
Public and MFC AC review (Northern, Southern, Finfish)	April 1–30, 2025
MFC selects preferred management option	May 21–23, 2025
Legislative review of draft FMP	June–July, 2025
MFC votes on final adoption of FMP Amendment 4	August 20–22, 2025
Division implements management strategies	August 2025

Development and adoption of Amendment 4, as proposed, is a short-term solution to address recreational access. Amendment 5 will explore long-term solutions to the issue of recreational access while maintaining Amendment 3 rebuilding requirements.

Management Options

Status Quo: Maintain Amendment 3 allocation transition schedule.

Expedite Allocation Shift: Expedite the sector (commercial/recreational) allocation transition to 50/50 in 2025 rather than in 2026 as prescribed in Amendment 3.

Advisory Committee Recommendations and Public Comment

The Northern, Southern, and Finfish ACs met in April 2025 to review and provide recommendations for Amendment 4. The Northern and Finfish ACs passed motions to remain at Status Quo, which maintains the Amendment 3 allocation transition schedule. The Southern AC made separate motions to maintain status quo and to expedite the allocation shift; both failed due to ties. Additionally, the Northern AC passed a motion to “*recommend that the Marine Fisheries Commission ask the DEQ Secretary to allow Amendment 5 to the Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan to change the 72% reduction that was adopted in Amendment 3 to a 52% reduction and split the total allocation equally between the commercial and recreational sectors*”.

The online public comment form was open April 1–30, 2025. The Division received 30 responses during this period. Most commentors expressed broad support for the expedited shift to 50/50 allocation in 2025. Some expressed concern about commercial gears’ effect on the Southern Flounder population.

Next Steps

Following MFC selection of preferred Amendment 4 management, draft Amendment 4 will be sent for DEQ Secretary and legislative committee review. The MFC will vote on final adoption of Amendment 4 at their August 2025 business meeting. Concurrently, the Division will continue developing the first draft of Amendment 5.