NC Marine Fisheries Commission

Director's Report

November 2026 Quarterly Business Meeting

Documents

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
October 2026 Meeting Report

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Rule Suspensions Memo

L&S Annual Report Memo

October 2026 Council Meeting Summary

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council met October 6-8, 2026, in Duck, NC. This document summarizes key actions taken and issues considered during the meeting. Presentations, briefing materials, motions, and webinar recordings are available on the Council's October 2026 meeting page.

HIGHLIGHTS

During this meeting, the Council:

- Agreed to initiate a joint amendment with the New England Council to consider revisions to vessel baseline restrictions, contingent on similar action by the New England Council in December.
- Initiated a framework action to consider modifications to the scup gear restricted areas and/or alternative measures to reduce scup discards.
- Maintained the previously adopted 2027 Illex squid specifications, including a commercial quota of 38,631 MT.
- Considered potential approaches for increasing the U.S. Illex quota and agreed to revisit the issue in December.
- Maintained the previously adopted 2027 Atlantic mackerel specifications, which include an increase in the commercial quota to 13,210 MT, subject to a potential payback adjustment.
- Reviewed a new longfin squid stock assessment that represents a significant scientific advancement and will inform catch limits for 2027-2029.
- Maintained the previously adopted 2027 spiny dogfish specifications, including a commercial quota of 9.2 million pounds.
- Reviewed recommendations for further developing an approach to apportioning blueline tilefish catch between the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Councils.
- Received updates on NOAA Fisheries' habitat consultation activities and major coastal and offshore projects in the Mid-Atlantic.
- Reviewed a draft regional framework for administering fisheries compensation funds associated with future offshore wind projects.
- Received an update on scoping for potential measures to reduce whale entanglement risks in commercial fixed-gear fisheries.
- Reviewed proposed actions and deliverables for 2027, with a draft Implementation Plan scheduled for Council consideration in December.

Evaluation of Vessel Baseline Restrictions

The Council reviewed an evaluation of vessel baseline restrictions conducted jointly with the New England Council. These restrictions limit potential increases in vessel length and horsepower for many limited access commercial fisheries managed by both Councils. The evaluation was intended to help determine whether to prioritize a joint management action to consider revisions to these restrictions.

The Council acknowledged the complexity of the issue, noting that potential challenges and benefits vary by fishery, gear type, and vessel size. Members also discussed how vessel baseline restrictions intersect with other regulations, including the prohibition on permit splitting.

The Council agreed to initiate an omnibus amendment to consider potential revisions, contingent on the New England Council taking similar action at its December 2026 meeting. If both Councils agree to move forward, public scoping hearings and initial development of management alternatives would be expected to take place in 2027.

Scup Gear Restricted Areas

The Council reviewed background information on the commercial scup gear restricted areas (GRAs), findings from the Council-funded scup GRA project, and input from the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The GRAs were implemented in 2000 to reduce juvenile scup discards in small mesh trawl fisheries, including longfin squid, black sea bass, and silver hake. The project evaluated potential modifications to the GRAs by examining spatial patterns in scup and longfin squid abundance and assessing socioeconomic impacts on the fishing industry. The results suggest that fixed time-area closures may not be an effective approach for mitigating scup discards in the small mesh squid fishery. The SSC concluded that the project's findings are scientifically supported by the available data and analytical approach. Based on this information, the Council agreed to initiate a framework action to consider modifications to the GRAs and/or alternative measures to reduce scup discards.

2027 *Illex* Squid Specifications

After considering the recommendations of the SSC, Advisory Panel, and the Monitoring Committee, the Council agreed to maintain the previously adopted 2027 specifications for *Illex* squid. These specifications were adopted in 2025 as part of the 2026–2028 multiyear specifications and would remain unchanged for 2026 and 2027. After accounting for expected discards, the commercial quota would again be 38,631 metric tons (MT).

Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) *Illex* Quota Issues

The Council reviewed the possibility of increasing the U.S. *Illex* quota in years when U.S. landings are high and catches in the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) area are low. The SSC concluded that these conditions have not been shown to reliably indicate when a higher U.S. quota would be consistent with the Council's risk policy. Based on the SSC's findings and staff recommendations, the Council decided not to pursue further action at this time. However, members discussed other approaches to evaluating whether higher catch limits may be warranted, including whether relatively large squid sizes could support an increase. The Council will revisit this topic in December 2026 as it finalizes the 2027 Implementation Plan.

2027 Atlantic Mackerel Specifications

After considering recommendations from the SSC, Advisory Panel, and the Monitoring Committee, the Council agreed to maintain the previously adopted 2027 specifications for Atlantic mackerel. These specifications were adopted in 2025 and would provide for a slight increase from 2026 to 2027, consistent with the rebuilding projections.

After accounting for Canadian landings, recreational catch, and commercial discards, the 2027 commercial quota would increase from 11,237 MT to 13,210 MT. However, a payback from a 2025 overage may reduce the 2027 quota by about 1,100 MT. This adjustment would be made automatically by NOAA Fisheries under existing Atlantic mackerel regulations.

Longfin Squid Research Track Assessment

Kristan Blackhart of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center presented results from a new Research Track stock assessment for longfin squid. The assessment represents a significant scientific advancement, producing two analytical stock assessment models for a stock that previously lacked such models. Both models passed peer review, and results suggest that fishing mortality has been relatively low compared with proposed reference points. The assessment also provided additional information on longfin squid biology and the influence of environmental conditions on the stock. The SSC will review the assessment in November 2026 and develop recommendations for 2027-2029 catch limits, which the Council will consider at its December 2026 meeting.

2027 Spiny Dogfish Specifications

After considering recommendations from the SSC, Advisory Panel, and Monitoring Committee, the Council agreed to maintain the previously adopted 2027 specifications for spiny dogfish. These specifications were adopted in 2025 and would remain unchanged for 2026 and 2027. After accounting for minor Canadian landings, minor recreational landings, and substantial expected discards, the commercial quota would again be 9.2 million pounds.

Joint MAFMC and SAFMC Blueline Tilefish Subcommittee

The Council reviewed recommendations from the Joint MAFMC and SAFMC Blueline Tilefish Subcommittee. The subcommittee was established to develop a framework for apportioning the blueline tilefish acceptable biological catch (ABC) north of Cape Hatteras between the two Councils' jurisdictions. The subcommittee recommended further development of a weighted rubric incorporating fishery-independent survey information, commercial and recreational fishery information, and the current 70% MAFMC/30% SAFMC proportional split, along with supporting analyses to inform each category. The Council expressed general support for the subcommittee's recommendations and continued collaboration between the two Councils on blueline tilefish.

Habitat Activities Update

Karen Greene of the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) Habitat and Ecosystem Services Division (HESD) provided updates on coastal resilience, marine mineral mining, dredging, and large infrastructure projects in the Mid-Atlantic. To date in 2026, there have been 569 requests for habitat consultation in our region. Given this workload and a staff of 11 responsible for Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) consultations, Ms. Greene highlighted efforts to improve efficiency through greater use of general concurrences and programmatic consultations with agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Federal Emergency Management Agency. Council Chair Joe Cimino emphasized the importance of EFH consultations and noted the value of HESD's engagement on these projects to state agency partners.

Regional Offshore Wind Fisheries Compensatory Mitigation Fund

The Council received a presentation on a draft Regional Offshore Wind Fisheries Compensation Framework, developed collaboratively by 11 East Coast states, federal agencies, commercial and for-hire fisheries representatives, and offshore wind energy project developers. The framework proposes a regional approach for administering fisheries compensatory mitigation funds associated with future offshore wind projects. The initiative is not responsible for determining the amount of compensation funding provided by individual projects. Instead, it focuses on how funds could be administered and distributed to eligible fishermen. A public comment period on the draft is open through November 3, 2026. Additional information is available here.

Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) Scoping

Corie Grewal and Jennifer Goebel of GARFO presented an update on scoping for potential future ALWTRP modifications. The scoping process, which included a public comment period ending October 16, 2026, was intended to solicit public input on strategies to reduce entanglement risks to North Atlantic right, humpback, and fin whales in commercial fixed-gear fisheries along the U.S. East Coast. No specific changes have been proposed at this stage. The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team is tentatively scheduled to meet in December 2026 to begin developing recommended risk-reduction measures for NOAA Fisheries' consideration. Additional information is available here.

2027 Implementation Plan

The Executive Committee reviewed progress on the 2026 Implementation Plan and a draft list of actions and deliverables for 2027. The Council develops annual Implementation Plans to guide its work and ensure progress toward the goals and objectives of its five-year strategic plan. The Committee recommended several modifications to the proposed 2027 actions and deliverables. The full Council will review a draft 2027 Implementation Plan at its December meeting.

Next Council Meeting

The Council will meet jointly with the ASMFC Policy Board on Thursday, November 12, 2026, to receive a report from the Recreational Sector Separation Workshop. The next full Council meeting will be held December 15-17, 2026, in Annapolis, MD. A complete list of upcoming meetings can be found at https://www.mafmc.org/council-events.

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September Council Meeting Advances Measures on Commercial Management and Headboat Limits



September 22, 2026

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council met September 14-18, 2026, in North Charleston, South Carolina. There were awards, new appointments, and discussions around fisheries management, largely in the Snapper Grouper Committee.

Council Recognizes Law Enforcement and Longtime Service



Trish Murphey (left) and John Carmichael (right) hold the Award of Excellence.

The Council presented Awards of Excellence to both Trish Murphey and Jeff Buckel in recognition of their decades of service to the Council and Scientific and Statistical Committee, respectively. We commend them for their meticulous

work and impactful contributions to fisheries management and science in the South Atlantic. The Council also recognized NOAA Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement Special Agent Kevin Mitchell as the 2025 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year for his work investigating fisheries violations, protecting North Atlantic right whales, and engaging with fishermen and the public.

Resilient Fisheries Initiative



The Council received an extensive update on the Resilient Fisheries Initiative, which supports projects addressing management challenges associated with changing ecosystems. The Council received a presentation from Dr. Sarah Gaichas on the completed Ecosystem Information Review Project, which examined how regional fishery management councils use ecosystem information and identified opportunities to strengthen the use of ecological and socioeconomic indicators in South Atlantic fisheries management. The Council also received updates on collaborative workshops and governance efforts and provided direction for a Governance Workshop to be held in early 2027 in conjunction with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and NMFS. The workshop will focus on improving management processes across Council regions, better documenting management and governance processes, and improving coordination among Councils and NMFS.

Commercial Management Measures



The Council continued work on Amendment 60, which is intended to improve long-term stability and profitability in the commercial snapper grouper fishery. The amendment would remove the current “2-for-1” requirement for transferable commercial snapper grouper permits, allow vessels to switch to or from bottom longline gear

during a trip under specified conditions, and adjust trip limits for several species.

The Council reviewed public comments received during the public hearings as well as information on vessel monitoring systems and how gear changes could be communicated to law enforcement. The Council will continue working with the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel and plans to consider final approval at its December 2026 meeting.

Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit Revision



The Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Unit (FMU) currently includes 55 species, many of which are unassessed or have low landings. Through Amendment 61, the Council is considering changes to the composition of the FMU to streamline management. Fourteen species are being evaluated to determine whether they should remain under federal management, be removed from the FMU, or be designated as Ecosystem Component (EC) species. For species considered for EC designation, the Council is exploring ways to maintain some management requirements to support data collection and prevent overexploitation. The Council will continue developing Amendment 61 and plans to consider approving it for public hearings in March 2027.

Headboat Vessel Limits



The Council continued development of Regulatory Amendment 38, which proposes a headboat-specific vessel limit of two gag or black grouper per six passengers. The measure is intended to improve efficiency and profitability for federally permitted headboats by allowing vessel limits to increase with the number of passengers onboard. The Council mostly focused on the criteria vessels would need to meet to qualify for the higher limit and settled on two requirements: a valid federal charter/headboat permit and a valid U.S. Coast Guard Certificate of Inspection (COI). The amendment also proposes updating golden

tilefish catch levels based on the latest stock assessment. Public hearings on the headboat vessel limit amendment will be held this fall.

Spawning Special Management Zones



The Council approved Regulatory Amendment 39 for public hearings to consider extending protections in three Spawning Special Management Zones (SSMZs): South Cape Lookout, Georgetown/Devil's Hole, and Warsaw Hole. The three areas currently have a sunset provision that would allow the fishing restrictions to expire in August 2027. The Council is examining options to extend the sunset provision for 10 years, through August 2037, allowing additional time for research and monitoring to evaluate the benefits of these areas for spawning fish and habitat. Public input will be collected through a webinar hearing as the amendment moves forward.

Additional Information

Additional information about the Council's September 2026 meeting, including individual reports from committee meetings and meetings of the Full Council, is available from the Council's website at: https://safmc.net/events/september-2026-council-meeting/. The next meeting of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is scheduled for Dec. 7 – Dec. 11, 2026, in Beaufort, NC.

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JOSH STEIN
Governor

D. REID WILSON
Secretary

JONATHAN HOWELL
Director

October 28, 2026

MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission

FROM: Jason Rock, Fisheries Science Section Chief

SUBJECT: Temporary Rule Suspensions

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

Findings
There have been no new rule suspensions since the August 2026 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-18-2026.

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 Management Plan. This suspension was implemented in proclamation M-34-2015 and continues in Proclamation M-16-2026.

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.

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.

JOSH STEIN
Governor

D. REID WILSON
Secretary

JONATHAN HOWELL
Director

November 2, 2026

MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission

FROM: Brandi Salmon, License and Statistics Section Chief

SUBJECT: Latest Version of License and Statistics E-Big Book Available

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The License and Statistics E-Big Book continues to be available to the public using this link: https://nc-dmf-bigbook.share.connect.posit.cloud/. The latest version contains updated commercial and recreational dependent data through calendar year 2025 and commercial and recreational license data through fiscal year 2026 (July 2025 – June 2026). Staff continue to accept recommendations on ways to summarize and display License and Statistics Section data for future versions.

In addition to the E-Big Book, the public can access recreational dependent data collected through the Marine Recreational Information Program's (MRIP) Query Tool using this link: https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/data-tools/recreational-fisheries-statistics-queries. The data supplied in the E-Big Book and the MRIP Query Tool contain backdated estimates using the most recent Fishing Effort Survey recalibrated numbers. Due to this adjustment, there may be discrepancies between the data found in the current version of the E-Big Book and data found in prior publications, such as stock assessments, Fishery Management Plans, prior data requests, etc. More information about these changes can be found here: Fishing Effort Survey Research and Improvements | NOAA Fisheries.