Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Sciaenids Management Board

May 6, 2026
9:15 – 11:30 a.m.

Draft Agenda

The times listed are approximate; the order in which these items will be taken is subject to change; other items may be added as necessary.

1.	Welcome/Call to Order *(B. Dyar)*	9:15 a.m.
2.	Board Consent • Approval of Agenda • Approval of Proceedings from October 2025	9:15 a.m.
3.	Public Comment	9:20 a.m.
4.	Consider Georgia and South Carolina Red Drum Management Proposals to Implement Addendum II **Final Action** • Review proposals (*T. Bauer*) • Consider Final Approval of Management Proposals	9:30 a.m.
5.	Consider North Carolina Spot Conservation Equivalency Proposal **Final Action** • Review of North Carolina proposal (*C. Batsavage)* • Plan Review Team and Advisory Panel Report (*T. Bauer*) • Consider approval of North Carolina's Conservation Equivalency Proposal	10:00 a.m.
6.	Consider Plan Review Teams' Report on Board Tasking to Review *De Minimis* Provisions for Sciaenids (*T. Bauer*) **Possible Action**	10:20 a.m.
7.	Progress Update on 2026 Atlantic Croaker Benchmark Stock Assessment (*C. Schlick*)	11:10 a.m.
8.	Update on the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (*P. Campfield*)	11:20 a.m.
9.	Other Business/Adjourn	11:30 a.m.

The meeting will be held at The Westin Crystal City (1800 Richmond Highway, Arlington, VA; 703.486.1111) and via webinar; click here for details.

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

MEETING OVERVIEW

Sciaenids Management Board
May 6, 2026
9:15 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Chair: Ben Dyar (SC) Assumed Chairmanship: 02/26	Technical Committee Chairs: Black Drum: Harry Rickabaugh (MD) Atlantic Croaker: Margaret Finch (SC) Red Drum: Ethan Simpson (VA) Spot: Harry Rickabaugh (MD)	Law Enforcement Committee Representative: Col. Matthew Rogers (VA)
Vice Chair: Vacant	Advisory Panel Chair: Craig Freeman (VA)	Previous Board Meeting: October 30, 2025
Voting Members: NJ, DE, MD, PRFC, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL (9 votes)		

2. Board Consent

- Approval of Agenda
- Approval of Proceedings from October 2025

3. Public Comment – At the beginning of the meeting public comment will be taken on items not on the agenda. Individuals that wish to speak at this time must sign-in at the beginning of the meeting. For agenda items that have already gone out for public hearing and/or have had a public comment period that has closed, the Board Chair may determine that additional public comment will not provide additional information. In this circumstance the Chair will not allow additional public comment on an issue. For agenda items that the public has not had a chance to provide input, the Board Chair may allow limited opportunity for comment. The Board Chair has the discretion to limit the number of speakers and/or the length of each comment.

4. Consider Georgia and South Carolina Red Drum Management Proposals to Implement Addendum II (9:30-10:00 a.m.) Final Action

Background

- In October 2026, the Sciaenids Management Board (Board) approved Addendum II to Amendment 2 of the Red Drum Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) to respond to the 2024 stock assessment results.
- The Addendum modified the fishing mortality (30% spawning potential ratio or F30%) for the southern stock will aim to meet with implemented management measures. At a minimum, states will reduce fishing effort to F30% to end overfishing with the unchanged long-term goal of reducing effort to achieve the fishing mortality associated with 40% spawning potential ratio.
- South Carolina and Georgia submitted proposals which contain regulatory options that, at minimum, achieve the 14.4% reduction associated with $F_{30\%}$ (**Briefing Materials**).
- The Technical Committee met on April 14, 2026 to review the proposals, and did not have any concerns.

Presentations

- Overview of Georgia and South Carolina Red Drum Management Proposals by T. Bauer.

Board actions for consideration at this meeting

- Final approval of Georgia and South Carolina's proposals

5. Consider North Carolina Spot Conservation Equivalency Proposal (10:00-10:20 a.m.) Final Action

Background

- North Carolina has submitted a conservation equivalency proposal to adjust their spot commercial fishing season (**Briefing Materials**). North Carolina is requesting an adjustment of their spot commercial fishing season closure period from December 10th through April 4th to January 1st through April 28th.
- Following the process established in the Commission's De Minimis Policy, the Spot Plan Review Team, Law Enforcement Committee, and South Atlantic Advisory Panel all reviewed the proposal and did not have any concerns (**Briefing Materials**).

Presentations

- Review of North Carolina's Proposal by C. Batsavage
- Summary of Committees' Review by T. Bauer

Board actions for consideration at this meeting

- Consider approval of North Carolina's spot conservation equivalency proposal

6. Consider Plan Review Teams' Report on Board Tasking to Review *De Minimis* Provisions for Sciaenids (10:20-11:10 a.m.) Possible Action

Background

- In the last 5-10 years, several states have experienced reoccurring issues related to the current definitions of *de minimis* for multiple Sciaenids Management Board (Board) species. In August 2025, the Board tasked the plan review teams (PRTs) to provide recommendations on 1) whether the current 1% threshold for a state to be considered *de minimis* is appropriate; and 2) whether there may be alternate ways to evaluate whether a state is *de minimis*.
- The PRT met four times between November 2025 and April 2026 to address the Board's tasking. The PRTs agree the current 1% threshold may not be appropriate for all Sciaenids Board species, at least without changes to the *de minimis* process, and propose several solutions for the Board's consideration to alleviate some of the current issues states are having (**Briefing Materials**).

Presentations

- Plan Review Teams' Report by T. Bauer.

Board actions for consideration at this meeting

- Consider recommendations of the Plan Review Teams' report

7. Progress Update on 2026 Atlantic Croaker Benchmark Stock Assessment (11:10-11:20 a.m.)

Background

- Work on the Atlantic croaker benchmark stock assessment was initiated in early 2023, but was paused in Fall 2024 due to multiple personnel constraints. Work was reinitiated in February 2025 to update time series, split datasets into a new regional stock structure

definition with a different stock boundary from what is currently used in the traffic light analysis, and reconsider data sets based on the new stock structure definition.

- The SAS held an in-person assessment workshop from March 2-6, 2026. A peer review workshop is tentatively scheduled for July 2026. The assessment and peer review report is scheduled to be presented to the Board at Annual Meeting.

Presentations

- Stock assessment update by C. Schlick.

8. Update on the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (11:20-11:30 a.m.)

Background

- The Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) is a cooperative program for the collection, management, and dissemination of fishery-independent data and information in the southeastern United States. It is a federally and state-funded program that provides timely data to inform management decisions for fisheries in coastal areas.
- There are three components to this program: The Gulf, the South Atlantic, and the Caribbean. The South Atlantic component of this program was started in 1983.
- Currently, many assessments for Commission species use SEAMAP data. These include the assessments for Red Drum (2024), Atlantic Menhaden (2025), and Bluefish (2025). A more comprehensive table of data uses can be found here.
- To support the long-term planning for this program and to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the surveys, the SEAMAP committees have put together a Strategic Plan for their next funding cycle (**Briefing Materials**). The aim of this document is to summarize the importance of each survey and outline proposed enhancements for improvements.
- More information about SEAMAP can be found at seamap.org.

Presentations

- Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program update by P. Campfield

9. Other Business/Adjourn

Sciaenids Management Board

Activity level: High

Committee Overlap Score: Moderate (American Eel TC, Cobia TC, Horseshoe Crab TC, Weakfish TC)

Committee Task List

- Atlantic Croaker and Spot SAS – Conduct Atlantic Croaker and Spot Benchmark Assessments
- Black Drum TC – Update indicators
- Atlantic Croaker TC – Gather data and assist with Atlantic Croaker Benchmark Assessment; Conduct Traffic Light Analysis
- Spot TC – Gather data and assist with Spot Benchmark Assessment; Conduct Traffic Light Analysis
- Atlantic Croaker TC/PRT – July 1: Compliance Reports Due
- Red Drum TC/PRT – July 1: Compliance Reports Due
- Black Drum TC/PRT – August 1: Compliance Reports Due
- Spotted Seatrout PRT – September 1: Compliance Reports Due
- Spot TC/PRT – November 1: Compliance Reports Due

TC Members:

Atlantic Croaker: Margaret Finch (SC, Chair), Tracey Bauer (ASMFC), Stacy VanMorter (NJ), Devon Scott (DE), Harry Rickabaugh (MD), Ingrid Braun (PRFC), Catherine Wilhelm (VA), Willow Patten (NC), Dawn Franco (GA), Halie OFarrell (FL)

Black Drum: Harry Rickabaugh (MD, Chair), Jeff Kipp (ASMFC), Tracey Bauer (ASMFC), Jennifer Pyle (NJ), Jordan Zimmerman (DE), Ethan Simpson (VA), Chris Stewart (NC), Chris McDonough (SC), Ryan Harrell (GA)

Red Drum: Cara Kowalchyk (NC, Chair), Jeff Kipp (ASMFC), Tracey Bauer (ASMFC), Stacy VanMorter (NJ), Devon Scott (DE), Matthew Jargowsky (MD), Ethan Simpson (VA), Joey Ballenger (SC), Chris Kalinowsky (GA), Sarah Burnsed (FL)

***Spot*:** Harry Rickabaugh (MD, Chair), Jeff Kipp (ASMFC), Tracey Bauer (ASMFC), Samara Nehemiah (ASMFC), Stacy VanMorter (NJ), Devon Scott (DE), Ingrid Braun (PRFC), Catherine Wilhelm (VA), Willow Patten (NC), Michelle Willis (SC), Britney Hall (GA), Halie OFarrell (FL)

Plan Review Team Members:

Atlantic Croaker: Ingrid Braun (PRFC), Ethan Simpson (VA), Willow Patten (NC), Chris McDonough (SC), Tracey Bauer (ASMFC)

Black Drum: Jordan Zimmerman (DE), Chris Stewart (NC), Chris McDonough (SC), Tracey Bauer (ASMFC)

Red Drum: Matthew Jargowsky (MD), Ethan Simpson (VA), Cara Kowalchyk (NC), Joey Ballenger (SC), Matt Kenworthy (FL), Tracey Bauer (ASMFC)

Spot**:** Harry Rickabaugh (MD), Ethan Simpson (VA), Chris McDonough (SC), Dawn Franco (GA), Tracey Bauer (ASMFC)

Spotted Seatrout**:** Tracey Bauer (ASMFC), Lucas Pensinger (NC), Brad Floyd (SC), Chris Kalinowsky (GA)

SAS Members:

Atlantic Croaker and Spot: CJ Schlick (SC, Chair), Jeff Kipp (ASMFC), Tracey Bauer (ASMFC), Samara Nehemiah (ASMFC), Harry Rickabaugh (MD), Brooke Lowman (VA), Trey Mace (MD), Margaret Finch (SC)

DRAFT PROCEEDINGS OF THE

ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

SCIAENIDS MANAGEMENT BOARD

Hyatt Place Dewey Beach
Dewey Beach, Delaware
Hybrid Meeting

October 30, 2025

TABLE OF CONTENT

INDEX OF MOTIONS

ATTENDANCE

Board Members

Joe Cimino, NJ (AA)
Jeff Kaelin, NJ (GA)
Adam Nowalsky, NJ, proxy for Sen. Gopal (LA)
Rich Wong, DE, proxy for J. Clark (AA)
Roy Miller, DE (GA)
Craig Pugh, DE, proxy for Rep. Carson (LA)
Carrie Kennedy, MD, proxy for L. Fegley (AA)
Robert T. Brown, MD, proxy for R. Dize (GA)
David Sikorski, MD, proxy for Del. Stein (LA)
Joe Grist, VA, proxy for J. Green (AA)
Chris Batsavage, NC, proxy for K. Rawls (AA)
Rep. Brian Turner (LA)
Ben Dyar, SC, proxy for B. Keppler (AA)
Malcolm Rhodes, SC (GA)
Mel Bell, SC, proxy for Sen. Cromer (LA)
Doug Haymans, GA (AA)
Spud Woodward, GA (GA)
Erika Burgess, FL, proxy for J. McCawley (AA)
Gary Jennings, FL (GA)
Ron Owens, PRFC

(AA = Administrative Appointee; GA = Governor Appointee; LA = Legislative Appointee)

Ex-Officio Members

Staff

Bob Beal
Toni Kerns
Tina Berger
Madeline Musante
Caitlin Starks
Tracey Bauer
James Boyle
Emilie Franke
Chelsea Tuohy
Katie Drew
Samara Nehemiah
CJ Schlick

The Sciaenids Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission convened in the Ballroom East/West via hybrid meeting, in-person and webinar; Thursday, October 30, 2025, and was called to order at 8:15 a.m. by Chair Doug Haymans.

CALL TO ORDER

CHAIR DOUG HAYMANS: Good morning, welcome to the fourth and final day of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Annual Meeting, and the loveliest day of all. I hope you guys enjoy liquid sunshine. I am calling to order the Sciaenids Management Board.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

CHAIR HAYMANS: First order of business is the approval of the agenda. Are there any additional items to add to the agenda? Seeing none; we'll consider that approved by consent.

APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS

CHAIR HAYMANS: If you've had a chance to read through the voluminous proceedings of the previous meeting in August, are there any changes, additions, deletions? Seeing none; we will consider those approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT

CHAIR HAYMANS: Now we move to the time where the public has an opportunity to comment on anything not on the agenda. In the room I see two members of the public if they wish to comment, and I see neither one of them. Is there anybody online? No one online, very good, then.

CONSIDER RED DRUM ADDENDUM II: MODIFICATIONS TO RED DRUM MANAGEMENT FOR FINAL APPROVAL

CHAIR HAYMANS: We can get to the heart of the matter 15 minutes ahead of time. Tracey. We're going to take up Addendum II to Amendment 2 to the Red Drum Fishery Management Plan.

The way we're going to do this is Tracey is going to walk us through each option one at a time. We will discuss the option, the public comment, all those sorts of good things and then we will move on that option, rather than going through the entire paper all at one time. With that, Tracey, it is all yours.

MS. TRACEY BAUER: Like Mr. Haymans said, I am going to start off with a very brief overview of the timeline, where we came from. Now that we're here a little bit of background. I'm going to give an overall Public Comment Summary and summary of the AP discussion before we delve into each specific issue one by one. At that time, I will give the public comment and the AP discussion on each issue separately that was specific to that issue.

Again, just as a brief reminder for everyone here and anyone online. One year ago, the Red Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment was approved for management use. The Board tasked the TC to look at next steps.

Back in May, earlier this year, May 2025, the Board initiated Draft Addendum II, and public comment period was held last month in September. Today the Board will be taking final action on Draft Addendum II. Again, a little bit of background, just to make sure everyone is on the same page. In the 2024 Benchmark Stock Assessment, the southern and northern regions were assessed separately, with two separate assessments. The southern region had a stock synthesis model and the northern region is currently using a traffic light analysis to assess stock status.

The southern region red drum stock was found to be overfished and experiencing overfishing, and the northern region red drum stock was found to be not overfished and not experiencing overfishing. However, the red drum northern region assessment did observe an increasing trend in fishing mortality.

REVIEW OPTIONS, PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY, AND ADVISORY PANEL REPORT

CHAIR HAYMANS: Red drum are currently managed under Amendment 2 from 2002, and in Amendment 2 it directs all states within a management unit to implement the appropriate recreational bag and size limit combinations to obtain the goal or target 40% spawning potential ratio SPR or F40%. In Amendment 2 it actually specifies a specific method, the Vaughan and Carmichael Paper that states need to use to determine what regulations obtain that 40% SPR target. It did not provide any flexibility for states to use any other method to accomplish this. Moving on to the Public Comment Summary Overview. Before we move into each separate issue in the document, public comments were accepted through midnight on October 1st, earlier this month, 382 comments were received with 377 individual comments and 5 written comments from organizations.

We received comments from Massachusetts through Florida, with a handful of comments from states north of New Jersey saying that they come down south to fish for red drum. In that number of written comments we received, a few people had also provided comment at the hearings as well, when I give you those numbers something to keep in mind.

The organizations we received public comment from there was a joint letter between the American Sportfishing Association, with the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, 100 Miles, American Saltwater Guides Association, Release Over 20, and the Virginia Saltwater Sportfishing Association.

Seven public hearings were held in September, 2025. Overall, 187 people were in attendance at, at least one public hearing, but that number could include some people who attended multiple hearings, but does not include state staff, commissioners or proxies in attendance or Commission staff. A total of 34 comments were provided at the public hearings.

Again, I am going to go over a couple of like general comments that don't apply to any specific management option in this document, but they were commenting on red drum, so I am going to go through them now ahead of all the options. There were multiple comments that shared observations of how many red drum they were seeing, in Georgia, specifically for the most part.

Some expressing concern that there were too many red drum, and did not believe any regulation changes should be made in Georgia. In that line, at least one commenter expressed concern that any restrictions to the regulations made at this time might never be lifted. There were one or two comments that also expressed concern with the assessment results, and noted there are other important factors to take into account in assessments, such as predation by dolphin and sharks that they were observing, and the potential overabundance of food for red drum. Conversely, a number of commenters did not express again, any support for any particular option in the document, but instead expressed general concern about the current state of the red drum population in their state, and support for taking management action to conserve and protect the stock, particularly stressing the urgency to take action.

Several commenters expressed support for prohibiting or limiting the targeting of mature spawning red drum, and/or closing known spawning areas in the fall. Multiple commenters expressed support for a catch and release only moratorium for red drum for at least a year, and there was also general support for lowering the 5-fish bag limits in the Potomac River Fisheries Commission and Georgia, which commentors thought was excessive and unsustainable.

Multiple comments also stressed the importance of factors such as habitat protection and restoration, enforcement of regulations and monitoring of discard mortality for red drum. Several comments also stated we should be addressing these issues,

especially habitat restoration, instead of focusing on changes to the regulations.

Several comments expressed support for regulation changes to the commercial fishery and/or the for-hire fishery specifically. Comments expressed support for states looking at additional regulations related to red drum fishing guide services. They were noting the frequency of their trips targeting red drum.

Several comments provided or stressed the importance of the financial aspect of red drum to the respective communities. Several comments provided recommendations related to the need for more research into mortality rates of red drum due to improper tackle, such as through the use of non-offset circle hooks and j-hooks.

There was also a recommendation to encourage increased communication between the fishing community and managers, and there was one comment suggesting we look into Bayesian or Hierarchical Models for red drum. Lastly, a commenter expressed disagreement with allowing the public to keep fish smaller than 20 inches.

This commenter stated people will keep fewer fish if they can take home larger fish. Then also in general, there were a number of comments that were suggesting specific regulation changes, which you can find in the public comment summary. For the Advisory Panel, they met on October 8. There were four members in attendance, 2 from Virginia and 2 from North Carolina.

Prior to beginning any discussion on any of the issues, the AP had noted that there were no AP members in attendance that day from the southern region, so they didn't feel comfortable commending on any southern region-specific issues. Again, like public comment, I just wanted to share some of the AP discussion that doesn't fit under any specific option, which primarily focused on current trends related to red drum in Chesapeake Bay.

One AP member noted that they've been observing an influx of trophy size fish, and keeper fish have been more difficult to find. Another AP member has been observing decent numbers of puppy drum, and one AP member noted that red drum abundance in Chesapeake Bay is highly episodic, with the Bay being overrun with red drum some years and they are harder to find in others. Then lastly, one AP member noted the belief that currently the striped bass and red drum fisheries in the Bay are not directly in competition, and thinks more recreational fishermen are targeting red drum now in the Bay due to the decline in large croaker.

We are going to be moving into the management options. There are five separate issues in this Addendum, and as always, the Board will have the opportunity to select a measure within the range of options that went out for public comment, including combining options across issues. First, Section 3.1, Alternative State Management Regimes, which would apply to both the northern and southern regions.

This issue in the Addendum directly addresses that problem that I previously stated that states can no longer use the Vaughan and Carmichael methodology in Amendment 2 to determine which regulations obtained the fishing mortality goal, as that methodology is no longer considered the best available science nor directly comparable to outputs from the modern red drum assessment.

Instead of Addendum 2 identifying a new specific method for states to use to determine which regulations will allow states to achieve the fishing mortality goal, the Board expressed interest in allowing for future flexibility by developing a process, which allows states to propose changes to regulations in response to the information on the stock.

As a part of this process, new methodologies to estimate the impact of regulation changes on fishing mortality could be proposed and approved

by the Board. Importantly, establishing this process at this time would allow the southern region states to respond to the results of the recent benchmark assessment.

In Section 3.1 there is Option A, where red drum management would continue to be limited to what is in Amendment 2 to determine the impact of regulations on catch and fishing mortality, and Option B, which would establish this new process to allow states in either stock to propose changes to the management measures.

This process would typically occur following the acceptance of a stock assessment for management use by the Board to end or prevent overfishing. The process in short, would be that states would develop proposals. The Technical Committee would review the proposals and make sure that they follow the Board approved methodology, and then states would implement the regulations.

States could gather public input within their state on their own at any time during this process, and Option B also includes language to clarify that if a state has already implemented regulations to reduce catch following the final year in assessment, data from MRIP could be used to estimate actual realized reductions achieved to determine the impact of those regulation changes on catch.

For the public comments received regarding Section 3.1. There were no comments that expressed support of status quo, Option A. All comments received supported Option B, and the commenters noted that Option B would modernize red drum management and allow states the flexibility to select measures that account for local preferences. The AP did not comment on this issue specifically. Mr. Chair, if you would like to pause here that is the end of Section 3.1.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Any questions for Tracey on 3.1, Public Comment or anything of that nature? Any discussion on 3.1? Erika.

MS. ERIKA BURGESS: Question/comment. This Addendum goes back and forth between the use of region and stock. It was assessed as two separate stocks. I think using the term region gives a different connotation that they are not separate stocks. I would prefer if when this is cleaned up for final that the Addendum replace region with stock.

MS. TONI KERNS: As long as it's the same meaning in the sentences that we change we can do that, at the Board's will. But if it was intended to mean something different than that, then we would leave it, for that sentence we would leave it be.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Thank you for that explanation, Toni. Ben.

MR. BEN DYAR: In the essence of time, I would like to go ahead and make a motion on this option. I believe staff have that, and I can speak to it once it is read.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Go ahead, Ben.

MR. DYAR: **Move to adopt Option B, Establish Process to Adjust Management Measures for Section 3.1.** If I get a second.

CHAIR HAYMANS: A motion and a second by Spud Woodward. Okay, Ben, go ahead.

MR. DYAR: Certainly nothing personal if John Carmichael is in the room or listening online, but the great work that he did and Vaughan. But as it's mentioned that this is no longer the best available science and that Option B would allow the states flexibility along with the Board to make the best decisions is what is right for their management options, in regards to the stock assessment.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Anyone else? Any members of the public wishing to speak before we vote? Any members of the public online wishing to speak?

Very good. **Is there any opposition to this motion? Seeing none; this motion passes, thank you 3.2.**

MS. BAUER: Moving on to Section 3.2, Allow Alternative Methods to Estimate Fishing Mortality for Use in Management, which would apply to both the northern and southern regions, unless otherwise specified by the Board in their motion. Section 3.2, allow alternative methods to estimate fishing mortality in the draft Addendum originates from a request by some members of the Board.

This issue is meant to proactively address concerns from Board members that delays to future assessments may delay a state's ability to reevaluate the impacts of red drum management on the stock or on four states to use outdated methods to provide management advice on red drum. Current Commission guidelines found in the Commission's Technical Committee Guidance Document state that alternative analyses or methods to assess a stock must be submitted within the Commission's assessment process, so whenever a new benchmark assessment occurs, to be considered for management use.

For example, if a state completes its own assessment of a sub-stock between Commission assessments, and finds out that there have been improvements to the stock status of their sub-stock currently in the Commission's red drum fishery management plan, or any Commission document. There is not a process to allow a state to bring forward those results to make adjustments to the management measures.

This leads to the options for Section 3.2. First there is Option A, status quo, which follows the current guidelines found in the Technical Committee Guidance Document that outside assessments should be brought forward during a Commission Benchmark Stock Assessment, if a group would like their assessment to be considered for management use. Alternative assessments are subject to the same standards, documentation and process as Commission assessments, including Stock Assessment Subcommittee, Technical Committee and Independent Peer Review. Option B would establish a process to allow for states to propose alternative methods to estimate fishing mortality and use these results to make management decisions outside of the Commission's assessment process.

Briefly, the process described or proposed in Option B would include the following steps. States would submit their method or analyses to the Technical Committee. The Technical Committee would review these analyses. The Board would also have the option to recommend additional review by the Assessment Science Committee.

The Board then would review the recommendations from the Technical Committee and the Assessment Science Committee if applicable, and would make the decision whether to improve those methods for management use. If the methods are approved for management use by the Board, then the states would follow a similar process as described in the section we just went over, 3.1 to submit a proposal with management measures to be approved by the Board.

In summary, for public comments received on this option. A majority of the comments were in favor of status quo, but there were several comments in favor of Option B. Some of the reasoning behind their support for either Option A or Option B, so for status quo comments expressing support for Option A expressed support for any new assessment methods undergoing rigorous review with the current process, which would ensure there is transparency and the consistency has remained among regional partners.

For the comments that supported Option B, allowing alternative methods to estimate fishing mortality, they pointed towards the review by the Technical Committee and Assessment Science Committee, which they argued would mirror the rigor of a formal review process to ensures that the

alternative methods are technically sound. They also put forward that Option B would improve the timeliness and new information, and allow for additional flexibility for the states in the management of red drum. Like Section 3.1 there were no AP comments in regards to this issue. Mr. Chair, I'll hand it over to you. That is the end of Section 3.2.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Thank you, very much, Tracey. I'll just say as we begin this next two sections that I am very respectful of a comment that came in. I'm speaking specifically to Georgia's standpoint. But I know a lot of the members of the public that were there, the ones that commented that it was very heavily guide oriented and guides were pushing the issue.

To me there was a bit of lack of understanding, particularly in 3.2, and you see that in the fact that they want transparency and consistency. I don't think there is a more transparent or consistent process than what the Commission goes through to make rules. I think, for at least me, that is where a lot of that comment was coming from. I'll say that and open it for discussion. Ben.

MR. DYAR: Hey, Mr. Chair, I have a question. For the Board if it desires in this process, if Option B is chosen to have the ASC Review, is that necessary to be done through a majority vote, or is it any Board member that requests that review to the ASC?

MS. KERNS: I need to read how the option read really quick.

MR. DYAR: Sure.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Toni is going to dig into that for just a second and we'll look for others. Chris.

MR. CHRIS BATSAVAGE: Tracey, I should know this from reading the Draft Addendum a couple of times at least. But did the PDT give any recommendations on, if Option B was chosen what kind of timeline there should be before that is considered? Should we have like management in place for a certain number of years removed from the last stock assessment? I didn't know if they gave any guidance on that or not.

MS. BAUER: I believe in some of the discussions, maybe not so much with the PDT. But when we discussed some of this with the Technical Committee and the Stock Assessment Subcommittee, I think there was some talk of possibly at least three years.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Ben.

MR. DYAR: I have a second question while we're figuring out the first. Just for clarity, and I believe it says this in here, so I apologize. But as Chris said, I've read this a few times. If Option B is chosen and it goes through the process and reviewed by the Committees, and the Board moves forward with some alternative measures for F. Is that then automatically how it's going to be set for specific regions, or is that going to be for a specific state or is it an and/or, or is only an or? Does that make sense.

MS. BAUER: I think so. The way I had interpreted this option is that the alternative methods to estimate F if they were accepted for management use. Is that the situation that you're asking about? That it would be a stop gap until we could reevaluate the region as a whole. That was how I interpreted it, but I'm not sure if there were other interpretations of that.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Erika.

MS. BURGESS: For the stocks we would evaluate F. I want to make sure that we're using consistent terms that is how the current fishery is assessed. I think it would be premature to say it would have to be one or the other, I think it would depend upon the developed methodology, and whether the states within the region have the data to demonstrate what that F would be. I am comfortable with leaving it open, and letting the TC

and ASC guide us as a management board and its applicability in use.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Toni, to answer Ben's question.

MS. KERNS: Ben, I think that this Board could specify and then we could put it in because it's pretty loose in how it's written here, so there is not a lot of specificity. If you want to say a Board member, we can get that into the document, or if it needs to be a majority vote of the Board then we would put that into the document. But I do think it would be helpful if you're looking for just to let us know what you want us to put in here.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Carrie.

MS. CARRIE KENNEDY: I just wanted to make the point that I think in a time of changing stock distributions that it is important for the Commission to have additional processes that allow flexibility. As we sort out and figure out new ways to do things, I think we need to try doing things like this more. I definitely think Option B is the way to go.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Rich, did you have something?

MR. RICH WONG: I just wanted to make the comment that estimating F at the state level, that is not an easy feat. Then going and tasking the TC and the ASC to evaluate or justify those estimates is not an easy task either. Just a little bit concerned about Option B there.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I know that there are some states with a lot more robust programs than ours and are capable of doing that. I don't think that we should limit those states' ability to suggest they are in total management. That's my thinking. Any others? Any other discussion?

MR. SPUD WOODWARD: No discussion, but I am ready to make a motion, Mr. Chair. Put it up on the board for us, please. I **move to adopt Option B, Establish Process to Adjust State Management Measures, Allowing for Alternative Methods to Estimate Fishing Mortality for Section 3.2.** I'll certainly add comments as needed.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I have a second from Dave. Discussion. Do you want to follow up on that, Spud?

MR. WOODWARD: Yes, I think there has been some discussion about it. I think it's certainly valid, and I think it's actually a very necessary complement to what we just approved in 3.1, that we be able to evaluate alternative management approaches is certainly consistent with what we tried to do across many other species in the Commission.

Obviously, if a state has the capacity to estimate fishing mortality that is going to be part and parcel to them being able to evaluate the efficacy of an alternative management approach, as well as any reviewers of that. I just echo what you said when we first started discussing this. I do think that there is an erroneous perception that the review under Option B would not be very rigorous, and it would be a pathway for states to maybe engage in a more risk prone approach, and I certainly don't think that is the case at all.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Joe.

MR. CIMINO: I'm in a tough position, because as much as I agree with what Spud just said, this type of process is very important. I still have real concerns with what was put forward so far here for this. We manage a lot of species. We've had unique situations in the past. I've been trying to think about what is the most relevant connections to this.

I think about striped bass in the Albemarle Sound, but we're talking about stocks that we were given some confidence, were not necessarily migratory stock. We treat speckled trout the same way. We've had many conversations about whether or not ASMFC should even be involved. These stocks are migratory.

I think to even consider something like this for some of our other species would be shocking to people, quite frankly. I don' t know that we quite got there yet on the methodology laid out. As Rich said, I think it's a very difficult task for the TC and AFC to be the ones that would have to do that. So far, that is my biggest concern.

I would much rather see, you know if we were talking about a stock that was less migratory that you are evaluating, or a much smaller F rate, and there was still a peer review process. You know we've done desk peer reviews for this species before. Even that being thrown out there is a little more comforting to me, so I can't support this and I'm sorry. I do agree that we need to get to a place where we can do this for some stocks.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Chris Batsavage.

MR. BATSAVAGE: I have the same concerns as Joe and Rich, and I had these concerns when this was brought up at an earlier meeting. It comes down to trying to compare a state level stock assessment to the coastwide stock assessment for the same population. The challenges of getting an F rate were already discussed, but I'm trying to understand how biomass estimates would be comparable in that case.

I agree that Option B is more timely compared to the Stock Assessment schedule, but I think I need to remind the Board that based on the stock projections for the southern stock the stock rebuilding time is measured in decades. We probably won't see any major changes right away in the status. With that I would like to offer a substitute motion. Move to adopt Option B for establishing a process to adjust state management measures, allowing for, basically Option B for Section 3.3. Oops, Option A, sorry.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I would suggest that rather than offering a substitute for Option A, you just vote down Option B, if that is what you want. I mean there are only two options there, it's either A or B. If you want A, you just vote down B. I understand that is my prerogative. Chris, if you are interested in A, then I would suggest vote no on this particular motion. Erika.

MS. BURGESS: The previous guidance we had as a management board for setting measures to not overfished and overfishing in this fishery came from 2001, and we didn't have any new guidance since. If we have to wait until a new assessment, and assessing this species is incredibly difficult.

With the inshore fishery operating largely on juveniles, and the offshore fishery being completely unknown, we have great challenges and great uncertainty with the assessment results and with the assessment methodologies that we can use, 3.2 provides a way for states with data to use alternative methods.

We have no control really over when a new benchmark assessment occurs. We have seen and we're currently under federal uncertainty with funding. We have no control over when SEDAR will pick up our projects. We have things delayed by cobia on a routine basis. This provides a way, not for states to carte blanche do whatever they want, or even the stocks and the states that manage those stocks to do whatever they want.

But for them to bring options before the Board to be reviewed by the Technical Committees and the Assessment Science Committee, and then have that information brought back to the Board. I think there is a high level of scrutiny that any state would be put under, and eliminating any alternatives is really, I don't think in this Board's best interest.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Erika, apologies for the technical issues. Spud then Mel.

MR. WOODWARD: Just a couple of comments, one about this migratory behavior aspect. I've been working with red drum before some folks in this room were even born, and we've learned a lot in those ensuing decades. Really, I mean I think we

mistakenly treat the southern stock as having the same migratory behavior that the northern stock, and it really doesn't.

We do contribute to a shared spawning stock biomass to a point. They are genetically identical, but behaviorally they are segregated in time and space to a point I have personally caught fish, adult fish that I've tagged a year later in the same spot, so there is a lot of site fidelity back too. Functionally we have sub stocks, and those sub stocks are subject to highly variable fishing pressure and environmental constraints when you move from Florida all the way up to Virginia, you know the South Carolina/North Carolian line.

I think this is respectful of what we've learned and I think there is a time when we need to even question whether our traditional interstate management approach to a species like red drum is valid and warranted. I think this moves us in that direction, with proper accountability measures in place to ensure that we don't violate the basic ethos of why we're here, and that is shared conservation across the board. But it also puts it back proportionately to what we know and how to manage the balance between access and opportunity in conservation.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Mel.

MR. MEL BELL: Similar to what Spud was talking about. I think Option B here kind of dovetails nicely with 3.1, in terms of flexibility for states. Not all states are, you know their coastlines are different. Some states have a lot more coastline and the possibility of isolated areas and the possibility of sub stocks.

I think the way, if I understand how this works, the state would have to provide data for their request. If there is a review from the TC there is oversight from the Board, there is review from the ASC. I don't think it could be misused, perhaps. I am a little sensitive to the concept of sub stocks because of our cobia situation, where cobia being highly migratory.

Even though they are, you know we manage a southern cobia area within our state separately from the other parts of the state, because through genetics work and tagging work, we were able to determine its stream site fidelity for cobia in our southern sounds. I don't think it has technically been classified it, but it is basically a genetically distinct population segment.

There can be situations within these species, where the ability for a state if they have the data, they can support their argument. I think this provides them an option, and a lot of the other states won't if you don't have the coastline, the same layout, in terms of how the estuaries are set up, isolated, you know you won't have a need to do that.

I think it's a useful thing to have available for a state, again with the idea of flexibility to match the state. As Erika said, we've been operating the same way since 2001 and it's quite a few years later, and some states do have the capacity to generate the data that they need a little better than other states. I personally would be supportive of B.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Joe.

MR. CIMINO: I appreciate, I guess several of us have gone a few times, but this is really important and I think fundamentally important. Again, I am not trying to argue the notion that something like this needs to happen. I just think fundamentally, to just suddenly say, like the TC and, I don't even know how many people know what the ASC is, to say well that is the same as a peer review and we can move forward.

I think another reason to discuss cobia is that we may be in that situation with the SEDAR with delayed help. We may not have information on where the terminal year for that stock is for a very long time. We need this type of information. I realize we need any type of alternative information we can get. I may be looking to staff a little bit to about like the difference between a peer review vs.

what these Boards can use for additional information. Like say for cobia, I think we're going to be in a situation where we're a decade out from where the terminal year was assessed in the last peer review assessment. We need other information to make management decision. My concern here is just the way this was spelled out is like, well, it's the same as a peer review, there is a lot of rigors. I think that is a dangerous precipice to be on.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Toni.

MS. KERNS: I guess a couple things. Just a reminder to the Board that you do have the ability to ask for a peer review and a change in the peer review schedule at any point in time along the way. It goes to the Policy Board, we evaluate and if it is a major priority for a species board then that carries all the way to the Policy Board, and we do our best to adjust the schedules.

We did do peer reviews between 2001 and now for red drum. One of them the Board did not accept the results of it. I'm not saying that that is not the message that we were doing, but I just want to remind for those that weren't around then that that did happen, and it is hard science to evaluate.

When we do peer reviews we pull individuals with the expertise for that specific species, that type of modeling. There is going to be likely a higher level of expertise to evaluate that information than you are going to have from a TC or even the ASC. It is just a higher level of information as Rich said. For some of these species it is very difficult to assess, and you may need that higher level of expertise when reviewing that information.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I would add that we are speaking of one species here and perhaps this is an opportunity to test a model that we haven't used before, allowing an individual state, especially a state like Florida I think has as much expertise and review capability as any other state along the Atlantic coast. Roy.

MR. ROY W. MILLER: Without trying to put anyone on the spot, I'm just curious what our ASC members that are in this room or Commission technical staff that perform this type of work if they are comfortable with this approach. Is it reasonable and not putting people on the spot to ask for an opinion in that regard from folks in this room?

CHAIR HAYMANS: I'll look around the room for expertise.

MR. JEFF J. KIPP: I think I would agree with how Toni put it, that the Peer Review Panels that are developed are based on specific needs for that species and assessment. I would say that the ASC is a more general body that may not have that expertise.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Any additional discussion or questions? Erika.

MS. BURGESS: I would like to say, when Florida helped bring this option forward, we consulted with the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, which is part of our state agency, and Dr. Luiz Barbieri was heavily involved in crafting this. Dr. Luiz Barbieri has contributed to the advancement of marine fisheries management in the U.S. leading multiple, National Science Foundation, National Science Academy programs, has served a long time with this board and he feels very comfortable with this.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Are there any members of the public who wish to speak before we take this vote? Anyone online? Okay, we don't see anyone. With that **let's move the vote forward. I'm sorry, all those in favor raise your hand.**

MS. KERNS: Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Virginia, Potomac River Fisheries Commission, Maryland.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Opposed.

MS. KERNS: New Jersey, North Carolina.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Null, Abstentions.

MS. KERNS: Delaware.

CHAIR HAYMANS: One abstention. The motion passes 6, 2, 1, 0.

MS. KERNS: Since this passed, just going back to Ben's question that he had asked before. Is there a preference from this Board to identify that it has to be a majority vote of the Board to go to the ASC or can a single board member ask for it to go to the ASC and it automatically does? I think that clarity will be helpful in the future.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Ben, go ahead.

MR. DYER: As much as I would like to say one board member to ensure that if we're looking at these, this species under separate stocks as well sometimes within a board, that might allow some more flexibility. But I don't take lightly also the tasking of such action on ASC with just one board member. I assume I would suggest the majority vote, but I am open to hearing from my other board members.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Carrie, to that point.

MS. KENNEDY: To that point. I agree with Ben. I think especially understanding the burden that we would be asking TC members ASC members to do this work, it probably shouldn't be quite so easy to ask for this to get done. I think running it through a majority vote of the Board provides some guardrails on, you know, for lack of a better word, willy nilly tasking of the TC to just constantly be reviewing stock assessments.

MS. KERNS: I don't think that there is anything in this document that prevents a state from bringing an alternative assessment to this Board. I guess, and I didn't take this option as it was written that I's the Board's vote. Once a state brings it to the Board, then it is in front of the Board to consider. I guess the Board could immediately vote it down to not be used, but I would assume that when a state brings it forward that it would want some guidance from the TC or the ASC, so that would just be helpful to know where that should go. As Jeff pointed out, the TC may not have the expertise to review an assessment.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I thought I heard Jeff say the opposite; the TC had more expertise than the ASC. Did I miss that?

MR. KIPP: I was speaking specifically to the ASC, which is a general body that has a member appointed from each state, and not necessarily appointed in terms of expertise in a certain area. I think that's a more generalized body. I think the Technical Committee obviously has expertise in red drum management and assessment. I think if they were uncomfortable with certain aspects that were outside their realm of expertise, that they would then, the next step would be to recommend let's go to ASC and that's where it's a more generalized body.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I think that the general question was whether a single individual, member of a board could request that to happen, or it needed to be a majority vote. I think that we've always offered a majority vote. I don't know that we've ever had a single individual push an issue, right? I would suggest its's majority. But, Bob.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROBERT E. BEAL: Yes, I think in general, you know tasking of technical committees or any subordinate group isn't done by one person, it's done by the Board, Policy Board or whatever it might be. What you said is consistent with how we operate in other species.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Roy.

MR. MILLER: I would just remind everyone that TCs are not always made up of stock assessment scientists. I would say the majority of the members probably aren't. Again, I think we would be looking to the ASC for that type of technical advice, maybe even to advise the TC.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Ben, then Spud for the last.

MR. DYAR: Roy took exactly what I was going to mention, and I would even go further to say that it might be beneficial that the ASC is somewhat of a general body, as where the TC is made up directly of folks that are focused on the subject, so taking any biases potentially out of any decisions that might be.

The ASC has that general expertise, with a little higher, as I understand, a little higher technical expertise than potentially some of the TC members. I would be very interested in almost if this process comes through, you know almost be automatic that the ASC reviews it. I don't know if that is the option.

That is what I would prefer to see, but the way the Addendum is written it is and, or we can task. But if that is the case then we are going to task, then I still stick with what Bob mentioned, and that we should do that through a majority vote, to be consistent with the way we do our processes.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Ben, if memory serves, it was written where it was automatically TCs and ASC and we decided at the last meeting that we didn't want that, it was a preference. That's where the change came. Spud.

MR. WOODWARD: Yes, I just want to follow up from something that Toni said, and make sure I understand how this would work. If this was brought forward to the Board, the Board could not take an action either positive or adverse until it had gone through at least TC review. That is the way I interpreted it, there at least has to be that before the Board can just qualify it or endorse it, or recommend it go to the next step or even particularly say that based on the AFCs recommendation there needs to be a peer review.

Then we have to figure out how to get that done. Is that the sequencing of this? That's the way I understand it. I don't see how the Board can just say, well, we think it's a bad idea, and nobody has even looked into it from a technical standpoint.

CHAIR HAYMANS: If we read Page 11 in the document, Number 2 says, the proposal to be reviewed by the TC to ensure data analysis are technically sound. The TC would evaluate states proposed action, based on whether it contributed to overfishing of the resources defined by the FMP, the public input, blah, blah, blah.

Number 3, the proposals would be presented to and approved by the Board. At that point, and I'm stepping away from the document. At that point the Board could decide it needs additional review and send it to the ASC. I'm pretty clear on how this needs to function. All right, so it goes to the TC, then to the Board. The Board decides. Okay, any additional discussion? All right, let's in the interest of time move on to 3.3.

MS. BAUER: Section 3.3, Management Program is the next topic in Draft Addendum II and may also apply to both the northern and southern regions. But again, this would apply unless otherwise specified by the Board in their motion. This issue originates from the Board's motion from the May 2025 meeting, where the Board requested the Draft Addendum consider a different level of fishing mortality states would need to implement to not exceed.

Looking at F30% instead of the current F40% that is in Amendment 2. I do want to note that addressing this request would not impact the biological reference points, such as the definition of overfishing that are found in Amendment 2. Section 3.3 provides options that specify fishing mortality level that states would need to achieve through proposed and implemented regulations.

Option A, status quo says states must implement an appropriate bag and size limit that will attain the target of 40% spawning potential ratios, SPR or F40%. Option B establishes requiring fishing mortality level of 30% SPR or F30%, which states would need to achieve to end overfishing through

proposed or implemented management measures with the target of decreasing fishing mortality below the fishing mortality associated with 40% spawning potential ratio.

The Plan Development Team had noted that if Option B is selected by the Board, then all states in the southern management stock would be required to implement regulations expected to reduce fishing mortality below the threshold of F30%. For Section 3.3 the public comment. The majority of comments were in support of maintaining the 40% spawning potential ratio as the goal. For Option B, there were a few comments that were in support of Option B. Some of the thought processes behind those who supported both Option A and Option B.

Those who submitted public comment in support of status quo, Option A, noted that F40% SPR provides an increased probability of conservation of red drum and they believe that going lower was not supportable. Multiple comments had noted that we need to keep future abundance in mind when we're setting our fishing mortality goals.

People who submitted comments in support of Option A also noted that they wanted to or thought that we needed to aggressively and proactively address the problem of declining fish stocks instead of shifting the goal posts, especially with the increasing fishing pressure from an increasing coastal population.

Several comments also noted that they wish for red drum abundance to rebound as quickly as possible, and they thought that going with status quo would achieve that. Comments that supported Option B, establishing a required fishing mortality level of 30% SPR or F30%. These comments put forward that F30% still ends overfishing, and their comments expressed their belief that the need to manage to F40% is punitive to the southern stock.

They also noted the lack of a stock recruitment relationship and how recruitment is influenced more by environmental variables than spawning stock biomass, so they thought managing to F30 versus F40 wasn't as big of an influence on SSB, compared to environmental variables. One commenter also argued that instead of looking at F40 versus F30%, problems could be addressed through angler advocacy and cooperative partnership with state management authorities as a different route to go for red drum conservation.

The AP did provide some comments on Section 3.3. It was noted during the APs discussion that currently Section 3.3 would only apply to the southern region. However, the benchmark stock assessments are scheduled to occur approximately every five years, and as a result SPR estimates may be available in the future for the northern stocks, so Section 3.3 may impact the northern stock in the future.

One AP member abstained from a recommendation, but did express agreement with some public comment that I just went over that the environmental conditions or variables are more responsible for availability in red drum recruitment compared to the spawning stock biomass of red drum, due to that lack of the stock recruitment relationship, and again questioned whether F40% versus F30% would have a large impact on red drum abundance.

Then two AP members supported Option A, status quo, F40%. One AP member who had supported Option A had expressed concern with the motivation from switching between F40% and F30%. With that, Mr. Chair, I will hand it back over to you. That ends my overview of 3.3.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Thank you, and once again, just a comment on the public comment, at least specific to Georgia, and I am very respectful of the public comment. But the fact that it was unanimous is interesting to me, because a lot of the individuals that I spoke to at the meeting and afterwards, were in favor of keeping our regulations where they are, which is five fish. I think they saw status quo as keeping it at five fish. There was some confusion. There was an awful lot of guys there as well who

want to see us go from five fish down to one or two fish, and they knew that 40% would get us there. Anyway, I don't know that there was a full understanding. But, let's open it up to discussion. Roy then Ben.

MR. MILLER: This may be outside of our purview as a northern de minimis state, but I wondered if a compromise would be possible here. Since it went to public hearing with both 40% and 30%, if someone were to propose 35% as a compromise, that is within the range of what went to public hearing, so Toni is shaking her head yes. I presume such a compromise would be okay.

MS. KERNS: Yes, Roy.

MR. MILLER: I don't know if I'm prepared to make that yet, because again, we're talking about a northern state weighing in on measures that at this point in time would apply typically to the southern region. I'll let that go for the moment, thank you.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I appreciate that sentiment, Roy, and the understanding that we are looking at separate stocks. We certainly have the option in a moment of separating this by stocks, and I hope we have some discussion to that point. Ben.

MR. DYAR: To piggyback on Roy's comment, the end of his comment of separate stocks. Given that this species is two separate stocks and a southern regional stock and a northern regional stock that are currently managed under two separate regimes, where the southern stock did have successful stock synthesis model completed and accepted for management use.

In the northern there was unsuccessful and utilizing a traffic light assessment. With the southern region having that ability to have a known SPR and where that needs to go in regards to this specific option, and then the lack thereof off to the north. I propose that we separate this option into separate stocks and I have a motion ready for that, and I believe staff does.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Okay, thank you, Ben, I think we're pulling that motion up.

MR. DYAR: **Move to separate Issue 3.3 in Addendum II for the northern region stock**. Is it possible to add that in there, since we both use both terms? Is that helpful throughout the document, so the southern region stock? **And the southern region stock so that the decision is independent for each region's preferred management program.**

CHAIR HAYMANS: Is the motion as we want it? Ben is the motion as you want it?

MR. DYAR: Yes.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Is there a second? Spud. Discussion on the motion, Ben, do you want to add anything else?

MR. DYAR: I don't have much to add. I believe, as I mentioned, currently right now this is directly affecting and impacting the southern stock, as we do have the ability to measure and manage to the threshold, whatever is decided, where currently that is not achievable in the northern region.

I would leave that maybe to them to decide the northern stock region and how they would prefer to move forward, once they have the ability to assess that stock and create a stock assessment to determine SPR, to know where that stock is sitting, to then make those decisions as they move forward. But it's again, being managed completely separate regimes right now currently, so I think it's prudent to separate these stocks for this specific option.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Thank you, Spud, anything to add?

MR. WOODWARD: No, I think he pretty much explained the logic behind this, and I do think when you do have a situation where you've got a dichotomy in your scientific advice, that giving yourself the ability to tweak those two situations

differently, it's just a prudent common-sense approach to management.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Adam.

MR. ADAM NOWALSKY: Would a vote in the affirmative for this essentially create F40% as status quo for both regions stocks as a starting point or where does that leave F as a starting point for those regions if we vote in the affirmative here?

CHAIR HAYMANS: That's the way I would read it, it's currently F40%. I would suggest that status quo remains the same for both stocks.

MS. BAUER: Yes, that is correct, Adam.

MS. KERNS: I hear this as the Board saying you want to be able to vote separately on the answer to that question. Here you are just saying, we are going to take two separate votes, one for the northern region and one for the southern region. If the northern region does not want to change from 40% then you don't have to vote at all, and it will stay that way. If the southern region wants to change then they need a motion to change that.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I think that is Adam's point is that status quo is 40 for both at this point. Ben.

MR. DYAR: That was my intention with the motion was to just go ahead and separate and then have two separate votes, or if again the northern stock prefers to stay exactly as you are, as Toni said. That was my intention.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Any additional discussion on this motion? Anyone in the public or online? Seeing none; **is there any opposition? I see one opposed.**

MS. KERNS: North Carolina is opposed.

CHAIR HAYMANS: All right, now let's consider. Let's take the southern stock first. Is there any discussion on Option A or B for the southern stock?

MS. BURGESS: Thank you, Mr. Chair, I would like to make a motion and then I'll explain my rationale.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Go right ahead.

MS. BURGESS: I would like to **move to adopt Option B for the Southern Stock for Section 3.3.**

CHAIR HAYMANS: Second by Spud Woodward. Rationale, Erika.

MS. BURGESS: I observed the same thing in public comment. I saw and heard again and again that this Option B in Section 3.3 was moving the goalpost, when in fact the goalpost remained the same. The goal is to get to F40, the threshold is to get to F30. We just approved an option for Section 3.1 that said that the goal and the requirements would be to end overfishing.

Achieving F30 would end overfishing for this stock, so this option gets to where we said we need to get to now, like this is what we need to achieve and this is the ultimate utmost importance. Florida had changed regulations to be more conservative, closing off essentially half of our coastline where red drum occur, and making it catch and release only, based on habitat conditions and declining suitability for red fish in that area.

The northern section of our state we reduced the bag limit in half; we reduced the vessel limit in half. We have the most conservative regulations for that in the southern stock. We have a slot limit, we're fishing on one year class of fish, and we don't yet have the ability to fully evaluate the impact of those changes.

Setting F30 does not prevent a state, should they so choose, setting that as a requirement does not prevent a state should they so choose from going above and beyond that. It merely says every state agrees that we will end overfishing collectively, and that is the most important thing that we achieve today.

CHAIR HAYMANS: The seconder, any additional?

MR. WOODWARD: Just a couple of things to emphasize. One is again like she said, we are binding ourself to ending overfishing. But what this decision would do is give us, you know a state like Georgia, greater flexibility to ameliorate any negative socioeconomic consequences, bridging that gap between 30 and 40.

I think our plan in Georgia is to recommend bag and size limits that will move us about halfway between 30 and 40. It is respectful of the target, but it also gives us again some flexibility to move things forward without having unnecessary adverse consequences.

CHAIR HAYMANS: To that point and to Roy's question earlier. Georgia is targeting 35 is our direction, and that is based on the fact that there is strong political opposition to going below a certain number of fish. There is an awful lot of people out there who still want to put fish in their coolers and not just catch and release, and I have to be mindful of that. Going to 40, I can't respect those two options, but 35 I am trying to find right now in my state. Chris Batsavage.

MR. BATSAVAGE: I am opposed to this motion. I think the 40% target has served the species pretty well, considering it's long lived and the management strategy of harvesting juveniles and not harvesting the adults. Managing to the 30% threshold even by going a little higher is risk prone for the life history and management.

It is also risk prone when you consider that noncompliant harvest isn't being considered for harvest reduction calculations for the southern population, making these calculations less conservative. Although the Board chose not to factor increasing fishing effort in the future, the Board must consider the improvements in fishing gear, technology and information available to anglers, which makes catching fish like red drum much easier compared to the past.

This can increase the chances of anglers recouping the harvest under more restrictive regulations, so therefore managing to the 40% target increases the chances of meeting this management objective in the addendum. Then finally, just regarding public comment. Although I can't speak for the anglers in Georgia, I think the public clearly understood this issue when they supported status quo, and there was more than just fishing guides.

There was a wide range of stakeholders. This is a species that we really manage for abundance. In the south it is entirely a recreational fishery and largely a catch and release. Going to 30% I think really compromises the long-term viability of this stock, and also doesn't really meet what this fishery really is, it's one that is driven by abundance.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Anyone else? Roy.

MR. MILLER: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman for requesting another opportunity to comment, but very quickly. This puts us in a scenario that has been discussed previously, and I'm still not sure how it was resolved. Specifically, is it appropriate for a northern state to vote on an issue that pertains to a southern stock? Is there any guidance from our Commission Guiding Documents on this, at this point in time?

CHAIR HAYMANS: At this point in time, no. That is why we established a Working Group. It's just the Working Group is about six months behind this vote, unfortunately. I hope that, well, I won't put that out there. Bob.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BEAL: I would answer exactly how you answered it, with one addition is that it is up to the individual members of the Board. If they feel that this isn't something that is appropriate for them and they want to abstain, they have every ability to do that.

CHAIR HAYMANS: We are running short on allotted time. If there is any other discussion, any from the

public, online. Seeing none; let's call the question. **All those in favor of the motion, raise your hand.**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BEAL: I'll call them out. Florida, Georgia, Virginia and PRFC. I think that is all.

CHAIR HAYMANS: All those opposed.

MS. KERNS: North Carolina, South Carolina.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Abstentions.

MS. KERNS: New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland.

CHAIR HAYMANS: And nulls. I see 4, 2, 2, 0 the motion passes. I'm sorry, oh 3 abstentions, thank you. Okay, let's consider the northern stock then. Discussion on the northern stock. Is there a motion for the northern stock? Dave.

MR. DAVID SIKORSKI: My apologies to staff, I did not provide text to you, but for Section 3.4 I would like to move Option B.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Dave, we're still in 3.3.

MR. SIKORSKI: I'm sorry, I'm trying to get out of here, I'm sorry. I'm going to Annapolis tonight and my head isn't here.

CHAIR HAYMANS: If there is no motion it maintains, so any interest in from the Board 3.3 northern stock. Seeing none then the northern stock would remain at status quo. Okay, let's move to 3.4. Dave, we should have Tracey tell us about 3.4 first.

MS. BAUER: All right, Section 3.4. Obviously, this would apply only to the northern region. Again, the inclusion of this issue in the Addendum is due to some of the concern of the increasing fishing mortality in the northern region, despite the stock assessment saying that it was not overfished and not overfishing was occurring. That increasing fishing mortality sort of what prompted the Board and some stakeholders to think about taking some preemptive action to control the fishing mortality in the northern stock. For Section 3.4, northern region management options, Option A is status quo, which would be no required changes to current management measures in the northern region.

Option B would be Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions modifications. As it reads is, all Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions would establish measures limiting recreational harvest to a Board specified bag limit of either 3, 2 or 1 fish per person per day, and establish measures limiting recreational harvest to a Board specified slot limit between 18- and 26-inches total length. Finally, Option C is North Carolina slot limit modifications, and this would be specific to North Carolina slot, as North Carolina's bag limit is currently at 1 fish per person per day, and it would require North Carolina to establish measures limiting recreational harvest to a Board-specified size limit between 18 and 26 inches. For public comment for this option. For Option A, status quo. Several commenters supported status quo for North Carolina. Specifically, there were 8 written comments and 5 comments at public hearings that supported status quo for North Carolina.

Then for Option B and C there were many commenters that expressed support for modifying the regulations in the Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions or states, and changes to the North Carolina slot. Moving on to public comments. Again, for those who supported status quo for North Carolina specifically, they did not believe there were any issues with North Carolina's red drum population, or enough evidence to say changes needed to be made.

They argued that North Carolina regulations have been in place for a long time and have been working. One commenter also advocated that further public input is needed in North Carolina before regulation changes can be made. In addition, one organization expressed some apprehension with making changes to the northern

stock without following the process in 3.1, and wanted to make sure there was some flexibility for these states too.

However, they did acknowledge it would be helpful to align the red drum regulations for the Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions. For those who supported Option B, Chesapeake Bay Jurisdiction Modifications. They expressed concern for recent trends in declining red drum abundance and confirmed observations of increasing fishing effort in the Chesapeake Bay due to declines of other species.

Commenters expressed support for being proactive to preempt further increases in fishing mortality and to prevent bigger problems later. In addition, commenters who supported Option B want to ensure that red drum fishing in these states or jurisdictions remain sustainable. Several comments also mentioned the recent cold kill of red drum in Chesapeake Bay as part of their concern, with the impacts that it had on a population, and managing red drum from that.

Lastly, again they did mention that it would align management across the Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions and simplify management enforcement. For specific regs mentioned in the public comments, there was support for anywhere between 2 to 3 fish bag limits, and a majority of comments supported an 18-to-26-inch slot.

The comments who supported Option B supported North Carolina regulation changes as a part of being proactive to protect the northern stock as a whole, and to reduce fishing pressure on the resource. For those who did express support for Option C, they supported a 19-to-25-inch slot, which according to the calculations we were able to do would achieve 11% reduction for North Carolina specifically.

Issue 3.4 was the other section that the AP was able to comment on at their meeting. One AP member supported Option A, status quo over all. One AP member supported Option A, status quo for North Carolina specifically, and again without an estimate of spawning potential ratio for the northern stock the AP member noted that there was no way to properly assess whether the northern stock was above or below the threshold. He also noted that North Carolin has had their current red drum regulations for over 15 year and he thought that most people in North Carolina believe that red drum are still highly abundant. Therefore, with the spawning potential ratio unknown in the northern stock and due to increasing numbers of the adult population in a long-lived species.

This AP member supported status quo for North Carolina regulations. Then lastly, one AP member expressed support for Option B, specifically an 18-to-26-inch total length slot and a 2 fish bag limit for all three Chesapeake Bay states jurisdictions. That brings my summary of Section 3.4 to a close.

CHAIR HAYMENS: Thank you, Tracey, and we are very short on time. Joe Grist.

MR. GRIST: Noting that we are short on time there is a motion prepared, but I would like to allow my joint Bay jurisdiction in Maryland to make a modification to it once it is on the screen.

CHAIR HAYMENS: Very well, I believe that is Carrie and motion on the screen.

MS. KENNEDY: Yes, I through this whole conversation lost track of the idea that we also have a lot, not a lot, but fishermen on our coast that are fishing for red drum. If we change Chesapeake Bay regulations in Maryland to be consistent, as proposed potentially here in this motion, we're probably going to need to also change what's happening on our coast.

I think that is important in an effort to improve our recreational data if we have a mismatch on our coast from what's happening in the Chesapeake Bay, then we're setting ourselves up to sort of mess with our already data poor MRIP numbers and I think that also for enforcement it's important for

consistent rules. I would want not only for these rules to apply to the Chesapeake Bay portion of Maryland, but also to the coast.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Carrie, couldn't Maryland do that themselves without it being directive of this Board and not be out of compliance? Toni.

MS. KERNS: Yes, they can and we've been talking about this option within the document itself anyway. I guess it depends on how you read the language. I think it's a little squishy as to whether it means just the Bay portion of your states or the whole state. I was interpreting it as the whole state, but I could see how someone may interpret it as the state, just the Bay.

But I think one of the intentions as you just stated of the document was to have consistent measures with shared waterbodies, shared states or adjoining states. You said on the record that you intend to have the same regs, and I think you're good there, and that notion is there and we can make sure that it is the meeting summary and is there if you would like.

MS. KENNEDY: Yes, so just to follow up. We can always do that. I think it's important for this Board to understand that as a body we are voting on having consistent rules across the jurisdictional states and PRFC, in an effort to improve our estimates. By allowing that sort of lack of clarity we are not addressing clearly the intent to have consistent rules to improve our recreational estimates.
CHAIR HAYMANS: Dave.

MR. SIKORSKI: I wonder if it might help just to remove the words, setting the Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions in the parentheses, and instead just say that we're setting the red drum Draft Addendum Section 3.4 for Virginia, Maryland and PRFC recreational measures for red drum. Then it is automatically where we have jurisdiction to manage these fish, which are our state waters and/or shared water body of the Potomac.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Well, it's still Carrie's motion, it hasn't been seconded yet. Well, I thought Joe recognized Maryland to make the motion. It hasn't been seconded yet so Carrie, craft it how you would like.

MR. SIKORSKI: Carrie says what I said. **Motion to adopt Option B of Section 3.4 of the Red Drum Draft Addendum II, setting the Virginia, Maryland, and PRFC recreational measures for red drum as an 18"-26" slot with a 3 fish per person possession limit.**

CHAIR HAYMANS: Very good, and we have a second by Mr. Brown, Owens, I'm so sorry. When you only comment once a week. All right, we have a motion we have a second, is there additional discussion? Chris Batsavage.

MR. BATSAVAGE: Yes, I am opposed to this motion. Going back to the objectives in Draft Addendum II for the northern population. One was to consider changes to the recreational bag limits and slot limits to the northern region of red drum to address increasing fishing mortality, and we saw just that in the northern region during the last two years of the stock assessment, and that harvest has only increased more since that terminal year.

These existing regs here are among those that were developed through the Vaughan and Carmichael SPR analysis, and they are arguably less restrictive compared to the existing regulations, and it was already stated before that using that analysis from 2001 is no longer the best available science.

It's concerning in addition to that, because the stock assessment for the northern population has very little data available for this part of the region. Basically, all the fishery independent surveys are from North Carolina, and there is no Wave 1 MRIP catch estimates north of North Carolina, and we know that Wave 1 catch of red drum occurs in Virginia.

It was already mentioned that red drum died from the very cold-water temps in the Bay this year. Therefore, I would like to make the following

substitute motion for the states, and that is a slot limit of 19 to 25 inches and a three-fish bag limit, and if I get a second, I will provide just a little more rationale.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Mr. Batsavage does that reflect your motion?

MR. BATSAVAGE: Yes, it does.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Is there a second? It's a motion to amend. It's a motion to amend, it's not a complete substitute it's amending the motion. Is there a second? Seeing no second the amendment fails. Back to the main. Any additional discussion on the main? Dave.

MR. SIKORSKI: I know we're short on time but I just want to give a few quick points. I think dropping the bag limit in the Potomac provides some conservation savings. In my experience as a Maryland angler that is where you are going to find the highest abundance of juvenile red drum, which are in the slot. Going from that 5 fish bag limit down to 3 is a savings.

Of course, Maryland is going from a 1 fish bag limit up to 3, but we have these fish coming through one year class in that slot, with a small window in the middle of the year. Twice in the last 15 years we've had catchable, legal red drum in Chesapeake Bay waters for recreational anglers. I think what's most important, 5% of the Bay harvest.

There you go, some technical information that is really important. The reality is we have a lot of work to do to better analyze this stock and understand what is happening in the Chesapeake Bay with it, especially in Maryland waters as we see it increase in abundance. We're committed to doing that as best we can, and so I think this smooths things out for recreational anglers and we need that in this space right now, so call the question, please.
CHAIR HAYMANS: Any discussion from the public or online? Seeing none; let's call the question. **All those in favor of the motion raise your hand.**

MS. KERNS: Maryland, Potomac River Fisheries Commission, Virginia. Pennsylvania is not on this Board.

CHAIR HAYMANS: All those opposed.

MS. KERNS: North Carolina.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Abstentions.

MS. KERNS: New Jersey, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Delaware.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Nulls, the final tally is 3 to 1, is that what I saw?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BEAL: Yes.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Okay, very good. Thank you, so that motion passes. Do we need to tackle Option C for North Carolina? No need to tackle C, that moves us to 3.5.

MS. BAUER: Section 3.5 is de minimis provisions. This will apply to both the northern and southern regions. The purpose of this section is to basically update the de minimis provisions that are in Amendment 2 to meet the requirements of the 2022 de minimis policy that the Policy Board put into place. Status quo would be continuing to have no specified de minimis requirements that are found in Amendment 2. Option B of Section 3.5 would update the de minimis provisions to align with the guidelines in the 2022 de minimis policy, and it would consider a date de minimis if the average total landings, commercial and recreational together for the last three years is less than 1% of the total landings from its respective region. De minimis would be split regionally with Option B.

It has not been done that way thus far for any Commission species, but it has been proposed for this for red drum due to the separate stock assessments and separate stocks. Option B also outlines a process that could be used in the future if

we ever do need to establish regulations for de minimis states.

The PRT and the TC could recommend measures for de minimis states and the Board would review that recommendation and approve, which the states would then implement and other guidelines in Amendment 2, including the states, must include de minimis requests as part of their annual compliance reports would still apply under this option.

Public comments for this option are very straightforward. The AP did not comment on it, but all comments we received in regards to Section 3.5 were in favor of Option B, as it would modernize red drum management. With that I can hand that back over to you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Well, thank you, Tracey, and I know there was an awful lot of support for de minimis 1% 3, but we really haven't answered the question whether de minimis is going to apply coastwide or to the stock.

MS. BAUER: Yes, we decided that last time.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Oh, we did. I guess I missed that, apologies. Discussion on the 3.5. Is there a motion for 3.5? Spud.

MR. WOODWARD: I **move we approve Option B to update De Minimis Provisions to Section 3.5.**

CHAIR HAYMANS: Second from Mel, any discussion? Joe.

MR. CIMINO: I'm not going to object necessarily, but for two other species and any species that are kind of the harvest is MRIP estimates are the motivating factor, a 1% is a very interesting threshold to deal with. We talked earlier about how we would need to have a discussion on a 1% threshold for croaker and spot.

I think it's a little weird to be putting ourselves in this position that we're going to say that now, when I have not looked at what that means for the red drum stocks and regions. But I do know that for two other sciaenids we discussed it. We may need to revisit that. I am a little concerned with this motion, but thank you.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Tracey.

MS. BAUER: To that point we will, I have started the process of gathering all the PRTs for all of the sciaenid species, to look into that question. Even though we're putting the 1% into place here, that is something we are going to be working to look into more holistically for all of the sciaenid species of is that 1% appropriate or not?

MR. NOWALSKY: Just what I believe is a cleanup note on this section. The document referenced sub-options and we didn't wind up with sub-options, so the final version would not reflect that I would assume.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Thank you for that. Roy.

MR. MILLER: Just for clarity, Mr. Chairman. As I read this it says the PRT and/or the TC would recommend commercial and recreational measures for de minimis states. That leaves it entirely up to them? I presume the states would have the ability to recommend something, in terms of baseline measures. Are we saying that the PRT and the TC would have to approve that?

MS. BAUER: What the TC or PRT put forward would only be recommendations to the Board, but the state would probably be the main focus of putting forward that or in a discussion of what is appropriate, compared to like states that are already de minimis with measures like New Jersey and Delaware.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Anyone else? Seeing none; public, online? None, let's call the question. **Is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none; the motion passes**. Next, we need to deal with

implementation of this Addendum. Do we have a motion for implementation, a time certain? Ben.

MR. DYAR: I would like to make a motion to set an implementation date of August 2026.

CHAIR HAYMANS: While they are working to put that motion up, just to let you know we are going to tackle Agenda Item Number 5 via an online vote, and we will hear from CJ in just a moment and try to.

MS. KERNS: Ben, if you could work with us a little bit and have the Board work with us a little bit. When would the states put their proposals in first? I believe, if I'm correct, South Carolina and Georgia would need to propose some measures, and then the Board would consider those measures, and then everything would be in place by August 31, is what I think you're saying?

MR. DYER: Correct, working backwards I'm not sure about. The second suggested proposal date but implementation date would be August 31, so working backwards from that what we need.

MS. KERNS: We could review those proposals in May, would that work for this Board for those two states, or would you want to submit proposals for the February meeting and be reviewed then?

CHAIR HAYMANS: Speaking for my state it's going to be interesting, because I have to get past whatever I propose and that's not a certain. We could certainly provide to you in the spring what our intentions are, and my intention would be to have it implemented by the August date.

MS. KERNS: Do you think you could submit something by March 1st? What is it that you all want to submit your proposals so the TC can review and then present to the Board?

CHAIR HAYMANS: I would say May 1st.

MS. KERNS: The spring meeting would be that first week of May, so we would need it ahead of that. We would need it either, if we knew it was coming April 1st, we could do that, because we could preestablish the TC meeting immediately, but we would really need them to be on time.

MS. BAUER: Just as a reminder, the proposals don't have to have your final options selected in it. You can have several different options you're considering if you don't know exactly what it's going to be yet, and all of those can get approved. Then you can select which one later.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I'm looking to my southerners in the back, because they are conferring. Ben.

MR. DYAR: Sorry, we were talking so I didn't hear what you needed, Doug, but May is good with us or April/May timeframe for submitting proposals works for South Carolina.

CHAIR HAYMANS: In order to make the May meeting it needs to be earlier than that, so April 1st would be the submission of proposals, and then an implementation by and we've always worked off the first of the month. I've never seen us do the end of the month. August 1st or September 1st.

MR. DYAR: Sounds good to me.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Okay, make it September 1st. Okay, very good. We have a motion, Ben, would you reread that motion, please?

MR. DYAR**: Move to set the following implementation schedule for Section 3.3 and 3.4: States to submit proposals by April 1, 2026. The Board will review and consider approval of proposals at the Spring 2026 Commission meeting, and States to implement regulations by September 1, 2026.**

CHAIR HAYMANS: Thank you and a second by Dave. Any additional discussion? Seeing none; **is there**

any opposition? Seeing no opposition, motion passes and that concludes.

CONSIDER FINAL APPROVAL OF ADDENDUM II

CHAIR HAYMANS: We have to approve it, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah that's important. Malcolm, do you have a motion?

DR. MALCOLM RHODES: Just a quick point. I love the schedule and I think it can be done, but South Carolina, all the regulations are legislatively mandated, so we will be going to the Legislature starting in November, and it has to go through the House and Senate Subcommittees before it goes to the Legislature. While we're going to be trying to hit this time table, if we're not, it is not because of our efforts.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Understood. I think we will hold the compliance letter, knowing that you are moving forward. Motion, all right, Joe Grist.

MR. GRIST: **Move to implement Draft Addendum II as modified today**.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Second by Dave Sikorski. Approve, move to approve. All right, let's get with the maker and the seconder. Joe Grist, Dave Sikorski. Any discussion? Chris Batsavage.

MR. BATSAVAGE: Since I've been on the losing side of almost every vote this week, I may as well continue my losing streak. But I am going to oppose this Addendum just for the same reasons as I opposed the Striped Bass Addendum yesterday. I think the decisions made for red drum in both regions are very risk prone, considering the life history of the stock.

I'm afraid we're going to find ourselves in the worst situation when we look at this again. I hope I'm wrong, but we've seen red drum at low populations before under management measures that were deemed later inappropriate. I don't think we really moved the ball enough to protect this stock long term.

CHAIR HAYMANS: All those in favor.

MS. KERNS: New Jersey, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Virginia, Potomac River Fisheries Commission, Maryland, Delaware.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Opposed.

MS. KERNS: North Carolina.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Abstentions, nulls. Seeing none; the Addendum is approved. Thank you all very much for that.

PROGRESS UPDATE ON 2026 ATLANTIC CROAKER BENCHMARK STOCK ASSESSMENT

CHAIR HAYMANS: C.J. let's go to Item 6 for the Update on the Atlantic Croaker Benchmark.

DR. C.J. CARROLL SCHLICK: Hello, everyone, I am the SAS Chair for the current assessment for Atlantic Croaker and Spot. Just as a reminder, when we lost our lead analyst due to job changes early in this assessment the SAS recommended that we decouple the croaker and spot assessments and focus on croaker first, while picking up spot assessment once croaker was completed. Most of this update will pertain specifically to croaker.

The last update to the Board occurred at the Spring 2025 meeting, where we mentioned we are moving with modeling two separate stocks for Atlantic croaker, a Mid-Atlantic stock, which is Carteret County North Carolina northward, any South Atlantic stock, which is anything south of Carteret County through the East Coast of Florida. If that is completed the data reviews on April 28 and May 22 to discuss the various data sources and life history traits for each stock separately, with special attention to the southern stock, as most of the data sources had been previously excluded.

The SAS met again on July 29 to discuss regional model configurations, while keeping in mind some past model stability issues with moving forward with the model. We also created two subcommittees from the SAS; the first one is a

modeling subcommittee that is meeting biweekly to discuss model progress. There is progress with both models. We have two running models. However, not all data sources have been incorporated yet, and there are will some diagnostic issues we're working through at this time.

The models are not yet ready for an assessment workshop, but we should be ready early in 2026. A second subcommittee was created, which was an environmental subcommittee. It was formed on July 29, and this was to address research and analyses and the terms of reference that are not directly addressed by the stock assessment model. Topics include environmental and non-fishing impacts on croaker populations that can't be captured in the models at this time.

The Subcommittee has met twice and is moving forward with examining the most recent literature and additional data analyses to answer these questions of interest. The Committee will meet one more time this year to progress with the analyses and provide write ups for the report within the stock assessment. The current timeline, even though we have pushed the Assessment Workshop into January or February of 2026, the remainder of the timeline should be fairly well on track.

We are intending to go to peer review sometime in May of 2026, and still believe that the assessment will be ready for the Board in August of 2026. As a reminder, we will begin spot once croaker goes through the peer review process. Our intent is to start the spot assessment in May 2026 and go through peer review sometime in April or May of 2027 and present spot assessment to the Sciaenids Board in August 2027. This is just a brief update, but I will gladly take any questions that you may have.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Any questions for C.J.? Seeing none.

ADJOURNMENT

CHAIR HAYMANS: Having moved Agenda Item 5 to online and we have no other business, motion to adjourn. Hands everywhere. We are adjourned, thank you very much.

(Whereupon the meeting adjourned at10:05 a.m. on Thursday, October 30, 2025)

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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South Carolina Red Drum Regulations Proposal

Methodology

SCDNR applied the April 21, 2025 TC/SAS-approved methodology to estimate size and bag limit changes needed to achieve a 14.4% reduction in removals (harvest + dead discards). Using MRIP data (Sept 2018–Aug 2022), staff evaluated reductions under more restrictive per-person, per-vessel, and slot limits, including combined scenarios. Chen and Rao (2007) was used to avoid double counting in combined measures.

To evaluate increasing the upper slot limit above 23" TL, SCDNR used a proxy due to lack of post-2007 data on catch >23" TL:

1. Estimate reductions from lowering the upper slot to 22" or 21" TL, and
2. Subtract those amounts when modeling increases to 24" or 25" TL.

This approach estimated a 4.05% (1") and 6.94% (2") loss in reductions. These amounts were added back when evaluating increased upper slot scenarios.

The Red Drum TC reviewed and recommended this approach on August 27, 2025.

Red Drum Regulation Options

While SCDNR considered a multitude of options, staff narrowed them to the following:

Proposed Option(s)	Bag Limit	Vessel Limit	Minimum Size Limit	Maximum Size Limit	Catch Estimate	Estimated Percent Reduction
Status Quo	2	6	15	23	1,651,575	0.0%
Option 1	1	6	18	25	1,228,757	25.60
Option 2	1	4	18	25	1,204,031	27.10
Option 3	1	2	18	25	1,174,922	28.86
Option 4	2	4	19	25	1,258,693	23.79
Option 5	2	2	18	25	1,205,430	27.01
Option 6	2	2	17	23	1,197,873	27.47

Estimated Implementation Timeline

South Carolina Senate Bill S961, introduced February 26, 2026, proposes Option 3: a reduced bag limit (1 per person, 2 per boat) and an 18–25" TL slot. It also requires the use of ≥4/0 non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks when using natural bait with hook-and-line gear. The bill has passed the Senate and is under House consideration. If enacted without changes, it would take effect **July 1, 2026**.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Georgia Red Drum Regulations Proposal

Due Wednesday, April 1, 2026

Please use the following template to submit regulation options that meet or exceed the percent reduction of catch at $F_{30\%}$.

Projected Fishing Mortality	Catch Reduction Need from 2019-2021 Average F Catch
$F_{30\%}$	14.4%

Methodology

We used TC approved methods to estimate our catch reduction amounts. We estimated bag and vessel limit reductions using the TC provided tools and estimated slot limit reductions based on the Georgia methods presented to and approved by the TC. The combined effect of bag and slot changes were estimated using the method provided by the TC.

Red Drum Regulation Options

The following are the regulation options under consideration, which Georgia would like to be approved by the Sciaenids Management Board. The options we are presenting here do not include a vessel limit, but that is also being considered by the state. Any vessel limit would increase the estimated reduction. Additional reduction scenarios including potential vessel limits are provided in Attachment 1.

Proposed Option(s)	Bag Limit	Vessel Limit	Minimum Size Limit	Maximum Size Limit	Catch Estimate	Estimated Percent Reduction
Status Quo	5	None	14	23	1,709,947	
Option 1	2	None*	14	23	1,273,911	25.5
Option 2	2	None*	15	24	1,186,703	30.6
Option 3	3	None*	15	24	1,325,209	22.5
Option 4	3	None*	16	25	1,085,816	36.5
Option 5	4	None*	16	25	1,164,474	31.9

*Vessel limit is being considered

Estimated Implementation Timeline

The Georgia state process for regulation changes requires Department of Natural Resources Board approval. This is anticipated to occur during summer 2026. After approval, changes are expected to be implemented by the September 1st Sciaenids Board deadline.

Attachment 1. Full list of Georgia Red Drum regulation options with potential vessel limits included.

Option	Bag Limit	Vessel Limit	Minimum Size Limit	Maximum Size Limit	Catch Estimate	Estimated Percent Reduction
Option 1a	2	None	14	23	1,273,911	25.5
Option 1b	2	6	14	23	1,272,201	25.6
Option 1c	2	4	14	23	1,234,582	27.8
Option 2a	2	None	15	24	1,186,703	30.6
Option 2b	2	6	15	24	1,184,993	30.7
Option 2c	2	4	15	24	1,154,214	32.5
Option 3a	3	None	15	24	1,325,209	22.5
Option 3b	3	9	15	24	1,323,499	22.6
Option 3c	3	6	15	24	1,299,560	24.0
Option 4a	3	None	16	25	1,085,816	36.5
Option 4b	3	9	16	25	1,084,106	36.6
Option 4c	3	6	16	25	1,065,297	37.7
Option 5a	4	None	16	25	1,164,474	31.9
Option 5b	4	12	16	25	1,162,764	32.0
Option 5c	4	8	16	25	1,155,924	32.4

JOSH STEIN
Governor

D. REID WILSON
Secretary

KATHY B. RAWLS
Director

Conservation Equivalency Proposal for Management of the North Carolina Commercial Spot Fishery

November 3, 2025

Proposed Alternative Management Option

The North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) proposes moving the current annual closure period for the commercial spot fishery (December 10th through April 4th) to begin January 1st and run 16 weeks through April 28th. This option maintains the 16-week closure and is projected to achieve an annual reduction in harvest of 6,940 lb, exceeding both the 1% harvest reduction (5,126 lb) required by Addendum III to the Omnibus Amendment for Spot, Spotted Seatrout, and Spanish Mackerel, and the projected reduction achieved by the current closure period (5,281 lb). NCDMF considered several alternative season closure options that would achieve the required harvest reduction; however, those options did not minimize regulatory discards and impacts to the fishery or preferentially protect the spawning stock to the extent achieved by the option presented.

Rationale

North Carolina began to explore alternative closure options for the commercial spot fishery after receiving several comments from commercial fishermen in the southern part of the state (south of Carteret County), mostly participants in the ocean gill net fishery, expressing that spot are becoming available to the fishery progressively later into the year as they migrate down the coast. Fishermen in the southern part of the state feel that the current closure period disproportionately impacts their access to the spot fishery relative to fishermen in other parts of the state, and that the fishery closes just as they are beginning to experience peak spot harvest. Fishermen in the south feel that their access to the fishery is being progressively restricted to shorter periods under the current management. There is also concern that regulatory discards of spot following the closure date in mid-December may have increased in other winter gill net fisheries over recent years, such as the ocean gill net fishery for kingfishes, as spot have remained in the area later than historically observed.

Ocean gill nets are the primary gear used to harvest spot commercially in the southern part of the state, and landings data from this fishery show that commercial harvest continued to increase up until the closure date (December 10th) in 2023, while in previous years, harvest mostly subsided before the closure date (Figure 1). This trend in the fishery likely contributed to sentiments expressed by southern fishermen. It is possible with changing ocean conditions that spot are migrating later in the year or remaining near the coast longer than historically observed. NCDMF staff reached out to spot fishermen in each area of the state to solicit feedback regarding various alternative closure options. Feedback received from fishermen in the southern part of the state suggested that a closure period beginning January 1st may reduce regulatory discards of spot in the winter ocean gill net fishery for kingfish, while also giving fishermen more time to harvest spot when valuable large adult fish are most available to the fishery.

The alternative closure option running from January 1st through April 28th seemed preferable to fishermen in the southern part of the state and was projected to achieve a reduction in harvest (6,940 lb) exceeding both the required 1% reduction (5,126 lb) and the projected reduction achieved by the current closure period (5,281 lb). Fishermen in other parts of the state were indifferent to moving the closure to begin

January 1st because by mid-December, spot have already moved out of their areas. This alternative closure option also achieves some of the same objectives met by the current closure period, including preferentially protecting adult fish during their spawning migration and minimizing regulatory discards by closing harvest of spot when the fishery is most targeted for spot, unlike during the summer months when spot are mostly harvested in mixed-species small-mesh gill net fisheries. This option also allows access to the fishery when the fish are largest and most valuable, and the closure period is similar enough to the current closure that implementation and enforcement should be straightforward.

Description

The current North Carolina closure period for the commercial spot fishery was selected to have the least impact on the fishery and to minimize dead discards. The 10-year period from 2010 to 2019 was used to calculate the 1% reduction in commercial harvest (5,126 lb) required by Addendum III (Table 1). The most recent 5-year weekly harvest averages at the time (2015 through 2019) were used to determine closure dates because more recent years were considered to be most reflective of catches and fishery characteristics, based on trends in monthly and annual harvest and gear use which stabilized during these years.

Since 2019, commercial spot landings have generally increased in North Carolina and have exceeded all annual harvest levels observed from 2015 through 2019, despite the annual closure (Figure 2). Landings exceeded the 10-year average landings for 2010 through 2019 (512,556 lb) in each year from 2020 through 2023. Because of this, the most recent five-year period from 2019 to 2023 was used to determine options for alternative closure periods projected to achieve the required 1% reduction in harvest based on current trends in the fishery. Weekly harvest averages were calculated for the most recent five-year period (2019 through 2023) using the same methods applied to determine original closure options in 2021 (Table 2).

Several different management options were developed using these methods and the most recently available commercial harvest data. The North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries' preferred alternative closure option would close the fishery from January 1st through April 28th (16 weeks), an option projected to achieve an annual harvest reduction of 6,940 lb based on average commercial harvest data for 2019 through 2023.

The projected harvest reduction of this alternative closure option exceeds both the required 1% reduction in harvest (5,126 lb) and the projected reduction achieved by the current closure period running from December 10th through April 4th (5,281 lb). A more conservative closure option, such as the proposed alternative option of January 1st through April 28th (6,940 lb), is appropriate given that annual commercial landings of spot in North Carolina have increased substantially since 2019 (Figure 2). Additionally, the projected harvest reduction for the proposed alternative closure dates is likely low because weekly harvest averages for January through April from 2022 and 2023 used to calculate the projected reduction for this option were limited by the current closure period. Without the current closure period limiting harvest during these months, the projected harvest reduction for this option would likely be greater than 6,940 lb. This option would have achieved the required 1% reduction in harvest in nine of the most recent 14 years used in this analysis (2010 through 2023), including 2022 during which landings were already limited by the current closure period (Table 3).

Description of Datasets Used in Analysis

Commercial spot harvest data collected by the North Carolina Trip Ticket Program (NC Trip Ticket Program) were used in all analyses. In North Carolina, commercially harvested spot (including species and quantity) are reported in trip tickets completed by licensed commercial seafood dealers who purchase

the fish, at the time of landing. Data from these trip tickets were used to calculate the 10-year harvest average for 2010 through 2019, weekly harvest averages for 2019 through 2023, and projected harvest reductions for alternative commercial season closure options, adhering to the same analytical process used to develop the current closure period.

The primary limitation to these analyses is that commercial spot harvest was limited by the current closure period (December 10th through April 4th) beginning December 10, 2021. This means that weekly harvest averages calculated for January through April in years 2022 and 2023 are likely to be lower than what would be observed without the closure in place. This limitation does not adversely impact the selection of an alternative closure period or determination of compliance with the requirements of Addendum III because it likely results in artificially low projected reductions for alternative closure options occurring during these months. The proposed alternative closure option is projected to exceed the required 1% reduction, despite reduced landings in 2022 and 2023 lowering the projected harvest reduction.

Anecdotes from fishermen regarding availability of spot to the ocean gill net fishery in the southern part of the state are difficult to substantiate using trip ticket data; however, several fishermen have shared this sentiment, and commercial harvest data from 2023 show that commercial harvest of spot increased until the closure date (Figure 1). It is possible that landings would have continued to increase in 2023 past December 10th if the fishery had not closed, unlike in most years since 2010 when the closure was not in place and landings still stabilized prior to the closure date. Conversations with fishermen in other areas of the state also indicated that only fishermen in the south are experiencing dissatisfaction with the current closure period. The intent of the existing season closure was to minimize impacts to the fishery, minimize regulatory discards, and protect the spawning stock.

Monitoring Plan

The North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries will continue to analyze commercial spot harvest data submitted through the Trip Ticket program to determine if commercial harvest continues to increase following implementation of the alternative closure period. The alternative option is projected to achieve a relatively conservative reduction in harvest, exceeding that of the current closure period and the required 1% harvest reduction. North Carolina will also continue to report annual commercial spot harvest in compliance reports submitted to the ASMFC.

Tables

Table 1. Total commercial harvest (lb) of spot by year in North Carolina, for 2010 through 2023. The required 1% reduction (bold) was calculated from the 10-year average for 2010 through 2019. The values for some years have changed slightly since 2020 when the data were initially analyzed, after being updated to account for minor corrections in trip ticket data

	Year	Harvest (lb) Used in 2020	Updated Harvest (lb)
	2010	572,315	572,315
	2011	936,970	936,970
	2012	489,678	489,678
	2013	768,592	768,943
	2014	766,224	766,224
	2015	376,979	377,028
	2016	241,039	241,044
	2017	413,999	415,465
	2018	167,696	167,696
	2019	392,067	392,206
	2020	542,870	542,870
	2021	527,464	527,464
	2022	543,104	543,104
	2023	761,610	761,610
2010-2019	Total	5,125,559	5,127,569
2010-2019	Average	512,556	512,757
1% of 2010-2019	**Average**	**5,126**	**5,128**

Table 2. Average weekly harvest of spot for 2019 through 2023. A week was defined as Sunday to Saturday and week 52 included any days in January of the following year that fell within the last week of the year. The December 10th through April 4th annual harvest closure impacted average harvest for weeks 50 to 52 in 2021, and weeks 1 to 13 and 50 to 52 in 2022 and 2023. Weekly averages used to determine the proposed alternative closure period (weeks 1 through 16) are indicated in bold font.

Week	Average Spot Harvest (lb)	Week Cont.	Average Spot Harvest (lb)
1	**208**	26	6,710
2	**58**	27	5,369
3	**122**	28	6,939
4	**112**	29	5,851
5	**25**	30	6,359
6	**87**	31	6,215
7	**71**	32	5,776
8	**142**	33	7,002
9	**167**	34	8,316
10	**131**	35	6,313
11	**139**	36	10,153
12	**252**	37	9,224
13	**208**	38	18,232
14	**1,417**	39	18,439
15	**1,512**	40	31,673
16	**2,098**	41	43,699
17	2,458	42	66,299
18	2,738	43	68,229
19	3,047	44	55,418
20	4,530	45	52,310
21	4,825	46	37,002
22	4,935	47	14,618
23	4,721	48	8,043
24	6,653	49	7,379
25	5,870	50	397
26	6,710	51	591
27	5,369	52	158

Table 3. Projected harvest reductions and success rate for the proposed alternative closure option by year based on the required annual harvest reduction (5,126 lb). Estimated reductions for 2022 and 2023 were impacted by the current spot closure running from December 10th through April 4th implemented in 2021, which limited harvest during the proposed alternative closure dates (January 1st through April 28th) in those years.

Approximate Date Range		Jan 1 - Apr 28
Closure Period		16 weeks
Year	2010	**7,032**
	2011	4,582
	2012	**5,878**
	2013	3,360
	2014	**30,998**
	2015	2,235
	2016	903
	2017	**11,038**
	2018	**12,565**
	2019	**6,754**
	2020	**7,611**
	2021	**10,338**
	2022	**6,361***
	2023	3,637*
Success Rate		9/14 years

Figures

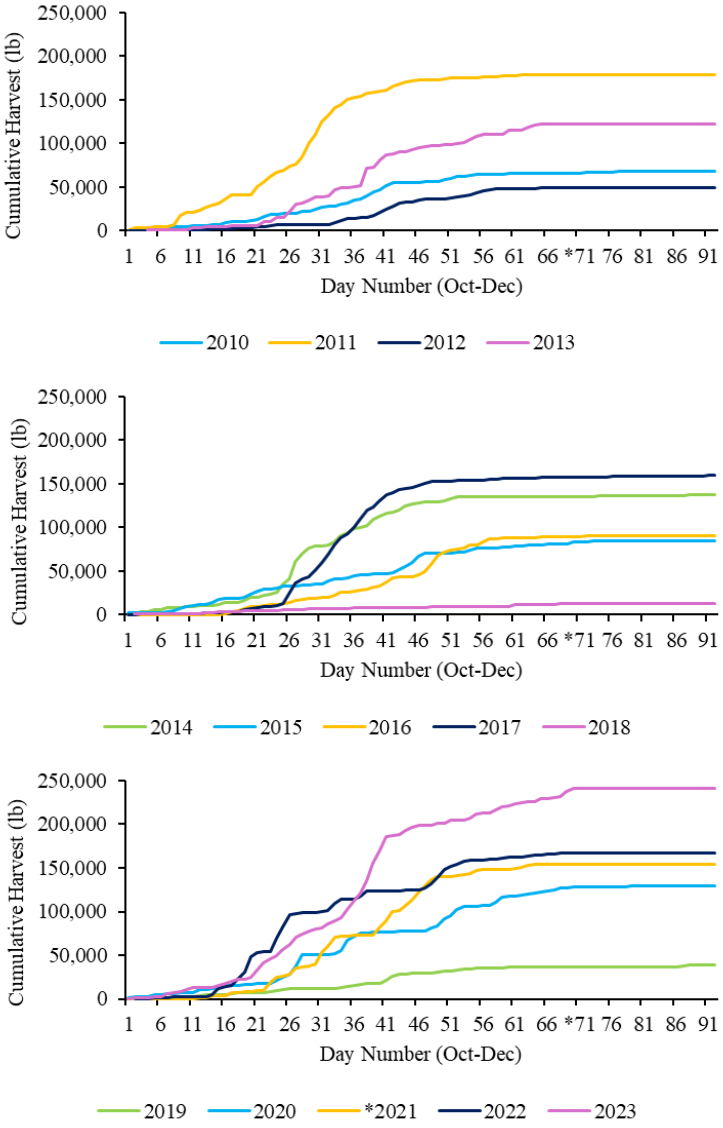

Figure 1. Daily cumulative commercial spot landings in North Carolina for October 1st through December 31st for the ocean gill net fishery in the southern district, for 2010 through 2023. In this figure, day 71(*) indicates December 10th (the first day of the annual commercial harvest closure implemented on December 10th, 2021).

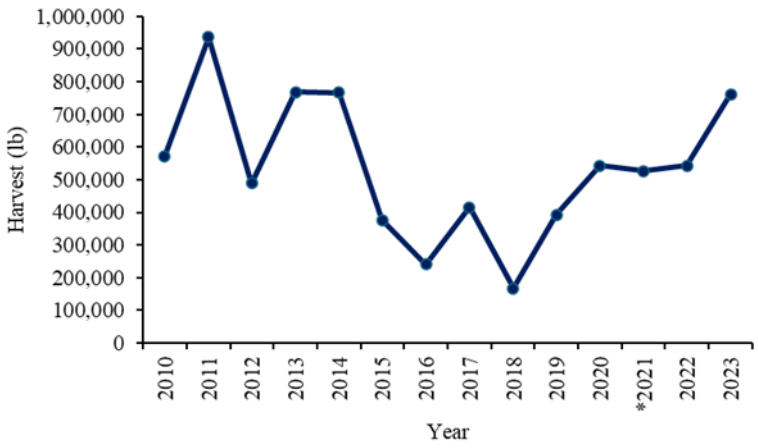

Figure 2. Annual commercial spot landings in North Carolina for 2010 through 2023. The annual commercial harvest closure from December 10th through April 4th was implemented in December 2021, indicated by an asterisk (*).

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

TO: **Sciaenids Management Board**

FROM: **Tracey Bauer, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator**

DATE: **April 20, 2026**

SUBJECT: **Summary of the Committees' Review of North Carolina's Conservation Equivalency Proposal**

The State of North Carolina has submitted a conservation equivalency (CE) proposal, concerned with their spot commercial fishery. This memo summarizes the reviews of this proposal by the Spot Plan Review Team (PRT) and South Atlantic Advisory Panel (AP), as well as reviews via email by the Spot Technical Committee (TC) and Law Enforcement Committee (LEC). The review of North Carolina's CE proposal followed the guidelines established in the Commission's Conservation Equivalency: Policy and Technical Guidance Document.

Proposal Overview – Key Takeaways

- North Carolina is requesting an adjustment of their spot commercial fishing season closure period from December 10th through April 4th to January 1st through April 28th.
- North Carolina's current spot commercial fishery closure was first implemented in 2021 following the 2020 triggering of the spot traffic light analysis, which required states to implement measures which would be estimated to achieve a 1% reduction in the previous 10-year average of spot commercial harvest. The season closure period was selected to have the least impact on the fishery and to minimize dead discards.
- North Carolina has submitted the CE proposal due to comments from commercial fishermen in the southern portion of the state. Fishermen have observed a shift in the availability of large, adult spot to the fishery in this part of the state in recent years. As a result, these commercial fishermen feel they have been disproportionally impacted by the current season closure period, which has been occurring during what should be their time of peak harvest of the large, adult spot. A later closure period would address this issue, as well as potentially reduce regulatory discards of spot in the kingfish winter gill net fishery.
- The proposal estimates a closure from January 1st through April 28th would achieve a reduction in harvest (6,940 lb.) which would exceed both the required 1% reduction (5,126 lb.) and the estimated reduction achieved by the current closure period (5,281 lb.).

PRT Review

The Spot PRT focused their review of the proposal as specified in the Commission's CE Policy and Technical Guidance Document. The first PRT review component is whether the proposal followed the CE standards and required proposal components outlined in the CE Guidance Document. The PRT agreed North Carolina's proposal included all the required information outlined in the CE Guidance Document, including rationale; description of how program meets FMP; review schedule; and monitoring and reporting process.

The second PRT review component is whether the proposal is equivalent to the standards within the FMP. The PRT agreed that the proposal demonstrated equivalency to and did not deviate from the standards within the spot FMP. In particular, the PRT noted that North Carolina's proposed closed season exceeds the required 1% harvest reduction and the reduction achieved by the current closure period.

South Atlantic Advisory Panel Review

The South Atlantic AP met on April 15, 2026 to review and discuss North Carolina's proposal. Overall, the South Atlantic AP did not express any major concerns about the proposal. However, one AP member asked whether North Carolina has looked at the available data in April, noting spot have been showing up earlier in April in recent years. As a result, moving the last day of the closure from April 4th to April 28th could potentially lead to an increase in regulatory discards of spot during that period.

Another AP member expressed support for the proposal because it will benefit commercial fishermen in the ocean gill net fishery in the southern area of North Carolina to be able to retain spot during what has become the time of peak harvest, while minimizing dead discards. The AP member also noted the North Carolina data appeared to be adequate for this type of analysis.

TC and LEC Review

The Spot TC and the LEC reviewed North Carolina's proposal via email. Neither group had any concerns.

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MEMORANDUM

TO: **Sciaenids Management Board**

FROM: **Sciaenids Plan Review Teams**

DATE: **April 20, 2026**

SUBJECT: **Discussion and recommendations on the definition of *de minimis* for Sciaenids Board species**

Background

The Commission includes *de minimis* provisions in interstate fishery management plans (FMP), which are meant to reduce the regulatory burden for states whose measures would have a negligible effect on the conservation of a species. The Commission's *De Minimis* Policy document provides guidance on standards for *de minimis*, but a species board may deviate from these standards to address unique characteristics of a fishery, as long as rationale is provided.

Generally, a state can request to be *de minimis* if the average landings for the last three years is less than 1% of the coastwide landings. *De minimis* states are also exempt from any sampling requirements established in the species' FMP. Other requirements, or lack thereof, for *de minimis* states vary by species FMP. For example, some FMPs do not require *de minimis* states to implement all the regulations required for non-*de minimis* states. The *De Minimis* Policy also encourages regulatory stability for *de minimis* states by recommending FMPs establish a set of measures for *de minimis* states that provide a minimum level of species conservation, prevent regulatory loopholes, and do not need to change annually.

The *De Minimis* Policy did not automatically change the provisions of current FMPs. To change a species' *de minimis* standards, an addendum or amendment process must be completed, unless the FMP specifies a different process.

Statement of the Problem

In the last 5-10 years, several states have experienced reoccurring issues related to the current definitions of *de minimis* for multiple Sciaenids Management Board (Board) species. *De minimis* provisions and requirements vary by species, but all Sciaenids Board species currently define *de minimis* using a three-year threshold of landings and a 1% threshold (Table 1). Notable differences between species include consideration of *de minimis* separately by sector for Atlantic croaker, and separately by stock for red drum.

Several states have expressed concern that the 1% threshold for these species may no longer be appropriate. States on the edge of a species range, like New Jersey and Delaware, have hovered around the 1% threshold, or have repeatedly been barely above the threshold in recent years. For example, from 2021-2024, Delaware's three-year average recreational Atlantic croaker harvest was 1.01%, 0.97%, 1.69%, and 1.92% respectively of the coastwide recreational harvest. In addition, in 2024, Delaware's three-year average Atlantic croaker commercial harvest was 1.26% of the coastwide commercial harvest. However, even if these states have no longer been meeting the definition of *de minimis* for a

species, the state's landings have continued to be relatively very low compared to the rest of the coast. In several cases, a single year of disproportionately high landings, averaged with two years of lower landings, caused a state to be just above the *de minimis* threshold. These experiences have led states to question how meaningful any regulations they implement would be for the stock, compared to that state's relatively low proportion of the coastwide landings and the time and effort it would take to implement those regulations.

Several states have also expressed concern about high uncertainty in some of their state's MRIP harvest estimates being used to calculate *de minimis*, which has been used as justification for allowing a state to remain *de minimis*. However, it should be noted that high uncertainty (i.e., a high percent standard error) in MRIP estimates indicates that a given harvest estimate could potentially be much lower *or* much higher.

Lastly, due to environmental factors that contribute to the cyclical nature of recruitment and adult abundance in some of these species and ongoing stock expansion, it is likely managers will continue to see increased variability and uncertainty in landings and changes in which states qualify for *de minimis*. As a result, the Board requested the Plan Review Teams (PRTs) review the current definition(s) of *de minimis* for the Sciaenids Board species.

Specifically, the Board tasked the PRTs to provide recommendations on:

- Whether the current 1% threshold for a state to be considered *de minimis* is appropriate
- Whether there may be alternate ways to evaluate whether a state is *de minimis*

Table 1. For all Sciaenids Board species, their respective stock(s), current *de minimis* threshold (the percent of coastwide total landings that a state's average landings must be less than to be considered *de minimis*), the current number of years of landings averaged to calculate *de minimis*, states which were granted *de minimis* based on requests from the FY2024 Compliance Reports, and whether the species' FMP has regulatory requirements for non-*de minimis* states. Sciaenids Board species do not have any monitoring requirements.

Species	Stock	Threshold	Number of years averaged	*De minimis* States (FY2024)	Regulatory requirements?
Atlantic croaker	NJ-FL	1%	3	Comm: NJ, DE, SC, and GA Rec: NJ	If TLA is triggered at 30% red threshold: Y If TLA isn't triggered: N
Black drum	NJ-FL	1%	3	none	Y
Red drum	Northern: NC-NJ Southern: SC-FL	1%	3	NJ, DE	Y
Spot	NJ-FL	1%	3	NJ, GA	If TLA is triggered: Y If TLA isn't triggered: N
Spotted Seatrout	NJ-FL	1%	3	NJ, DE	Y

PRT Discussion and Recommendations

The PRTs met four times between November 2025 and April 2026 to address the Board's tasking. The PRTs agree the current 1% threshold may not be appropriate for all the Sciaenids Board species, at least without changes to the *de minimis* process.

The PRTs propose several possible solutions for the Board's consideration to alleviate some of the current issues states are having. The options described below suggest either:

1. Modifications to the current definition of *de minimis or*
2. Modifications to the *de minimis* process.

The Board can choose to further explore any one option below, or multiple, on a species-by-species basis. However, the PRTs do not necessarily recommend simultaneously implementing multiple options suggested below for a single species. None of the options below would be suitable as a one-size-fits-all approach for all Sciaenids Board species. For example, the PRTs would not recommend the multiple threshold approach (1B) for spotted seatrout. The options below should be considered on a species-by-species basis, due to these species' varying life history, assessments, and other differences in the fisheries.

Overall, the PRTs caution the Board about the amount of leeway that may be allowed to states who wish to remain *de minimis* despite not qualifying for it, particularly if there are concerning trends with the stock or a negative stock status. If a state has no regulations for a particular species, there is potential risk of a stock being harmed if a state is allowed to remain *de minimis*, when in hindsight it shouldn't have been. For example, New Jersey has fairly strict regulations for red drum (1 fish at 18"–27"), so New Jersey remaining *de minimis* poses a low risk to the stock, even if all red drum moved to New Jersey waters. Conversely, since Atlantic croaker are unregulated recreationally in New Jersey, the state remaining *de minimis* carries a much greater risk to the stock because there is very little protection from potential overfishing.

Lastly, the PRTs recommend any changes to the definition of *de minimis* or the *de minimis* process should undergo review by the species' respective technical committee (TC) prior to or during the development of an addendum/amendment. The TC can provide a recommendation to the Board on the appropriateness of the changes to *de minimis* for that specific species, with the goal of ensuring the proposed change will have a negligible effect on the conservation of a species.

1. Potential modifications to the definition of de minimis

A. Number of years of harvest averaged

Averaging 5 years of harvest instead of the current standard of 3 years may be appropriate for longer-lived species, if landings data are highly variable, and/or where it's suspected the stock may be undergoing expansion. If the Board wishes to go this route, this option should be considered on a species-by-species basis.

B. Multiple Thresholds

Under this option, there would be multiple threshold levels, each with differing requirements. A state would need to average a greater amount of harvest (i.e., 3% as opposed to 1%) to be required to fulfill all requirements for non-*de minimis* states. The multiple thresholds would include:

- If the average landings for the most recent (3 or 5) years are less than 1%, a state would qualify for *full de minimis*. States that fall into *full de minimis* are not required to implement regulations and do not have any monitoring requirements (if applicable).
- If the average landings for the most recent (3 or 5) years are between 1 and 3%, the state would qualify for *provisional de minimis*. States that qualify for *provisional de minimis* would

not be allowed to liberalize any current regulations in place. However, they would not need to implement any FMP-required regulations for non-*de minimis* states.

- If the average landings for the most recent (3 or 5) years are greater than or equal to 3%, then the state would officially be *non-de minimis*. If a state meets or exceeds this upper threshold, it cannot request continuance of *de minimis* or provisional *de minimis*.

The PRTs recommend this approach only be used when there are no major concerns about the status of the stock, e.g., allowing more leeway in defining which states are *de minimis* when the stock is doing well. Each year, each species' FMP review summarizes information on the stock either from a recent assessment or the most recently completed TLA/indicator analysis. If the species PRT has concerns about the stock after reviewing the most up-to-date information on stock status, the PRT can recommend the use of a strict 1% threshold for *de minimis* in the following year, which would need to be approved by the Board. This recommendation won't be applied retroactively to the current year's *de minimis* requests. The PRTs discussed the importance of the states knowing the *de minimis* criteria ahead of the submission of compliance reports for that year.

The PRTs recognize this approach may not be appropriate for all species. For example, although spotted seatrout is assessed on a much more localized scale than the other Sciaenids Board species, *de minimis* for this species is calculated for the entire coast. The different spotted seatrout stocks may all have different statuses, making a general recommendation on the level of risk to take with defining *de minimis* difficult. Likewise, this approach may not be appropriate if a species' stock status can frequently change, which could lead to frequent recommended changes in whether to use the 1% or multiple threshold approach.

2. Potential Modifications to the De minimis Process

A. Codify the number of years before a state can no longer request de minimis status

States have been requesting to remain *de minimis* despite no longer qualifying for it, particularly if the state has been *de minimis* for many years and would need to go through the process of implementing FMP requirements if no longer *de minimis*. The species PRT has typically allowed the state to remain *de minimis* to see if this is a consistent trend in higher landings for the state. However, the PRT also usually recommends a specific cut-off where they will no longer recommend *de minimis*, i.e., if the state continues to not qualify for *de minimis* for a consecutive number of years (usually two or three years). However, this process, including the number of years to use, is not officially established anywhere.

It may be appropriate to codify the number of years a state has before the state can no longer continue to make the request for *de minimis* and must begin implementing FMP requirements to be in compliance with that species' FMP. This would make the process more official, no longer just a recommendation, with the benefit that states would know expectations ahead of time. The PRTs recommend if a state does not qualify for *de minimis* for a number of times (non-consecutive) within a specific time frame (e.g., if a state's landings are above the threshold for *de minimis* in 3 out of the last 4 years), the state would no longer be able to request *de minimis* unless there are extenuating circumstances. Any extenuating circumstances would need to be detailed by the state in their annual compliance report for the PRT and Board to review. The PRTs recommend that the specific number of years be established by a species' PRT and TC, based on what is determined to be most appropriate for that species.

If a species' FMP is already modified to increase the landings threshold for *de minimis* above 1%, such as in 1B above, it may be appropriate to not allow states to request *de minimis* if this higher threshold is exceeded unless there are extenuating circumstances.

B. States remain non-de minimis or de minimis for X number of years

The PRTs also brainstormed ideas to improve stability in the implementation of FMP-required regulations and/or monitoring requirements if a state has a history of moving in and out of qualifying for *de minimis*. Once a state is officially no longer *de minimis*, there could be a set number of years before the state can qualify for *de minimis* again, regardless of their landings. The reverse could be true as well, where once a state moves from non-*de minimis* to approved as *de minimis*, they could automatically be able to remain *de minimis* for a set number of years. For example, if the Board no longer approves a state's *de minimis* or that state decides to no longer request *de minimis* after multiple years of higher landings, the state must begin the process of implementing FMP-required regulations and/or begin collecting samples required for non-*de minimis* states (if applicable) for a set number of years before they can be eligible for *de minimis* status again.

3. Additional Considerations

This section contains additional considerations related to *de minimis* discussed by the PRTs. If interested in exploring further, the Board can request the individual species PRT to investigate on a species-by-species basis. These considerations will not be appropriate for all Sciaenids Board species.

A. Splitting De minimis by Sector

The PRTs recommend further consideration of splitting *de minimis* by sector, wherein the species PRT (with consultation of the TC) explore if this change would be appropriate on a species-by-species basis. As previously mentioned, *de minimis* status is already determined separately by sector for Atlantic croaker. It has been a longstanding recommendation by the Spot PRT to be implemented for that species as well. For species like spot, sector separation may alleviate the need of states with a small commercial fishery to make regulatory adjustments (primarily reductions) to commercial landings for a fishery that has relatively insignificant landings while retaining recreational management measures required by the FMP.

B. Splitting De minimis by Stock

The PRTs discussed red drum's recently implemented definition of *de minimis*, which splits *de minimis* by stock. The PRTs recommend splitting *de minimis* by stock continue to be considered on a species-by-species basis. If a species has more than one stock, which are managed separately, *de minimis* should similarly be evaluated at the stock level. The PRTs note that although currently the only Sciaenids Board species with more than one stock is red drum, two separate stocks are currently under consideration for Atlantic croaker through its ongoing benchmark stock assessment.

C. Consideration of Total Removals when Determining De minimis

The PRTs also discussed the possibility of redefining *de minimis* to use total removals instead of total harvest, highlighting concerns with increasing discards for several Sciaenids species. Consideration of total removals could allow for a more complete picture of each state's contribution to fishing mortality.

Currently, consideration of total removals would likely only be possible in combination with separating *de minimis* by sector, as state-specific commercial discard estimates are not available on

an annual basis. The impact of including recreational dead discards on which states would qualify for *de minimis* would need to be examined in more detail on a species-by-species basis, if the Board is interested in pursuing this idea further.

Although commercial discards cannot be incorporated into the calculation of *de minimis*, the PRTs briefly discussed how the lack of this information could impact our understanding of *de minimis*, particularly for species such as spot and Atlantic croaker that have much higher commercial discards compared to commercial harvest. Using only harvest to calculate the threshold and determine *de minimis* for these species may overestimate the impact on the population from states with lower commercial harvest and little to no discards, and underestimate the impact from states with higher commercial harvest and discards. In addition, the pounds of landings at the 1% *de minimis* threshold or 3% *de minimis* threshold for a species with very high commercial discards will both likely be relatively minor compared to the total removals.

APPENDIX I

The figures in this appendix illustrate whether a state's 3-year average harvest was less than 1% (i.e., qualified for de.minimis; blue), greater than or equal to 1% but less than 3% (yellow), or greater than or equal to 3% (green) of the total coastwide (NJ-FL) harvest for the years 2015-2024. This information is shown for the combined recreational and commercial harvest (excluding Atlantic croaker since de.minimis is already split by sector for this species), solely recreational harvest, and solely commercial harvest. Actual values are not given due to some confidential data. These tables depict what states qualified for de.minimis in any given year but may differ from states that were granted de.minimis status. For example, some states may have qualified for de.minimis but did not request it, or were granted de.minimis when they did not technically qualify for it.

Atlantic Croaker

Recreational

Year	NJ	DE	MD	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL
2015	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%			≥3%
2016	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%			≥3%
2017			≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%		≥3%
2018	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%		≥3%
2019	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%		≥3%
2020	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%		≥3%
2021	<1%			≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2022	<1%			≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2023				≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2024				≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%

Commercial

Year	NJ	DE	MD	PRFC	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL
2015		<1%	≥3%		≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	<1%
2016		<1%	≥3%		≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	<1%
2017	<1%	<1%			≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	<1%
2018	<1%	<1%			≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	
2019	<1%	<1%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	
2020	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2021	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2022	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2023	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2024	≥3%			<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%

Black Drum

Combined

Year	NJ	DE	MD	PRFC	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL
2015	≥3%	<1%	<1%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%		≥3%
2016	≥3%	<1%	<1%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2017	≥3%	<1%	<1%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%		≥3%
2018	≥3%		<1%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2019	≥3%		<1%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2020	≥3%			<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2021	≥3%	<1%		<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2022	≥3%	<1%		<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2023		<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2024		<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%

Recreational

Year	NJ	DE	MD	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL
2015	≥3%	<1%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2016	≥3%	<1%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2017	≥3%	<1%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%		≥3%
2018	≥3%		<1%		≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2019	≥3%		<1%		≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2020	≥3%				≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2021	≥3%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2022	≥3%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2023		<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2024		<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%

Commercial

Year	NJ	DE	MD	PRFC	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL
2015	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2016		≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2017	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2018	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2019	≥3%	≥3%		<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2020		≥3%		<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2021				<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2022	<1%			<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2023	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2024	<1%		<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%

Red Drum

Combined Northern Stock

Year	NJ	DE	MD	PRFC	VA	NC
2015	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2016	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2017	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2018	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2019	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2020	<1%	<1%		<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2021	<1%	<1%		<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2022	<1%	<1%		<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2023	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2024	<1%	<1%		<1%	≥3%	≥3%

Recreational Northern Stock

Year	NJ	DE	MD	VA	NC
2015	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2016	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2017	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2018	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2019	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2020	<1%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%
2021	<1%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%
2022	<1%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%
2023	<1%	<1%		≥3%	≥3%
2024	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%

Commercial Northern Stock

Year	NJ	DE	MD	PRFC	VA	NC
2015	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2016	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2017	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%		≥3%
2018	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%		≥3%
2019	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%		≥3%
2020	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%		≥3%
2021	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2022	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2023	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%
2024	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%

Southern Stock (Recreational)

Year	SC	GA	FL
2015	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2016	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2017	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2018	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2019	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2020	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2021	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2022	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2023	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2024	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%

Spot

Combined

Year	NJ	DE	MD	PRFC	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL
2015			≥3%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%
2016	<1%		≥3%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%
2017	<1%	<1%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%
2018	<1%	<1%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%
2019	<1%	<1%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%
2020	<1%		≥3%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2021	<1%		≥3%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2022	<1%		≥3%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%
2023	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%
2024	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%

Recreational

Year	NJ	DE	MD	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL
2015			≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%
2016	<1%		≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%
2017	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%
2018	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%
2019	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%
2020	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	≥3%
2021	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%		<1%	≥3%
2022	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	
2023	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	
2024	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	

Commercial

Year	NJ	DE	MD	PRFC	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL
2015	<1%		≥3%		≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	<1%
2016	<1%		≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	
2017	<1%	<1%	≥3%		≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2018	<1%	<1%	≥3%		≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2019	<1%		≥3%		≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2020			≥3%		≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2021					≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	
2022					≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	
2023					≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	
2024			≥3%		≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	

Spotted Seatrout

Combined

Year	NJ	DE	MD	PRFC	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL
2015	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2016	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2017	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2018	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2019	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2020	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2021	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2022	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2023	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2024	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%

Recreational

Year	NJ	DE	MD	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL
2015	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2016	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2017	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2018	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2019	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2020	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2021	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2022	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2023	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%
2024	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%	≥3%

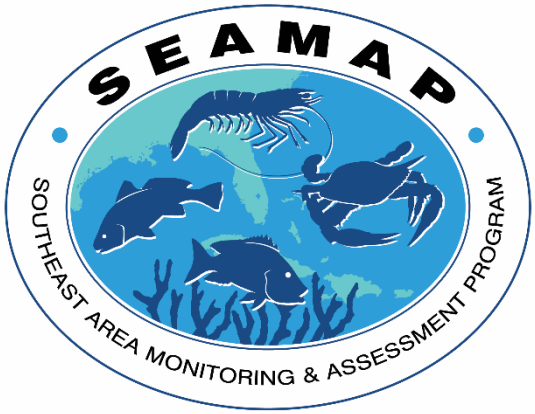
Commercial

Year	NJ	DE	MD	PRFC	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL
2015	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2016	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2017	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2018	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2019	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2020	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	≥3%
2021	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	
2022	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	
2023	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	
2024	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	≥3%	≥3%	<1%	<1%	

The Southeast Area Monitoring & Assessment Program

SEAMAP Strategic Plan 2026 - 2030

Image: NOAA Caitlin Langwiser



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South Atlantic State-Federal Fisheries Commission
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NOAA
National Marine Fisheries Service
NA21NMF4350311

The Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) has been committed to collecting and disseminating fishery-independent data to inform United States fishery management efforts since its inception in 1981. The program is composed of three regional units: the Gulf of America, the South Atlantic, and the Caribbean.

The data (e.g., distribution, abundance, biomass, and environmental parameters) are essential to population assessments and informed resource management strategies. These surveys have provided essential data to state and multi-state management entities as well as the Gulf, South Atlantic, and Caribbean Fishery Management Councils. The longstanding nature of the data allows the establishment of baseline trends for fishery stocks and habitats. This enables scientists to evaluate how factors such as fishing pressure, management actions, environmental changes, and natural or human-caused disasters influence ecosystems in real time.

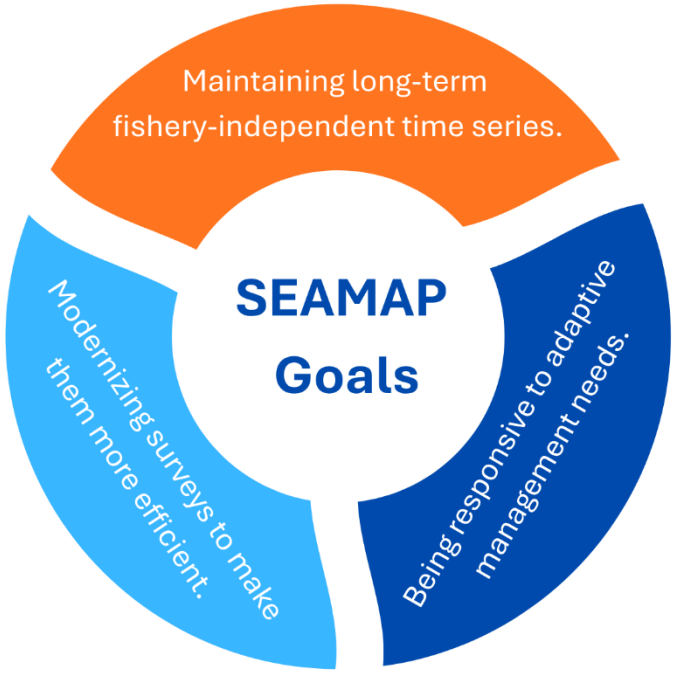
SEAMAP is committed to evaluating program components to ensure that the program is continually meeting the needs and emerging concerns of a dynamic fishery. With this in mind, we are proud to share the summary of our efforts herein, and our visions for meeting the needs of our management councils for the next 5 years.

Program Goals

Maintaining long-term fishery-independent time series. SEAMAP was started in 1981 with the goal of collecting data on species that are of commercial and recreational interest, independent of existing management regulations. These time series data, many of which are decades long, show long-term trends in fish populations which then aid fishery managers in making management decisions. The primary goal of SEAMAP is to maintain these time series to support the long-term sustainability of fisheries.

Modernizing surveys to make them more efficient. Modernizing the surveys that collect these fishery-independent data will improve efficiency and expedite the fisheries management decision-making process. By maintaining up-to-date hardware, software, and equipment, SEAMAP aims to enhance survey accuracy and support the continued profitability of America's fisheries.

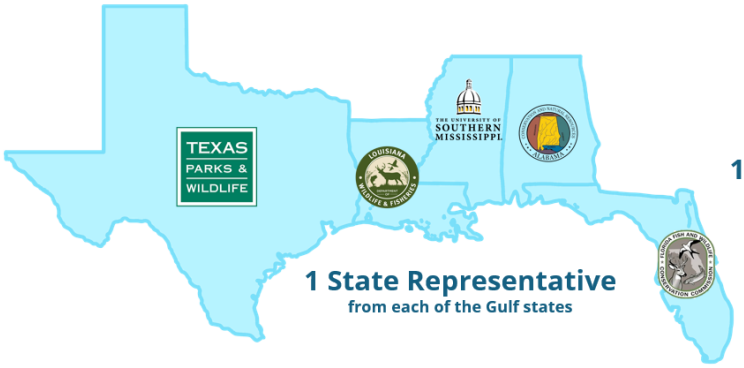
Being responsive to adaptive management needs. As management objectives evolve, SEAMAP strives to remain adaptable to meet emerging needs. Because we operate in a constantly changing environment, disturbances such as hurricanes and human-caused hazards can create unforeseen monitoring requirements. SEAMAP is committed to staying responsive and prepared to address these challenges.



Program Structure

Each component consists of a representative from each state, a coordinator from an interstate management commission or Sea Grant, a representative from a Regional Fisheries Management Council, and a representative from the National Marine Fisheries Service. These components are managed by a NOAA-assigned Program Manager, Technical Monitor, and Grants Manager.

SEAMAP - Gulf of America



1 State Representative
from each of the Gulf states

1 Coordinator

1 Council Representative

1 Federal Representative

SEAMAP – South Atlantic

1 State Representative
from each of the South Atlantic states

1 Coordinator

1 Council Representative

1 Federal Representative

SEAMAP – Caribbean

1 Representative
from each territory

1 Coordinator

1 Council Representative

1 Federal Representative

Economic Benefits of Fisheries Data Collection

The economic value of fisheries in the United States is derived from four principal components: employment, sales of landed catch, direct support industries, and indirect support industries. Employment includes all jobs involved in harvesting, processing, and marketing seafood products, ranging from crew members on fishing vessels to workers in processing plants, distribution networks, and retail operations. Sales of landed catch include both domestic and international transactions contributing to overall market value. Direct support industries comprise enterprises engaged in the construction and maintenance of vessels and the provision of essential supplies such as fuel, gear, and bait. Indirect support industries include activities and services that facilitate access to fishing grounds, such as transportation, lodging, and related tourism services.

For individuals and businesses engaged in fishing, consistent income, reliable access to fishing opportunities, and stable operational support are fundamental to sustaining participation in the sector. These conditions are closely linked to effective fisheries management and the maintenance of stable, predictable fish populations.

In 2023, three of the seven largest U.S. commercial fishing ports (by weight) were located in the Gulf of America (Gulf). Approximately 1.3 billion pounds of marine species were landed at Gulf ports in 2023, generating a dockside value of $800 million. The Gulf region also led the nation in marine recreational fishing trip expenditures in 2022, totaling more than $5.1 billion and supporting over 44,500 jobs. The Gulf states (Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas) collectively supported over 100,000 jobs and contributed approximately $17 billion in economic activity.

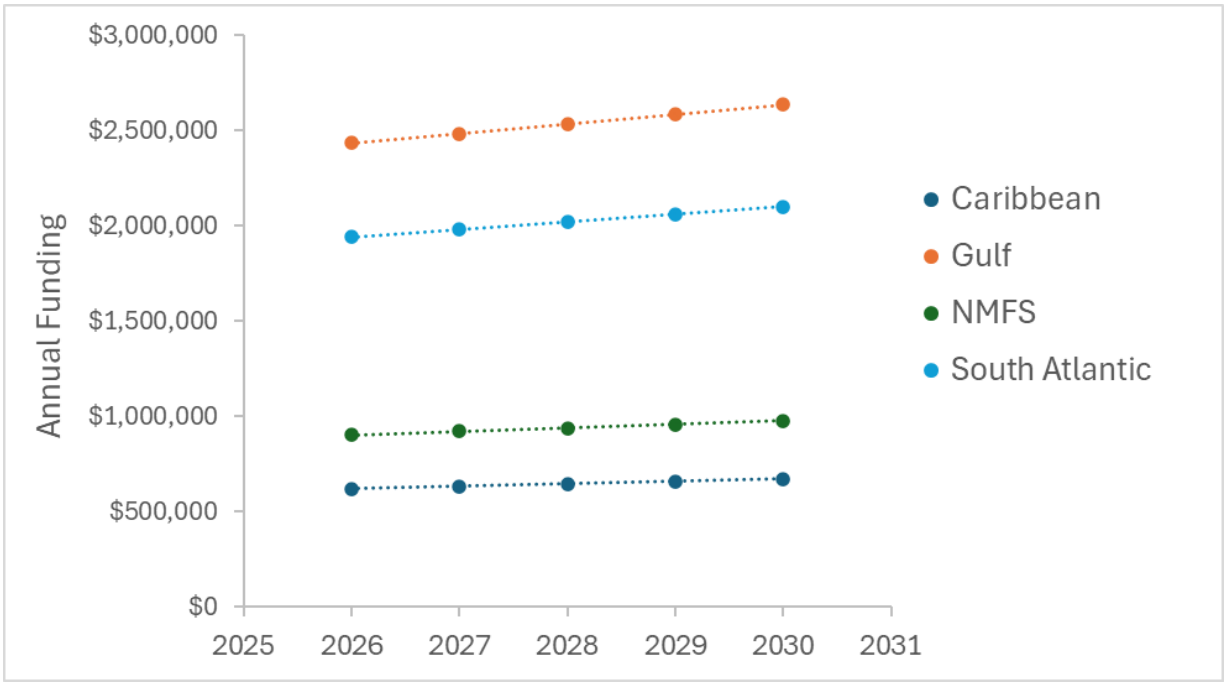
In the South Atlantic region, encompassing North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, fisheries supported more than 40,000 full- and part-time jobs and generated an economic impact exceeding $12 billion. Florida, with fisheries on both the South Atlantic and Gulf coasts, accounted for nearly 160,000 jobs and a total economic impact of $41 billion.

The U.S. Caribbean region, consisting of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix), remains highly dependent on coastal and marine resources for both artisanal and recreational purposes. From 2014 through 2019, commercial fisheries in Puerto Rico generated an average annual value of $11.26 million, while fisheries in the U.S. Virgin Islands contributed approximately $4.71 million annually.

Coastal and offshore fisheries throughout these regions are sustained by scientific surveys that provide essential data for stock assessments and informed fisheries management. These surveys directly support thousands of jobs and are funded in whole or in part by NOAA and indirectly support hundreds of thousands of jobs reliant on the fisheries management decisions based on the data produced by the surveys. The Southeast Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) serves as a primary funding mechanism for these efforts across the Gulf, South Atlantic, and Caribbean regions. Between 2021 and 2025, NOAA funding for SEAMAP surveys ranged from $5.125 million to $6.725 million per year, representing a modest investment relative to the substantial economic returns generated by commercial and recreational fisheries in these regions.

Program Budget

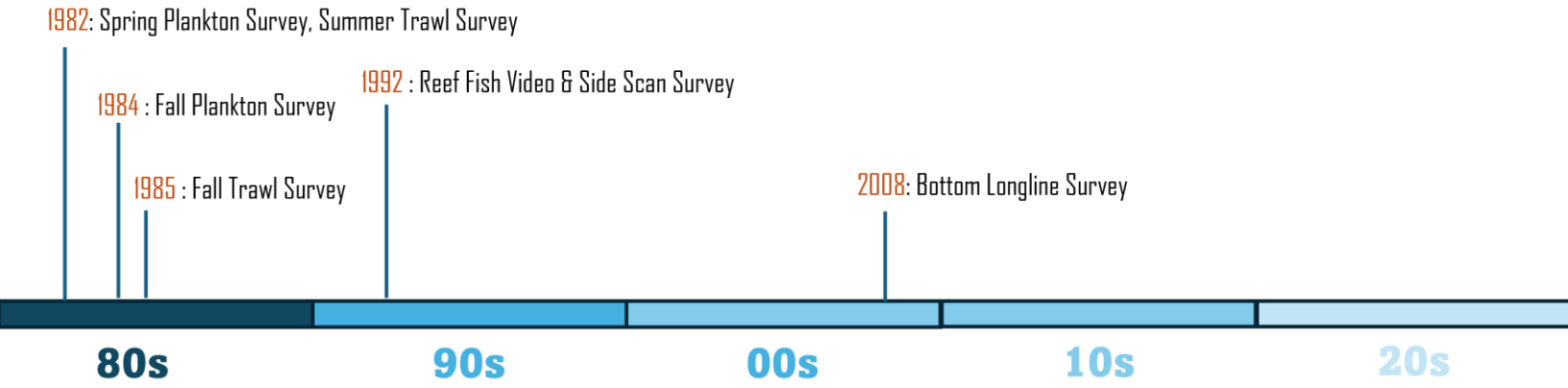
To maintain survey and data management activities at current levels through the 2026–2030 funding cycle, annual funding increases will be necessary to offset inflation-based cost increases. Regional, annual funding estimates are shown below. Level or decreased funding will result in reduced sampling and subsequent loss of fishery-independent survey data critical to effective fisheries management.



Program enhancements, new projects, or new partners would require additional funds over these baseline estimates. In some cases, enhancements, such as the development of new technologies to automate or improve the efficiency of existing surveys may result in reduced costs in the long-term but would require initial investments to develop and evaluate. New projects or partners would likely require ongoing funding to fall under the SEAMAP programmatic theme of providing long-term monitoring data. Many enhancements to existing surveys proposed below specifically target improving long-term cost efficiency or reducing error in data products, which would improve use in stock assessments and management decisions.

Fishery-independent data reduce the variability around stock metrics, thereby improving assessment accuracy and allowing for more precise management limits. This results in the industry having more sustained access to fish. By supporting these surveys, scientists are continuously aware of species population levels and are implementing adaptive management efforts, negating situations where populations plummet and require long-term closures for recovery. These surveys benefit both the fishers and the fisheries.

SEAMAP-Gulf of America

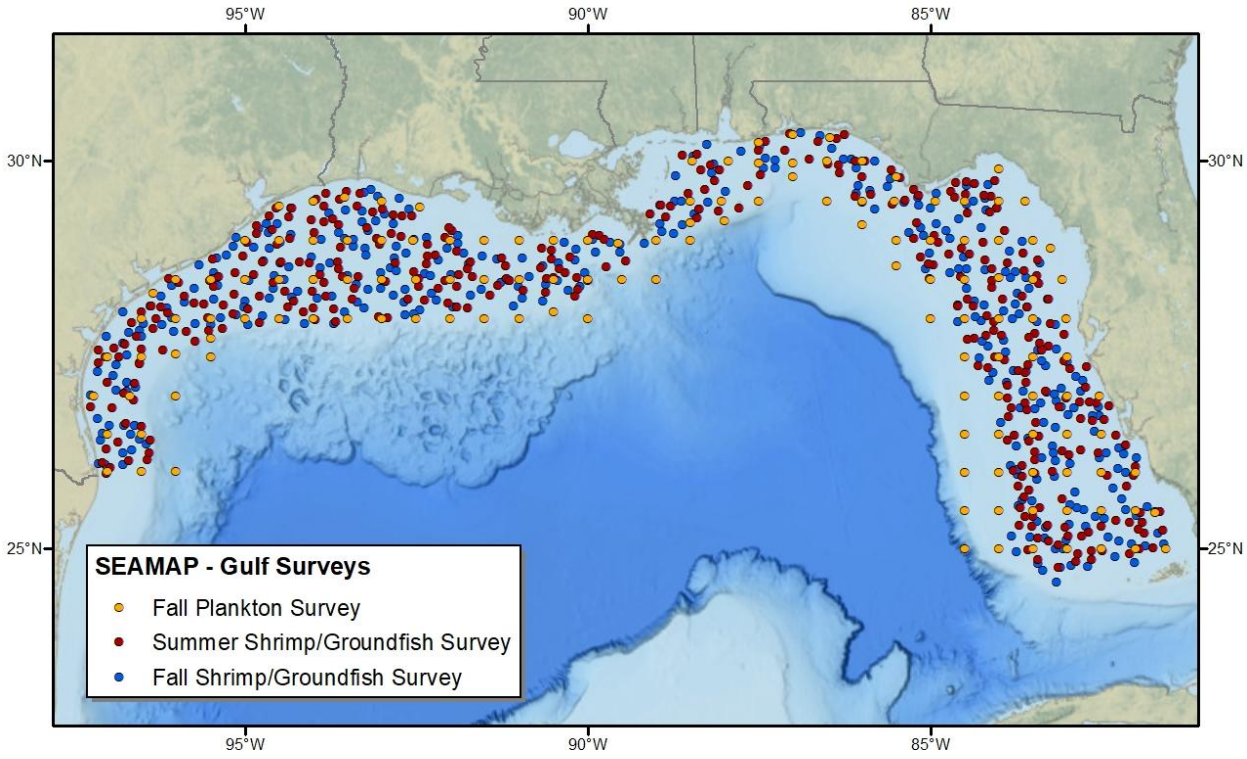


Shrimp/Groundfish Trawl Surveys

The Summer and Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Surveys use bottom trawls to sample waters from 9 – 110 m throughout the Gulf from the southern border of Texas to the Florida Keys. These surveys primarily target commercial/recreational species such as penaeid shrimp, mackerels, reef fishes, and sharks. The surveys monitor abundance, diversity, size, biomass, and distribution of fish and invertebrates. Additional data are collected for age, growth, reproduction, and diet of specific species.

To ensure even distribution and balance of sampled stations throughout the Gulf, the region is divided into 21 statistical zones and stations are randomly selected in each zone based on the proportion of available habitat by depth (9 – 37 m and 37 – 110 m). The Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey samples approximately 350 stations while the Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey targets over 300 stations each year. Environmental data are measured at each station.

Proposed Enhancements: Integrating active acoustics into existing trawl surveys would provide data for the entire water column and allow a more accurate estimation of the biomass present at stations. In addition, installing net monitoring systems on SEAMAP trawl vessels would allow for comparisons between vessels to determine whether differences exist in trawl performance during surveys. With sensors attached to the doors and footrope, the system could calculate how far the doors are spread and monitor the trawl's position in reference to the seafloor using an inclinometer, providing more accurate measures of the area swept by each trawl. Annual software licenses and net monitoring transducers would be required for each vessel to implement this effort.



Bottom Longline Survey

The Bottom Longline Survey is a seasonal (Spring, Summer, Fall) survey that samples waters from 3 – 10 m across the entire Gulf and complements the NOAA Bottom Longline Survey conducted in deeper waters. The survey monitors abundance, diversity, size, and distribution of teleosts and sharks. Additional data are often collected for age, growth and reproduction of specific species. This survey is particularly important in assessing valued commercial/recreational species such as Blacktip Shark, Great Hammerhead Shark, and Red Drum.

To ensure even distribution and balance of sampled stations throughout the Gulf, the region is divided into 21 statistical zones and stations are randomly selected in each zone based on the proportion of available habitat. Over 300 stations are sampled by the survey annually. Environmental data are also collected at each station.

Reef Fish Survey

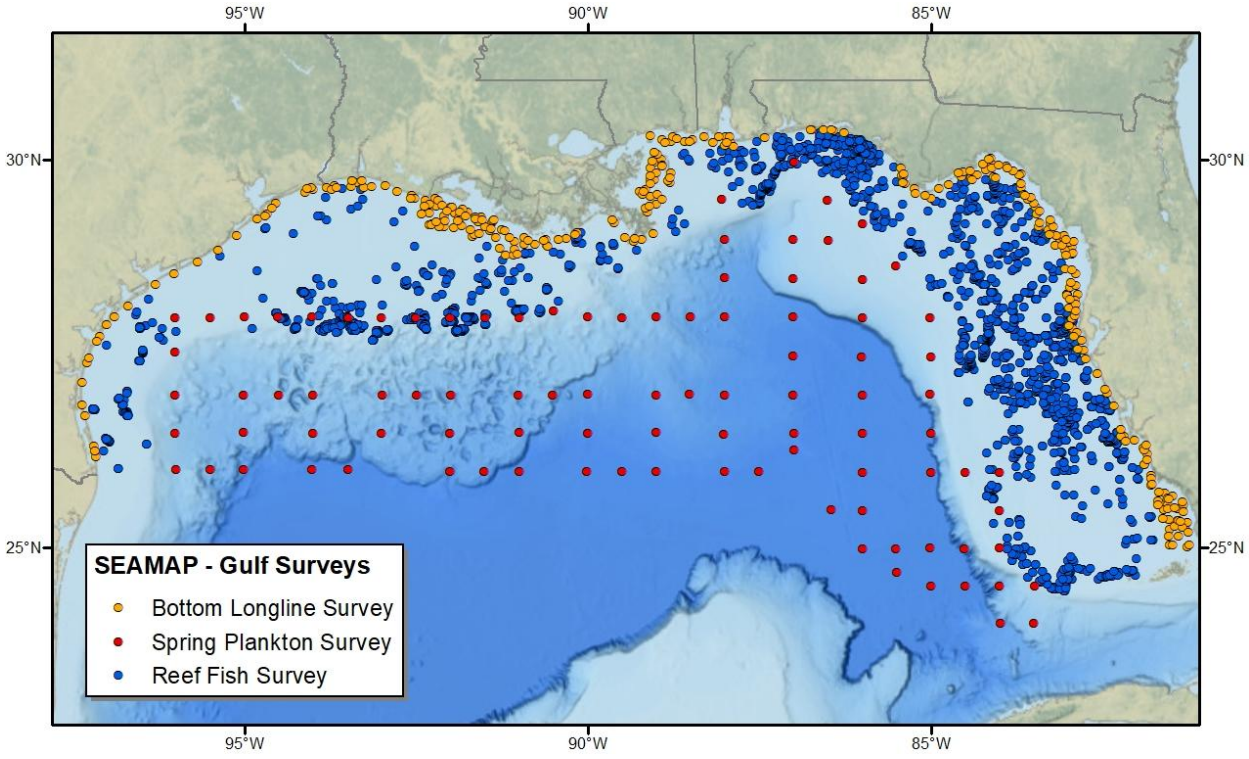
The Reef Fish Survey is an annual survey conducted in waters from 10 – 180 m at continental shelf edge-banks, oil and gas platforms, and artificial reefs across the entire Gulf. This survey primarily targets reef associated species such as snappers and groupers. The survey uses 1) short duration deployed camera arrays to monitor reef fish diversity, abundance, and size and 2) side scan sonar to map bottom topography in the region.

This survey uses a habitat-based survey design with proportional station allocation based upon six spatial strata and six habitat strata. Over 2,000 stations are sampled annually. Environmental data are collected at each station and approximately 100 water samples are collected per year for eDNA analysis.

Proposed Enhancements: Most of the funding for the Reef Fish Survey comes from grants that are set to expire in 2029. Sustaining the Reef Fish Survey will require additional annual long-term funding. Additionally, areas in the north central and western Gulf have low visibility, which limits the effectiveness of optical surveys. Incorporating technologies such as acoustic cameras and collecting eDNA samples to help assign species identifications would help collect valuable data in these low-visibility regions. Implementing these enhancements would require new equipment costs and annual costs for data processing.

Plankton Surveys

The Spring and Fall Plankton Surveys sample surface waters with bongo and neuston nets at stations throughout the Gulf (spring) and along the Gulf continental shelf (fall). These surveys primarily target Atlantic Bluefin Tuna, Skipjack Tuna, Red Snapper, Vermilion Snapper, King Mackerel, and Gray Triggerfish. The surveys monitor abundance, diversity, and distribution of early life stages of spring and fall spawning fishes, and invertebrates. The Spring Plankton Survey provides the only fishery-independent data included in the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) stock assessment of Atlantic Bluefin Tuna and is used to tune the adult stock assessment.



SEAMAP-Gulf's data are used to manage many federal, regional, and state species to help ensure that the Gulf's fisheries are around for generations to come. The table below gives a snapshot of how many different management plans and research data requests the data from these surveys have supported from 2020-2025.

Use Type	Shrimp/Groundfish Trawl	Bottom Longline	Reef Fish	Plankton
Federal Management	12	1	13	4
State Management	1	1	3	0
Data Requests/Publications	153	13	80	70

To ensure even distribution and balance of sampled stations throughout the sampling universe, the region is divided into a 56 km x 56 km grid with a station conducted at each vertex. Between 100 and 150 stations are sampled by the survey per season. Environmental data are collected at each station.

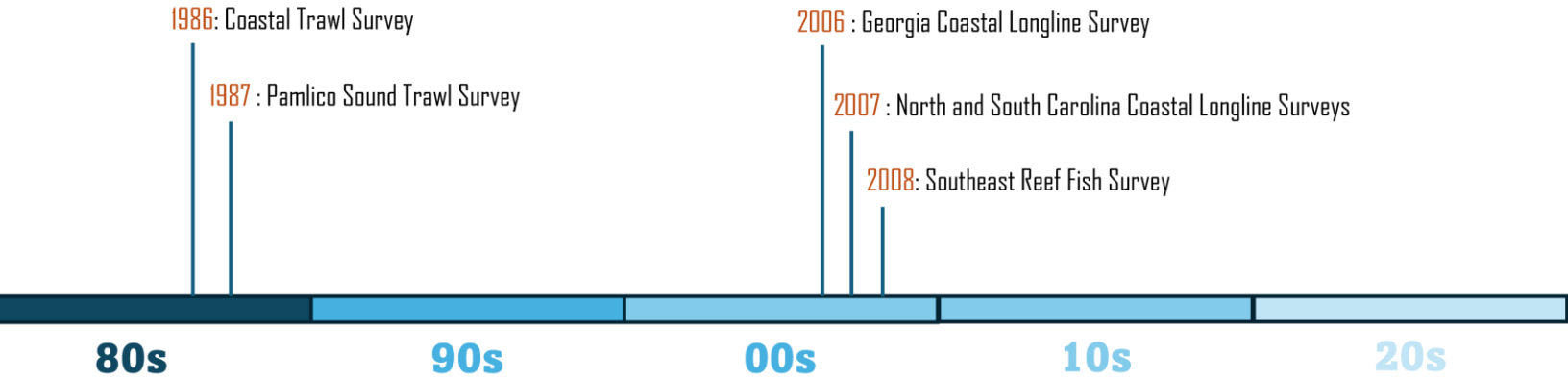
Proposed Enhancements: Implementing a close-kin mark-recapture on larval Atlantic Bluefin Tuna captured in the Spring Plankton Survey to develop a time series of absolute abundance of Atlantic Bluefin Tuna would aid in identifying population abundance for this important pelagic species. Additional funds would be needed to conduct the analysis and conduct targeted sampling during the survey.

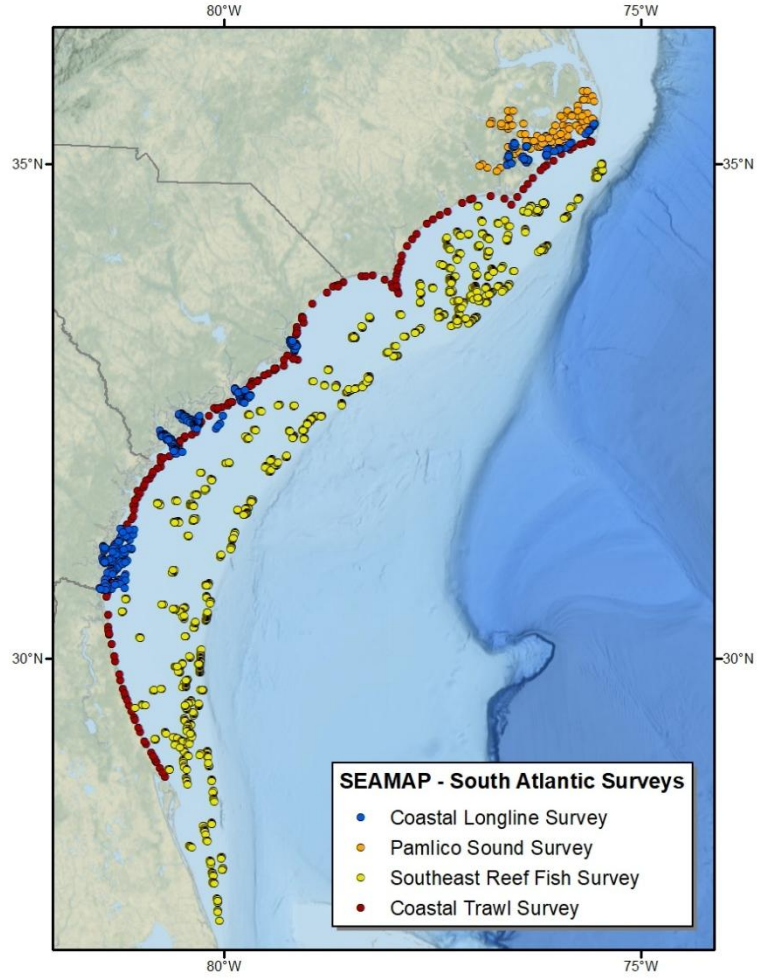
Data Management

The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) has managed the SEAMAP-Gulf data since 2007. Through the GSMFC SEAMAP website, environmental and biological data from multiple survey platforms including Shrimp/Groundfish, Bottom Longline, and Reef Fish surveys can be downloaded by fisheries managers, research institutions, and stakeholders. An interactive, web-based data viewer allows users to directly explore spatial coverage, station summaries, and detailed biological data for trawl and bottom longline datasets. Available data types include catch composition, length frequency, environmental parameters, and specimen-level information. Standardized field operations manuals and metadata protocols have been developed collaboratively by SEAMAP to maintain data integrity. Further, survey data are cross checked by collecting agencies and verified by the SEAMAP Data Manager using rigorous automated validation programs that verify spatial coordinates, environmental parameters, species codes, and biological measurements to ensure consistency and quality. Data are routinely assessed and submitted for applicable state, regional, and federal stock assessments to inform management decisions.

Image: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

SEAMAP-South Atlantic





Coastal Trawl Survey

The Coastal Trawl Survey (CTS) is a bi-annual (spring/summer and summer/fall) multi-state survey focused on data collection for species associated with soft-bottom habitats near the coast from Florida to North Carolina. This survey uses a trawl to sample waters from 4.6 – 9.1 m deep. Sampled species include Atlantic Croaker, Weakfish, Kingfish, shrimp, Bluefish, mackerels, sharks and rays, sea turtles, etc. and collects abundance, distribution, size composition, age composition, growth, and reproductive output.

Based on the history of the survey, at least 200 stations must be sampled annually to adequately characterize stocks in the region, but many species benefit from higher sampling effort.

Proposed Enhancements: Increased information about bottom habitats sampled by the survey and species' associations with environmental variability would help inform how to combine CTS data with other regional trawl surveys but would require bottom mapping or camera transects and additional data analyses. North Carolina recently enacted strict regulations for Southern Flounder and South Carolina began an extensive stock enhancement program due to population declines. Additional funds would allow CTS to provide age and reproductive data for the increasing number of Southern Flounder being encountered. Both enhancements would provide more comprehensive understanding of the regions' stocks and a broader U.S. east coast perspective.

Southeast Reef Fish Survey

The Southeast Reef Fish Survey (SERFS) is an annual collaborative, multi-state survey focused on data collection of species associated with hard-bottom habitats on the Atlantic shelf from Florida to North Carolina. This survey uses chevron traps, long bottom longlines, and trap-mounted video footage to sample at depths of 15 – 300 m. Species sampled include groupers, snappers, sea basses, porgies, grunts, etc.

Based on the history of the survey, at least 1,000 stations must be sampled annually to adequately characterize stocks in the region, but many species benefit from higher sampling effort.

Proposed Enhancements: Regional bottom mapping is insufficient to determine if SERFS is sampling an adequate amount or variety of hard-bottom habitats in the region, in particular low relief habitats used by juvenile Red Snapper and Red Porgy. Abundance and biomass are available as relative and not absolute values due to lack of estimates of effective area sampled for many species and require targeted acoustic tagging studies to quantify. Absolute abundance would allow combining

SEAMAP-SA data are used to manage many federal, regional, and state species to help ensure that the southeast's fisheries are around for generations to come. The table below gives a snapshot of how many different management plans and research data requests the data from these surveys have supported from 2020-2025.

Use Type	Coastal Trawl	Southeast Reef Fish	Pamlico Sound	Coastal Longline
Federal Management	2	13	0	6
Regional Management	6	2	7	2
State Management	4	0	14	3
Data Requests	75	60	25	5

data from SERFS with other surveys, such as those using trawls. Demographic sampling is often under-funded, limiting the availability of data for assessments, population and ecosystem modelling, and these enhancements hope to remedy this.

Coastal Longline Surveys

The Coastal Longline Survey (CLS) is an annual multi-state, fishery-independent survey run by the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, Georgia Department of Natural Resources—Coastal Resources Division, and South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. This survey uses a bottom longline to sample waters from 1.1 to 22.3 m deep and provides data on the distribution, relative abundance, catch per unit effort, size distribution, and age composition of adult Red Drum in North Carolina's Pamlico Sound, South Carolinian estuarine systems, and in the coastal and offshore waters of Georgia. The survey also provides information on relative abundance, size distribution, sex, and maturity of several coastal shark species.

The different iterations of the survey boast a large, combined effort with North Carolina sampling 30 grids annually (10 regions, 3 time periods and 2 samples per grid), South Carolina sampling 360 stations annually (4 sounds, 3 time periods, 30 longline sets per sound during each time period), and Georgia sampling 140 stations annually (quarterly sampling by zone and strata, 35 stations sampled each quarter), with all surveys using a random stratified sampling design to choose sampling locations.

Proposed Enhancements: Evaluating of current methodological details such as hook type and how they affect species catch and increased collection of descriptive location data, including distance from shore measurements and the observation of the presence or absence of hardened structures on the shoreline could be incorporated into current sampling easily with no extra funds and would allow the assessment of possible relationships between catch and new environmental factors.

North Carolina Pamlico Sound Survey

The North Carolina Pamlico Sound Survey is a bi-annual (spring and fall) fishery-independent, survey conducted by the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF). This survey uses a bottom trawl to sample waters from 1.7 to 8.5 m and provides long-term, fishery-independent data on the distribution, relative abundance, and size composition of estuarine fish and decapod crustaceans in the waters of Pamlico Sound and adjacent river systems, focusing primarily on Weakfish, Spot, Atlantic Croaker, Southern Flounder, Summer Flounder, Bluefish, Southern Kingfish, Blue Crab, Brown Shrimp, Pink Shrimp, and White Shrimp.

The NCDMF lost use of its research vessel, the *R/V* Carolina Coast, after it was found to be structurally unsound following completion of the 2024 sampling season. In the upcoming grant cycle, effort will be focused on the development of a replacement survey, using alternate gear and methodology to meet the unique data needs historically filled by the Pamlico Sound Survey. Pilot studies will focus on optimizing sampling locations to collect biological data on target species considered commercially and recreationally important to NC. New sampling strategies will also prioritize spatial and temporal sampling units not covered by other NCDMF surveys. The implementation of a new survey will be dependent on pilot study results.

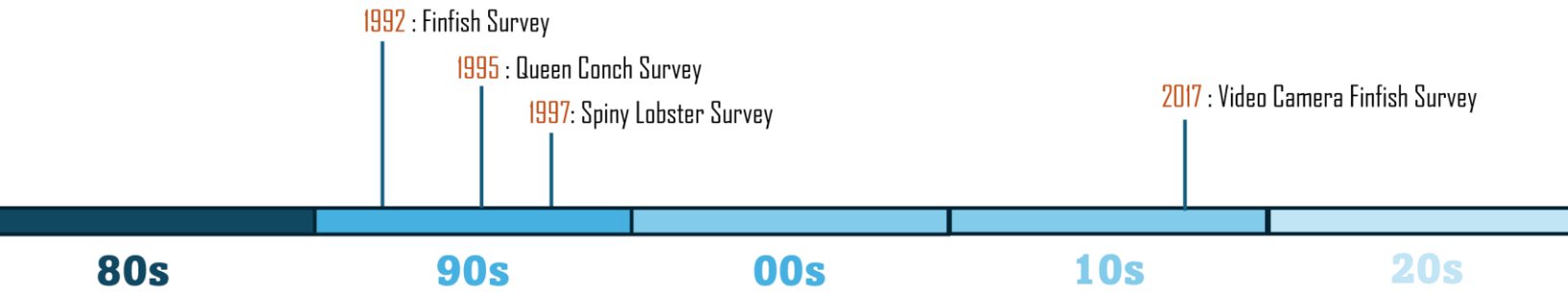
Data Management

A collaborative data management strategy was established for the SEAMAP-SA surveys in 2012 with the development of an online database. Through this platform, data can be queried and downloaded by fisheries managers, academic partners, industry professionals, and other interested parties. Available download types include abundance and biomass, length frequency, individual specimen, and tagging data. Interactive GIS products such as summary maps, StoryMaps, and data summaries are also provided as part of this collaboration. Since the dedicated data management effort began, SEAMAP-SA data types have been standardized, undergone rigorous quality checking procedures, and improved for consistency and quality. Survey data have been formatted using Darwin Core terminology, the international standard for biological data, to enable integration across diverse datasets. Standardized metadata and best-practice documents have been developed and made available to constituents through the online platform. While data are currently publicly accessible, research into future, more modern data platform options are ongoing.

Proposed Enhancements: Pipeline transition smoothing: support for individual surveys in database development and quality checks related to data delivery to the online platform through standardized, survey-specific databases and automated processes (e.g., R-based translations and query outputs) is recommended. Regional data consistency: a standardized state and regional stock assessment data template—modeled after the existing federal template—should be developed, integrated into SEAMAP-SA databases and quality check workflows. Standardized GIS shapefiles: the development of SEAMAP-SA survey shapefiles will enable consistent spatial analyses across surveys and reduce redundant efforts in creating spatial components for modern, spatially explicit assessment models.

Image: South Carolina Department of Natural Resources

SEAMAP-Caribbean



Queen Conch Survey

The queen conch (*Aliger gigas*), the second most harvested marine invertebrate in the U.S. Caribbean, was recently listed as threatened under the U.S. Endangered Species Act in 2024, sparking increased interest in strengthening long-term population monitoring. The SEAMAP-C Queen Conch Survey fulfills this role via a diver-based census that uses 10-m radial transects to monitor conch across multiple habitat types (e.g., sand, seagrass, algal, etc.) and depth strata (approximately 5 m to 30 m) across Puerto Rico, St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix. The survey assesses population abundance, distribution, and size structure. Divers also collect critical data on maturity status and reproductive activity. SEAMAP-C queen conch data have been used to inform the development of management measures such as seasonal and area closures and harvest regulations (see table below).

Since 2020, the SEAMAP-C Queen Conch Survey has undergone two significant transitions to improve data quality; protocol shift and sampling frequency. The survey protocol transitioned from a diver-based 500-m linear belt transect to a 10-m radial transect design to increase sample size, provide more accurate abundance/density data, increase efficiency, and complement NMFS Queen Conch Survey protocols in the region. In 2026, the survey is also transitioning from a once in 5-year frequency to an annual frequency, with a target sample size of 160 stations per island platform (160 for Puerto Rico, 80 for St. Thomas/St John, and 80 for St. Croix). Environmental data will be measured at each station.

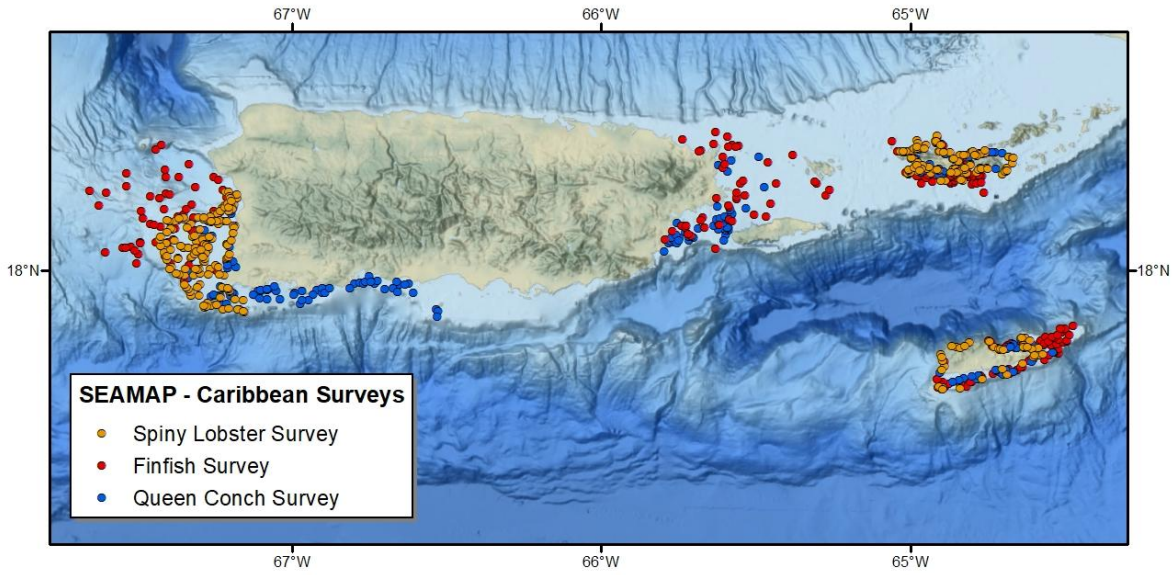
Proposed Enhancements: As the transition to an annual survey frequency requires additional resources, it will expand the spatial scope, sample size, and efficiency of queen conch surveys across the U.S. Caribbean. This would include additional funding for field personnel and associated training, vessel operations, and remote survey equipment. In addition, conducting a pilot study that integrates remotely operated vehicle (ROV) technologies and artificial intelligence-assisted image analysis for a queen conch survey in depths beyond diver limits (> 30m) would increase survey depth and area. Such technologies also help reduce overall project costs and increase safety by reducing diver dependence. These enhancements are designed to complement existing methodologies and provide high-quality, science-based information to support future management decisions.

Caribbean Spiny Lobster Survey

The Caribbean spiny lobster (*Panulirus argus*), the most harvested marine invertebrate in the U.S. Caribbean, inhabits structurally complex habitats at depths of up to 90 m. The current SEAMAP-C spiny lobster survey is a diver-based roving census that monitors spiny lobster across multiple habitat types (e.g., coral reef, rocky bottom, etc.) and depth strata (e.g., 1-10 m, 10-20 m, 20-30 m) across Puerto Rico, St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix. The survey assesses population abundance, distribution, and size structure. Additional data are collected for age, growth, and reproduction. SEAMAP-C spiny lobster data have been used to inform the development of management measures such as seasonal and area closures and harvest regulations (see table below).

Since 2020, the SEAMAP-C Spiny Lobster Survey has undergone a significant transition to improve data quality and utility. In 2026, the survey is transitioning from a once in a 5-year frequency to an annual frequency, with a target sample size of 80 stations per island platform (80 for Puerto Rico, 40 for St. Thomas/St John, and 40 for St. Croix). Environmental data will be collected at each station.

Proposed Enhancements: As the transition to an annual survey frequency requires additional resources, it will expand



the spatial scope and annual sample size of the Spiny Lobster Survey across the U.S. Caribbean. This would include additional funding for field personnel, associated training, and vessel operations. In addition, a spiny lobster trap study is needed to sample the portion of the population occurring at depths beyond diver limits (> 30 meters). This study would also compare diver-based survey to lobster trap survey in the shallower depths. Spiny lobster trap studies would increase survey depth and provide a more efficient method for collecting samples for age, growth, and reproductive analyses. These enhancements would improve the ability to detect patterns in population dynamics and provide more robust data for stock assessment models. These enhancements would also complement existing methods, promote consistency across jurisdictions, and support the sustainable management of Caribbean spiny lobster populations in the U.S. Caribbean.

Finfish Survey

The SEAMAP-C Finfish Survey is a semi-annual survey that targets various reef fish species (e.g., Yellowtail Snapper, Lane Snapper, Nassau Grouper, Black Grouper, Queen Triggerfish, etc.) across multiple habitat types (e.g., coral reef, algal, sand, seagrass, etc.) and depth strata (e.g., 0-20 m, 21-40 m, 41-100 m) across Puerto Rico, St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix. The survey uses a combination of short-duration deployed camera arrays and hook-and-line sampling to monitor the diversity, abundance, and size of targeted reef fish species. Additional life history data are collected for age, growth, and reproduction. SEAMAP-C Finfish Survey data have been used to support seasonal and area closures, inform essential fish habitat designations, contribute to Productivity-Susceptibility Analysis and Acceptable Biological Catch discussions and provide inputs for state regulations and scientific review processes in the U.S. Caribbean (see table below).

Since 2020, the SEAMAP-C Finfish Survey has undergone two significant transitions to improve data quality: a protocol shift and a change in sampling frequency. The survey protocol transitioned from unbaited to baited cameras to provide more accurate relative abundance and length data. In 2026, the survey is transitioning from a biannual to an annual frequency, with a target sample size of 120 stations per island platform (120 for Puerto Rico, 60 for St. Thomas/St John, and 60 for St. Croix). Environmental data will be collected at each station.

Proposed Enhancements: As the transition to an annual survey frequency requires additional resources, it is necessary to extend the spatial scope to deeper habitats, increase sample size, and apply artificial intelligence tools for automated video analysis. Additionally, establishing a centralized video data repository would improve data accessibility and better facilitate cross-jurisdictional collaboration. These enhancements aim to complement current survey methodologies, increase efficiency, and provide robust data to guide sustainable fisheries management decisions in the region.

Data Management

SEAMAP-C currently manages survey data through a cloud-based repository where committee members maintain shared access to datasets, reports, and supporting documentation. Data products include abundance estimates, length-frequency distributions, CPUE metrics, species occurrence records, and habitat information generated from queen conch, spiny lobster, and finfish surveys conducted throughout Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Since the dedicated data management effort began, SEAMAP-C data types have been standardized, undergone QA/QC procedures, and improved for consistency and quality. Large-volume stereo-video files are presently archived on external hard drives

SEAMAP-C data are used to manage many federal and regional species to help ensure that the southeast's fisheries are around for generations to come. The table below gives a snapshot of how many different management plans and research data requests the data from these surveys have supported from 2020-2025.

Use Type	Queen Conch	Spiny Lobster	Fin-fish
Federal Management	0	1	0
Island-Based Management	0	0	0
Data Requests	1	2	1

maintained by participating agencies. In previous years, SEAMAP-C reports were publicly accessible through a dedicated website; however, that platform is no longer active, and public access to program documents is currently limited. At present, development of a small server for video storage is underway, as secure and reliable archiving of video data is a top priority for the program.

Proposed Enhancements: SEAMAP-C proposes to strengthen its data infrastructure to improve long-term storage, accessibility, and coordination among partner agencies. A primary goal is to restore public access to program reports and educational materials through the Puerto Rico Sea Grant website. We are in the process of standardizing datasets to ensure continued accuracy and consistency. In addition, the program plans to establish a centralized server to securely and efficiently store video files, enabling participating agencies to access shared videos when needed. These improvements will provide more reliable data storage, improve information sharing among partners, and better support fisheries assessments and management decisions in the U.S. Caribbean region.

Image: Manuel Olmeda, Puerto Rico, Quen Conch Survey

Cost of Proposed Enhancements

From North Carolina to Texas to the U.S. Virgin Islands, the fishing industry represents a multibillion-dollar economy. It is imperative that we protect this industry by conducting the science that will help inform sustainable fishing practices, which SEAMAP has provided for the last 40 years. Maintaining the continuity of SEAMAP's long-standing time series remains a central priority for SEAMAP. Therefore, the core surveys detailed above will continue to provide the standardized fishery-independent data that support stock assessments and guide harvest levels for commercial and recreational fisheries. However, expanding and updating survey approaches is essential to improve efficiency, strengthen data quality, and address changing management needs.

Gulf partners have identified the need for increased structural funding to extend the current sampling level in the Reef Fish Survey beyond 2029. Additional needs include acoustic systems for trawl surveys and the Reef Fish Survey, along with net mensuration gear. These updates improve efficiency, modernize survey operations, and strengthen adaptiveness by filling gaps in areas with limited information, supporting comparisons among trawl surveys, and providing data for species not captured by current gears. The estimated total for these changes is a one-time cost of $830,000 and an annual cost of $3.13 million.

South Atlantic partners are preparing to resume the Pamlico Sound Survey by calibrating new trawl gear and spatial design to the historical design to ensure continuity. To improve efficiency and modernize operations, the region has identified needs related to increasing knowledge of bottom and sampling habitats and environmental associations, expanding demographic sampling, developing automated video processing, and standardizing data formatting and translation. These improvements strengthen the region's ability to meet emerging management needs by informing predictive models and providing broader demographic representation. The estimated total for these changes is a one-time cost of $105,000 and an annual cost of $630,000.

U.S. Caribbean partners are transitioning to annual survey frequencies to expand the spatial scope and sample size for Queen Conch, Spiny Lobster, and reef fish. These enhancements include increased field personnel, vessel operations, and the establishment of a centralized video data repository to improve cross-jurisdictional collaboration. To modernize data collection and improve safety, the region will also invest in advanced technologies, including remotely operated vehicles (ROVs), lobster trap studies, and AI-assisted image analysis to survey habitats beyond diver limits (> 30m). Collectively, these improvements integrate cutting-edge tools with traditional methodologies to provide robust, science-based data for stock assessments and sustainable fisheries management. The estimated total for these changes is a one-time cost of $300,000 and an annual cost of $220,000.

Expanding the SEAMAP program will allow for more robust and accurate data to be collected in support of our fisheries. Given the immense economic value of these fisheries, the investment of enhancing these monitoring efforts will be repaid tenfold by ensuring that this industry is maintained and flourishes for future generations.

A detailed breakdown of the costs of these enhancements is in Appendix A.

Conclusion

For more than four decades, SEAMAP has supplied data that underpins nearly every major fishery management decision across the Gulf of America, South Atlantic, and Caribbean regions. These surveys often provide the only consistent source of fishery-independent data for key species, supporting stock assessments, sustainable harvest levels, and the long-term economic and ecological stability of U.S. fisheries. Continued improvements to survey methodologies, together with the resources needed to sustain and enhance long-term time series, modernize platforms and technologies, expand habitat and geographic coverage, and strengthen regional coordination and data accessibility, will ensure that fish populations are accurately represented in management considerations. By securing increased and sustained investment, SEAMAP can continue to support the commercial and recreational communities that rely on these fisheries and maintain the scientific foundation necessary to balance economic opportunity with ecological stewardship for generations to come.

Appendix A: Detailed Costs of Proposed Enhancements

Gulf	
Shrimp/Groundfish Trawl	
Integrating active acoustics into existing trawl surveys	$400,000
Annual software licensing for data interpretation	$30,000
Installing net monitoring systems on all SEAMAP vessels	$130,000
Reef Fish	
Acoustic cameras	$300,000
Annual data processing	$100,000
Continued long-term operations	$3,000,000
	One-time total: $830,000
	Annual total: $3,130,000
South Atlantic	
Coastal Trawl	
Annual bottom mapping or camera transects	$50,000
Annual additional data analyses	$30,000
Age and reproductive data for Southern Flounder	$30,000
Reef Fish	
Annual regional bottom mapping of low-relief habitats	$300,000
Annual targeted acoustic tagging studies	$175,000
Annual full coverage of demographic sampling	$75,000
Data Management	
Pipeline transition smoothing	$25,000
Improving regional data consistency	$25,000
Standardizing GIS shapefiles	$25,000
	One-time total: $105,000
	Annual total: $630,000
Caribbean	
Queen Conch	
Annual expansion of spatial and temporal scope, sample size, and efficiency	$60,000
Integrate ROV technologies and AI-assisted image analysis	$80,000
Spiny Lobster	
Annual expansion of spatial and temporal scope, sample size, and efficiency	$80,000
Lobster trap pilot studies	$200,000
Fin-fish	
Annual extension of spatial scope to deeper habitats and increasing sample collection	$80,000
Establish a centralized video data repository	$20,000
	One-time total: $300,000
	Annual total: $220,000