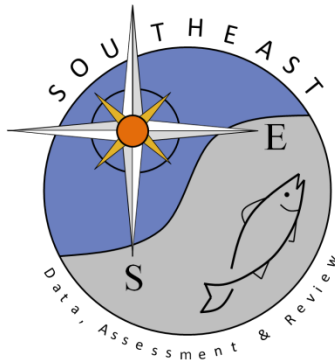


Summary of Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting Program Records for Hogfish Catch in Southeast Region

LAPP/DM Branch, SERO

SEDAR94-DW-23

19 September 2025



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LAPP/DM Branch
NOAA Fisheries Service
Southeast Regional Office
September 2025

Background

In January of 2021, both the Gulf Council and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) implemented amendments to modify reporting for all for-hire vessels that have been issued federal permits to fish for species in the reef fish, snapper grouper, dolphin wahoo or coastal migratory pelagic (CMP) fishery management plans. Prior to this amendment, only the federally permitted vessels selected for the Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) were required to complete logbook reports for trips that fished for or landed reef fish, snapper grouper, dolphin wahoo, or CMP species in state or federal waters in the Gulf and South Atlantic regions. The amended regulations modified the timing of reporting for headboats subject to the SRHS, and implemented a new electronic reporting requirement for all other federally permitted vessels via the Southeast For-Hire Electronic Integrated Reporting (SEFHIER) program. The programs are intended to improve timeliness and accuracy of data from the for-hire fleet, by using a census approach to improve catch statistics used to monitor and manage federal fisheries under the purview of the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils.

Federally permitted for-hire vessels not selected for the SRHS program, are required to submit weekly trip level or no-fishing reports to SEFHIER through an approved electronic application. Approved applications at this time are either Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program's (ACCSP) eTRIPS mobile or Bluefin Data LLC's VESL application. Logbook records that provide fishing information include: trip start and end dates/times, end port, vessel and captain information, number of angles, number of crew, fishing method, hours fished, primary fishing depth, common name and count for each species kept or discarded, charter fee, fuel used, and fuel price per gallon. Data collected by the approved applications is aggregated and warehoused by ACCSP. These data are later made accessible to the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) to aid with customer service, quality control and quality assurance checks, monitoring of compliance, and data analysis for participants in SEFHIER.

On February 23, 2023, the final rule implementing the Gulf SEFHIER program was set aside by the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. This ruling restricts the release and use of any data collected by Gulf SEFHIER vessels or dually permitted Gulf and South Atlantic SEFHIER vessels before the program was set aside (Data Provided August 14, 2025).

Aggregation of Catch Statistics

SEFHIER vessels have been required to report a logbook for every for-hire fishing trip they take beginning in January of 2021. However, 2021 is considered a "burn-in" year due to very low

compliance, therefore only data from 2022 onward is considered in this analysis. The stock boundaries designated for the assessment require catch data to be aggregated into three geographic regions: West Florida (Escambia through Collier County), Keys/ East Florida (Monroe through Nassau County), Outside of Florida (all landings outside of Florida). The disposition of fish reported by SEFHIER vessels can only be categorized as retained or discarded, with no ability to discern the difference between fish released alive and dead. Annual catch statistics were calculated by aggregating reports of landed and discarded hogfish by stock region for SEFHIER vessels (**Table 1**). Data from 2022 are excluded from the table due to preserve confidentiality for the West Florida Shelf and Outside of Florida regions, and no hogfish were reported in the Florida Keys and East Florida region in 2022. SEFHIER vessels operating in the West Florida Shelf reported the greatest magnitude of both retained and discarded hogfish, as compared to the other stock regions. The average annual catch by gear type and stock was calculated, between 2022 and 2024, to show the distribution of catch based on the gear designation from each SEFHIER trip report (**Figure 1**). In both regions, no discards were reported on trips that reported using spear gear, with a higher magnitude of retained catch as compared to trips using hook and line gear in both stock regions. Trips that reported using hook and line gear reported similar numbers of retained and discarded fish in the West Florida Shelf region, whereas the reports of discarded fish were much higher than retained fish in the Florida Keys and East Florida region.

Comparison of SEFHIER and MRIP

Charter (state and federally permitted vessels) estimates are derived by combining effort estimates generated by the For-Hire Telephone Survey (FHS) and catch data from dockside intercepts of charter vessels in the Marine Recreational Information Program's Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (MRIP APAIS). SEFHIER logbooks have the potential to provide an alternative estimate of federal charter effort, harvest and discard levels. The following analysis provides a comparison of SEFHIER and MRIP charter fleet summary data to quantify red hogfish catch and effort levels for each stock.

SEFHIER logbooks are provided at the vessel trip level, but MRIP charter effort is generally calculated by expanding MRIP APAIS angler trip intercept data based on the effort estimates from the weekly FHS. For this analysis, MRIP effort estimates were instead generated in vessel trips to match the effort units available. The number of vessel trips where hogfish were caught (retained or discarded) were aggregated by year and stock for each program (**Table 2**). Annually, MRIP estimates a much higher number of hogfish vessel trips, as compared to SEFHIER, in both stock regions. Some of the difference in magnitude between vessel trip estimates for MRIP vs SEFHIER may be attributed to the inclusion of state permitted charter trips in the estimation for MRIP, but low compliance and exclusion of data from dually permitted Gulf only SEFHIER vessels also influence the differences seen between programs.

MRIP charter catch data from the ACL monitoring file (MRIP FES ACL file, downloaded May 15, 2025) was aggregated from 2022 to 2024, to match the retained and discard catch dispositions reported in SEFHIER logbooks for the same time period. Catch data was compared between the two programs and stocks, to investigate annual catch trends (**Figure 2**). There are no

clear patterns that can be discerned comparing the differences in discarding and retained catch between the two programs in each stock region.

Utility of SEFHIER Estimates

The use of SEFHIER data as a direct replacement for the hogfish estimates generated for the entire charter mode fleet (state and federal charter) would present the analysts with several challenges. The SEFHIER catch data provided in this working paper excludes trip reports from SEFHIER vessels that operated solely in the Gulf or that were dually permitted, before February 23, 2025. These exclusions may bias the catch statistics provided, as their effort and catch is not being incorporated into the data aggregations described above. Additionally, the SEFHIER program has suffered from low compliance in the South Atlantic region since its inception. A large proportion (>50%) of SEFHIER vessels report late, and more than half of federally permitted SEFHIER vessels that do report, submit “Did Not Fish” reports in each month of the calendar year (**Figure 3**). These low reporting compliance rates undercut the value of the data provided by SEFHIER vessels, as a census count of federal charter fishing effort. The aggregated counts of retained and discarded hogfish reported by the SEFHIER fleet do not have an accompanying trip or effort validation survey that can be used to correct for mis- or non-reporting. The lack of a trip validation method also limits the availability of biological data to describe the size, weight and age of the fish retained by SEFHIER participants, inhibiting the ability to generate an estimate of the weight and age distribution of hogfish retained by the fleet. In a [letter](#) to the South Atlantic Council, both SERO and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) stated that SEFHIER program data should not be used for science or management due to low compliance and lack of independent validation. Without independent validation, the data cannot be evaluated for representativeness nor can the size or direction of any biases be determined. It is recommended that the data should be used only in a qualitative nature as SERO and SEFSC indicated in the letter to the South Atlantic Council that SEFHIER does not represent best scientific information available.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council has undertaken steps to improve the compliance with SEFHIER reporting requirements and the Gulf Council is working to develop a replacement for the Gulf SEFHIER program that was set aside. Until compliance improves, decisions to consider using SEFHIER data to represent the charter fleet should be weighed heavily against the ability to employ a valid statistical method to properly expand the catch and discards reported in logbooks. SEFHIER catch data lack an appropriate methodology to expand the census reporting to account for mis- and non-reporting. Any decisions to replace existing charter estimates with SEFHIER data should clearly document the expected benefit to the stock assessment process before improvements to compliance and validation can be implemented.

Table 1. Annual number of hogfish reported as retained and discarded by SEFHIER vessels between 2023 and 2024, aggregated by stock boundary. Data from 2022 is excluded due to confidentiality concerns for the West Florida Shelf and Outside of Florida regions, no hogfish were reported in the Florida Keys and East Florida in 2022. Discarded fish corresponds with hogfish that were released alive and dead.

Stock	Year	Trips	Retained	Discarded
West Florida Shelf	2023	193	1000	495
	2024	201	1169	260
Florida Keys & East Florida	2023	20	18	29
	2024	31	26	52
Outside of FL	2023	14	30	0
	2024	15	22	4

Table 2. Annual number of hogfish vessel trips estimated by MRIP charter or reported to SEFHIER between 2022 and 2024. Dash corresponds with confidential data values.

Stock	Year	Estimated MRIP Charter Vessel Trips	Reported SEFHIER Vessel Trips
West Florida Shelf	2022	8,159	-
	2023	15,986	193
	2024	8,606	201
Florida Keys & East Florida	2022	3,153	0
	2023	1,364	20
	2024	2,276	31

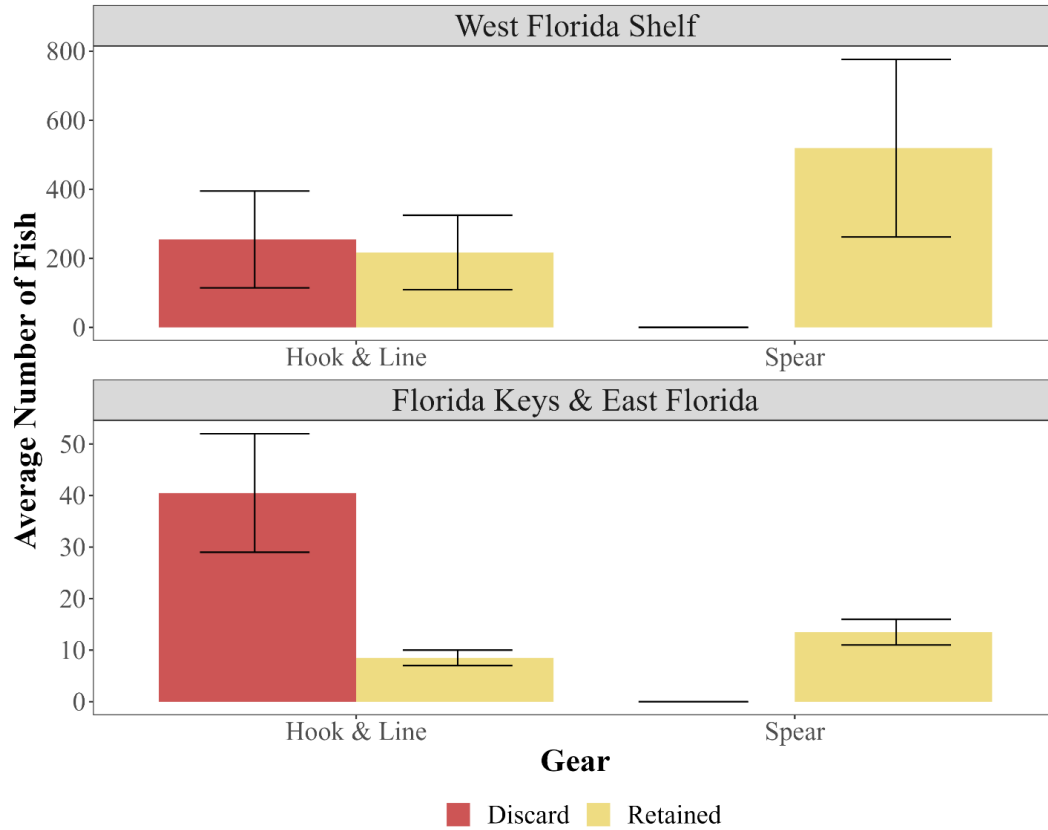


Figure 1. Average number of hogfish reported as retained and discarded by SEFHIER vessels between 2022 and 2024, by stock and gear. Discarded fish correspond with hogfish that were released alive or dead.

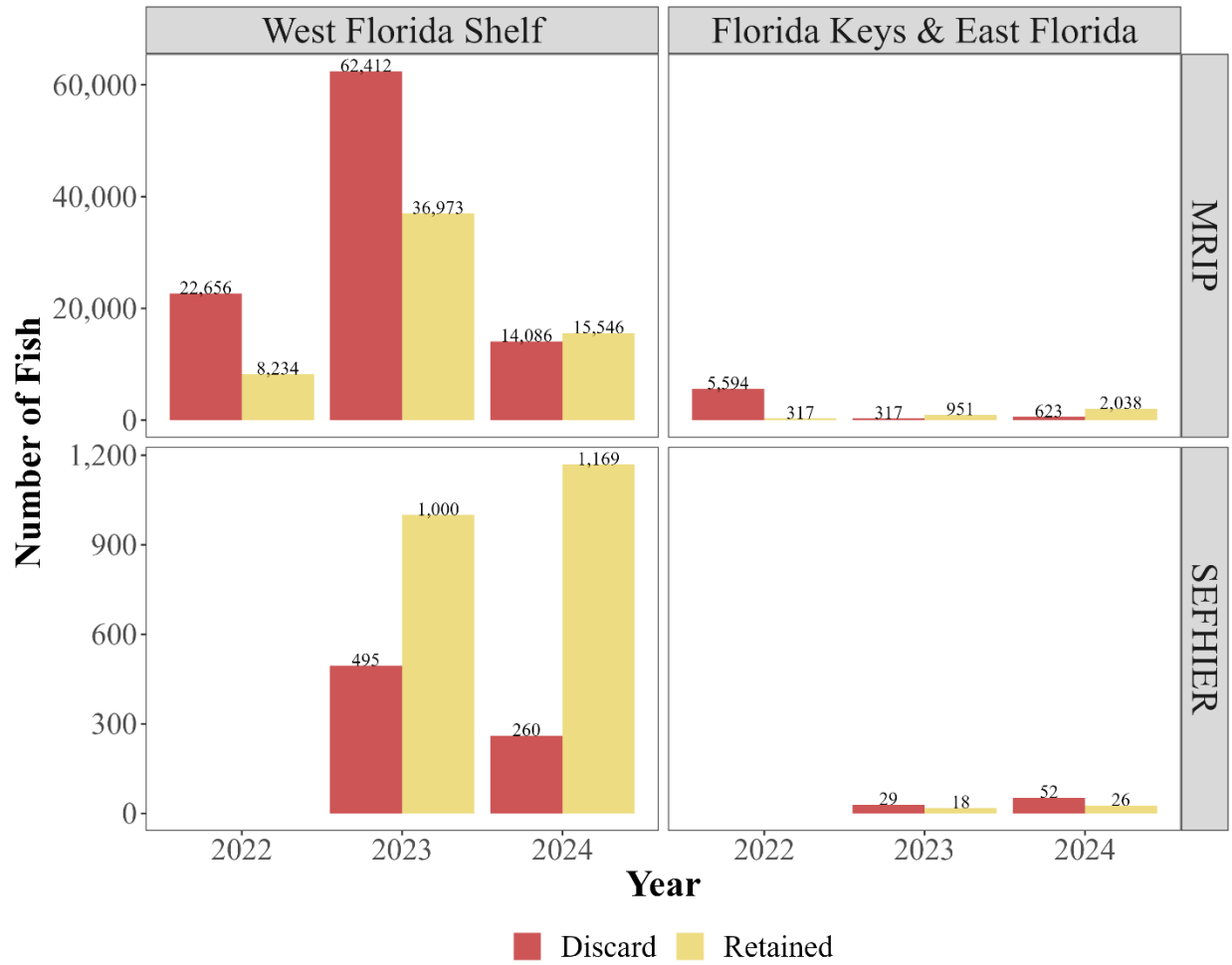


Figure 2. Number of hogfish reported as retained and discarded by SEFHIER between 2022 and 2024, by stock. Discarded fish correspond with hogfish that were released alive or dead.

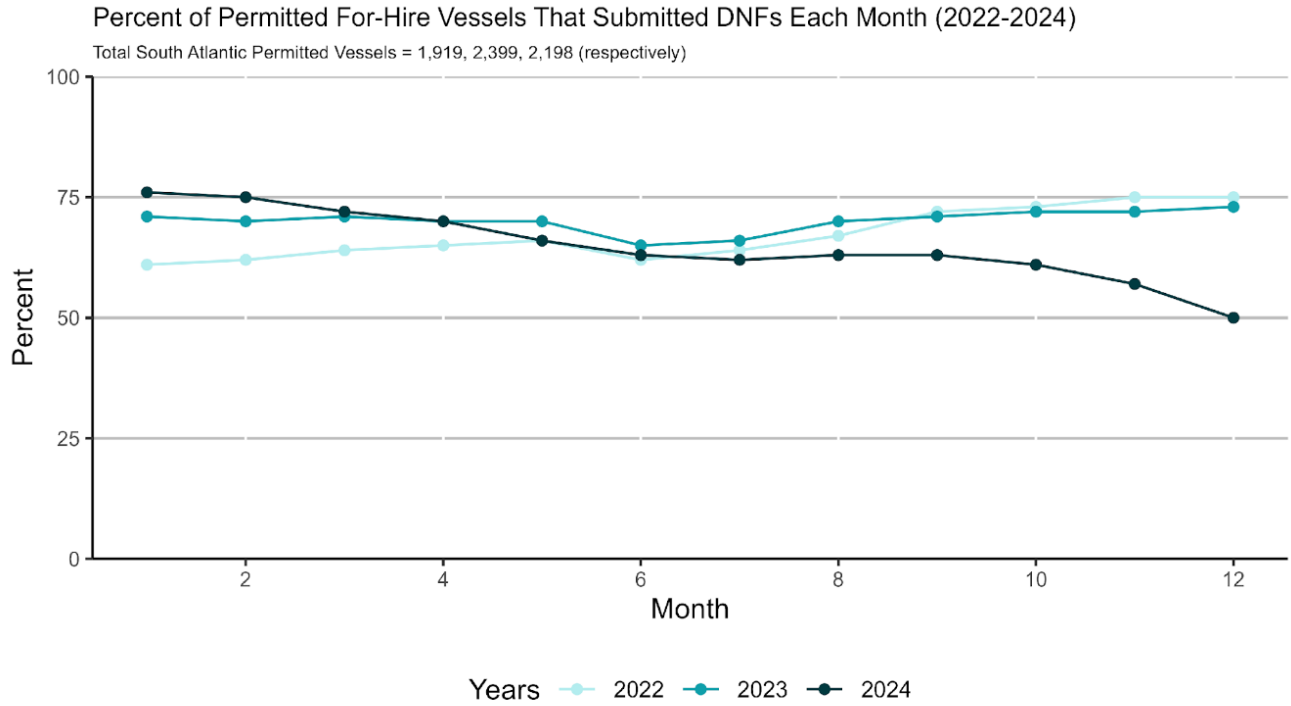


Figure 3. Proportion of South Atlantic federal for-hire permitted vessels, excluding vessels that report to the Southeast Region Headboat, submitting “Did Not Fish Reports”, from 2022 to 2024.