

Hello. My name is Jesse Mock. I am an owner/operator in the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper fishery. I participate mainly in the black sea bass pot fishery; this fishery has been ruined by the NMFS and the South Atlantic Council.

Ten to twelve years ago, we were told by professionals that were paid by NMFS that we had the most unique fishery in the world. It was unique and highly successful because it was governed by the fishermen. Through our own regulations, we, on our own, were fishing *responsibly*. The professionals were amazed that we were limiting ourselves, had produced our own trap limit, were voluntarily using a larger mesh trap, and had stopped leaving gear in the ocean for more than 24 hours at a time. Our self regulations created a highly sustainable resource that was lucrative and open to new participants. The fish were not in danger. We fished for sea bass when they were here, not when they were somewhere else! Since the government takeover of our unique, lucrative fishery, we have gone from successful fishermen to qualifying for food stamps and welfare. No other job or branch of government would be allowed to bankrupt people like this. We were not offered financial aid, educational courses for a new career, new job placement or anything else. I have been forced for all these years to donate free professional data through fishing trip reports that I have not been compensated for, not one cent. I consider my data to be professional because I have more field experience than all of your paid scientists combined. I have been studying the nature of these fish with more passion and motivation than anyone else.

In order for this fishery to be successful again, we need to reform the laws to better represent the unique fishery the professional fishermen had created. The only closure needed for black sea bass is a spawning closure during the months of March, April and May. I also believe there should be no catch limit until 75% of the quota has been landed. Our current size limits for both commercial and recreational fisherman are causing too many throw backs, and restricting us from catching our quota. Our 10 inch size limit was working perfectly. I believe there is data to show that it also matches our gear perfectly. Recreational fishermen at the current size limit of 13 inches also have to constantly throw fish back. These current size limits are causing an overwhelming amount of regulatory discards. Some recreational fishermen are fishing all day and not catching legal size fish, so they are throwing back good, edible fish all day long. The size limit for sea bass in the South Atlantic needs to be 10 inches for commercial fishermen and 11

inches for recreational fishermen. Also, for trap fisherman to be successful on warm slow migrating seasons, we need to be able to leave our traps in the ocean over night while we head in to unload our previous catch. Not days at a time, but for next day returning trips. Early closure, Increased size limit, trip limit, and bringing our traps in each trip are all measures put in place to lengthen our fishing season. After catching less than half of our quota, and three years in a row of not being allowed to reach our quota, I think it is time to reduce our restrictions.

This over regulation is killing our fishery and our mental health. Annual cycles range from good to bad according to weather conditions. Each year is unique and different. Some of our best cycles have been paired with extreme closures. We will never recover from the loss of those catches. It is time to give us back our stewardship.

Jesse Rae Mock