

March 2016 SAFMC Meeting Public Comments

It is unfortunate that this council continues to push for more closures of our traditional fishing grounds with no MSA mandate to do so while ignoring congressional requirements to limit waste, make efficient use of our resources, and promote the safety of fishermen at sea. Amendment 36 should be tabled or merged with the MPA System Management Plan. Artificial Reef SMZs should be created on existing MPAs. The new habitat should be designed to support Warsaw Grouper and Speckled Hind since protecting those two species is the stated reason for rushing to close new areas. Video cameras should be built into the ARSMZs to collect data. Images could be sent by data buoys marking MPAs. The buoys could be equipped with surface cameras to prevent poaching. Simply managing Snowy Grouper and Blueline Tilefish so closures occur during July and August when SH and WG are spawning would do far more to protect those aggregations than the proposed SMZs.

The first step for a Citizen Science Initiative should be properly managing TACs to avoid extended closures and excessive discards. Your own SSC scientists say these closures and regulatory discards negatively impact stock assessments with gaps and uncertainty in the data being used. Properly managing quotas would solve so many problems for the fish, fishermen, consumers, and stock assessment scientists. Avoiding prolonged closures was the number one issue brought up by fishermen in the Visioning Project public comments. Part of the CSI should be setting up an official online forum where stakeholders can discuss how TACs should be managed. That forum should also be used to let licensed fishermen vote for who represents us on the council.

I respectfully ask the SAFMC to table any plans for closing more of our traditional fishing grounds. Stakeholders have not even been given a chance to comment on the currently proposed SMZ site off NC as it has changed many times. NOAA is planning to expand the Monitor Marine Sanctuary which could include the Malchese wreck that was one of the first proposed SMZ sites. We should wait to see how that plays out before rushing to close other areas. It seems as if the SAFMC/NMFS/NOAA are trying to close as many traditional fishing grounds as possible, as quick as possible, by any means necessary. It is time to start focusing more on enhancing our fisheries and food supply than restricting the public's freedom to access them.

Sincerely,
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