



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

4055 FABER PLACE DRIVE, SUITE 201
NORTH CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA 29405

TEL 843/571-4366 FAX 843/769-4520
Toll Free 866-723-6210

Email: safmc@safmc.net Web site: www.safmc.net

David M. Cupka, Chairman
Ben Hartig, Vice Chairman

Robert K. Mahood, Executive Director
Gregg T. Waugh, Deputy Executive Director

February 23, 2012

Dr. Roy Crabtree, Regional Administrator
NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Region
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Dear Roy:

This letter is relative to recent issues that have surfaced with the management and protection for speckled hind and Warsaw grouper. I have worked with staff to develop a plan we believe will best address these issues.

At the March meeting the Council will be reviewing scoping comments and determining how to proceed with addressing the bycatch mortality of speckled hind and Warsaw grouper. I recognize that this must be addressed in a timely manner and have outlined a timeline that has the Council approving a final document at the September or December 2012 meeting (see attached). We will be reviewing material developed by our staff that will provide the capability for the Council, Advisory Panels (APs), and public to modify existing MPAs (first) and then draw new MPAs (second). In each case, the known percentage distribution of speckled hind/Warsaw grouper or known habitat will be calculated. The approach will be demonstrated based on all existing data from Regulatory Amendment 11. If this approach is approved by the Council in March, it will be presented to the SSC during their April 3-5, 2012 meeting in Savannah, GA; to the Snapper Grouper AP during their April 18-19, 2012 meeting in Charleston, SC; and to the public during the 5 workshops to be held prior to the Council's June 11-15, 2012 meeting in Orlando, FL (should the Council approve these workshops).

Suggested alternative MPA sites from the APs, SSC (if any), and Workshops would be presented to the Council in June. The Council would then need to balance the recommendations from the SSC, NMFS SEFSC/SERO, and NGO's on what the correct percentage is to protect these two stocks with the resulting impacts on fishermen. This will be similar to what was done for our existing Coral HAPCs and allowable golden crab fishing areas and shrimp areas.

We recently learned that the SERO has a model and draft MPA sites completed. Rather than have this presented at the March meeting, which would be premature and could lead to extensive delays similar to what we encountered in our early development of existing MPAs, I would like this model presented to and reviewed by our SSC at their April 3-5, 2012 meeting. This will avoid similar problems we experienced when the SERO Red Snapper Model and Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 11 were presented to the Council prior to any SSC review; the SSC has strongly advised against technical analyses going to the Council prior to the SSC having the opportunity to review. The SERO model and SSC recommendations would then be presented to the Council at the June 2012 meeting.

We need your help in two areas:

1. We request the NMFS SERO work with the NMFS SEFSC to provide guidance on what percentage (of occurrence or habitat) is "appropriate" to be closed. We are also asking the SSC to evaluate this and provide recommendations during their April 3-5, 2012 meeting in Savannah, GA. One could suggest 10% or 20% and correlate it to 10% or 20%SPR as a MSY or overfishing target. If one wanted to be more conservative, one could suggest 30% and correlate it to 30%SPR or 40% to 40%SPR as an OY level.
2. We request the SERO develop a way to model the distribution of catches within the statistical grids such that once the Council chooses an area, we could then determine the percent of catch of each sector (commercial, headboat, & charter/private) in the proposed area. Further, that the NMFS analyze the reduction in catches assuming a 10%, 20%, 30%, and 40% reduction in catches to each sector (commercial, for-hire, and private recreational) and provide this information to the Council for the June meeting to frame the level of impacts. The finer resolution of impacts could be done after the Council chooses alternatives for public hearings at the June meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I would like to thank you and your staff in advance for the close cooperation and hard work that will be necessary for us to address this very important issue. If you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Bob or me.

Sincerely,



David Cupka
Chairman

cc: SAFMC Members and Staff
Monica Smit-Brunello
Phil Steele and Jack McGovern, Nikhil Mehta and Mike Travis
Bonnie Ponwith, Theo Brainerd and Tom Jamir

SAFMC	NMFS
1. Scoping – Jan/Feb 2012; done.	Scoping – Jan/Feb 2012; done by SAFMC.
2. Review scoping comments & provide direction to staff – March 5-9, 2012 in Savannah, GA.	
3. SSC review – April 3-5, 2012 in Savannah, GA.	
4. AP review – April 18-19, 2012 in Charleston, SC.	
5. Public Workshops (5) – prior to June 1 st (if approved by the Council in March).	
6. Council reviews recommendations and selects alternatives for public hearing; approves for public hearings – June 11-15, 2012 in Orlando, FL.	DEIS Comment Period – must begin on or before Friday, July 21, 2012 for the DEIS comment period to end by start of Council’s September 10-14, 2012 meeting.
7. Public Hearings: (a) August 6 – Pooler, GA (b) August 7 – Jacksonville, FL (c) August 8 – Cocoa/Canaveral, FL (d) August 9 – Key Largo, FL (e) August 14 – Charleston, SC (f) August 16 – New Bern, NC	
8. Council reviews public hearing input and DEIS comments – September 10-14, 2012 in Charleston, SC.	
9. Council approves for formal review – September 10-14, 2012 in Charleston, SC.	
10. Council approves for formal review – December 3-7, 2012 in Atlantic Beach, NC.	
11. Send to SOC by September 27 th or December 13 th , 2012.	
12. Target implementation January 1 st or May 1 st , 2013.	