UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Southeast Regional Office
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505
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Mr. Ben Hartig, Chairman
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, South Carolina, 29405

Dear Mr. Hartig:

This letter advises you that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) approved Amendment 8 to the Fishery Management Plan for Coral, Coral Reefs, and Live/Hardbottom Habitats of the South Atlantic Region (Coral Amendment 8). Approved actions include expansion of the northern and western boundaries of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC); expansion of the Stetson-Miami Terrace and Cape Lookout Coral HAPCs; and establishment of a transit provision through Oculina Bank HAPC for vessels with rock shrimp onboard. Within the expanded HAPCs, the use of bottom longline, bottom trawl, dredge, pot or trap is prohibited, and if aboard a fishing vessel, anchor, use of anchor and chain, and grapple and chain is prohibited. Mid-water trawl is also prohibited in the Coral HAPCs, including Stetson-Miami Terrace and the Cape Lookout Coral HAPCs.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) approved the amendment during their September 2013 meeting. The notice of availability for Coral Amendment 8 published in the *Federal Register* on May 20, 2014 (79 FR 28880), and the comment period ended on July 21, 2014. The proposed rule for Coral Amendment 8 published on June 3, 2014, and the comment period ended on July 3, 2014 (79 FR 31907). A final rule, which will give effect to the proposed actions and regulations, should be published in the *Federal Register* shortly.

NMFS appreciates the Council's ongoing efforts to manage fishery resources in the South Atlantic region. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator