



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

Southeast Regional Office  
263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701  
(727) 824-5305; FAX (727) 824-5308  
<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

MAY 15 2008

F/SER24:SB

Mr. Robert Mahood  
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201  
Charleston, SC 29405

*Bob*  
Dear ~~Mr. Mahood:~~

Enclosed is a request from the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, Inc. (Foundation) to obtain an exempted fishing permit (EFP) for a 15-month period beginning July 2008. If issued, the EFP would exempt personnel from the Foundation from regulations found at 50 CFR 622.36 (seasonal fishery closures), 622.37 (size limits), 622.38 (landing fish intact), and 622.44 (trip limits). If issued, the EFP would allow continued data collections on snapper and grouper taken during standard commercial fishing operations in South Atlantic federal waters. The study would augment the current pool of data available to stock assessment scientists for "data poor" species by characterizing catch and discard mortality within the South Atlantic commercial hook-and-line snapper-grouper fishery. Most specimens would be examined onboard. Legal specimens would become part of the vessel's commercial catch, and regulatory discards would be returned to the water. However, the applicant requests to retain some specimens (both legal and regulatory discard) outside of the allowable commercial harvest for either extended onboard examination or later shoreside analyses.

The sampling program would take approximately 500 undersized or out-of-season snapper and grouper, and thus is expected to have minimal effects on the snapper and grouper stocks in the South Atlantic. The data collection effort would not alter the manner in which the fishery is conducted, and would collect information based on long-standing fishing procedures. The collections would not further impact habitat or non-target species over what has been considered in other stock assessments or environmental evaluations. The estimated 500 fish to be retained represent a small fraction of the average annual landings, and the impacts of the proposed collection on fish stock status would be negligible.

Similarly, the limited sampling program and associated sampling methodology listed in the EFP is not expected to impact marine mammals or threatened or endangered species in any manner that has not been considered in the most recent biological opinion for the existing fishery management plan. The biological opinion specifically addresses the impacts associated with EFPs. It considers fishing activities authorized under an EFP within the scope of the opinion, if those activities do not significantly increase the overall fishing effort within the fishery, and fishing is conducted by commercial or research vessels, using similar or identical fishing methods to those employed in the fishery.



For your review, please also find enclosed a draft EFP, including EFP conditions, for this proposed activity. Please contact us no later than June 15, 2008, should you have questions or concerns about issuance of this EFP. If you need additional information, please contact Steve Branstetter on my staff by calling (727) 551-5796.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Roy".

Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.  
Regional Administrator

Enclosure