



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Duane Harris, Chairman
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Robert K. Mahood, Executive Director
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December 11, 2008

Mr. Craig Cockrell
NMFS HMS Management Division
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

RE: Notice of Intent to Issue FEPs in 2009

Dear Mr. Cockrell:

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is concerned about the pelagic longline research project and approved the following motions at their December 2008 meeting:

Motion #1: The Council voted to object to extending the exempted fisheries permit for the experimental pelagic longline project for an additional year.

Motion #2: The Council requested that if the exempted fisheries permit is extended for an additional year, then restrict fishing activities to the 10 mile extension to the west of the southern portion of the authorized research area (no further north than 29 degrees N. Latitude).

Motion #3: The Council recommends that if continued, that the exempted fisheries permit research project be required to retain the fish or parts that are necessary for ongoing or anticipated research needs.

During his presentation, Chris Rilling updated the Council on data collected thus far:

Catch in 13 sets:

Total Swordfish Catch

178 (60%) Swordfish >47 inches

121 (40%) Undersized Juvenile Swordfish (<47 inches)

62 of 121 (51%) undersized released dead

Bycatch:

6 marlin in 13 sets or approximately 1 marlin bycatch every 2 sets

2 leatherbacks in 13 sets or approximately 1 leatherback bycatch every 6 sets

This seems to verify that the Charleston Bump is a swordfish nursery area. Also, the bycatch of marlin and turtles is high and an equivalent bycatch rate of threatened and/or endangered species could shut down/curtail inshore fisheries in North Carolina.

The Council is also concerned about the time delay with respect to characterizing discards and bycatch. The Council was told that NMFS could shut the fishery down quickly if discards and/or bycatch warranted a closure. However, the research project began in February 2008 and data have only recently been provided which precludes real-time monitoring and closure if warranted.

On behalf of the Council I would like to thank you for the progress report and request that we be kept informed about this research project.

Sincerely,



Duane Harris
Chairman

cc: Council Members and Staff
Bonnie Ponwith (SEFSC)
Monica Smit-Brunello
Phil Steele
Jackie Wilson & Chris Rilling (HMS)