



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

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

F/SER24:SB

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

AUG 25 2014

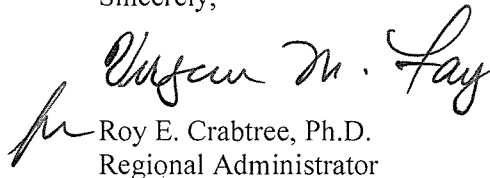
Dear Mr. Mahood:

Enclosed is a request from the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, Inc. (Foundation) to obtain an exempted fishing permit (EFP) for a 24-month period beginning October 2014. If issued, the EFP would exempt, with certain conditions, personnel from the Foundation from regulations found at 50 CFR 622, including but not limited to 622.181(b) (limited harvest species), 622.183(b) (seasonal closures), 622.184 (seasonal harvest limitations), 622.185 (size limits), 622.186 (landing fish intact), and 622.191 (trip limits) as they affect the commercial hook-and-line segment of the snapper-grouper fishery in the South Atlantic Region. If issued, the EFP would allow re-initiation of data collection 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 as quickly as possible after examination. However, the applicant requests to retain some specimens (both legal and regulatory discard) outside of the allowable commercial harvest for extended onboard examination, later shoreside analyses, or quality control assurance; such retention would not count as part of the vessel's trip limit.

The two-year sampling program expects to take no more than 500 individuals (fish and invertebrates) for scientific research activities during the project, where possession and retention is otherwise restricted or prohibited by regulations. Sampling would occur year round. This retention 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. 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 individuals 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.

For your review, please also find enclosed a draft EFP, including EFP conditions, for this proposed activity. Please schedule a review of the EFP application by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council at the next meeting. If you need additional information, please contact Steve Branstetter by calling (727) 551-5796.

Sincerely,


Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator

Enclosure
cc: Judy Jamison, Foundation

