Summary of Workshops to Obtain Public Input on Possible MPAs for Speckled Hind and Warsaw Grouper

Four workshops were held during the August 2012 round of public hearings to obtain additional input on areas that could be considered for MPA designation to protect speckled hind and warsaw grouper. The Florida workshops were held in Jacksonville, Cocoa Beach and Key Largo. An additional workshop was held in New Bern, NC. Below is a summary of the type of comments that were received at the workshops. Written comments were also accepted until August 2012 and are attached to this summary. Written comments submitted at the meetings are included at the end of each set of minutes. The latter are in the Additional Material folder in the Briefing Book.

- Consider re-orientation of the Edisto MPA to protect depths from 190-210 feet. This would cover prime spawning habitat for speckled hind
- MPAs should be a last resort management measure. Managers need to seek input from all interested parties; MPAs are not a panacea and should only be used in extreme cases due to socio-economic impacts.
- MPAs should have a sunset clause.
- Fishermen want to know what percentage of critical habitat needs to be closed to effectively protect speckled hind and warsaw grouper. What is the goal? Are there any studies on the effectiveness of current MPAs? Have the results of current management regulations been considered? Greater than a million less trips are made annually it he SA region.
- If fishermen are going to be asked to identify areas for MPAs and give up more fishing bottom, then they want to know how much needs to be closed and for how long. Fishermen are not being promised anything; only asked to give up more.
- Consider allowing take of warsaw for data collection purposes. A tag program would be appropriate to start gathering some data.
- 21 Fathom Ridge, between Ponce Inlet and Pt. Canaveral, is an area where warsaw grouper are often caught.
- Push Button Hill contains lots of fish in spawning condition (NOTE: this area was included as a priority area in Florida by the MPA Expert Workgroup).
- Council needs to devote much more time to determine suitable areas for MPAs.
- Warsaw groupers are commonly caught off the Florida coast. Fishermen try to avoid them but they are hard to avoid at certain depths. Fishermen recommend going back to 1 per vessel per day to ease bycatch mortality and obtain the necessary data.
- Speckled hind not common off east central Florida – some fishermen attribute this to the disappearance of the Oculina habitat.
- Data on warsaw and speckled hind are very unreliable, thus we can't assume fishing is the cause of decline. Off east-central FL warsaw grouper are abundant.

- Council should focus on enforcing the rules that are already in place, i.e. Oculina MPA.
- No reason for MPAs when scientists admit there are not enough data, especially since there is a directed fishery in the Gulf for these two species.
- Too much uncertainty about where to place them and how to enforce. There is no money to conduct studies to evaluate effectiveness. Fishermen are concern is that MPAs are going to be put in place and never be taken away. A sunset clause should be based on determining whether an MPA is working or not so the burden is on obtaining that information.
- MPA initiative lacks scientific integrity. Focus on conducting assessments of individual fisheries.
- Need to have another meeting (two full days) of the MPA Expert Workgroup. Last meeting was not long enough. Consider inviting Mike Barnette.
- Warsaw groupers exist in 60-75 feet of water.
- Confusion as to why MPAs action was removed from CE-BA 3. Council members have repeatedly stated on the record the importance of quickly moving forward with protection for these two species.
- Recommendation to put MPA action in a framework amendment.
- Amendment 14 contains many references to speckled hind and warsaw grouper being protected by the deepwater MPAs.
- Both species are harvested regularly in the Gulf and it is possible that recruitment to the South Atlantic comes from the Gulf stock.
- Council should focus on obtaining a stock assessment for these two species and institute a tagging program that involves fishermen.
- Consider small closed areas and allow fishing year round outside those areas and ease the restrictions.
- There are distinct differences in the abundance of fish inside and outside reserves. Reserves do work. Fishermen typically oppose them at first but eventually come to realize their worth. There is no other way to protect these two species without MPAs. Establishing a tagging program is not feasible because the Council needs to address overfishing of these two species.
- Fishermen in the Gulf have come to support their MPAs.
- Suggest consideration of the 50-Fathom Rock in the Keys as a protected area.

Speckled Hind and Warsaw Grouper Observations - YouTube

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_UJ7ykqRS4k

To: Myra Brouwer,

Please add this Michael Barnette video of Speckled hind and Warsaw groupers to the MPA public comment record.
Thank you.

Rusty **;-)**

Russell H. Hudson, President
Directed Sustainable Fisheries, Inc. (DSF, Inc.)
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DIRECTED SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES, INC.

A CONSULTING COMPANY

Myra Brouwer
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC)
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, South Carolina 29405

Monday August 20, 2012

Re: Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Speckled hind (SH) & Warsaw groupers
Email to: MPAWorkshopComments@safmc.net

To: Myra Brouwer,

The Directed Sustainable Fisheries, Inc. (DSF) fishing industry clients are very concerned about accelerated efforts by the SAFMC to push through agendas with MPAs to "protect" SH and WG stocks. Both oral and written comments have been submitted by MPA Experts since the two half-day meetings ended on May 17, 2012. There are a lot of unresolved issues and questionable analysis being used so far.

As a SAFMC MPA Expert Panel participant I came away feeling the meeting length of two half-days combined with the Panel's inability to fathom in depth the integrity of the historic and current datasets, combined with fishing expertise that was needed but not fully utilized to make vetted decisions. The final result produced an incomplete product for MPA management during an unrealistic time frame. Nor did the management product improve during the short window of the 4-day written comment period that ended on May 21, 2012 to be included into the Final MPA Expert meeting report dated June 01, 2012. That report was presented to the SAFMC during the June 2012 Orlando, Florida meeting in an inaccurate way, because it was an incomplete product that needs resolving before moving forward.

The Southeastern Fisheries Association (SFA) East Coast Fisheries Section (ECFS) presented 2 written comments to the SAFMC on May 21, 2012. One comment was one-page long and represented the SFA ECFS MPA Policy statement, while the other ECFS comment was a three-page MPA Issues paper about the MPA Expert meeting in Pooler, Georgia on May 16-17, 2012. They are being resent for further review and considerations with today's date used.

Some further observations have emerged in our review of the historic documentation of the fishery for Speckled hind in the Carolina Headboat reports from the 1970's showing average sizes of 4 to 12 pounds, much as seen in recent MARMAP samples. This demonstrates a female sex ratio ranging from mostly juvenile to some adults.

The Carolina SH were caught in depths from 25 to 55 fathoms (150 feet to 330 feet), usually with electric fishing reels mounted on rods. This Carolina Headboat technique was not repeated in the Florida regions for many headboats historically. Usually Penn 65 hand crank reels were the fishing equipment of choice for Florida Headboats since the early 1950's. These smaller reels fishing ability is effected by depth and due to the close proximity of the Gulf Stream in the Florida regions, strong currents.

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The average size Warsaw grouper was listed usually as 23 to 40 pounds and caught in depths of 30 to 60 fathoms.[1]

In the 1983 NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-SEFC-115 by Tester et al including Huntsman and was titled "Reef Fish Distributions off North Carolina and South Carolina as revealed by Headboat Catches" on page 8 is Figure 5 for distribution of catch (numbers of Speckled hind grouper) with numbers taken from 1975-1978 data. On page 11 is Figure 8 with the geographic distribution of headboat trips for which catch records are available for 1975-1978. These need to be compared with current MARMAP and other recent analysis for correlating areas and numbers seen by Head boats.

In another document within a compilation from 1994 for the "Proceedings of the 43rd Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute" was Huntsman et al titled "A Preliminary Assessment of the Populations of Seven Species of Grouper (Serranidae, Epinephelinae) in the Western Atlantic Ocean from Cape Hatteras, North Carolina to the Dry Tortugas, Florida" which has an obvious mistake. In Table 5 of the 1988 estimated catch of these seven groupers, the authors inverted the number of Warsaw groupers in the commercial and the headboat catch totals with the weight in kilograms. The MRFSS Warsaw grouper catch numbers were correct it seems and then all three were combined as a grand total for modeling yield per recruit and spawning stock per recruit ratio. The Warsaw grouper inputs need to be reexamined in this document and see if the legacy of these mistakes are found in other documents from before and after this publication for the

As a last note, a 1999 collection of documents in a compilation called "Life in Slow Lane" and the one titled "Groupers (Serranidae & Epinephelinae) Endangered Apex Predators of Reef Communities" by Huntsman et al blasted the SAFMC actions up to that date for certain grouper species including SH & WG. That document should be reexamined for relevancy to the current conditions. Mr. Huntsman had recently retired from NMFS it seems and the following footnote was included in that final report.

> [1]The critical opinion of SAFMC efforts is that of the senior author. The opinions of the junior authors, all NMFS employees, cannot be revealed.

On July 19, 2012, I received an unsolicited email [copy pasted below] from Michael C. Barnette, a shipwreck diving expert, and it was sent to seven other email recipients mostly from the SAFMC MPA Expert Panel. This "worthy" email drew issue with some of the mindset included in the MPA Expert Panel meeting's Final Report about shipwrecks, airplane wrecks, etc., as compared with natural bottom and advised caution.

[1] November 1976 Florida Sea Grant Program Report Number 17 edited by Bullis and Jones for the Proceedings: Colloquium on Snapper-Grouper Fishery Resources of the Western Central Atlantic Ocean Table 1: Species commonly caught by the Carolina Head Boat Industry found on page 194 attributed to Gene Huntsman, NMFS, Beaufort Lab, NC and footnote applies to Speckled Hind referenced above Warsaw grouper in this comment.

In the same MPA email Mr. Barnette had a hyperlink to a You Tube video recently produced by himself showing 7-minutes of various footage of SH and WG taken while diving on various wrecks.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_UJ7ykqRS4k

I submitted to the SAFMC on August 08, 2012 in Cocoa Beach, Florida a copy of the 17-page email thread that contained more of Mr. Barnette's carefully worded responses to the various MPA experts that commented back to his July 19, 2012 original email. The entire thread is very important and should be carefully studied, considered and debated for future use.

Highlighted by myself below with the text of his email in bold print are some comments that are relevant to moving forward in a responsible way with this MPA Expert Panel's final product.

More material worthy of consideration can be found with Mr. Barnette's 2010 book titled "Encyclopedia of Florida Shipwrecks, Volume 1: Atlantic Coast" and should be a reference publication for any future MPA Expert Panel to consider. Mr. Barnette should be consulted as needed by the SAFMC MPA Expert Panel.

http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/encyclopedia-of-florida-shipwrecks-volume-i-michael-c-barnette/1028377742

I will conclude this comment and include the copies of the other comments for the SAFMC written record on the MPA, SH & WG issues.

Rusty Hudson

[**Bold print, enlargement and/or underlining below by Rusty to highlight Mr. Barnette's important comments.**]

Subject: **Observations of speckled hind and warsaw grouper in the South Atlantic region - Marine Protected Area Workshops information submission**
Date: 7/19/2012 6:06:08 P.M. Eastern Daylight Time
From: michael.barnette@noaa.gov
To:
koenig@bio.fsu.edu, SedberryG@dnr.sc.gov, DSF2009@AOL.COM, lindeman@fit.edu, Dondemaria@aol.com, Churchill.Grimes@noaa.gov, roger.pugliese@safmc.net, nick.farmer@noaa.gov

Hi All-

I think most of y'all know me or we have worked together on various issues in the past. I recently got caught up on the subject issues and **out of personal interest** wanted to offer some observations **on the presence/absence of the two critters in question**, per the solicitation for information in the MPA workshops, as well **as some basic, overall**

suggestions on the documents exploring potential management alternatives for SH and WG. Please feel free to pass this along to the other working group members **if you deem it worthy**.

First, I would suggest abandoning the idea of identifying "important wrecks" such as those identified in the Final Report (http://www.safmc.net/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=5Cl1M4ndCp8%3d&tabid=404). **First, it gives the impression that any cited wreck is more important or significant than other wrecks. While certain wrecks in the depth/habitat range of each species would likely offer varying amounts of habitat, and therefore be reflected in productivity from a fishing standpoint (i.e., some wrecks "put out" better than others for various species), I contend all shipwrecks (as well as rocky outcrops, cones, ledges, and other "rough" habitat) basically from 180 feet on out should be considered suitable habitat for both species (and increasing depth resulting in increasing habitat value for warsaw). And there are several hundred shipwrecks from 180-600+ feet from NC-FL that I am sure hold both species (particularly those with a lot of "overhead" environment), so picking out a handful and citing them as "important" is misleading,** IMHO. **Second, you are identifying these wrecks largely by anecdotal or past catch information, not by actual presence/absence. Third, I wanted to point out issues with at least a couple of the wrecks listed...**

The WWII aircraft listed in 180 feet: **all shipwrecks have finite lifespans, and airplanes have especially short ones**. I have dived on numerous aircraft wrecks, and most of the WWII era wrecks in the Atlantic are now largely just a couple shreds of metal that are sanded in. The point being that any decline in fish may not necessarily be attributed to fishing pressure or other issues, but the fact certain wrecks don't hold fish as well as they used to due to natural deterioration. Plus, the cited depth indicates to me that this is only a part-time habitat and likely only for sub-adult warsaw.

The VITRICK (sic): **The VITRIC (proper spelling) is an old schooner barge resting in 309 feet of water off Key Largo. There is no shallow end in 120 feet of water**, otherwise the wreck would have to be over two miles long. **This is not the "Motorcycle Wreck" - that is another wreck resting in 230 feet of water off Islamorada that was identified as the QUEEN OF NASSAU; also known as the "220 Wreck."** I am not sure where the information on the cubera snapper spawning aggs come from, and the statement about this being a nursery area without credible data is questionable. The **VITRIC is largely deteriorated**, with only several large storage tanks present at the site. **The few dives I have done on this wreck I have not seen warsaws or cuberas, but I have seen some specks.**

The language used in the **WILKES BARRE, KENDRICK, etc. is a bit misleading**, as relies largely on catch info as evidence of species' presence, and not actual observation (aside from Don's past

observations). I am not sure if Don is still diving these wrecks, but I am and the critters are still there (not speaking to changes in historical abundance, but just presence/absence)....

I definitely agree with the report statement that, **"The Workgroup analysis of existing observations clearly show that wrecks (ships, planes) and other man-made habitats are important for these two species." There is ample evidence that warsaw grouper utilize the hundreds of scuttled ships (i.e., artificial reefs) along Florida, and West Palm Beach to Miami in particular**, and **increasingly so for some unknown reason in recent years**. I have friends who have been diving many of the deep wrecks since their deployment in the early 1980s, and while there have been warsaws observed from time to time, **it seems the past couple of years they are much more common (typically 40-50 pound juvies), possibly due to emigration from other habitat areas (offshore?).** Sometimes this is coupled with seasonal upwellings, sometimes not. **As evidence, one only needs to look at all the reports of speared warsaws on these artificial reefs the past couple of years on the various spearfishing forums, keeping in mind that 200-300 feet deep is still the shallow end of the pool for WG.**

IMHO, **the use of Rudershausen et al. (2008), or perhaps the weight placed on its conclusions, is largely inappropriate**. For example, the Final Report states, "The "Snowy Edge" southeast of Cape Lookout is recommended as a good site for SH. In the 1970s, SH were among the five most abundant reef fish caught (most abundant grouper), but were severely depleted by the 1980s (Rudershausen et al. 2008)." As noted in the 90-day finding responding to the ESA listing petition for warsaw, the study states **"the total fishing effort in the 1970s was greater than 2005–2006, which could explain the absence of [this - warsaw grouper] species in the latter period." For the inshore sites, there were 78 trips in the 1970s and only 34 trips in 2005-2006. For offshore sites, there were 94 trips in the 1970s and only 20 trips in 2005-2006. Furthermore, the 2005-2006 trips did not visit as many different fishing areas as utilized in the 1970s work**, which introduces additional bias. While the conclusions are technically accurate, it's all about the context IMHO. **Also, specked hind was the 11th most abundant reef fish caught at Snowy Edge with only 5 specimens caught over 2 different trips (0.5% total catch).**

I have dived extensively along the SA and GOM coasts to depths in excess of 400 feet. In most cases, I am diving shipwrecks and am not really paying attention to the marine life except in cases when I see something notable; outside of the fact that my observed habitat preference is uniform, my observations could perhaps be considered random. But it would seem my experiences and opinions perhaps differ a bit from some assessments for both of these species. In particular, I have noted both species fairly regularly on deep shipwrecks from NC through FL. **I have also noted behavior peculiarities for both species, which could potentially bias census results using both ROVs**

and submersibles. In particular, in my experience, in many instances **specks flee** and hole up relatively rapidly, and may not be easily noticeable on standard transects. While in **many cases warsaw don't have a problem getting right up in your face**, I have noted many times they tend to get behind and follow you. I have been surprised by them on several occasions when I turn around or change direction after having not observed them earlier on the dive. **I am not sure if they would behave the same way for ROVs and submersibles, but something to consider if running straight transects without the benefit of video coverage behind you, and particularly if using bright lights.**

Anyway, I have droned on long enough. As a reward for suffering through the above, **I recently digitized a lot of my old dive video and put together a little clip demonstrating observations of the subject species on various wrecks from NC-FL. This is only a sample, as I did not have time to sit through all the footage looking for every example on each dive.** Again, this stuff is just happenstance as I am more focused on the shipwrecks themselves, and I am not really after purty fish. I switched to shooting stills several years ago, so I don't have that many fish pics as I typically use a 15 mm fisheye lens to get wide-angle wreck images. Hoping to remedy that in the near future. **I did include a recent shot of a typical warsaw observed on the South Florida artificial reefs, as well as a juvie speck shot from a couple weeks ago;** the little bastard would not let me get close enough to get a nicer image. **A friend caught a nice warsaw on the same wreck (QUEEN OF NASSAU) a little while back as well**. I did include a couple shots of snowy grouper, as I tend to see them as well. The video ends with a clip of a white margate spawning aggregation on the WILKES just for general informational purposes. There were several pockets of fish around the wreck like that documented on video. I left the audio on from the dives for your amusement....
Enjoy!

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_UJ7ykqRS4k

Cheers,
Mike

--
Michael Barnette
Fishery Biologist
Protected Resources Division - Southeast Regional Office
National Marine Fisheries Service

Rusty

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Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Coastal Shark (CS) AP Florida (FL) commercial & for-hire recreational member
Former South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Marine Protected Area (MPA) AP FL commercial member
Former NMFS Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team FL member (ALWTRT)
Former NMFS Bottlenose Dolphin Take Reduction Team FL member (BDTRT)
Current American Elasmobranch Society (AES) member
Participant, observer and/or contributor to US coastal shark stock assessments during 1992, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2011 and 2012
Participant, observer and/or contributor SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) 11 (Large Coastal Sharks), 13 (Small Coastal Sharks), 16 (King Mackerel), 19 (Red Grouper/Black Grouper), 21 (Large Coastal Sharks/Small Coastal Shark), 24 (Red Snapper), 25 (Black Sea Bass/Golden Tilefish), SEDAR 28 (Spanish Mackerel/Cobia) and SEDAR 29 (Gulf Blacktip Shark)

On Aug 20, 2012, at 9:53 AM, "DSF2009@aol.com" <DSF2009@aol.com> wrote:

To: Myra Brouwer,

Please add this 17-page email thread to the public record for MPAs which includes the Michael Barnette communications with various MPA Experts detailing problems with assumptions of the MPA Expert Panel final report dated June 01, 2012. Hard copy was submitted on August 08, 2012 at the SAFMC public hearing in Cocoa Beach, Florida.

The earliest thread from July 19, 2012 begins at the end of the 17-pages and works forward in time to where I submitted email copy to the list openly copied below on August 07, 2012.

Rusty Hudson

From: DSF2009@aol.com
To: robert.mahood@safmc.net, palmettobooks@bellsouth.net, mackattackben@att.net
CC: michael.barnette@noaa.gov, koenig@bio.fsu.edu, lindeman@fit.edu, churchill.grimes@noaa.gov, roger.pugliese@safmc.net, Nick.Farmer@noaa.gov, abundantseafood@gmail.com, sunrise@coastalnet.com, bobfish@aol.com, hullsseafood@aol.com, captpaul1966@aol.com, fishnmore@cfl.rr.com, ABACO711@HOTMAIL.COM, gregg.waugh@safmc.net, roy.crabtree@noaa.gov, bonnie.ponwith@noaa.gov, ga_capt@yahoo.com, tbburgess@embarqmail.com, mcurrin1@bellsouth.net, Wilson_Laney@fws.gov, Warner-KramerDM@state.gov, steveamicks@aol.com, tom@swatzel.com, Doug.Haymans@dnr.state.ga.us, Jessica.McCawley@MyFWC.com, jolleyjw@yahoo.com, michelle.duval@ncdenr.gov, anna@pamlicoguide.com, bellm@dnr.sc.gov, myra.brouwer@safmc.net, carolyn_belcher@dnr.state.ga.us, luiz.barbieri@fwc.state.fl.us, jim.berkson@noaa.gov, John.Boreman@ncsu.edu, jeffrey_buckel@ncsu.edu, SCadrin@umassd.edu, andrew_cooper@sfu.ca, chip.collier@ncdenr.gov, scott.crosson@noaa.gov, yjiao@vt.edu, eric.johnson@unf.edu, AMLange@aol.com, SLarkin@ufl.edu, ReichertM@dnr.sc.gov, george.sedberry@noaa.gov, whiteheadjc@appstate.edu, tyandle@emory.edu, fishzack@comcast.net, kensurffex@gmail.com, gdebrango@planethollywoodintl.com, irlcoast@gmail.com, dondemaria@aol.com, jlfishing@bellsouth.net, DSF2009@aol.com, sfaecfs@aol.com
Sent: 8/7/2012 7:38:32 P.M. Eastern Daylight Time
Subj: Fwd: Observations of speckled hind and warsaw grouper in the South Atlantic r...

To the SAFMC voting members et al,

Michael C. Barnette wrote during July 19, 2012 the following statement in an early email included on this thread at the bottom of this copied text;

"*Please feel free to pass this along to the other working group members if you deem it worthy*."

It is important for everyone to read these worthy written comments from Mike Barnette and to know that the debate about the Marine Protected Area (MPA) expansion is just beginning and needs better information and decisions before getting to the end of this process with regard to the Speckled hind (SH) and Warsaw groupers (WG) stocks.

Since the SAFMC voting members, the SSC and the SG AP are all involved, along with various academic and industry experts in the ongoing effort about the MPA analysis and by proxy **are** all "working group members" in my opinion as a MPA Expert Panelist from the May 16-17, 2012 Pooler, Georgia meeting. We need to get this SAFMC MPA SH & WG debate going into a meaningful direction and I am submitting this email thread as a public written comment to help achieve that goal.

The DSF clients believe that Michael Barnette and his recent book "Encyclopedia of Florida Shipwrecks, Volume 1: Atlantic Coast" **is an exceptional addition** to any marine library and his experienced

view of diving shipwrecks shared in this email thread, though personal are indeed **very thoughtful and useful** to the ongoing effort about the SAFMC MPA analysis SH & WG stock protection choices.

Please accept this email thread as a detailed MPA written comment from the DSF clients to further the debate about management choices for SH and WG. The first meeting of the Panel of MPA experts was too short, just two half day sessions and the need for a second and longer meeting is certainly evident. The debate on management choices is at an early stage in the opinion of the fishing communities to be effected by these potential regulations in the near future.

Rusty Hudson
386-239-0948

From: Dondemaria@aol.com
To: michael.barnette@noaa.gov
CC: koenig@bio.fsu.edu, DSF2009@aol.com, lindeman@fit.edu, Churchill.Grimes@noaa.gov, roger.pugliese@safmc.net, nick.farmer@noaa.gov
Sent: 8/2/2012 5:44:54 P.M. Eastern Daylight Time
Subj: Re: Observations of speckled hind and warsaw grouper in the South Atlantic re...

Mike:

I don't know what to say--other than:

<th_chill_pill.jpg>

Cheers, Don

In a message dated 8/2/2012 9:55:06 A.M. Eastern Daylight Time, michael.barnette@noaa.gov writes:
Hi Don-
Yeah, the suggestion to do any dives on Warsaw Hole was probably a silly one, as why would you want to do a fish census on an area you are looking to close down for conservation reasons? I guess it serves no purpose to potentially establish a baseline of an exploited habitat area that could potentially serve as a comparison down the road and after protective management is in place. Besides, I am sure with our agency's blossoming budget and robust technical diving program, it should be no problem getting out there any time to get useful information. I guess relying on fuzzy anecdotal information on what people caught decades ago, mixed in with speculation and conjecture on spawning aggregations, etc., should be sufficient.
Listen, I am not a "knuckle-dragging ape" (your term), as the last time I think I shot a fish was probably around 2003-2004. The number of fish I have caught hook-and-line over the past 10 years you could probably count on both my hands. I obviously have no commercial fishing permits or interests. I am not anti-MPA as I advocated for the Tortugas closed areas while working for an NGO prior to working for NMFS, and you can ask Rusty about out conversations on the expansion of Oculina Bank as we were on opposite sides of that issue. Basically, you would be hard pressed to even remotely try and consider me as anti-conservation.
But you can disregard my "handful" of casual observations on deep shipwrecks, even though I have been diving deep shipwrecks and other areas almost exclusively just about every weekend I am available and

the weather allows over a very broad area for over 12 years. And you
can laugh off the single speck I videoed on the WILKES, pretending
that was the sole purpose of that dive and assume that was the only
one on the wreck (FWIW, I have viewed video from the WILKES from dives
made back in the 80s and it did not look much unlike what we see today
[well, aside from the insane abundance of lionfish]).
I am going to extract myself from this conversation, as we obviously
are doing little to convince each other on a different point of view.
But perhaps y'all should look into some of those published books to at
least get the name of the wreck, depth, and its history correct ;>)
Cheers,
Mike

On Thu, Aug 2, 2012 at 7:34 AM, <Dondemaria@aol.com> wrote:
> Mike:
>
> If we would have waited until it was actually "proven" that mutton snapper
> spawned on Riley's Hump before the site was designated a marine protected
> area the Hump would still be open to fishing. No one that I am aware of
> observed mutton snapper spawning until years after the closure. We had a
> good idea the muttons spawned there from landings, accounts from fishermen
> and observations from above of fishing activity. Still, we were not 100%
> certain that this was not some sort of pre spawning aggregation and the
> actual spawning site was in the deeper water or elsewhere. We compiled all
> existing data and testimony from fishermen to make an educated decision, and
> we were right. This is what we are trying to do with SH and WG.
>
> As far as some sites fading from memory as you indicated. This is not the
> 1950's and earlier when the main navigational equipment available to
> commercial fishermen was a compass, wrist watch and sounding weight. We are
> in the age of GPS and everyone (unfortunately) writes down the coordinates,
> compiles them in books that are often sold with the vessel. Others, that are
> not even fishermen have published books. Sportfishing magazines not only
> publish GPS coordinates, but describe how to anchor and tactics used to
> catch these fish.
>
> The days of wooden boats and iron men are long over. Now, anyone with a
> Bayliner can not only reliably find the "hotspots" but catch fish, just like
> the hated commercial fishermen have done. Plus, they can pass the
> coordinates on to others, post them on facebook, etc.
>
> I remember diving the Wilkesbarre 20 plus years ago with Billy Deans.
> Speckled hinds were probably the most common grouper on that wreck, lots of
> small ones. There were some larger black grouper and scamps, but SH were
> plentiful. So, I am not sure what your video of one lone SH actually
> proves, other than to cast doubt on the assertion these fish are seriously
> overfished.
>
> I don't know that a dive on the Warsaw Hole west of Key West will prove much
> more than our dives on Riley's did prior to the closure. A few WG's can be
> found today on this site, but it is nothing like it was in the past.
>
> Don
>

>
>
> In a message dated 8/1/2012 5:04:43 P.M. Eastern Daylight Time,
> michael.barnette@noaa.gov writes:
>
> Hi Don-
> Good to hear from you - hope all is well with you and the family.
>
> I understand that things have changed in recent years. And I totally
> appreciate the impact of GPS, the internet, etc. has had in increasing
> accessibility to sites that were previously kept in tight circles.
> That being said, with the shut-down of LORAN and reduction in numbers
> of commercial fishermen, there are many sites that will likely fade
> from memory and, therefore, be "protected" more or less; I know I am
> still chasing some sites based on LORAN numbers (conversions are much
> easier in some areas than others). What has also changed in recent
> years is the cost of fuel, the overall economy, and the fishery
> management regime. Outside of the east coast of Florida and the Keys,
> it is a costly exercise to head to deep waters, and given the
> restrictions on many species, be it seasonal or year-round
> species-specific restrictions, I would expect these issues help serve
> as a deterrent to keep fishing pressure down in many areas. I
> certainly don't see as many boats - even on really, really nice days -
> the past couple years in many areas, when 10-12 years ago I felt like
> you had to take a number to work your way into the que to dive a deep
> wreck. The economy may certainly change for the better (I hope so!)
> in the near future, and I understand management should perhaps take
> that into consideration, but I am not sure we will ever see a
> significant declining trend in conventional fuel prices, not in our
> lifetimes at least.
>
> There are other species aside from SH and WG that are considered
> overfished and/or undergoing overfishing. As you know the biology of
> some species don't allow us to simply flip a switch so to speak to
> rebuild them overnight. It may take years or decades for some species
> to bounce back, even with a complete prohibition. So rushing to add
> additional protection after a complete prohibition may be a bit
> premature IMHO, especially if there are no metrics in place that would
> allow you to detect or differentiate the impact of those measures.
>
> And I know that what we see in the wild may differ from what
> biologists and modelers assert is going on out there. I definitely
> get that. Sometimes it's because I am looking at a smaller area or
> it's a fluke and I just happen to see an anomaly, or the difference
> could be due to a lag in the data availability from real-world
> conditions, or sometimes it could be due to a lack of good data. But
> the fact is we have been significantly handicapped in getting good
> information on the biological status of these deep water species, even
> moreso now with the lack of any fishery-dependent data.
>
> As an aside, going back to Rudershausen et al. (2008), is it not
> interesting to note that for the one good/comparable (IMHO) offshore
> data set (i.e., Snowy Edge), snowy grouper, scamp, yellowedge grouper,
> and misty grouper populations all seemed stable or "increasing"
> between the two time frames according to the numbers? If fishing
> mortality and/or release mortality were impacting these similar

> grouper species equally (i.e., unless there is some unknown
> gear/bait/other selectivity issue at play), would you not expect to
> see their numbers decline a bit too? Maybe it's just a species
> composition shift away from SH and red porgy to these other species,
> and I will concede that perhaps it is due to the former species'
> declines as a result of fishing mortality (or some other factor)? I
> don't know, but I thought that was interesting nonetheless....
>
> Again, I personally would be supportive of MPAs to offer additional
> protection to these species if the MPAs were well thought out and the
> science indicated the MPAs would be effective. For example, if there
> was information indicating an area served as a spawning aggregation
> site, or that larval transport would help replenish habitat areas
> "downstream" if impacted by current or retained if not. Information
> like this should be available and utilized to support MPA boundary
> designation, such as what was done for the Tortugas closed areas that
> you are familiar with. I am sorry but I just don't see that
> information being available. Maybe it's just the early stages and
> that information will be forthcoming, but I am a little skeptical of
> designating closed areas based on little more than presence/absence of
> a species, even if it's to prevent whatever remaining fishing pressure
> may be occurring in that area (hopefully it would not simply displace
> that effort and negate any overall gains). Because doing so would
> potentially undermine other MPA efforts.
>
> Don, I am not directly involved with this process and have no
> influence whatsoever. I am simply offering my personal opinion.
> That being said, I am all for working to obtain more and better
> information on these critters. Want to do some dives on Warsaw Hole
> in the near future?
>
> http://www.keysnet.com/2012/07/11/462122/fwc-considers-new-marine-protected.html
>
> Cheers,
> Mike
>
>
> On Wed, Aug 1, 2012 at 3:42 PM, <Dondemaria@aol.com> wrote:
>> Mike:
>>
>> Much has changed in recent years due not only to the availability and
>> accuracy of navigation equipment, but also publications available to the
>> public listing wrecks and other productive fishing sites. As all of us
>> know
>> certain fish, especially groupers and snappers, are attracted to wrecks
>> and
>> artificial reefs--often preferring those structures over natural bottom.
>>
>> So, if we have long living, slow growing fish that tend to aggregate on
>> known sites, and we publish the exact GPS coordinates of those sites for
>> all
>> to know and fish, then it is reasonable to assume that more of these fish,
>> like SH and WG, are going to be caught. Add to this the increased fishing
>> pressure by the recreational fishing sector in recent years, and something
>> has to give.
>>

>> Often, what I see while diving and the conclusions of many biologists do
>> not
>> agree. However, in the case of SH and WG, I am in agreement--these fish
>> are
>> definitely overfished and presently undergoing overfishing. You also seem
>> to agree with this, but don't feel that MPA's will have much of an impact
>> on
>> top of a complete ban on possession, already in place. If these species
>> are
>> still undergoing overfishing with a complete ban in place and the Council
>> and NMFS are mandated to stop overfishing, then what do you suggest they
>> do
>> to satisfy this mandate?
>>
>> Unfortunately, the incidental take of these two species is still
>> unacceptable. Even a complete ban on possession has little impact as they
>> are caught while fishing for other species and can not easily be released
>> unharmed. The only way I know of releasing these fish caught in deeper
>> water is to swim down and vent them at depth--very few anglers are willing
>> to do this. So, we are back to the question of how do you prevent
>> overfishing on these species. Apparently, the answer is to not catch them
>> at all.
>>
>> A series of well thought out and strategically placed shelf edge reserves
>> seems to be the most reasonable alternative discussed so far. I firmly
>> believe that if we are going to allow GPS along with other sophisticated
>> electronics to be used for fishing, alter the habitat and habits of fish
>> with artificial reefs and wrecks, and publish books on the exact
>> locations,
>> then we need to make concessions. That concession, in my opinion, are
>> shelf
>> edge reserves.
>>
>> Don
>>
>>
>>
>>
>>
>>
>>
>> In a message dated 7/27/2012 1:30:48 P.M. Eastern Daylight Time,
>> michael.barnette@noaa.gov writes:
>>
>> Hi Chris-
>> I don't think I ever refuted the conclusion that SH is overfished, or
>> undergoing overfishing, etc. I simply stated I personally don't think
>> it's as gloom and doom as some conclude (e.g., warranting of an ESA
>> listing for example), nor do I think MPAs will have a measurable
>> effect over the total prohibition of catch and harvest. Yes, there
>> will still be fishing-related mortality due to release
>> mortality/barotrauma; I am not refuting that, either.
>> I only wanted to offer some additional perspective, as I think
>> information on both of these species is extremely limited. And I am
>> all for trying to help improve on those information needs.
>> All of these e-mails are my personal opinions only.

>> Cheers,
>> Mike
>>
>>
>> On Fri, Jul 27, 2012 at 12:50 PM, Chris Koenig <koenig@bio.fsu.edu> wrote:
>>> Mike:
>>>
>>> Re the Rudershausen et al. paper, we could go round and round because it
>>> is
>>> very difficult to reproduce the exact fishing conditions now as existed
>>> then
>>> in the 1970s. So, it boils down to whether or not you think SH is
>>> overfished
>>> and undergoing overfishing in the SATL region (let's keep the Gulf out of
>>> this because there are no MPAs proposed for the Gulf). As for WG, there
>>> were
>>> not enough caught to do a stock assessment according to Huntsman et al.
>>> (1999). If you look at the stock assessments that have been done on SH ,
>>> they indicate that they are overfished (Huntsman and colleagues did this
>>> in
>>> the early 1990s). If you don't think they are undergoing overfishing,
>>> then
>>> you should look at the Ziskin et al. (2011) paper. In the Ziskin et al.
>>> paper, nearly 3/4 of the SH caught were juveniles and mortality rates are
>>> higher in the late 2000s than they were in the late 1970s-early 1980s.
>>> They
>>> conclude continued overfishing. If you don't believe those data and that
>>> conclusion, then maybe you should talk to some of the scientists who
>>> fished
>>> the Cape Lookout area in the 1970s. They include Churchill Grimes, who
>>> published their data (Grimes et al. 1984) and maybe Gene Huntsman, who
>>> published the SH stock assessment. If you don't believe the scientists
>>> who
>>> had direct experience with fishing the Cape Lookout area in the 1970s,
>>> then
>>> I would like to know what kind of information you would need. And you
>>> counter all this information with your casual observations of SH on a few
>>> wrecks?
>>>
>>> You say that the total harvest prohibition should have an effect on the
>>> recovery of SH and WG. How can a total harvest prohibition of these two
>>> species have any significant effect on their recovery since nearly all
>>> are
>>> dead via barotrauma when caught at shelf-edge depths, and the vast
>>> majority
>>> are caught at shelf-edge depths. Many fishermen fish high-relief
>>> shelf-edge
>>> habitat where a significant number of these fish reside. How do you
>>> propose
>>> to stop fishermen from catching them (and killing them) incidentally? In
>>> this case, a caught fish is a dead fish, whether the fisherman intended
>>> that
>>> or not.
>>>
>>> So, what "prudent management" should be put into place other than
>>> selecting

>>> habitat where these species reside and are being killed incidentally and
>>> proceeding with experimental approaches to locate spawning areas and
>>> nursery
>>> areas?
>>>
>>> Best,
>>>
>>> Chris
>>>
>>>
>>>
>>>
>>>
>>>
>>> At 06:08 PM 7/26/2012, Michael Barnette wrote:
>>>>
>>>> Hi Chris-
>>>> Thanks for the response. I will see if I can clarify some of my
>>>> points...
>>>>
>>>> I understand this is a first step, I was simply suggesting caution on
>>>> the general and specific information that is currently presented. And
>>>> I was hoping to provide correct or better information on some of the
>>>> listed sites.
>>>>
>>>> I did not mean to imply all wrecks are equivalent. I think I
>>>> mentioned that some wrecks are likely better than others, which would
>>>> likely be reflected by some wrecks "putting out" more than others.
>>>> What I meant was that I think all wrecks deeper than 180 are
>>>> *potential* SH and WG habitat. Of course, some wrecks will be better
>>>> than others. Size of the wreck, type of material, amount of relief,
>>>> complexity of habitat (e.g., barge vs freighter), etc. will all likely
>>>> impact the size and number of fish supported at any particular wreck
>>>> site. And then there is all the other factors at play that impact
>>>> local fish communities such as currents, proximity of adjacent
>>>> habitat, etc. But I think if there is a wreck (or other rough/complex
>>>> habitat) in that depth range, there is a *potential* for SH and WG to
>>>> be found there. That's all that point was.
>>>>
>>>> My point about increasing depth is this - if you have two identical
>>>> wrecks, say 200-foot long freighters, and one is in 200 feet of water
>>>> and one is in 350 feet of water, and all other things are equal, I
>>>> would contend the deeper wreck may potentially support more warsaws,
>>>> and larger ones at that.
>>>>
>>>> I accept that fishing pressure has increased in areas over the years,
>>>> particularly off South Florida. But I don't think it's appropriate to
>>>> conclude that an observed increase in warsaw grouper catch is solely a
>>>> result in increased fishing effort. If that were the case, you would
>>>> see other factors appearing, including reduced average size/weight,
>>>> etc. But look at the LA state record for warsaw grouper - of the top
>>>> 10 largest warsaws on record, 9 were landed in the past 10 years. Of
>>>> course there may be other factors at play there, but an interesting
>>>> trend nonetheless IMHO.
>>>>
>>>> I guess we will have to agree to disagree about Rudershausen et al.

>>>> (2008). I respectfully don't think you can say "the evidence is clear
>>>> that SH and WG (especially SH) were relatively abundant in the 3 areas
>>>> sampled off Cape Lookout and are not now." In the 1970s they caught
>>>> only 1 warsaw grouper compared to 0 in the same areas, which is not
>>>> really compelling data. And they only sampled 2 of the 3 sites they
>>>> caught SH in 2005-2006, so you certainly can't say there was a decline
>>>> in all 3 sites. Plus, the inshore site they only caught 5 SH on 2
>>>> trips out of the total 78 trips in the 1970s. They did half as many
>>>> trips in 2005-2006 to the same area. Your points about technology,
>>>> skill, etc. have merit, but I still think there may be bias due to
>>>> other factors including weather, seasonality, currents,
>>>> upwellings/water temperature, moon phase, etc. As any fishing captain
>>>> will tell you, some days the fish just don't bite. So I think
>>>> shortening the number of total trips can exacerbate "bad" fishing days
>>>> encountered during sampling and introduce bias. More fishing days, at
>>>> least approaching what was fished in the 1970s, could smooth out these
>>>> potential issues. If they caught more speckled hind over more trips
>>>> in the 1970s at this site, then I would definitely concede the point.
>>>> But the fact it was 5 fish on just 2 trips out of 78, should
>>>> demonstrate they were not a regular catch even back in the 1970s at
>>>> this inshore site.
>>>>
>>>> I believe there should be prudent fishery management to insure the
>>>> species is not whacked down to oblivion, and obviously allow for
>>>> sustainable fishing per MSFCMA, etc. I guess I just don't see the
>>>> situation as so gloom and doom for these two critters. If, say, we
>>>> had evidence warsaw grouper aggregated to spawn in certain areas in
>>>> number, I would be all over seasonal or year-round site protection,
>>>> even if the species were in good shape, since that type of rational
>>>> management makes sense to me. But we have no information as far as I
>>>> know documenting that, and SH and WG harvest and possession is already
>>>> totally prohibited in the SA. I personally don't think small or even
>>>> large MPAs will have much of an impact on top of that, and I certainly
>>>> don't see a clear way you could document their success to the
>>>> rebuilding of the species over the total harvest prohibition already
>>>> in place, a prohibition which has only been in place for a very short
>>>> time anyway.
>>>>
>>>> This has definitely been an interesting getaway from my normal gig
>>>> dealing with turtles and TEDs. I would be interested in discussing
>>>> this stuff further, and as you know I am always happy to talk about
>>>> shipwrecks. I would also like to get out to do some dives on Jeff's
>>>> Reef and other natural habitat areas - if you have any suggestions for
>>>> other interesting areas to dive, please let me know.
>>>>
>>>> Cheers,
>>>> Mike
>>>>
>>>>
>>>>
>>>> On Thu, Jul 26, 2012 at 4:14 PM, Chris Koenig <koenig@bio.fsu.edu>
>>>> wrote:
>>>> > Mike:
>>>> >
>>>> > Thank you for your comments on the MPA Workshop document. I agree
>>>> > with

>>>> > you
>>>> > on some points, disagree on others, and in places am uncertain about
>>>> > your
>>>> > meaning.
>>>> >
>>>> > First, I agree that we should be cautious about selecting ship and
>>>> > airplane
>>>> > wrecks for long-term MPAs because they are constantly deteriorating
>>>> > and
>>>> > some
>>>> > are nearly gone. However, we see our approach as a first cut--a
>>>> > necessary
>>>> > first step to get the process of effective protection for these two
>>>> > species
>>>> > underway. This is explained to some degree in the workshop document.
>>>> > In
>>>> > other words, we need to protect sites where these fish occur over a
>>>> > broad
>>>> > geographical area, but then use our access to those protected areas to
>>>> > further our research into the ecology of WG and SH and other important
>>>> > species that might be protected within those sites. As I have learned
>>>> > through much wasted effort, if there is no site protection, there can
>>>> > be
>>>> > very little done in terms of ecological research because the
>>>> > experimental
>>>> > subjects are continuously being removed through fishing.
>>>> >
>>>> > It remains to be seen if all wrecks are equivalent in the quality of
>>>> > their
>>>> > habitat for these species. That is not what the commercial fishermen
>>>> > here
>>>> > in the Gulf have told me. They say some are productive and some are
>>>> > not,
>>>> > suggesting that place in addition to depth is important for some
>>>> > species.
>>>> > But for now, it appears that wrecks that have been shown to have
>>>> > spawning
>>>> > fish are important for our our present needs and our future research.
>>>> > I
>>>> > know in regards to goliath grouper spawning, a great deal of spawning
>>>> > takes
>>>> > place on wrecks. I have documented that. But all wrecks are not
>>>> > equally
>>>> > acceptable to them for this purpose--I don't know why, but that is the
>>>> > case.
>>>> >
>>>> > And I am not sure that "increasing depth [results] in increasing
>>>> > habitat
>>>> > value for warsaw". Depths of about 70 to 120 m appear to be primary
>>>> > nursery
>>>> > for warsaws, but we are not sure. At least it looks that way in
>>>> > Madison
>>>> > Swanson (they are depleted elsewhere along the shelf edge of the NE
>>>> > Gulf).
>>>> > We are not sure either of their spawning habitats other than a few
>>>> > catches

>>>> > of gravid females reported in the Workshop document. However, if
>>>> > appropriate studies are done in protected areas where we know they
>>>> > occur
>>>> > we
>>>> > can find this out. Remember, this selection is step one and the
>>>> > selected
>>>> > wrecks are those with known occurrences of SH and WG, some of them in
>>>> > spawning condition. If you know of others that would be appropriate
>>>> > for
>>>> > protected status, please let us know.
>>>> >
>>>> > You mention that you have friends who have been diving many of the
>>>> > deep
>>>> > wrecks since their deployment in the early 1980s. It is too bad that
>>>> > no
>>>> > surveys of the WG or SH have been made by these people so we can
>>>> > examine
>>>> > trends. But, as you said, the primary objective of these wreck dives
>>>> > is
>>>> > to
>>>> > study the wreck, not the fish. So unfortunately we only have
>>>> > impressions to
>>>> > go on rather than semi-quantitative surveys. Fishing on the shelf
>>>> > edge
>>>> > is
>>>> > intense in the Gulf and I would expect that it is in the Atlantic as
>>>> > well,
>>>> > so it is hard to believe that incidental catch of SH and WG has not
>>>> > increased in the last couple of decades. And, as you know, increased
>>>> > incidental catch means increased mortality at shelf-edge depths.
>>>> > Maybe
>>>> > the
>>>> > wrecks are more difficult to fish and many WG and SH break off because
>>>> > they
>>>> > hang in the wreck (goliath grouper do this which makes them very
>>>> > difficult
>>>> > to catch while in wrecks). Indeed at least one of the WG in your You
>>>> > Tube
>>>> > video had a hook in its mouth.
>>>> >
>>>> > I definitely disagree with you about the use of the Rudershausen et
>>>> > al.
>>>> > (2008) paper being "inappropriate" for use in the Workshop Document.
>>>> > The
>>>> > task of this study was to compare CPUE, catch structure, size of
>>>> > catch,
>>>> > overall mortality (Z), etc. from past h&l catches (1970s) with their
>>>> > recent
>>>> > h&l catches (2005-2006) in the same approximate areas off Cape
>>>> > Lookout,
>>>> > NC.
>>>> > You state that the recent study sampled fewer sites and made fewer
>>>> > trips
>>>> > than the historical study. If the question is: has the abundance of
>>>> > WG
>>>> > and

>>>> > SH declined since the 1970s, then looking only at the number of trips
>>>> > and
>>>> > sites visited as introducing a negative sampling bias (lower CPUE,
>>>> > inadequate sampling site effort) tells only part of the story. As
>>>> > Ruderhausen et al. point out, a bias in the opposite direction
>>>> > (positive
>>>> > bias, e.g., increased CPUE, better site selection, etc.) is
>>>> > unavoidable
>>>> > in
>>>> > comparing modern fishing methods and captains with historical. The
>>>> > recent
>>>> > sampling used GPS and high-resolution echosounders whereas in the
>>>> > 1970s
>>>> > LORAN A and lesser echosounders were used. In addition, the
>>>> > experience
>>>> > of
>>>> > the captains was much greater in the recent sampling, being at least
>>>> > 25
>>>> > years of fishing in that area, whereas in the past study when the
>>>> > fishery in
>>>> > that area off Cape Lookout was just getting started, the captains had
>>>> > limited experience and were just in the learning phase. And the
>>>> > vessel
>>>> > used
>>>> > in 2005-2006 was much more maneuverable than the one used in the
>>>> > 1970s--the
>>>> > more maneuverable vessel could fish on small sites more effectively.
>>>> > In
>>>> > addition, captains in the recent study were free to visit the most
>>>> > productive sites within the defined areas--this allowed them to count
>>>> > on
>>>> > experience more than luck to increase the catch. It was also pointed
>>>> > out by
>>>> > Rudershausen et al. that Chester (1984) reported SH being an important
>>>> > component of the 1970s headboat fishery and was caught aboard the R/V
>>>> > Onslow
>>>> > Bay on the shelf edge during the 1970s in 28 of 33 trips (85%).
>>>> > Comparatively, even considering all the biases, positive and negative,
>>>> > none
>>>> > were caught on the 2005-2006 trips. There are other relevant issues
>>>> > discussed in Rudershausen et al., but I think the evidence is clear
>>>> > that
>>>> > SH
>>>> > and WG (especially SH) were relatively abundant in the 3 areas sampled
>>>> > off
>>>> > Cape Lookout and are not now. Thus, they are locations appropriate
>>>> > for
>>>> > protection.
>>>> >
>>>> > I agree with you about WG following ROVs and submersibles. In fact, I
>>>> > was in
>>>> > the back compartment of the JSL II for a dive on Madison Swanson in
>>>> > July
>>>> > 2010 and observed at least 4 juv WG following the sub. Red snapper
>>>> > also
>>>> > do

>>>> > this, but SH do not, but tend to remain secretive, as you observed.
>>>> >
>>>> > I am not sure from what you have written whether or not you are in
>>>> > agreement
>>>> > with protection of WG and SH. It seems as if you are saying that there
>>>> > are
>>>> > plenty of them ("But it would seem my experiences and opinions perhaps
>>>> > differ a bit from some assessments for both of these species. In
>>>> > particular, I have noted both species fairly regularly on deep
>>>> > shipwrecks
>>>> > from NC through FL."). It is hard to interpret your comment because
>>>> > you
>>>> > present no data, only your impression over a relatively short term in
>>>> > a
>>>> > time
>>>> > period when the populations were already considered heavily overfished
>>>> > (Huntsman et al. 1999). As I noted above, your observations of their
>>>> > occurrence on wrecks could be an artifact of the wreck environment
>>>> > providing
>>>> > some protection from hook and line fishing as it does for goliath
>>>> > grouper.
>>>> >
>>>> > I would like to talk with you about your extensive wreck
>>>> > observations--they
>>>> > could be very helpful in our attempt to increase the fishery
>>>> > productivity of
>>>> > these two species.
>>>> >
>>>> > Best regards,
>>>> >
>>>> > Chris
>>>> >
>>>> >
>>>> >
>>>> >
>>>> > At 06:06 PM 7/19/2012, Michael Barnette wrote:
>>>> >>
>>>> >> Hi All-
>>>> >>
>>>> >> I think most of y'all know me or we have worked together on various
>>>> >> issues in the past. I recently got caught up on the subject issues
>>>> >> and out of personal interest wanted to offer some observations on the
>>>> >> presence/absence of the two critters in question, per the
>>>> >> solicitation
>>>> >> for information in the MPA workshops, as well as some basic, overall
>>>> >> suggestions on the documents exploring potential management
>>>> >> alternatives for SH and WG. Please feel free to pass this along to
>>>> >> the other working group members if you deem it worthy.
>>>> >>
>>>> >> First, I would suggest abandoning the idea of identifying "important
>>>> >> wrecks" such as those identified in the Final Report
>>>> >>
>>>> >>
>>>> >>
>>>> >> (http://www.safmc.net/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=5Cl1M4ndCp8%3d&tabid=404).
>>>> >> First, it gives the impression that any cited wreck is more

>>>> >> important
>>>> >> or significant than other wrecks. While certain wrecks in the
>>>> >> depth/habitat range of each species would likely offer varying
>>>> >> amounts
>>>> >> of habitat, and therefore be reflected in productivity from a fishing
>>>> >> standpoint (i.e., some wrecks "put out" better than others for
>>>> >> various
>>>> >> species), I contend all shipwrecks (as well as rocky outcrops, cones,
>>>> >> ledges, and other "rough" habitat) basically from 180 feet on out
>>>> >> should be considered suitable habitat for both species (and
>>>> >> increasing
>>>> >> depth resulting in increasing habitat value for warsaw). And there
>>>> >> are several hundred shipwrecks from 180-600+ feet from NC-FL that I
>>>> >> am
>>>> >> sure hold both species (particularly those with a lot of "overhead"
>>>> >> environment), so picking out a handful and citing them as "important"
>>>> >> is misleading, IMHO. Second, you are identifying these wrecks
>>>> >> largely
>>>> >> by anecdotal or past catch information, not by actual
>>>> >> presence/absence. Third, I wanted to point out issues with at least
>>>> >> a
>>>> >> couple of the wrecks listed...
>>>> >>
>>>> >> The WWII aircraft listed in 180 feet: all shipwrecks have finite
>>>> >> lifespans, and airplanes have especially short ones. I have dived on
>>>> >> numerous aircraft wrecks, and most of the WWII era wrecks in the
>>>> >> Atlantic are now largely just a couple shreds of metal that are
>>>> >> sanded
>>>> >> in. The point being that any decline in fish may not necessarily be
>>>> >> attributed to fishing pressure or other issues, but the fact certain
>>>> >> wrecks don't hold fish as well as they used to due to natural
>>>> >> deterioration. Plus, the cited depth indicates to me that this is
>>>> >> only a part-time habitat and likely only for sub-adult warsaw.
>>>> >>
>>>> >> The VITRICK (sic): The VITRIC (proper spelling) is an old schooner
>>>> >> barge resting in 309 feet of water off Key Largo. There is no
>>>> >> shallow
>>>> >> end in 120 feet of water, otherwise the wreck would have to be over
>>>> >> two miles long. This is not the "Motorcycle Wreck" - that is another
>>>> >> wreck resting in 230 feet of water off Islamorada that was identified
>>>> >> as the QUEEN OF NASSAU; also known as the "220 Wreck." I am not sure
>>>> >> where the information on the cubera snapper spawning aggs come from,
>>>> >> and the statement about this being a nursery area without credible
>>>> >> data is questionable. The VITRIC is largely deteriorated, with only
>>>> >> several large storage tanks present at the site. The few dives I
>>>> >> have
>>>> >> done on this wreck I have not seen warsaws or cuberas, but I have
>>>> >> seen
>>>> >> some specks.
>>>> >>
>>>> >> The language used in the WILKES BARRE, KENDRICK, etc. is a bit
>>>> >> misleading, as relies largely on catch info as evidence of species'
>>>> >> presence, and not actual observation (aside from Don's past
>>>> >> observations). I am not sure if Don is still diving these wrecks,
>>>> >> but
>>>> >> I am and the critters are still there (not speaking to changes in

>>>> >> historical abundance, but just presence/absence)....
>>>> >>
>>>> >> I definitely agree with the report statement that, "The Workgroup
>>>> >> analysis of existing observations clearly show that wrecks (ships,
>>>> >> planes) and other man-made habitats are important for these two
>>>> >> species." There is ample evidence that warsaw grouper utilize the
>>>> >> hundreds of scuttled ships (i.e., artificial reefs) along Florida,
>>>> >> and
>>>> >> West Palm Beach to Miami in particular, and increasingly so for some
>>>> >> unknown reason in recent years. I have friends who have been diving
>>>> >> many of the deep wrecks since their deployment in the early 1980s,
>>>> >> and
>>>> >> while there have been warsaws observed from time to time, it seems
>>>> >> the
>>>> >> past couple of years they are much more common (typically 40-50 pound
>>>> >> juvies), possibly due to emigration from other habitat areas
>>>> >> (offshore?). Sometimes this is coupled with seasonal upwellings,
>>>> >> sometimes not. As evidence, one only needs to look at all the
>>>> >> reports
>>>> >> of speared warsaws on these artificial reefs the past couple of years
>>>> >> on the various spearfishing forums, keeping in mind that 200-300 feet
>>>> >> deep is still the shallow end of the pool for WG.
>>>> >>
>>>> >> IMHO, the use of Rudershausen et al. (2008), or perhaps the weight
>>>> >> placed on its conclusions, is largely inappropriate. For example,
>>>> >> the
>>>> >> Final Report states, "The "Snowy Edge" southeast of Cape Lookout is
>>>> >> recommended as a good site for SH. In the 1970s, SH were among the
>>>> >> five most abundant reef fish caught (most abundant grouper), but were
>>>> >> severely depleted by the 1980s (Rudershausen et al. 2008)." As noted
>>>> >> in the 90-day finding responding to the ESA listing petition for
>>>> >> warsaw, the study states "the total fishing effort in the 1970s was
>>>> >> greater than 20052006, which could explain the absence of [this -
>>>> >> warsaw grouper] species in the latter period." For the inshore
>>>> >> sites,
>>>> >> there were 78 trips in the 1970s and only 34 trips in 2005-2006. For
>>>> >> offshore sites, there were 94 trips in the 1970s and only 20 trips in
>>>> >> 2005-2006. Furthermore, the 2005-2006 trips did not visit as many
>>>> >> different fishing areas as utilized in the 1970s work, which
>>>> >> introduces additional bias. While the conclusions are technically
>>>> >> accurate, it's all about the context IMHO. Also, specked hind was
>>>> >> the
>>>> >> 11th most abundant reef fish caught at Snowy Edge with only 5
>>>> >> specimens caught over 2 different trips (0.5% total catch).
>>>> >>
>>>> >> I have dived extensively along the SA and GOM coasts to depths in
>>>> >> excess of 400 feet. In most cases, I am diving shipwrecks and am not
>>>> >> really paying attention to the marine life except in cases when I see
>>>> >> something notable; outside of the fact that my observed habitat
>>>> >> preference is uniform, my observations could perhaps be considered
>>>> >> random. But it would seem my experiences and opinions perhaps differ
>>>> >> a bit from some assessments for both of these species. In
>>>> >> particular,
>>>> >> I have noted both species fairly regularly on deep shipwrecks from NC
>>>> >> through FL. I have also noted behavior peculiarities for both
>>>> >> species, which could potentially bias census results using both ROVs

>>>> >> and submersibles. In particular, in my experience, in many instances
>>>> >> specks flee and hole up relatively rapidly, and may not be easily
>>>> >> noticeable on standard transects. While in many cases warsaw don't
>>>> >> have a problem getting right up in your face, I have noted many times
>>>> >> they tend to get behind and follow you. I have been surprised by
>>>> >> them
>>>> >> on several occasions when I turn around or change direction after
>>>> >> having not observed them earlier on the dive. I am not sure if they
>>>> >> would behave the same way for ROVs and submersibles, but something to
>>>> >> consider if running straight transects without the benefit of video
>>>> >> coverage behind you, and particularly if using bright lights.
>>>> >>
>>>> >> Anyway, I have droned on long enough. As a reward for suffering
>>>> >> through the above, I recently digitized a lot of my old dive video
>>>> >> and
>>>> >> put together a little clip demonstrating observations of the subject
>>>> >> species on various wrecks from NC-FL. This is only a sample, as I
>>>> >> did
>>>> >> not have time to sit through all the footage looking for every
>>>> >> example
>>>> >> on each dive. Again, this stuff is just happenstance as I am more
>>>> >> focused on the shipwrecks themselves, and I am not really after purty
>>>> >> fish. I switched to shooting stills several years ago, so I don't
>>>> >> have that many fish pics as I typically use a 15 mm fisheye lens to
>>>> >> get wide-angle wreck images. Hoping to remedy that in the near
>>>> >> future. I did include a recent shot of a typical warsaw observed on
>>>> >> the South Florida artificial reefs, as well as a juvie speck shot
>>>> >> from
>>>> >> a couple weeks ago; the little bastard would not let me get close
>>>> >> enough to get a nicer image. A friend caught a nice warsaw on the
>>>> >> same wreck (QUEEN OF NASSAU) a little while back as well. I did
>>>> >> include a couple shots of snowy grouper, as I tend to see them as
>>>> >> well. The video ends with a clip of a white margate spawning
>>>> >> aggregation on the WILKES just for general informational purposes.
>>>> >> There were several pockets of fish around the wreck like that
>>>> >> documented on video. I left the audio on from the dives for your
>>>> >> amusement....
>>>> >> Enjoy!
>>>> >>
>>>> >> http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_UJ7ykqRS4k
>>>> >>
>>>> >> Cheers,
>>>> >> Mike
>>>> >>
>>>> >> --
>>>> >> Michael Barnette
>>>> >> Fishery Biologist
>>>> >> Protected Resources Division - Southeast Regional Office
>>>> >> National Marine Fisheries Service
>>>> >
>>>> >
>>>> > Christopher C. Koenig, Ph.D.
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Seafood Coalition (SFC) member
National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Advisory Panel (AP) commercial member
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Coastal Shark (CS) AP Florida (FL) commercial & for-hire recreational member
Former South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Marine Protected Area (MPA) AP FL commercial member
Former NMFS Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team FL member (ALWTRT)
Former NMFS Bottlenose Dolphin Take Reduction Team FL member (BDTRT)
Current American Elasmobranch Society (AES) FL member
Participant, observer and/or contributor to US coastal shark stock assessments during 1992, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2011 and 2012
Participant, observer and/or contributor SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) 11 (Large Coastal Sharks), 13 (Small Coastal Sharks), 16 (King Mackerel), 19 (Red Grouper/Black Grouper), 21 (Large Coastal Sharks/Small Coastal Sharks), 24 (Red Snapper), 25 (Black Sea Bass/Golden Tilefish), SEDAR 28 (Spanish Mackerel/Cobia) and SEDAR 29 (Gulf Blacktip Shark)

Myra,

Here are my comments on MPA additions/expansions for SH & W Grouper:

1) We do not know enough about the current status of these stocks to determine whether they need additonal area(s) set aside.

2) If there is not enough money to do proper stock assessments - there is certainly not enough money to evaluate the effectiveness of existing areas much less adding new ones.

3) MPAs are created with the idea they will be permanant and never go away. There may be sunset clauses attached but it is too easy to extend their existence with zero proof that there is any effectiveness or positive results from them.

4) Should an be MPA created, it should have a finite period after which the designation is completely dropped - unless, absolute, peir-reviewed, conclusive evidence is produced that illustrates the effectiveness and productivity of the designated area. This will stop the full scale effort to close bottom without the need to prove effectiveness. It will also focus the scientific, evaluation efforts on the most productive sites.

5) For the above reasons, I am against the rush to create MPAs for these species until after legitimate science is done to justify the need.

Thank you.

Mike Merrifield
Cape Canaveral Shrimp Co.
Wild Ocean Seafood Market

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SFA ECFS MPA Issue Items
Monday August 20, 2012
MPAWorkshopComments@safmc.net

With respect to developing Snapper Grouper (SG) fishery management plans (FMPs) to support new and expanded marine protected areas (MPAs) in the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) region because of Speckled Hind (SH) & Warsaw Grouper (WG), we encourage the Council to consider the following issues of concern:

1. The SAFMC has presented no critical review of evidence to justify new and expanded MPA's in the South Atlantic Council region.

Preceding the MPA "expert panel" meeting on May 16-17, 2012 in Pooler, Georgia the "Trojan-horse" justification for new and expanded MPAs in the South Atlantic Council regions, designation of either SH or WG as threatened or endangered by the federal government under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), was not supported by recent National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) reviews.[1] A substantial portion of the scientific literature (11 of 34 documents) supporting the current case for new and expanded MPAs for SH & WG was presented electronically AFTER the Council's "MPA expert panel meeting." Some of the documents were submitted by invited MPA experts, while of another 7 documents requested by the SFA ECFS, 3 papers were still not available as of today, and 4 were electronically available since the meeting ended. One of the research reference articles discussed in plenary on the final day, Harter et al. (2009)[2], was only made available to the panel after the MPA expert panel meeting. Harter et al. (2009) presented poorly-controlled experimental evidence on the efficacy of the *Oculina* habit area of particular concern (OHAPC) in supporting higher density of groupers inside the OHAPC versus unprotected (open hook and line fishing access) areas. Specifically, aggregate grouper density was only significantly higher in one of the five OHPAC habitat-types versus those in "open area" control sites. In this one significant main effect for habitat/ grouper density, higher aggregate grouper abundance (i.e. density, groupers / hectare) may have resulted from habitat "density-dependency" issues, where percent cover of "rocky outcrop" habitat was significantly higher in the open area, which may result in a dispersed stock (i.e. lower grouper density), rather than a main effect of "fishing-removal" between the areas. Alternatively, there is more compelling evidence that smaller "spawning aggregation" reserves, such as Riley's Hump, may protect and increase density of gravid aggregating females (see Burton et al. 2005)[3] and

[1] Federal Register 2012 May 01 Speckled Hind ESA Finding
Federal Register 2010 September 28 Warsaw Grouper ESA Finding
[2] Harter S.L., Ribera M.M., Shepard A.N., and J.K. Reed J.K. 2009. Assessment of fish populations on Oculina Bank, a deep-sea coral marine protected area off eastern Florida.
[3] Burton M.L., Brennan K.J., Munoz R.C., and R.O. Parker. 2005. Preliminary evidence of increased spawning aggregations of mutton snapper, Lutjanus analis at Riley's Hump two years after establishment of the Tortugas South Ecological Reserve. Fish. Bull. 103: 404-410

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consequently, may increase recruitment potential in downstream reef tracts. In summary, the SAFMC should produce a thorough review of the evidence on the efficacy of the current MPAs to provide justification of new and expanded larger MPAs versus the potential advantage of smaller "spawning aggregation" reserves. We believe the SAFMC's MPA policy should be based upon a rigorous review of "the best scientific information available."

2. Weak SH and WG stock / population assessments in the South Atlantic region do not justify new and expanded MPAs. There is <u>not</u> sufficient evidence that "overfishing" of SH & WG is still occurring and this should necessitate proper assessment <u>before</u> creation of new or expanded MPAs.

The historical assessments of the South Atlantic Council regional stocks of SH & WG by Huntsman et al. (e.g., 1976, 1992, 1994)[4], Grimes et al. (1982)[5], and Rudershausen et al. (2008)[6] are wrought with spatial bias making them unacceptable for characterizing stock status of these species in the South Atlantic Council's management region. For example, in Rudershausen et al. (2008), SH sample collection was restricted to the Onslow Bay, North Carolina region. The data series from a preliminary stock assessment of SH by Huntsman et al (1992), was constructed with data collected largely from SC & NC headboats and commercial landings that represent a predominately inshore and female SH sub-population. This analysis cannot, alone, represent the SAFMC SH population sufficiently. Clearly, the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), in their April 2012 meeting, had reservations on supporting the "overfishing" status for SH & WG based upon these and other analyses that lack the resolution of a SouthEast Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) stock assessment. We believe that development of FMPs (e.g. MPAs), based on the current stock status of SH & WG, are premature and without adequate scientific merit until a full benchmark stock assessment is completed on these species.

[4] Huntsman G.R., 1976. Offshore Headboat Fishing in North and South Carolina.
Huntsman G.R., Potts J.C., Mays R., Dixon R.L, Willis P.W., Burton M., and B. W. Harvey. 1992. A stock assessment of the Snapper-Grouper Complex in the U.S. South Atlantic based on fish caught in 1990. Report submitted to SAFMC.
Huntsman G. R., Potts J.C., and R. W. Mays, 1994. A preliminary assessment of the populations of seven species of grouper (Serranidae, Epinephelinae) in the western Atlantic Ocean from Cape Hatteras, North Carolina to the Dry Tortugas, Florida. Published on pages 193-213 *in* Proceedings of the 43rd Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Association Annual Meeting

[5] Grimes C.B., Manooch C.S., and G.R. Huntsman. 1982. Reef and Rock Outcropping Fishes of the Outer Continental Shelf of North Carolina and South Carolina, and ecological notes on the Red Porgy and Vermilion Snapper.

[6] Rudershausen P.J., Williams E.H., Buckel J.A., Potts J.C., and C. S. Manooch III. 2008. Comparison of Reef Fish Catch per Unit Effort and Total Mortality between the 1970's and 2005-2006 in Onslow Bay, North Carolina.

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3. The recent Amendments to the SG FMP have decreased bycatch pressure on the rarer members of the SG complex, such as SH and WG

The SG FMP has decreased the landings and trips for Snowy Grouper since institution of the rebuilding plan in 2008, thereby reducing the potential for bycatch mortality of SH & WG. Despite commercial and recreational closures of SH & WG directed harvest, many have contended that incidental bycatch of these species, as the result of open SG fisheries, will continue to result in decline of SH & WG. For example; Snowy Grouper, the annual quota of 344,508 pounds gutted weight was reduced effective January 01, 2006 to 151,000 pounds gutted weight and lowered by steps over the three years to 84,000 pounds gutted weight effective January 01, 2008. Prior to the rebuilding plan, commercial landings of snowy grouper averaged almost 173,000 pounds gutted weight from 2004-2007, with the step-wise reduced quota. Since the 84,000 pound quota was implemented in 2008, and that quota has not been harvested annually to date and landings for 2008 - 2011 have averaged just under 53,000 pounds gutted weight per year. The current annual harvest rate is nearly a 85% reduction from the pre-rebuilding plan quota. The quota has not been met because there is a 100-pound trip limit regulation associated with the current 82,900 pound quota and it is not economicially feasible for commercial vessels, in most of the South Atlantic Council region, to target snowy grouper at the 100-pound per trip level. The 85% decrease in directed Snowy Grouper annual landings is a function of reduced trips and landings resulting from directed harvest of the deep-water SG FMP complex including the SG Amendment 17B effective January 31, 2011 that established a no take of SH & WG for both the commercial and recreational sectors, which clearly must translate to significantly decreased bycatch of both SH & WG. In addition, the January 2010 closure of the Red Snapper harvest in the SAFMC area has drastically reduced the number of recreational and commercial trips and hooks in the water, thereby representing a significant mitigation of SH & WG potential bycatch. Clearly, resolution of the decrease in SH & WG bycatch resulting from the Snowy Grouper rebuilding plan, and these other SG FMP amendments, must be considered in a thorough stock assessment for SH & WG.

Jimmy Hull, Chairman SFA ECFS
JGH/pjb/rhh

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From: charlesandgeorge@bellsouth.net
To: mpaworkshop comments
Cc: Trip Aukeman; greg craddock; grburdette@aol.com; steve orman; george lindley
Subject: If the fishing is good there, close it
Date: Wednesday, August 01, 2012 4:24:02 PM

I object to the increasing use of MPA's as a management tool. The regulation of fishing has gotten completely out of hand. To close an entire area to fishing because someone might accidently catch a fish of the wrong species should only be used in extreme emergencies. To establish significant numbers of closed areas is unnecessary at this time. You have enough management tools to accomplish your goals without taking such radical measures. The final report from your workgroup says over and over that they do not have enough data, so the answer is a scatter gun approach to solve the problem? That does not say much for your scientists. You say we do not know where they spawn so we will close the areas where other species spawn, maybe we will get lucky. My personal feeling is you just want to close as many of the good fishing areas as you can get away with.

If you feel these extreme measures are needed and you do establish MPA's; at least have the foresight to limit the length of time they are in effect. Many of those will be unnecessary and difficult to remove in the future.

Sincerely,
Charles T. Holt, member CCA
616 Tara Farms Dr.
Middleburg, FL