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June 1, 2026

Chair Trish Murphey
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, SC 29405

Andy Strelcheck
NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Re: Support for Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 40

Dear Chair Murphey, Mr. Strelcheck, and Members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council,

Oceana appreciates the Council's work on Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 40 and supports the continued development of this amendment to allow the use of black sea bass pots equipped with on-demand retrieval systems in seasonal nearshore closed areas. We appreciate the Council's efforts to advance solutions that support both fishermen and marine wildlife.

As the Council considers Amendment 40 at its upcoming meeting in St. Augustine to review the work completed to date and reviews a range of alternatives to be evaluated, **Oceana would like to express its strong support for Alternative 2 under Action 1**, which would remove the seasonal prohibition on harvest and possession of black sea bass in nearshore areas for black sea bass pots equipped with on-demand retrieval systems. **We support Sub-alternatives 2a and 2b**, such that this action would apply annually from November 1 through April 30, the full extent of the seasonal management area in the SE region. We do not see a reason to consider any other alternatives as part of Action 1 and that the range of alternatives are sufficient to meet the Purpose and Need of the Action.

Regarding the modified trip limits considered under Action 2, Oceana agrees with the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel's (AP) recent recommendations that there is no need to reduce commercial trip limits for black sea bass pots as part of Amendment 40. As discussed by the AP, the fishery is unlikely to become a derby fishery given the limited number of active endorsements. We also agree with the AP that lowering trip limits could make participation in the fishery economically unviable for fishermen. Therefore, **for Action 2, Oceana supports Alternative 1: No Action: The trip limit for the commercial black sea bass pot component would stay at 1,000 pounds gutted weight.** We appreciate the AP's thoughtful discussion and believe their recommendations reflect a balanced and practical approach. Excluding these alternatives will optimize staff resources and allow Amendment 40 to achieve its goals without unnecessary actions that are not supported by the industry and may jeopardize the economic viability of the fishery.

Finally, given the AP discussion and support for maintaining existing trip limits, we recommend **revising the Purpose and Need statements to remove any references to reducing the commercial trip limit for black sea bass pots and removing Action 2 from this Amendment.** Again, this will streamline the Amendment and not use limited staff resources to explore and analyze unneeded alternatives.

Amendment 40 represents an important opportunity to advance innovative fishing practices that reduce entanglement risk for North Atlantic right whales while supporting continued access to fishing grounds for fishermen. We appreciate the collaborative work by the Council, AP members, fishermen, and staff on what we view as a strong win-win approach.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and we look forward to the Council's action later this month.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex Aines". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alex Aines
Marine Scientist
Oceana