



**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/SER25:RD

DEC 06 2013

Mr. Ben Hartig, Chairman  
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201  
North Charleston, South Carolina, 29405

Dear Mr. Hartig:

NOAA Fisheries has determined, based upon best available scientific information, the South Atlantic blueline tilefish stock is undergoing overfishing and is overfished according to the current definition of the minimum stock size threshold (MSST). This determination was based upon a review of the 2013 assessment of this species by the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review panel and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). A final report for the stock assessment can be obtained from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center's Web site at: [www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar](http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar).

The SSC recommended  $MSST = 0.75\% * SSB_{MSY}$  because the overfished threshold (MSST) is slightly below the rebuilt threshold ( $SSB_{MSY}$ ). Their concern was biomass of blueline tilefish could fluctuate between a rebuilt and overfished condition due to natural fluctuations in environmental conditions. If the MSST definition for blueline tilefish is changed to  $75\%SSB_{MSY}$ , the stock would not be overfished. The SSC, at their October 2013 meeting, acknowledged that  $75\%SSB_{MSY}$  is an acceptable choice for MSST for blueline tilefish, and voiced no concern regarding the adoption of this management reference point.

Within two years following Council notification of stock status, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires the Council and NOAA Fisheries to implement a fishery management plan amendment and regulations to end overfishing immediately, and rebuild the affected stock. I look forward to working with the Council in developing a plan to end overfishing and rebuild blueline tilefish.

Sincerely,

*Miles M. Croom*

*for* Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.  
Regional Administrator

cc: F/SER2 – Phil Steele  
F/SEC – Bonnie Ponwith  
F/SER25 – Jack McGovern

