



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
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/region/southeast>

F/SER24:KO

Mr. John Carmichael, Executive Director
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, SC 29405

Dear Mr. Carmichael:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) requests the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council review the enclosed Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) application at their December 2021 meeting. The EFP application was submitted by the Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF). If issued, the EFP would exempt, with certain conditions, the applicant from prohibited gear and fishing method regulations found at 50 CFR 622.9(c) and exempt the research activities from the seasonal closures at 50 CFR 622.403. Exemptions for any other applicable laws and regulations are not included in this EFP and would need to be obtained by the applicants through appropriate regulating agencies. The proposal is summarized below.

REEF is requesting authorization to test non-containment traps in the South Atlantic to harvest lionfish aboard commercial spiny lobster fishing vessels and state research vessels. The proposed research would examine the efficiency and efficacy of non-containment trap designs for capturing lionfish, with the goal of identifying the best modification to maximize lionfish catch and reduce bycatch. Traps would be fished singularly or in a trawl configuration. No bait would be used in the non-containment traps. Some traps would be outfitted with cameras and/or hydrophones. Non-containment trap deployment and retrieval would be compared to standard spiny lobster trap controls. Sampling with the traps would occur in depths from ~100-300 feet between Alligator Reef to Looe Key Reef in the Florida Keys with a total of 30 sampling trips on the state research vessels per year and a total of 20 trips per year on the commercial vessels. Vessels would deploy no more than 100 non-containment traps in the water at any given time and soak times would vary, but not exceed 21 days per deployment.

NMFS has analyzed the impacts of these activities in the programmatic environmental assessment titled "Testing Traps to Target Lionfish in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, including within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary" and will provide terms and conditions, including a sampling authorization for a maximum duration of two years, if the EFP is granted.

Sincerely,

Andrew J. Strelcheck
Regional Administrator

Enclosures

