



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

JUN 11 2019

Jessica McCawley  
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201  
North Charleston, SC 29405

Dear Ms. McCawley:

Thank you for your letter dated May 16, 2019, regarding concerns about the impact of large coastal sharks on fisheries managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

These concerns include increasing interactions between large coastal shark species in Council-managed fisheries, including depredation of snapper-grouper and coastal migratory pelagic species, gear damage, economic loss, and possible effects on the long-term sustainability and conservation of Council-managed species. To address these issues, the Council has suggested options such as using an ecosystem approach that would account for both highly migratory species (HMS) and Council-managed species, taking action to improve harvest of the entire Atlantic large coastal shark quota, and potentially increasing and improving shark stock assessments.

Currently, we are advancing efforts to implement ecosystem-based fisheries management (EBFM) for HMS. NOAA Fisheries released a new 5-year EBFM implementation plan that outlines how the agency expects to use EBFM principles for Atlantic HMS. This EBFM implementation plan is tiered off of NOAA Fisheries' National EBFM Policy and Roadmap, and contains milestones that include working with Fishery Management Councils on issues pertaining to HMS and Council-managed species, such as those described in your letter.

We have also begun the process for re-examining how to establish the annual catch limits for managed shark stocks. On May 21, 2019, NOAA Fisheries announced the availability of a scoping document on Amendment 14 to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic HMS Fishery Management Plan (84 FR 23015). In that scoping document, we evaluate potential approaches for establishing the acceptable biological catch and accounting for the uncertainty that arises from stock assessments, consider methods on how to establish annual catch limits in the absence of a full stock assessment, and examine options to establish acceptable biological catch, phase-in, quota carry-overs, and overfishing determinations. While Amendment 14 could result in a series of changes to shark quotas and shark management overall, we will need to continue to balance the needs of different shark species. We are requesting receipt of any comments on the scoping document by July 31, 2019.

In regards to shark stock assessments, while only a limited number of stock assessments can be conducted every year because of budgetary and staffing constraints, a benchmark assessment on the Atlantic blacktip shark stock, which is a large coastal shark, is underway through SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) 65. Currently, there is no stock assessment for this



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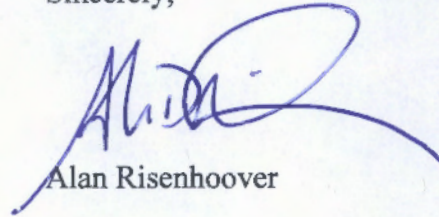




stock. This stock assessment is expected to be completed by the end of 2020, and will help inform future management decisions.

We look forward to continuing this discussion and working collaboratively with you. We also are willing to send staff from the Atlantic HMS Management Division to the upcoming fall Council meeting to discuss this issue and shark management. Please contact Karyl Brewster-Geisz in the HMS Management Division at (301) 427-8503 if you have further questions.

Sincerely,



Alan Risenhoover

cc: Greg T. Waugh, Executive Director, SAFMC  
Mel Bell, Vice Chair, SAFMC  
Sam Rauch, NOAA Fisheries Office of the Assistant Administrator  
Monica Smith-Brunello, NOAA GC  
Megan Walline, NOAA GC  
John McGovern and Rick DeVictor, NOAA Fisheries SERO  
Clay Porch, Theo Brainerd, and Peter Thompson, SEFSC Miami  
Erik Williams, SEFSC Beaufort