

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

February 4, 2026

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

We, the undersigned commercial black sea bass pot fishermen and small business owners from the Southeast, are writing to express our strong support for Snapper Grouper Amendment 56, which would allow black sea bass pot fishermen to access seasonally closed areas using on-demand (ropeless) gear. We respectfully urge you to move Amendment 56 forward without further delay, place this item on the agenda for the upcoming March 2026 meeting, and schedule final action as soon as possible.

For generations, black sea bass has been a cornerstone fishery for our communities, supporting working waterfronts, local seafood dealers, and family-owned fishing businesses. Seasonal nearshore closures implemented to protect North Atlantic right whales during calving and migration have significantly restricted access to black sea bass fishing grounds, placing financial strain on fishermen who depend on consistent access to these areas to maintain their businesses. Amendment 56 offers a practical way to restore access and allow fishermen to continue operating during times when closures would otherwise shut down this important fishery.

Through years of Council-authorized research and Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs), on-demand gear has been extensively tested in the South Atlantic black sea bass fishery. Between 2022 and 2024, fishermen conducted nearly 3,000 hauls using on-demand gear with a retrieval success rate of more than 99%. These results demonstrate that the gear is effective and reliable.

Amendment 56 is the necessary next step to build on this momentum and translate successful EFP testing into permanent regulations. Relying on temporary EFPs that expire and limit participation is not a sustainable path forward.

We urge the Council to continue this important work by advancing and approving Amendment 56 and ensuring that on-demand gear can be used to fish black sea bass in closed areas as a permanent management solution. Doing so will help protect endangered whales and sustain a historic fishery.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service.

Sincerely,

Michael Cowdrey

Owner, SBPE 8
Owner, F/V *Lady Kay*
Sneads Ferry, NC

Jimmy Hull

Owner, SBPE 7
Owner, F/V *Work-A-Hull-Ic*
Ponce Inlet, FL

Elbert Gaskill

Owner, SBPE 24
Owner, F/V *Miss Sandy V*
Harkers Island, NC

John Batson

Owner, SBPE 19
Owner, F/V *Cheerio Lady*
Carolina Beach, NC

Justin Wysowski

Owner, SBPE 25
Owner, F/V *Fishin' Mission*
Cape Carteret, NC

Lawrence Long

Owner, SBPE 6
Owner, F/V *Long Line*
Little River, SC

Stanley Pierce

Owner, SBPE 22
Owner, F/V *Olivia Renee*
Sneads Ferry, NC

Jesse Mock

Owner, SBPE 2
Owner, F/V *Mock 1*
Hampstead, NC

Charlie Locke

Owner, SBPE 16
Owner, F/V *Salvation*
Wanchese, NC

Charlie Phillips

Owner, SBPE 26 — F/V *Runnin' Rabbits*
Owner, SBPE 18 — F/V *Scrappy Dog*
Owner, SBPE 20 — F/V *Capt Lynn*
Townsend, GA

Mark McDaniel

Captain, F/V *Scrappy Dog*
Townsend, GA

Oscar Navarette

Captain, F/V *Capt Lynn*
Townsend, GA

Paul Young

Owner, SBPE 15
Owner, F/V *Impatience*
Charleston, SC

Scott Buff

Owner, SBPE 31
Owner, F/V *Reel-M-In*
Holden Beach, NC

Clarissa Grant

Owner, SBPE 8
Grant's Oyster House
Sneads Ferry, NC

Adrian Kugatow

Owner
Surf City Crab
Surf City, NC

Matthew Mitchell

Owner
Mitchell's Seafood
Sneads Ferry, NC