

February 9, 2017

Mr. Mark Williams, Commissioner
Georgia Department of Natural Resources
2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SE, Suite 1252
Atlanta, GA 30334

Mr. Spud Woodward, Director
Coastal Resources Division
Georgia Department of Natural Resources
One Conservation Way
Brunswick, GA 31520

Mr. Doug Haymans
Coastal Resources Division
Georgia Department of Natural Resources
One Conservation Way
Brunswick, GA 31520

Dear Mr. Williams, Mr. Woodward, and Mr. Haymans:

We appreciate your hard work to improve Georgia's fisheries and ensure these fisheries are sustainable for future generations. As Georgia for-hire captains, our livelihoods are dependent on these resources and the management decisions that you make are critical to ensuring thriving economies and healthy fisheries along our coast.

As you may know, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is developing a white paper to explore options for a limited entry system for federal Snapper Grouper for-hire permits. A limited entry system would have many benefits to fisheries off of the Georgia coast. First, limited entry would be a means to enforce future logbook reporting and reduce uncertainty in the for-hire catch data. Improved data is needed to more accurately assess the status of fish stocks and inform management decisions when setting annual catch limits. Second, a limited entry system would prevent overcapacity in the for-hire sector. According to SERO, there are currently 50 federally permitted for-hire vessels in the Georgia and this number has increased by 56% since 2016. Overcapacity can have numerous negative economic and ecological consequences, such as overfishing/overfished stock statuses, exceeding the annual catch limits and shorter fishing seasons. Third, a limited entry system would reduce the number of captains operating illegally without the necessary federal permits and make enforcement of this ongoing issue easier.

As Georgia for-hire captains, we take the management of fishery resources very seriously and aim to ensure these resources are sustainable. Fishing is a vital part of our lives and we depend on these resources as a means to support our families and strengthen our communities. **Therefore, we strongly support a limited entry program and request that Georgia support and work to advance a limited entry program for federal for-hire permits in the South Atlantic.** We are eager to see the white paper and discuss options to make this limited entry program a success.

Sincerely,