

February 17, 2026

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

Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator  
NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office  
263 13th Avenue South  
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

To Chair Murphey, Mr. Strelcheck, and Members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council,

Oceana has been engaged on Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 56 (A56) and is appreciative of the work that the Council is doing to utilize ropeless gear, also known as on-demand fishing gear, in the South Atlantic. We were pleased to see an action as part of A56 that would allow vessels using on-demand black sea bass pots to access and fish in seasonal nearshore closures that take place from November to April to protect North Atlantic right whales that are present. As we've mentioned in previous comments, Oceana strongly supports on-demand gear which helps reduce the risk of wildlife entanglement in trap fisheries.

**Oceana would like to see on-demand gear be approved for voluntary use in the black sea bass pot fishery and allowed in areas that are seasonally closed to conventional trap gear to reduce entanglement risk with large whales, including North Atlantic right whales.**

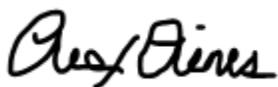
Approving access to an otherwise closed area with on-demand/ropeless gear in Amendment 56 will provide access to fishing grounds in a responsible way, and the Council should resume development of A56 as soon as possible.

Resuming and completing Amendment 56 is a critical step forward in ensuring that North Atlantic right whales and other marine wildlife are protected from deadly entanglements in conventional trap and pot gear while supporting healthy and historic fisheries. To ensure that ropeless gear can be used in seasonal closures and voluntarily outside of closures, we urge the Council to resume work on A56 at the upcoming March meeting and schedule final action as soon as possible.

Thanks to the Council's efforts, on-demand gear has gained considerable momentum in the South Atlantic, and A56 builds on that momentum from the Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) work and Amendment 36 to create a lasting opportunity for the black sea bass fishery. A56 would benefit both the fishermen and North Atlantic right whales by allowing black sea bass fishermen to resume fishing with on-demand gear during seasonal closures without an exemption and reduce the risk of whale entanglements. This gear is reliable, enforceable, and economically profitable. Over 100 individuals have been trained in the use of on-demand gear during the EFPs. Years of testing have gone into this gear, including 6,687 deployments from May 2020- May 2024 under the 2020 and 2022 EFPs with more than a 99% retrieval success rate.<sup>1</sup> While EFPs have played an important role in testing and data collection, they are a temporary measure that allows for limited participation. EFPs are not a substitute for permanent regulations. On-demand gear has been rigorously tested, and therefore the Council should move to establish more enduring regulations rather than relying on temporary exemptions.

We are pleased to see A56 on the March 2026 Council agenda and look forward to working with you on completion of this important action. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Alex Aines  
Marine Scientist  
Oceana

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<sup>1</sup> South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. "Appendix G: On-Demand Gear Project Summary." In *Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 36*. Accessed February 17, 2026. [https://safmc.net/documents/sgregamend36\\_revised/](https://safmc.net/documents/sgregamend36_revised/).