



**Testimony before the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
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Jekyll Island, Georgia**

Good evening. My name is Leda Dunmire, with The Pew Charitable Trusts. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments today.

We continue to support the Council's plan to protect spawning deep water snapper and grouper species through the designation of five new spawning Special Management Zones (sSMZs) in Amendment 36. Research, monitoring, outreach, and enforcement of these areas are critical to measuring their success. We appreciate the Council staff's considerable work in developing the system management plans for the existing MPAs and proposed sSMZ. Well-planned cooperative research will play an important role in Amendment 36 by stretching limited resources and bringing together fishermen, scientists, managers, and the NGO community to improve our understanding of protected areas.

We have been discussing such research to secure baseline data ahead of the Amendment's implementation with state, federal, and private partners and look forward to financially supporting this work at the three natural bottom areas later this year. We applaud the careful consideration and hard work that have gone into developing this amendment, and urge you to vote for final approval in full council.

We are very supportive of the For-Hire Reporting Amendment moving forward. It is a necessary first step toward improving data collection by increasing the accuracy and timeliness of fishery-dependent data, which in turn can help to avoid ACL overages and improve stock assessments. We submitted detailed comments via email last week that emphasized the need for the public to better understand the pathway and goals of this amendment. Specifically, we recommended the following five steps. (These are not to say there are deficiencies in development of the amendment to date, simply that these are appropriate next steps for the Council to take.)

1. Explain the three major phases of moving toward electronic reporting in the for-hire the sector: regulation (this Amendment), program design, and program evaluation

A clear explanation is needed of the role of electronic logbooks in recreational fisheries management and how they can benefit the for-hire industry. Connecting these pieces will help to define the path forward and build community support. This Amendment is an important first step, but implementation and evaluation of the program are also necessary before this information can be used to support management decisions. The Council has noted its desire to remove charter boats from the MRIP reporting system, but using these data to augment or replace MRIP is a long process that requires stringent validation and careful calibration.

2. Identify Short- and Long-Term Management Goals and Objectives

We encourage the Council to consider the specific management goals and needs that are driving this Amendment, and to state explicitly how it fits into a longer-term strategy for improving data collection, including what constitutes “better” data. Clearly articulating the Amendment’s goals is essential in designing the overall program and clarifying what electronic reporting will provide that the MRIP does not currently provide.

3. Articulate strategies for achieving these goals

Once goals are identified, they should be used to inform decisions about specific reporting requirements, such as frequency and mechanism for reporting, and data elements reported. Given the importance of discard mortality, for example, recording bycatch is essential. This should include depth information, measurement and condition of released fish, and information on their disposition to allow for more targeted strategies to reduce bycatch mortality in the future.

4. Incorporate Lessons Learned from the Gulf of Mexico and ACCSP Pilot Projects

For example, the recently-completed Gulf study highlighted the importance of recording trip information daily, whether or not the data is submitted daily or weekly. It also demonstrated that individual logbooks were not always in agreement with dockside sampling values, suggesting that implementation should be phased in at a smaller regional scale, and that a concerted outreach effort is important. This and additional information from the ACCSP pilot project as it gets off the ground should inform the South Atlantic’s plan for implementing this amendment.

5. Develop a comprehensive outreach plan

Buy-in from the for-hire industry is essential to the success of this Amendment. The Council should actively engage affected stakeholders in designing and implementing an ELB program as much as possible. Our suggestion would be to hold a series of port-style meetings throughout the region to increase communication, gather feedback, and improve understanding of how electronic reporting will benefit the for-hire community. Ideally, these would be conducted prior to finalizing the Amendment to allow for participants to be part of the program design.

Finally we are encouraged by the Council’s commitment and enthusiastic approach to developing a citizen science program to improve management. We were pleased to participate in the January workshop and will continue to assist in our capacity serving on the organizing committee and other opportunities that may arise. This program holds great promise not only to augment existing research and data collection efforts, but to build much-needed bridges among the science, management, NGO, and fishing communities. The whole is certainly greater than the sum of its parts when we envision the positive impacts to the region’s fisheries that can come from increased information-sharing, collaboration, science literacy, and trust.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. We appreciate your consideration of our input and look forward to continuing to work with the Council and other stakeholders toward healthier, more resilient fisheries and fishing communities.