



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

Southeast Regional Office

263 13th Avenue South

St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

F/SER25:FH

September 27, 2017

Dr. Michelle Duval, Chair
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, South Carolina 29405

Dear Dr. Duval:

NOAA Fisheries has determined management action is necessary for red grouper in the South Atlantic region as the stock is undergoing overfishing and is overfished, and is not making adequate rebuilding progress pursuant to section 304(e) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

In 2010, a Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review benchmark assessment (SEDAR 19) was completed for red grouper. SEDAR 19 determined that red grouper was undergoing overfishing and overfished. In response, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) and NOAA Fisheries implemented management measures to end overfishing and begin a 10-year rebuilding plan that started in 2011. In February 2017, a standard assessment was completed, which indicated that the red grouper stock is currently undergoing overfishing and is overfished and cannot rebuild by 2020 (SEDAR 53). The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee reviewed SEDAR 53 and determined that the assessment is based on the best scientific information available.

Following Council notification that a stock is undergoing overfishing and overfished and is not making adequate rebuilding progress, the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the Council and NOAA Fisheries to prepare and implement a plan amendment and regulations within two years of the notice to end overfishing immediately and rebuild the affected stock.

NOAA Fisheries recommends that the Council revise the rebuilding plan for South Atlantic red grouper based on the results of SEDAR 53. Two recruitment scenarios were presented in the assessment: long-term (expected) recruitment and low recruitment. Due to the effects of possible episodic recruitment, the Council could consider using the expected recruitment scenario when revising the rebuilding plan and timeframe. Additionally, the Council could take a conservative approach by adopting new annual catch limits based on the low recruitment scenario to increase the likelihood of stock rebuilding.

I look forward to working with the Council to develop a plan to end overfishing and rebuild the red grouper stock.

Sincerely,

Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator

Cc: F/SEC - Bonnie Ponwith
F/SER2 - Jack McGovern
F/SER25 - Rick DeVictor

