Public Reporting

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Public Comment Form

Meeting

September 2024 Council Meeting

The South Atlantic Council will convene in Charleston, SC for its September meeting from 9/16/24 to 9/20/24. Meeting information, including agendas, webinar registration, and briefing book materials can be found here: https://safmc.net/events/september-2024-council-meeting/.

Submit Date	Submitted By	Location	Affiliation	Comment
9/5/2024	First Name: Scott Last Name: Sampson Email: scott@fishingmaster.com	City: Orlando State: Florida	Private Recreational	In regard to Amendment 56 for Black Sea Bass, I want to bring attention to the section relating to "Potential Interactions with Red Snapper Evaluated Using Ecopath/Ecosim." In the amendment, in Figure 3, the losers under the Mixed Trophic Impacts are almost an exact match to those spring spawners having trouble recruiting according to the SAFMC seminar titled "Low Recruitment in Some South Atlantic Managed Species" at the 40th minute. We might not be able to trust all the data from the report by Gentry et al. 2021, as the reporters suggest, but that is an interesting outcome and correlation. In the report by Gentry et al. 2021, it also shows that if the biomass of Red Snapper is 10 times what we are currently estimating, then Black Sea Bass would be reduced by 20% over 20 years. That information was omitted from the Amendment. It is still not the numbers we are seeing as we have lost 80% of our Black Sea Bass since 2010, which is when red snapper were closed, but this is the best clue so far as to how it is happening. If you can't open Red Snapper a little, to save the Black Sea Bass, please close Black Sea Bass completely, as it is more important to save the species, in our area, then to worry about fishing for them. Thanks for your time and hard work on this! Scott
9/8/2024	First Name: Chris Last Name: McCaffity Email: freefish7@hotmail.com	City: Morehead City State: North Carolina	Commercial	September 2024 SAFMC Meeting Public Comment I have been trying to get the council to manage quotas with appropriate possession limits that avoid extended closures and excessive discards for over a decade. Our multi-species fishery needs to be sustainably managed so most seafood is legal to harvest at the same time, so we can target fish with higher limits while keeping most by-catch. This logical solution greatly reduces Regulatory Discards along with associated Dead Discards while providing accurate data rather than relying on worst-case-scenario assumptions. The premature commercial Gag Grouper closure this year resulting from paybacks based on last year's end of season retroactive quota slashing along with drastic cuts to Red Snapper quota despite being overpopulated have made it unprofitable to fish inshore. Those unnecessary closures have forced the entire fleet to focus on a few offshore species. This is flooding the market and driving down prices as consumers have fewer options with less quality. A glut of the same few fish means the oldest are being pushed first as the rest are held longer than they would be with a wider variety available. These avoidable closures compromise our safety at sea as we travel further and stay longer to be profitable. One solution that follows Magnuson-Stevens Act mandates to limit waste, make efficient use of our Public Resources, and promote fishermen's safety at sea is to set aside the final 25% of commercial quotas experiencing prolonged (more than a month) closures for 50 pound By-catch Allowances. Any quota under 100,000 pounds should be managed as by-catch. I would be happy to provide a detailed outline of appropriate limits for species experiencing prolonged closures and excessive discards. Please remember that fish and fishermen are more than just numbers. Just because you don't have to see the waste or feel the financial burden of multiple extended closures, doesn't make it any less tragic for those who do. We can achieve better rebuilding results with less waste and danger if we manage quotas wisely.

9/9/2024	First Name: John Last Name: Reed Email: johnkreed48@gmail.com	City: Fort Pierce State: Florida	Private Recreational, Non-Govt Org (NGO), Other	September 9, 2024 SAFMC Meeting Public Comment Re: Response to Oculina Habitat of Particular Concern (OHAPC) Proposed Amendment 10 and Options 1-4 The attached document provides critical information that clearly shows why the proposed Amendment 10 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the new Options 1-4 must be denied. The western boundary of the proposed shrimp trawling access zone abuts and even extends directly over high-relief habitat, i.e., Oculina coral ecosystem habitat (see Fig. 2 of attached document). NOAA Fisheries surveys of this region show that these high-relief features in this region depict coral ecosystem and fin fish habitat (see Fig. 1 a, b). Although Option 1 of Amendment 10 presented by the shrimpers proposes to move their trawl zone east of the high relief coral, how did they miss the high relief coral in the original Proposal of Amend 10. Clearly they don't know where the coral habitat is. Also it does nothing to address the additional factors outlined below. During ROV dives conducted with NOAA Fisheries at the sites in the northern OHAPC (Reed and Farrington, 2011), the dominant fish observed included scamp (common), gag grouper, snowy grouper, red porgy (common), amberjack (abundant), black seabass (abundant), tilefish, red hogfish, tattler, cubbyu, blue angelfish, bank butterfly, morays, rough tongue bass, bigeye, scorpionfish, batfish, wrasses. Dominant invertebrates include Oculina varicosa coral (10-40 cm colonies), gorgonian corals, black coral (abundant), sponges, starfish, sea urchins, and mollusks. Unfortunately, the mounds appear to have been impacted by years of bottom shrimp trawling as documented within the Oculina HAPC. Many of these fish forage on the flats away from the reefs. If the shrimp trawling zone is opened inside the OHAPC and made closer to the reefs, it will make these fish more vulnerable to bycatch of the trawls. Per Dr. Grant Gilmore: "I personally documented the rock shrimp trawl fish by-catch by participating in collecting and preserving the fish caught in shrimp trawls during a multi-annual Florida Department of Natural Resources [now the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission] study off Cape Canaveral conducted by Dr. Stewart Kennedy, 1973-1974. The trawl by-catch was substantial. Fishery impacts were primarily on seabass (Centropristis spp.), grunts, flatfishes, cuskeels and batfishes)." I presented these data from these NOAA cruises to the SAFMC; and together with members of the Council including Roget Pugliese, Shrimp Advisory Panel, and Coral Advisory Panel present, the Council drew the new boundaries for the north extension that would protect all the coral habitat and Oculina coral ecosystem. In 2015 the SAFMC council passed the amendment to include the northern Oculina HAPC. We don't need more studies. We need the SAFMC to keep the protections in place that helps sustain the health and conservation of this unique ecosystem. The current eastern border of the OHAPC of Amendment 8 was purposely drawn along the 100 m contour line and varies from a minimum of 500 m to about 1000 m east from the high relief bathymetry. This is a quite reasonable buffer. Per the Coast Guard, straight borders, and wide buffer zones allows easier enforcement to keep potential poachers and errant trawls far from the reef habitat. And it reduces potential sedimentation from the trawls on the reefs. If passed, this Amendment will allow shrimp trawlers access to bottom trawl within the boundaries of a portion of the OHAPC. It will increase the degradation and proximal destruction of this unique-in-the world coral reef system. Adding in the already existing environmental stressors the coral reefs here (and around the world) and we could see the unintended expansion of degradation and destruction growing within the marine protected area. The purpose of marine protected areas like the OHAPC are to protect areas of essential habitat, fish populations and their spawning grounds. That is the whole purpose of establishing marine protected areas. It is not and should not allow special interests devest MPAs of their purpose. If we destroy the habitat, we lose the fish; if we lose the fish, we lose the fisheries. The deep-water Oculina coral reefs are a unique coral reef ecosystem like no other on earth. These are truly a treasure that should be protected for perpetuity. Destructive fishing gear, specifically bottom trawls, should have no right to be used within the OHAPC. They have been banned for 38 years, there is no good data to suggest it is OK to allow it now. Opening a portion of the HAPC to trawling is a bad precedent. What would prevent the trawlers from requesting other portions of the OHAPC or the Deepwater CHAPC protected areas to be opened? Now is the time to protect these reefs, to allow the corals to recover, to allow the spawning aggregations of important grouper and snapper to recover. Now is not the time to diminish an area that is already protected. I am requesting that NOAA Fisheries and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council deny Amendment 10. I ask you keep the current protections in place: "No person may use a bottom longline, bottom trawl, dredge, pot, or trap in the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern. If aboard a fishing vessel, no person may anchor, use an anchor and chain, or use a grapple and chain." Currently there are no shrimp fishery access areas within the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern, and now is not the time to reverse course, nor to redraw the boundaries of the protected area. John Reed Research Professor Emeritus, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, Florida Atlantic University Johnkreed48@gmail.com 772-579-8215
9/9/2024	First Name: Shari Last Name: Anker Email: sranker@mac.com	City: Port St. Lucie State: Florida	Non-Govt Org (NGO)	I will send a comment to the administrator's email address.
9/11/2024	First Name: Brian Last Name: Cousin Email: becousin@gmail.com	City: North Palm Beach State: Florida	Other	I strongly urge that no changes be made to Amendment 10. Thank you.
9/18/2024	First Name: Nell Last Name: Brewer Email: nellbrewer1234@gmail.com	City: Jensen Beach State: Florida	Other	The Oculina Banks Reef is unlike any other deep coral reef in the world, and it represents the world's first deep coral marine protected area. The Oculina Banks Reef is critical habitat for many different marine animals including fish like groupers that use it as spawning grounds. There are thousands of species of animals that will be impacted by trawling on the Oculina Banks Reef. Trawl nets drag the sediment and deposit it on the coral, smothering the coral. The trawling also drags over and breaks coral. This critical reef habitat was protected by NOAA in 1984 because it is so unique and 90% of it was formerly destroyed by shrimp trawling. This decision to open the area to trawling will impact the health of the ocean ecosystem and other fisheries besides the shrimp.