

HARBOR BRANCH

FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

August 19, 2021

Mr. Andy Strelcheck
National Marine Fisheries Service - Southeast Regional Office
Sustainable Fisheries Division
263 13th Avenue, South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Dear Mr. Strelcheck:

This letter is an official request for an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) from NMFS for the collection of reef and pelagic fishes in federal waters of the South Atlantic (i.e., Florida east coast between Jupiter and Sebastian Inlets). The request is being made for approximately 2 years, from the date of issuance to an end date of 8/31/2023. Below I have filled out the requested details for the application:

Innovation
Exploration
Research
Education
Conservation

- 1. The date the application is submitted and extent of time (research end date) needed to accomplish work.**
Submission: 8/20/2021
Project Timeline: Date of Issuance – 8/31/2023
- 2. The applicant's and/or project coordinator's name, mailing address, telephone number, e-mail, and fax number, if available.**
Applicant Name: Dr. Matthew Ajemian, Assistant Research Professor
FAU Harbor Branch, 5600 US Highway 1 North, Fort Pierce, FL, 34946
772-242-2730; Email: majemian@fau.edu
- 3. A point of contact who can respond to any questions regarding the project that NMFS staff may have during consideration of your application.**
Same as above
- 4. A statement of the purposes and goals of the activity for which an EFP is needed, including justification for issuance of the EFP.**

The activities proposed will be taking place as part of a NOAA/NMFS Cooperative Research Program funded project entitled: *"Using a citizen-science approach to characterize shark depredation in the recreational fisheries of the southeast United States"* (Award #NA21NMF4540279).

Project Summary: Shark depredation is an emerging issue that is purportedly affecting several non-HMS (snapper-grouper, coastal migratory pelagic, dolphin/wahoo) as well as select HMS (e.g., tunas and billfishes) fisheries in the southeastern US. While the NOAA Office of Sustainable Fisheries recently produced a report on shark depredation in commercial fisheries (i.e., pelagic/bottom/vertical longlines), there have been no attempts to quantify these

interactions in recreational fisheries that heavily support the economies of this region. As indicated in the recent HMS AP meeting, these data are sorely needed to characterize the scale of the issue and determine the need for (and types of) mitigation measures. However, characterization of this issue is impossible without stakeholder involvement. Here, we propose a citizen-science based approach to 1) acquire depredation data (composition, frequency, etc.) in the recreational sector via leveraging our existing fishing partnerships), and 2) evaluate fishermen perceptions of the issue.

EFP Justification: This project hinges upon fishermen participation for collecting depredated fish carcasses, which we will swab for DNA and assess for depredator identity. We will achieve this through opportunistic collection of carcasses during ride-along surveys on for-hire charter vessels, which will be supported by a Letter of Authorization from NOAA/NMFS. However, due to budget limitations and other logistics we cannot participate on all charters throughout the year. Because depredation can be episodic and somewhat unpredictable, we anticipate needing additional samples to be collected while we are not out with our for-hire charter captains in order to maximize our sampling efficiency. To do this we are requesting issuance of an EFP for our four fishing partners to facilitate collections for this important scientific research.

5. A list of the specific regulations from which an exemption is being requested and why each exemption is required for the experiment to succeed.

Exemptions Requested:

- Federally permitted charter fishing captains may harvest all fish carcasses from Snapper-Grouper (SG), Dolphin-Wahoo (DW), and Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP) complexes that are exhibiting signs of depredation (i.e., partial removal of tissues) for transfer to the scientific team if they are managed by the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council and:
 - Below minimum size limits (SG – 622.185; DW - 622.275; CMP(Atlantic) - 622.380)
 - Above bag limits (SG - 622.187; DW - 622.275; CMP (Atlantic) - 622.380)
 - Out of season recreational closures for the following species (although we do not expect charters to target these):
 - Black Grouper (January 1 – April 30)
 - Gag (January 1 – April 30)
 - Red Grouper (January 1 – April 30)
 - Red Snapper (Outside the July 2022 recreational season))

6. Catch information:

1. **The species (target and incidental species must be clearly differentiated) expected to be harvested and/or discarded under the EFP.**

Four federally-permitted charter captains will be conducting these activities during routine fishing operations and opportunistically collect fish from the following species complexes that are damaged or partially consumed by depredators:

Species Group	Number	Expected Species (in order)
Snapper-Grouper	120*	Red Snapper, Mutton Snapper, Greater Amberjack, Gag Grouper, Red Grouper, Gray Snapper, Black Grouper, Cubera Snapper, Gray Triggerfish, Red Porgy, Yellowtail Snapper
Dolphin/Wahoo	60*	Wahoo, Dolphin
CMP	60*	King Mackerel, Cobia, Spanish Mackerel
TOTAL	<u>240*</u>	

*-numbers represent any combination of species within each complex. We expect a 2:1 ratio of fish landed above and below size limits, respectively, and expect approximately 10% of samples landed above bag limits.

2. **The number or weight, by species, of such harvest and/or discard anticipated to occur during the exempted fishing, regardless of whether or not it is retained for sale.**
SEE ABOVE
3. **The expected disposition of all regulated species harvested under the EFP (e.g., what will be done with the fish once it is caught).**
Fish exhibiting signs of depredation will be retained by the fishermen on board, isolated from other catch, and transferred to the scientific team when returned to port. Signs of depredation from landed fish include:
 - Fresh teeth marks and active bleeding
 - Partially removed trunk tissue (scales, skin, and muscle)
 - Exposed musculature and/or internal organs
 - Missing fin(s)
4. **Any anticipated impacts on fisheries, marine mammals, endangered species, or Essential Fish Habitat.** None

7. Anticipated effort information for each vessel:

For-hire charters will collect fish using hook-and-line techniques (bottom fishing, trolling, artificial and natural bait) in federal waters of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (3 nautical miles from shore to the gulf stream) across natural and hardbottom habitats outside of their ports of call on the Florida east coast: Fort Pierce (Last Mango, Shock Leader) and Stuart (DayMaker, Off The Chain). This region will span from Sebastian to Jupiter Inlet, ranging from 3 to 30 nautical miles offshore. Fish will be collected throughout the day during routine federally-permitted charter fishing activities, which can change depending on customer preference, fishing seasons, and/or environmental conditions. We expect that charters will fish an average of 100 days a year per vessel (400 days total), split evenly between bottom and pelagic fishing techniques. Up to six rod-and-reel fishing gear setups will be fished at a time on each vessel.

8. Information for vessels to be used for the EFP as soon as the information is available and before operations begin under the EFP:

1. **Vessel name.** Last Mango
 2. **USCG documentation number, state license or registration of each vessel.** 911403
 3. **Vessel home port.** Fort Pierce, FL, USA
 4. **Vessel owner information –** Captain Tristam Colket; (772) 569-0594; tristam4th@gmail.com
 5. **Vessel captain information and primary project participants –** Same as previous
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1. **Vessel name.** Day Maker
 2. **USCG documentation number, state license or registration of each vessel.** 1194801
 3. **Vessel home port.** Stuart, FL, USA
 4. **Vessel owner information –** Captain Pat Price, Inc.; (772) 405-0091; pat@daymakerfishing.com;
 5. **Vessel captain information and primary project participants –** Same as previous.
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1. **Vessel name.** Off The Chain
 2. **USCG documentation number, state license or registration of each vessel.** 1230970
 3. **Vessel home port.** Stuart, FL, USA
 4. **Vessel owner information –** Captain Scott Fawcett; 772-285-1055; fishscottyf@bellsouth.net
 5. **Vessel captain information and primary project participants –** Same as previous.
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1. **Vessel name.** Shock Leader
2. **USCG documentation number, state license or registration of each vessel.** FL 6427 SZ
3. **Vessel home port.** Fort Pierce, FL, USA
4. **Vessel owner information** – Captain Cole Hazellief; 772-979-1194; captain@shockleaderfishing.com
5. **Vessel captain information and primary project participants** – Same as previous.

All vessels are currently compliant with the Southeast For-Hire Electronic reporting program. Our results will be communicated with assistance from extension personnel involved in the project and will take the form of whiteboard videos and/or presentations to resource managers such as NOAA's HMS Advisory Panel and regional fishery management councils.

Sincerest thanks for your consideration of our application. Should you require additional information or need to discuss any further details, feel free to contact me directly.

Regards,



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