August 17, 2016

Dr. Bonnie Ponwith
Southeast Fisheries Science Center
75 Virginia Beach Dr.
Miami, FL 33149

Dr. William Karp
Northeast Fisheries Science Center
166 Water St.
Woods Hole, MA 02543

Dear Dr. Ponwith and Dr. Karp:

As NOAA Fisheries develops priorities for the science enterprise for the next five years as required by Section 404 of the Magnuson Stevens Act and considers how to make the most efficient use of limited resources, we strongly urge you to allocate means for conducting a coastwide, deepwater species survey along the Atlantic coast. The draft Section 404 Report to Congress includes the following items that are directly related to this request:

- Use a national process to expand fishery-dependent and –independent monitoring, including catch, abundance, and biological data collection to increase the number of stocks with adequate assessments;
- Expand surveys of stocks experiencing climate-related distributional shifts. These efforts will support climate-ready fisheries management and ensure long-term sustainability of commercial and recreational fisheries, protected species, and the communities that depend on them;

As you are aware, the Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils have been grappling with the daunting task of future management of blueline tilefish, a deepwater fishery that has clearly experienced a northward expansion in recent years, yet is data-limited throughout that distribution. Anecdotal information, fishing reports and even recent harvest statistics indicate this is not the only deepwater species for which such expansions are occurring, most certainly due in part to the impacts of climate change. Other examples of data-limited, deepwater species that are susceptible to the effects of climate change include golden tilefish[1], snowy grouper, wreckfish and blackbelly rosefish. Effective coastwide management of the deepwater complex demands an effective fisheries independent data collection system throughout the range of these species.

[1] https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/ecosystems/climate/northeast-fish-and-shellfish-climate-vulnerability/index

Over the past year, several efforts have been undertaken to address these data deficiencies: a collaborative deepwater survey design workshop in the South Atlantic with participation by fishermen and scientists to discuss methods, platforms and habitats[2]; cooperative sampling in portions of both the South and Mid-Atlantic aboard fishing vessels to pilot test gear configurations, depth strata and collect genetic samples; and a Mid-Atlantic Council call for proposals to develop proof-of-concept methods appropriate for bottom types found in throughout that region (http://www.mafmc.org/newsfeed/2016/request-for-proposals-tilefish-surveying.) It is our sincere hope that the insight gained from these opportunistic efforts will inform the successful implementation of a coastwide deepwater species survey that efficiently utilizes both industry and research platforms. We urge the agency to work with the councils and regional science centers to develop a long-term plan to implement a coastwide deepwater survey to follow the pilot efforts in the South and Mid-Atlantic.

In addition to the bulleted priorities noted above, the agency has recently issued multiple policy directives that directly support this need and justify the allocation of resources to support it: the Climate Science Strategy and associated regional implementation plans and the Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management Policy and draft Blueprint. The ability of a well-designed survey to address issues of climate-induced distribution shifts and inform our transitions to ecosystem-based fisheries management will ultimately improve our governance and coordination in managing these transboundary species. Our goal is to prevent future scenarios that are driven by lack of effective, coastwide sampling programs.

The development of science priorities through the Section 404 Report, combined with the launch of policies that promote and use large-scale approaches, presents an ideal opportunity for the agency to embark upon a ground-breaking effort that will meet critical data needs and management goals across multiple jurisdictions. We very much appreciate your consideration of our request and look forward to working with you to make this a reality.

Sincerely,

Michelle A. Duval

Dr. Michelle Duval
Chair
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Michael Luisi
Chair
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

cc: Dr. Richard Merrick

[2] http://docs.lib.noaa.gov/noaa_documents/NMFS/SEFSC/TM_NMFS_SEFSC/NMFS_SEFSC_TM_685.pdf

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Northeast Fisheries Science Center
166 Water Street
Woods Hole, MA 02543-1026

September 30, 2016

Michael Luisi
Chair
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
800 North State Street, Suite 201
Dover, DE 19901

Michelle Duval, Ph.D.
Chair
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, SC 29405

Dear Mike and Michelle:

On behalf of Dr. Bonnie Ponwith, Science and Research Director for the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, and myself, I would like to thank you for your letter, dated August 17, 2017, requesting additional investment by NOAA Fisheries for conducting a coast wide, deepwater species survey along the Atlantic Coast. Our Science Centers share your concern for improving information on important fishery resources in our shared regions and the changing conditions that are challenging our management and science operations.

We appreciate the leadership of both the South and Mid-Atlantic Councils in initiating pilot efforts to better define and explore collaborative deepwater survey design options. We also concur that a consistent multi-jurisdictional approach and long-term plan would be very beneficial. As we finalize our regional Climate Action Plans; and in the case of the NEFSC, transition to new science leadership, we intend to respond to this request more substantively later this fall.

Thank you for communicating this request to our respective Centers. We will follow up with you specific proposed actions in the coming months.

Sincerely,

William A. Karp, Ph.D.
Science and Research Director
Northeast Fisheries Science Center

Cc: Jon Hare
Richard Merrick