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From: <stevesmith@clis.com>
Date: Monday, December 05, 2011 9:51 PM
To: <Barbara.Niswander@noaa.gov>
Subject: sea bass

I tried to leave a comment on the SA web site and was unsuccessful so I am sending it to you. Please pass this out to the committee or include my comments in your report.

North Carolina offshore waters under Federal jurisdiction is a unique ecosystem that has characteristics of both the South Atlantic and Mid Atlantic Councils. In the summer we have semitropical conditions because of the Gulf Stream and in the winter we have cooler waters because the Labrador Current sneaks past Hatteras and winds shift to the NW and inshore waters cool significantly. The sea bass fishery is a major source of income for the fishermen and fish houses in the winter time. I know of a fish house in Sneads Ferry that will probably close for economic reasons because of the sea bass closure. This closure is having a significant economic impact on the coastal counties. A neighbor of mine is a teacher at our local hi school and is also a part time charter boat captain. He will probably sell his boat after this season due to not being able to let his customers keep only a few fish if he can't find the grouper. He spent 3 hours a month ago in the morning 15-20 miles off Cape Lookout catching only sea bass and american red snapper while trying to catch a grouper or trigger fish. His party caught over 300 "black" sea bass and had to throw all of their fish back. These bass were the dark ones with green heads that are caught in the mid Atlantic region in the cool waters north of Hatteras in the summer then migrate south in the fall through the spring. These dark fish are not overfished in the mid Atlantic fishery but as soon as they pass Hatteras they become overfished and protected just because of an imaginary line. The summer bass subspecies is a light brown fish that prefers warmer waters that head south out of nc for the most part. These are the fish that are intended to be protected by the closure now. There is no reason to close the season on the darker subspecies. Sadly many committee members are not aware of the 2 subspecies that I have discussed. Even Preston Pate was unaware of the difference. Please let the members know of the 2 distinct subspecies that exist off our waters. The mid Atlantic fishery and South Atlantic fishery does not know how far south the dark bass migrate. This needs immediate study and it can be done very quickly by letting the fishermen do a week long catch and see how and where the 2 sub species mix together. The best solution I have is to declare there are 2 separate subspecies and would be treated differently as are grey trout and speckled trout. Please open the darker skinned green head fishery that are off our coast and leave closed the browner sea bass that is overfished and has headed south. This would not make it necessary to move the Hatteras line to open the sea bass fishery and save many local jobs. I hope this helps your argument to help our local fishermen. ss

12/5/2011