

Good morning gentlemen,

I'd like to thank each of you again for your time and expertise in deliberating good fishery decisions on the SAFMC.

I've written a few times to advocate support for setting aside known fish spawning sites in the South Atlantic and would like to pass along this Letter to Editor published several weeks ago in the Post-Courier.

The letter was edited for length but I believe most of my thoughts remained intact.

Again, thank you for your service and hard work on the council.

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<http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20140823/PC1002/140829653/1021/>

Healthy fisheries

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) is considering whether to protect known sites where over-pressured snapper and grouper species gather to spawn. They should hear a resounding "yes"

from South Carolinians, given the importance of fish and fishing to our heritage and economy. SAFMC's decisions could create a legacy of healthy fisheries for future generations, or may be remembered as a missed opportunity to do something meaningful for the health our oceans.

Fish spawning aggregations are reported to take place in unique and rare places in our oceans, often along shelf edges. Some species may only gather once or twice a year to reproduce.

Not all fish aggregate to spawn, but many of our most important South Atlantic fish do, such as gag grouper, scamp, gray triggerfish and greater amberjack. Protecting the areas where they spawn can help healthy populations thrive and struggling populations recover.

Much research, input from fishermen and debate has gone into this strategy in our region. This research is facilitated by the SAFMC, the Marine Resources Monitoring, Assessment and Protection agency and the S. C. Department of Natural Resources, which has been collecting hands-on fishery data for almost 40 years.

South Carolina is blessed with a conservation ethic that fuels our coastal economic engine. It begins with sustainable fishing, smart seafood consumers (local residents and tourists) and local chefs who are building a world-renowned image of fresh, sustainable local foods.

Healthy fish is the connection between fishermen, chefs, local consumers, tourism and coastal businesses.

Research that pinpoints where these fish gather to spawn allows us the opportunity to protect them without cordoning off huge swaths of ocean.

I love living in coastal South Carolina for many reasons. Among these are going out fishing and enjoying the diverse harvest of the Atlantic. I support our local efforts to preserve, protect and also enjoy our fishing resources.

I encourage fishermen, sportsmen and seafood lovers alike to visit safmc.net and add your voice to this important issue.

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