



## SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Carolyn N. Belcher, Ph.D., Chair | Trish Murphey, Vice Chair | John Carmichael, Executive Director

November 21, 2022

Lieutenant Ryan Gilbert  
United States Coast Guard  
Seventh Coast Guard District  
Waterways Division  
909 SE First Ave. (Attn: DPW)  
Miami, Florida 33131

RE: Proposed Rule: **Safety Zones in Re-entry Sites; Jacksonville, Daytona, Cape Canaveral, Tampa, and Tallahassee, Florida** (FR Doc. 2022-22972)

Dear Lieutenant Gilbert:

On behalf of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council), I thank you for the opportunity to comment on the U.S. Coast Guard's proposed establishment of five temporary Safety Zones for the safe splashdown and recovery of reentry vehicles launched by Space Exploration Technologies Corporation (SpaceX) in support of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and privately chartered missions from January 1, 2023, through February 4, 2024. The Council understands the need to ensure the protection of vessels and waterway users from the potential hazards created by re-entry vehicle splashdowns and recovery operations, and the safe recovery of entry vehicles and personnel involved in re-entry services. Three of the five proposed temporary safety zones are in the EEZ off the east coast of Florida in the Atlantic Ocean: (1) Approximately 65 nautical miles (NM) northeast from Jacksonville; (2) 29 NM northeast from Daytona; and (3) 17 NM east from Port Canaveral, in areas where the Council has management authority for recreational and commercial fisheries, fish stocks, and the essential fish habitat (EFH) they depend on. Upon review of the proposed rule, the Council offers the following comments:

Several habitats federally designated as EFH or EFH-HAPC under the Council's fishery management plans for snapper grouper species, dolphin and wahoo, shrimp, and coastal migratory pelagic species, occur within or near the proposed Safety Zones. Although most of the impacts to these resources associated with recovery operations are expected to be short-term, cumulative impacts could be of

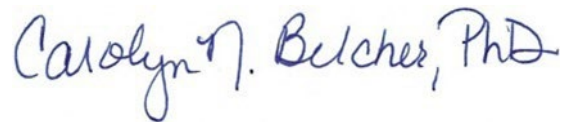
concern as the frequency of recoveries increases.

The proposed rule states the temporary Safety Zones would be activated two days before a reentry vehicle splashdown and recovery operation, however, the Council wants to ensure commercial and recreational fishermen are notified via the most efficient means possible to minimize disruption to fishing activity. The Council suggests expanding the means to notify fishermen beyond the proposed Broadcast Notice to Mariners (BNM) on VHF-FM channel 16, and/or Marine Safety Information Bulletins (MSIB) to optimize notification to commercial and recreational fishing vessels given the anticipated increased frequency in launch and recovery operations.

Additionally, future analyses should include an understanding of the potential cumulative impact on the benthic and pelagic habitats supporting local fisheries if there is associated release of chemicals during the recovery efforts. It would be important that the re-entry safety zones be clearly identified on digital navigation or AIS charts so fishermen and other boaters would not have to input coordinates each time a notification is issued.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment and for your consideration of our comments. If you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Roger Pugliese, Habitat and Ecosystem Scientist, at [Roger.Pugliese@safmc.net](mailto:Roger.Pugliese@safmc.net), or myself.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carolyn N. Belcher, PhD". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

Carolyn N. Belcher, PhD  
Council Chair

LN# 202229

cc: SAFMC Members & Staff

Monica Smit-Brunello, NOAA GC

John McGovern and Rick DeVictor, NMFS SERO

Clay Porch and John Walter, SEFSC Miami