



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Silver Spring, MD 20910

DEC 4 2017

Mr. Charlie Phillips
Chair
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place, Suite 201
North Charleston, South Carolina 29405

Dear Mr. Phillips,

Thank you for your letter of October 11 regarding the regarding the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's request for MRIP to re-calculate the 2015 and 2016 Atlantic cobia recreational harvest using an alternative estimation method. You indicate the Council understands "re-calculations of Atlantic cobia recreational harvest would require extensive resources and review, but could be available at a later date". You also request "a timeline for recalculated 2015 and 2016 Atlantic cobia recreational landings, and for evaluation of alternative estimation approaches for species rarely encountered during access-point angler intercept surveys".

As I indicated in my previous letter to Dr. Duval, we think a rigorous evaluation of the suitability of any estimation method other than the standard MRIP method is needed before we can justify producing alternative estimates of harvest for Atlantic cobia or any other fish stock, including those rarely encountered in the surveys. The current MRIP method is statistically valid. We need to be sure that the application of any new method would be justified on statistical grounds.

We have initiated joint planning within our Agency for a 2018 project that will evaluate the potential applicability of various alternative estimation approaches for rare event species, and we are hoping to engage the Council SSCs at some point in that effort. That project will also assess the applicability of an alternative estimation approach for cobia. At this point we do not have a clear timeline for completion, but our intent is to complete the project as soon as we can with available resources. We will keep the Councils informed on our progress.

We remain committed to working collaboratively with the fishery management councils to develop and certify statistically sound approaches that would be appropriate to apply in specific situations when standard MRIP estimates are not sufficiently precise. I look forward to working with you and your SSC as we move forward to identify and evaluate alternative estimation methods that can better support the management needs for the South Atlantic.

Sincerely,

Dave Van Voorhees, Ph.D.
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Office of Science and Technology
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