

A Message from Roy Crabtree (Southeast Regional Administrator) and Clay Porch (Southeast Science and Research Director)

The Southeast Region is unique in the complexity of its charge, covering four ecologically-diverse Large Marine Ecosystems with hundreds of species of fish that support the second largest commercial fishery in the United States by volume and more recreational fishing than the rest of the nation combined. Over 90 stocks of dolphin, whales and sea turtles also share our waters, along with many coral and other protected species. Not surprisingly, numerous management bodies share overlapping jurisdictions in the region, including three Regional Fishery Management Councils (Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean and South Atlantic), two Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions (Atlantic and Gulf), the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, and scores of other state and federal agencies. The political, fiscal and logistical challenges posed by so broad a charge are enormous, and it is clear that better planning and more effective collaborations are key to our success. We are therefore very pleased to introduce our first ever region-wide strategic plan.

This Southeast Strategic Plan reflects the same practical approach to conserving our living marine resources and supporting the Blue Economy as outlined in the National plan. We recognized from the beginning that there were not enough resources available to the Regional Office and Science Center to meet all of the needs in the Southeast. Accordingly, we focused on aligning our science and management priorities on those activities that will most benefit our constituencies. These include modernizing our data information systems (taking advantage of new technology and leveraging the capabilities of other agencies), reducing the regulatory burden on our customers, supporting design and permitting processes to increase marine aquaculture production, streamlining stock assessments, improving organizational efficiency, building trust and communicating more effectively.

Our strategic plan also embraces the fact that there are many other agencies at work in the Southeast region. The staff at the Regional Office and Science Center are enthusiastic, capable and committed, but they are only a small part of the wider enterprise. It is critical therefore to forge closer partnerships with the Regional Fishery Management Councils, states, federal agencies, academia, industry and other stakeholders who share our stewardship mission. Together, we can implement an inclusive approach to natural resource management that is based on both common sense and world-class science.

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