



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

Southeast Regional Office

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St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

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Mr. Gregg Waugh, Executive Director
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, SC 29405

MAY 21 2018

Dear Mr. Waugh:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) requests the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council review the enclosed Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) application at their June 2018 meeting. The EFP application was submitted by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). If issued, the EFP would exempt, with certain conditions, the applicants from prohibited gear and fishing method regulations found at CFR 622.9(c). Exemptions for any other applicable laws and regulations are not included in this EFP and would need to be obtained by the applicants through appropriate regulating agencies. The proposal is summarized below.

FWC is requesting authorization to test modified wire spiny lobster traps in the South Atlantic, to harvest lionfish aboard commercial spiny lobster fishing vessels. The proposed research would examine the efficiency and efficacy of modified trap designs for capturing lionfish, with the goal of identifying the best modification to maximize lionfish catch and reduce bycatch. Traps would be fished in a trawl configuration and would have modified funnel dimensions, varying funnel locations, escape gap locations and sizes, and bait types. Some traps would be outfitted with lionfish optical recognition technology. Modified traps would be compared to standard wire spiny lobster trap controls. Sampling with the traps would occur in depths from 100-300 feet between Alligator Reef to Looe Key Reef in the Florida Keys, approximately twice per month over the course of a year. Vessels would deploy no more than 100 traps in the water at any given time and soak times would vary, but not exceed 21 days per deployment.

NMFS has analyzed the impacts of these activities in the programmatic environmental assessment titled "Testing Traps to Target Lionfish in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, including within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary" and will provide terms and conditions, including a sampling authorization for a maximum duration of three years, if the EFP is granted.

Sincerely,

Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.

For Regional Administrator

Enclosures

