



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

Southeast Regional Office

263 13th Avenue South

St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505

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

F/SER25:FH

Dr. Michelle Duval, Chair
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, South Carolina 29405

MAR 03 2017

Dear Dr. Duval:

The most recent South Atlantic red snapper stock assessment (SEDAR 41) was completed in April 2016 and indicated that the stock is undergoing overfishing and is overfished, but is rebuilding. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the assessment and determined the assessment is based on the best scientific information available. However, the SSC noted there is considerable uncertainty in the exploitation status, and thus, the degree of overfishing is highly uncertain. The uncertainty in exploitation status inhibits the Council's ability to set an acceptable biological catch that can be effectively monitored. Additionally, in the February 15, 2017, response to a Council request for red snapper projections, Dr. Bonnie Ponwith, Director of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Southeast Fisheries Science Center noted that the overfishing determination was based on fishing mortality levels during 2012-2014 when a limited amount of harvest was allowed. Landings during 2012-2014 represented a high fraction of the overall fishing mortality, but since that time, harvest has been prohibited. Dr. Ponwith also noted that the uncertainty in the assessment is large and is predicted to increase as catch and effort estimates are updated through the new Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) effort survey.

NMFS has determined that the latest assessment identified the South Atlantic red snapper stock as undergoing overfishing, and adequate management action has been taken to address overfishing and continue to rebuild the stock through a harvest prohibition in 2015 and 2016. Due to uncertainty in the level of overfishing associated with the assessment and the new MRIP effort survey, data poor assessment methods for the red snapper stock, such as use of fishery independent indices, may be appropriate in the future. I look forward to continuing work with the Council on Amendment 43 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region to reduce discards of red snapper in the South Atlantic and continue to rebuild the stock.

Sincerely,

Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator

cc:

F/SEC - Bonnie Ponwith
F/SER2 - Jack McGovern
F/SER25 - Rick DeVictor

