



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

4055 FABER PLACE DRIVE, SUITE 201
NORTH CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA 29405
TEL 843/571-4366 FAX 843/769-4520
Toll Free 1-866-SAFMC-10
email: safmc@safmc.net web page: www.safmc.net

Duane Harris, Chairman
David Cupka, Vice Chairman

Robert K. Mahood, Executive Director
Gregg T. Waugh, Deputy Executive Director

June 23, 2009

Rear Admiral D. F. Baucom
U.S. Fleet Forces Command
1562 Mitscher Ave., Suite 250
Norfolk, VA 23551-2487
Attention: David MacDuffee

Dear Rear Admiral Baucom:

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) has been made aware that the Navy decided not to adopt the recommendations provided by the National Marine Fisheries Service Habitat Conservation Division (NMFS HCD) to protect and conserve essential fish habitat (EFH) during operation of the JAX Range Complex. Therefore, the activities may impact deepwater coral and other habitats that are spawning and nursery areas for federally managed fishery species including the recently designated North Florida Marine Protected Area.

The Council is concerned that the extent of the impacts to coral and live/hardbottom habitat cannot be accurately predicted at this time because very little of the Range is mapped in fine detail and it is also not feasible to forecast exact locations of where the projectiles used in training will settle upon the seafloor. Given this uncertainty, the Council supports improved enhanced coordination with USFFC and NMFS to identify data collection needs that will provide further understanding of the impacts.

Given the Council, USFF and NMFS HCD have a mutual interest in understanding the potentially effected environment and the impacts of current and proposed Navy activities, we support collaboration between the parties to establish an approach for improving coordination on data collection including but not limited to habitat mapping and localized oceanographic characterization to facilitate further impact assessment. It is hoped that as data collection and other research results in new habitat data, USFF will continue to reassess and incorporate such information into future environmental planning for the JAX Range Complex. Therefore, coordination could involve the following: the Council in cooperation with NMFS identify specific areas of known or potential deepwater habitat; USFF identify existing or potential areas where high use of expended materials that could potentially disturb bottom habitats or significant fishery operations; and the Council, NMFS HCD and USFF agree to further assess those areas in future environmental planning documents once areas of overlap are identified.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. Please direct questions or comments to Roger Pugliese (Roger.Pugliese@safmc.net) at the SAFMC office, (843) 571-4366.

Correspondence: Harris to Baucom, June 23, 2009

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Duane Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "D" and a long, sweeping tail.

Duane Harris
Chairman

Cc: (via electronic mail)
Council members and staff
Habitat AP
Coral AP