



**Historical Overview of the  
South Atlantic Fishery Management  
Council's  
Marine Protected Areas Related  
Activities: 1990-2006**

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**This material is intended to give the reader a brief overview of the Council's consideration of MPAs during the past 16 years. A more detailed account is available in our draft MPA Source Document. If you would like to receive a copy of this on CD, please contact the Council office (see cover for information).**

**1990** - The potential for using marine reserves within the snapper grouper fishery first originated with the Council's Snapper Grouper Plan Development Team (PDT). This technical group prepared a report (April 1990) entitled "The Potential of Marine Fishery Reserves for Reef Fish Management in the U.S. South Atlantic." The Plan Development Team offered this approach because they believed it was the only viable option for maintaining optimum size, age, and genetic structure of slow growing, long-lived species over the long-term. The Council received an extensive briefing on marine reserves at the February 1990 Council meeting. This provided an opportunity for the Council to discuss marine reserves as a concept and to hear about experiences with marine reserves in other parts of the world.

**1992** - Marine reserves were initially considered as a possible option in early discussions on Amendment 4 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan, however the Council determined the reserve concept should be addressed separately and scheduled scoping meetings in each of the states. During 1992 the Council held scoping meetings. Scoping meetings are less formal than public hearings and occur prior to the Council taking any position on a management issue. When the Council is considering the need for management, scoping meetings provide an opportunity for members of the public to make suggestions BEFORE the Council has made any decisions.

**1993** - During the 1992 scoping process support for and against the concept surfaced. The Council reviewed the scoping information at the January 1993 meeting and decided to (1) recommend to National Marine Fisheries Service that they convene a Scientific Review Panel to review the concept of Marine Reserves and (2) drop consideration of the marine reserve concept at that time.

**1994** - The previously designated *Oculina* Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) off Ft. Pierce in eastern-central Florida was declared the Experimental *Oculina* Research Reserve (EORR). This area, measuring 4 X 23 nautical miles with depths between 30 and 75 fathoms, was closed to bottom fishing for a period of 10 years to allow for scientific studies in a closed area. The 10 year "sunset" was specified to ensure establishment of a proper research and evaluation program. In 1995, the closure was extended to include all anchoring within the boundaries of the experimental closed area. The area was closed to bottom fishing to enhance stock stability and increase recruitment by providing an area where deep water species (snowy grouper, golden tilefish, speckled hind and Warsaw, misty and yellowedge groupers) can grow and reproduce without being subjected to fishing mortality. Virtually any level of fishing mortality results in a large reduction in numbers of males and an altered size, age, and genetic structure. This effect is magnified when fishing in areas where these groupers gather for spawning. Such spawning aggregations have been observed in the *Oculina* Habitat Area of Particular Concern.

**1995** - A scientific review of the 1990 Snapper Grouper Plan Development Team report was completed by the Scientific Review Panel as requested by the Council. The panel consisted of international experts with different experience in fishery science, marine reserves, ecology, fish genetics, sociology, and economics.

The Scientific Review Panel concluded that properly designed marine reserves in combination with other management measures can be an effective management tool for reef fish resources in the U.S. South Atlantic region subject to the following conditions: (a) biological, ecological, social, and economic objectives of the reserves are clearly specified; (b) the relative biological, ecological, and economic impacts of reserves in the context of other fishery management measures have been estimated for various constituents; and (c) the development of marine reserve proposals proceed with the involvement of all constituencies and stakeholders.

Also the scientific review panel concluded that recognizing the alarming declines in stocks of key fishery species, the panel would urge that reserve options be considered immediately as part of a comprehensive fisheries management plan to prevent irreversible loss to species and fisheries.

**1997** - In further developing Snapper Grouper Amendment 8 (and later Amendment 9), the Council realized that severe impacts would be felt by fishermen if necessary percentage reductions in catches of overfished species were imposed to achieve the mandated fishery management goals. Marine reserves once again surfaced as a potential alternative to fisheries closures.

Also in 1997 the Council accepted portions of the final Management Plan for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary that designated one larger reserve that extended into the Council's jurisdiction and 12 small "preservation areas" that also function as marine reserves. These areas are being evaluated and will be reexamined at a five year review.

**1998** - After deciding to reconsider the possibilities of marine reserves, the Council proceeded to take steps to initiate a fact-finding process using the Marine Reserves Committee and the Advisory Panel.

**1999** - In May 1999, the Marine Reserves Advisory Panel unanimously passed a motion confirming that the Panel believes there is potential in using marine reserves as a fishery management tool.

**2000** - The Council then laid out a deliberative process by which they would determine if marine protected areas were a tool that they should use to manage fisheries in the South Atlantic. This process included a series of informal meetings that Council members and staff attended in the spring of 2000. Any organizations that requested to could have a Council member and/or staff member come and talk with them about the potential use of marine protected areas. It was the Council's intent to begin a dialogue with stakeholders on ways to solve the overfishing problems in the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Fishery

and to ask the public if they thought marine protected areas may be one answer to a complex problem.

The stakeholders voiced many different opinions on the use of marine protected areas. There was an equal amount of support and opposition for no-take marine protected areas, but many variations were offered from all sides. Many groups were in support of protecting known spawning areas from fishing, and creating artificial habitats and prohibiting fishing in these areas. The responses the Council heard from the more formal scoping meetings they held later in the spring of 2000 were similar.

In September of 2000, after reviewing comments received from the informal meetings and scoping meetings, the Council voted to move forward with the use of marine protected areas.

**2001 through 2003** - In the Spring of 2001 the Council held a final round of nine scoping meetings. The public was provided charts that showed known hardbottom areas off the South Atlantic coast and was asked to use their experience and knowledge of snapper grouper species (specifically deepwater snapper grouper species) to suggest areas the Council may want to consider designating as marine reserves. As a part of this scoping process, the Marine Reserves Advisory Panel was asked to also suggest areas. As a result of this process over 40 sites were suggested and originally considered as potential marine reserves.

At their February 2001 meeting, the Council's Marine Reserves Committee discussed the difficulty managers and stakeholders were facing given that many different agencies were looking at marine reserves, marine sanctuaries, marine protected areas, etc. The different nomenclature associated with this management tool made things very confusing to the public and managers alike. The Committee determined that the term "marine reserves" was coming to imply an area that allowed no fishing. This was contrary to the Council's definition and intent. In order to be more consistent with national definitions the Council adopted the term Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

During 2001 and into 2002 the Council, with help from its advisors, began working to determine which sites would best meet the Council's management objective to protect deepwater snapper grouper species. In August of 2001 the Council held an unprecedented "Mega-AP" meeting of the Habitat, Coral, Snapper Grouper, MPA, Law Enforcement, and Wreckfish Advisory Panels (APs). The APs were asked to help the Council select sites that would be the most beneficial for overfished, deepwater snapper grouper species using their various and vast knowledge, understanding that the Council's intent was to look at sites that protect more inshore snapper grouper species further down the line (that is, in the future).

Later in 2001 the Snapper Grouper Assessment Group, the Scientific and Statistical Committee, and the Snapper Grouper AP met with the Council's Snapper Grouper Committee to provide additional input on possible MPA sites. Based on input from the SSC, APs, and the Snapper Grouper Committee, the Council instructed staff to develop

an options paper for Snapper Grouper Amendment 14 with an initial level of analysis of sites the Council felt met the criteria of protecting overfished, deepwater snapper grouper species.

**2004** - The sites that met the criteria of protecting overfished, deepwater snapper grouper species were included in the Informational Public Hearing Document and taken out to public hearings in early 2004. At those public hearings social and economic data were collected to help staff refine sites and analyze the impacts of the proposed sites.

The information gathered at the Informational Public Hearings was useful in helping staff begin to assess the social and economic impacts of each individual site. It became clear that the location of a few of the sites may need to be tweaked in order to achieve the Council's goals and lessen social and economic impacts.

**2005** - At their September 19-23<sup>rd</sup> Council meeting in Charleston, South Carolina the Council voted to include MPAs as an approach to manage deepwater snapper grouper species in Snapper Grouper Amendment 13B. Of the nine sites originally proposed to be considered, only eight were to be included in Amendment 13B. The site not carried forward was a proposed artificial reef MPA two miles off the North Carolina coast. The Council felt that this site did not meet the criteria of protecting deepwater snapper grouper species.

At the December 5-9<sup>th</sup> Council meeting in Carolina Beach, North Carolina the Council voted to move consideration of MPAs into a separate Snapper Grouper Amendment 14 to address deepwater Type II MPAs.

**2006** - At the March 2<sup>nd</sup> Council meeting in Jekyll Island, Georgia the Council reviewed a draft of Snapper Grouper Amendment 14 and approved motions to: (a) add a monitoring plan to the research needs section and (b) add alternatives to look at Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) for snapper grouper vessels with a snapper grouper permit and bottom longline gear onboard.

At their June 12-17, 2006 Council Meeting in Miami, Florida the Council approved Snapper Grouper Amendment 14 for public hearing.