

**PUBLIC COMMENT SESSION
BEAUFORT, NORTH CAROLINA
DECEMBER 8, 2021**

MR. MCCAFFERTY: My name is Chris McCafferty, and I'm commercial snapper grouper fisherman in Morehead City, and I have prepared a few comments, just to kind of stay on point, but I appreciate the extra minute of time, and so I might use. First off, stock assessments, and most fishermen agree that our gag grouper fishery needs some help. Years of complete closures appear to be a possibility.

It will be much better for the fish, the fishermen, and the seafood consumers to keep our fishery open with reduced quotas and trip limits. This will also help collect data for future stock assessments. Complete closures create waste, while injecting uncertainty into data and assessments. We had some talk, and I'm not sure what the quotas are going to end up being, but I would strongly urge the council to manage the quotas with appropriate trip limits, to avoid extended closures and excessive discards.

Red snapper is a big issue, and the best way to reduce discard mortality is to reduce the number of fish we're required to discard, and our goal should be to make regulatory discards rare, while encouraging fishermen to release illegal fish in ways that give them the best chance of survival. The fewer fish we must discard, the more likely it is that we'll use the best release practices. One form of encouragement should be to reward responsible fishermen with higher quotas, by reducing discard mortality projections.

Millions of pounds of red snapper are being wasted every year, as projected dead discards leave fishermen with little left to keep for food. We're seeing all different size red snapper here in North Carolina, and the fishery is healthy. We appreciate the seventy-five pounds for a little while, and it would be nice if we could make that extend, and I had to throw back so many, and myself and other fishermen will avoid areas that hold the red snapper, and so we're targeting other areas a little harder than we might otherwise if we could spread that pressure out. I am trying to be responsible, and it also is a little bit of a catch-22 there.

This council is considering a holistic approach to managing the snapper grouper complex. Please consider using frugal management tools that focus on enhancing our fisheries and food supply. Wise use of hatcheries and habitat enhancements could be the perfect blend of public-water mariculture and wild-caught seafood that lives free and self-sufficient until harvested by independent fishermen. This is a wonderful alternative to closing fisheries and letting global corporations use our public waters to cage fish. Stocking native seafood that can naturally reproduce benefits everyone and the resource, the way our public resources should be managed. Please help keep fish and fishermen wild and free, rather than trying to put us in corporate cages.

The stocking is a form of aquaculture, mariculture, and that's something we should look at, and we can stock a wide variety of seafood at this point, and mahi, the red porgy, and black sea bass would be a very easy one, and cobia. That way, you have more recreational opportunity, more seafood to feed people, and it generates more revenue. By creating a commodity like that, you've actually created new money, rather than just shifting it around.

The last thing that I want to touch on is the rush to use public waters for windmill farms. Please support giving states the right of first refusal on any public-water leases off their coast. Rather than subsidizing global corporations to exploit our public resources, we should consider options that generate power and revenue for citizens. Please support these two options for mitigating the negative impacts of restricting access to public waters with windfarm leases, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

The first is to require the base of all windmills be designed as permanent artificial reef habitat, and the second is that each leased area should include a research platform equipped with hatcheries to stock offshore species, such as mahi, snapper, grouper, triggerfish, cobia, and black sea bass. If we're going to do the wind farms, and we can't stop it, basically, and the same with offshore oil drilling, when that was an issue, and I brought that up, that any offshore energy production platform should be designed as a permanent underwater structure that is ideal habitat and be also where it can be either cut off or dismantled to a safe navigational depth after it is decommissioned.

There are some things that we can do to really help our fisheries and make them better for recreational, commercial, consumers, but we have technology to do it, with the hatcheries and the habitat enhancement, and let's use that and make our fisheries the best they can be. Thank you for your time.

MR. S. LEWIS: My name is Selby Lewis, and I've been grouper fishing for thirty-seven years. Bear with me. I wrote a bunch of stuff out on the way here, but I ball up a little bit when I start talking to people. I started Sustainable Fishing on Facebook, and I started talking to commercial fishermen about what would work best for our industry.

We're not at this place right now because of the fishermen, and we're at this place for mismanagement, and a group of us came here eight years ago and told you that spearfishing would be the end of fishing, grouper fishing, and why that is is spearfishing targets the big fish that we need for breeding, and they take longer to get big, and spear fishermen wound a lot of fish. I have caught fish with hooks in their mouths, but I have never caught a grouper with spear in it.

On top of that, you know, we have got rid of longlining and j-hooks and fish traps, and so getting rid of a spear should not be a problem. If there's a fight to keep spearfishing, we ought to get pole spears, where they actually have to be up close and hunt the fish, to give the fish an equal chance, and, as I was hearing earlier, I'm also doing a program at UNC-W where we're catching black grouper right now, and we're bringing them in, and they're going to breed them.

One thing I've noticed is my bigger fish live. My twenty to twenty-two-inch fish don't live, and I think, all these years, we've been throwing back the wrong fish, and I think that was brought up ten years ago, that maybe we ought to be keeping a certain amount of the first fish we've catch. From what I've seen, that's what we need to be doing, and so maybe the size needs to be investigated more and we need to be catching a certain amount of small fish, but it's the consensus of the fishermen that I've talked to that we're willing to do anything to keep the fishing open.

We would like to see a 150-pound trip limit, if possible, and then go from there, and that would keep fresh seafood for our customers, and it would make us a little bit of money, so we could stay in the industry we started out in, and it would keep our way of life, and I think, if you will start doing the numbers that we're all looking at, and we take away the spearfishing, that there will be a lot more quota for the hook-and-line fishing. Everybody can hook-and-line fish, but not everybody can dive. There's a lot of health reasons and stuff, and so let's eliminate where certain people can't go into this sport.

I had some other stuff on my tongue, and I would love to just -- If there are any questions eventually, you all could contact me, and I would be glad to answer them, on my experiences, but there's a lot of stuff to talk about, and I have one other thing.

We all want a license for recreational fishermen, and there needs to be a way to track who is actually fishing and participating, and they need to be checked equally as the commercial fishing. The biggest harm done to fishing was big numbers on the sides of the boats, and we have been targeted for years, where I have boats pulling out at the boat ramp with 200 pounds of illegal grouper, on recreational boats, but I'm getting checked for all my life equipment, that they don't have to have, that I spend money on every year, and they just pull out and do their dentist's job, but they go sell the fish, and I'm trying to make a living, and I'm getting checked for forty-five minutes, while they're pulling out beside me, and so things need to be looked at in a practical way and a way that we can enforce stuff.

If we could see, just by what's going on at the Snowy Wreck -- If you can't hold people accountable, there is no reason to make laws, because you're just making people outlaws, and you have got to make people pay for what they're doing. Thank you.

MR. S. LEWIS, JR: My name is Selby Lewis, Jr. I have here because I have watched, my whole life, as more and more regulations are passed, and it makes it harder and harder for my dad to make a living, and now there is people spearfishing, and we all know that it's not fair, because it's like a deer in the headlights. The grouper doesn't know what hits them until it hits them, and it's just not fair.

I have had to get people at the fish market to help me pick up grouper that the spear fishermen bring in, because they're that big, and that's all they bring in, is the males, the big males. That's what they target, and something has to be done about it, because, if we don't do something about it, there won't be any males left, and there won't be an industry, and we've got to save the industry, and so that's all I've got to say.

MR. COX: Welcome back. It's been a long time since I've sat in front of a microphone, but it's good to be here and see everybody, and welcome to our beautiful weather in Carteret County. I didn't really come in here with an agenda, and I wasn't planning on speaking, but Kim over there put a clipboard in my hand, and so I felt like I could find something to talk about, but I would concur with what the other fishermen are saying that have just spoke. Just about everything they said is right on target.

We need to keep some access to the gag fishery, until we can figure out what's going on with it, and, by the way, I'm on the AP. The Snapper Grouper AP, we work mighty hard at helping you folks figure out what to do, and we certainly -- All of us agree that the recreational industry has

to be held accountability at the federal level, just like we are as commercial fishermen, and that means a federal permit, in my opinion, that a lot of the -- I hear a lot of people talking about getting state compliance for the recreational people, and some kind of state permitting, but it doesn't carry the weight that the federal does, and I feel like, once we go online, it's going to be just as easy to figure out a way for those guys to get a federal permit and keep up with what they're doing and catching and some reporting to help the science.

Another thing we've got to talk about is the sharks. Every time I go fishing, the sharks are just more and more abundant, and we're losing a lot of fish to sharks, and we don't have any idea how that plays into our stock assessments, and I know that's a hard nut to crack, but the sharks are a problem, through all of our fisheries, whether it's snapper grouper or tuna fishing or whatever it is.

As far as the gag fishery is going, I've been doing it for a long time, about forty years, and we started seeing big declines in the gag fishery when the GPS came about, and the trolling motors on the recreational boats, and they don't have to work as hard as we used to to go gag fishing, and things have gotten a lot easier. With that said, we're going to have to really figure out what's going on with those guys, because it's taken a lot of the guesswork out of it, and so I would hope that you guys would really pay attention to that and help us get that done, and we constantly talk about that on the AP, and it comes up at every meeting, and so please pay attention.

I can't think of really a whole lot other, and the windmill thing is going on at a federal level, and it's coming at us pretty fast in the South Atlantic, and I think that we've got to be careful that they don't take good bottom away from the fishermen, you know put some restrictions in place so that we can't fish around it, and I certainly don't have any problem with windmills, but I think that, from what I've seen in other regions, they are going to restrict us to the proximity of where the windmills are, and so the South Atlantic can carry a lot of weight in the way that we say, hey, this is good bottom, and it's certainly not a good place to put it.

I can always sit here for a few minutes and think about a few other things, but accountability in the commercial industry, and I've always been a proponent of VMS, and I still am. With the way I've seen people exploit trip limits, I would never go back down the road on things that I used to be interested in, but certainly VMS would be a component that may help our seasons last a little longer, but it seems like, as far as stock assessment goes, we're always behind the eight-ball for so many years, and then we realize that we should have been a little bit -- Maybe we should have gone a little bit slower down the road on access.

In other words, I think about, when I was on the council and we had a really good, robust stock assessment on snowies, and we were getting 10,000 pounds of quota added a year, because the assessment was so good, and now we're looking back at that and saying, well, we probably shouldn't have gone that hard at it, because now all of our groupers are in trouble, including snowies.

With that said, a lot of fishermen that I talk to say, with the price that they're getting on fish, that they would certainly be happy with an across-the-board limit on -- I've heard some of the trip-limit boats say that, if I have 500 pounds of every species, I can make a decent living on it, but

leave some access to the gag fishery, so that we can help with the science, and we certainly need to do something about all of our groupers, because they're certainly in trouble. Thank you.

MS. GUYAS: Hi, everybody. This is Martha Guyas, representing the American Sportfishing Association, out of Tallahassee, Florida. I'm so glad that you all were able to get together to meet in-person this week, and I wish that I was there with you, but I am grateful to be able to call-in and participate via webinar, and so I hope that everybody is doing well. It's been far too long since I've seen many of you in-person, and I look forward to working with you all in my new role at ASA.

I've been in and out of the meeting this week, but I have a couple of comments to offer on items that I was able to tune-in for. Really, it's two things. The first one is on Mackerel Amendment 34, and I listened to your discussion on Monday, and I really appreciate what you all had to say about allocations, and I just wanted to reiterate that, as Chester and a couple of other people pointed out, the no action alternative in Action 2 for allocation is indeed a de facto reallocation from recreational to commercial, because of the change in the MRIP numbers used in that recent assessment, and so, because of that, the allocation under Alternative 1 is no longer based on the best available scientific information.

I would note that, even though those percentages stay the same under Alternative 1, this alternative does not maintain status quo, from the perspective of how the fishery operates on the water, and so the other thing that I wanted to mention is I was really glad to be able to listen to your discussion yesterday morning about the recent private recreational angler working group meeting and just where to go from here on snapper grouper fishery management and talk about endorsements and the Florida State Reef Fish Survey and all that.

I think the discussion you had was really great, and I encourage you to keep the ideas flowing, as the workgroup and the council continues to work on how to move forward. I know, in the past, Kelly mentioned, in her testimony, the innovative management of the private recreational sector of the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery report that was paid for and executed by the recreational industry and community, and so I wanted to make sure you all have that, and so I sent the link to John to distribute, so that you all have it to use as a resource as you continue discussions.

That's really it for me, and I really appreciate all the work that you all are doing on some very tough issues in front of this council, and I truly look forward to working with you all. Be safe as you head home, and I hope to see you in-person at your March meeting, and I hope you all enjoy the holidays coming up. Merry Christmas. Thank you.

MR. MARTIN: My name is Drew Martin, and I'm a volunteer with the Sierra Club, and I live in Palm Beach County, Florida. I just want to speak about a couple of subjects, and I hope that it's not too off-topic, but I do want to talk about the gag grouper and the importance of keeping many of these fish in the environment that divers and recreational people like myself, who like to view these fish, and we like to see them, and, if there are too many people take them out of the environment, then there's not an opportunity for those of us who like to either scuba dive or snorkel to see those fish, and I remember seeing a grouper that swam right up behind me one time, and I was very close to shore, and I turned around and it was about a foot away from me, but it was really a thrill to see that.

I want to say the same thing about sharks. I really actually enjoy seeing sharks in the environment, and so it concerns me if we lose too many of these marine species. I think that we focus a lot on the commercial aspect of fishing, but we forget that many, many people are recreational divers and recreational snorklers who want to see the fish, and so it's not just a matter of -- The commercial side of it is not just the take, but it's also the ability of the fish to survive.

I am very concerned about the reefs, and I was very sad and unhappy of the decision at the last meeting, where you opened that twenty square miles to trawling, and I wanted to speak that day, but I was on the telephone, and I was unable to raise my hand, but I do think that not enough science was taken into account, and I noticed that a number of the members had said that they would like to have more science before that decision was made, and I really think that many members of the public, from my area, are very unhappy with that decision. I know that it's been made, but we were very disappointed.

I think it's important to remember that the reef system provides many benefits to the public and that fishing debris often damages that, and things like trawling and fishing nets that catch on reefs, and anchoring, all play a role in the damage to the reefs, the reef system.

I just wanted to mention, briefly, concerns about the fisheries management when it comes to allowing too much bycatch, and, as we well know, we lose a lot of fish species, and there is no economic benefit to bycatch. I do agree with the speaker that said that we should limit spearfishing, when it comes to the groupers, and I think that spearfishing -- The fish just doesn't have a chance, and that's really the issue with spearfishing, because people take the largest and best fish, and so I do think that there's really not much sport to it.

I think it's more important that we preserve the fish for the next generation, rather than allowing commercial fishing to take too many fish out of the environment and leave a limited number of fish for the future. I appreciate you allowing me to speak virtually, and I thank you for all your work as voluntary members of the council. Again, thank you for letting me speak, and I appreciate your time.

MS. READER: I am Kelly Reader, located in Martin County, Florida, and I'm in the commercial fishing sector, and I had some comments regarding the amendment for the gag grouper rebuilding. During today's session, it was discussed that protecting the breeder male gags is an important item to the rebuilding plan, and I completely agree with that goal. However, I wanted to add some additional details to the two main solutions that were discussed, which was the slot limit from twenty-four inches to forty-one inches and the gear restrictions to prohibit spearguns.

Restricting the use of spearguns for gag grouper would cause a detrimental economic impact to the commercial spear fishermen, as well as significantly reduce the amount of local grouper available to our fish markets and restaurants. For 2021, 40 percent of our fishing income is from gag grouper, but 95 percent of those gags were below that forty-inch mark, and we measure our fish, the bigger ones, just to see what the size is, and so we keep track of that on my boat, and it may be different in Georgia and the Carolinas, and I completely recognize that, but, in Florida Atlantic waters, in the depths that are divable, it's very rare for us to see those big gag groupers

over forty inches, those breeders, and complying with the slot limit would not be an issue for the spear fishermen.

It was also mentioned in today's session that the hook-and-line fishermen don't land the large, breeder gags, and it was mainly a concern for spearfishing. Implementing that slot limit from twenty-four to forty-one would accomplish the protection of the male breeder gags, which was stated as the goal, while still allowing commercial spear fishermen to remain in business, and spearfishing is the most selective form of fishing, and judging a fish size underwater is what we do on a regular basis. Judging a top-end size would be no different from judging a minimum size for us.

In the spearfishing community, the rule is that if a fish is borderline on size or you're questioning whether it's big enough, you don't shoot that fish, and it would be the same if there was a slot limit and a maximum size. Anything borderline, or even close, would be off limits. That's all I have. Thank you guys so much for all the information today and the discussion, and I appreciate it.

(Whereupon, the public comment session was adjourned.)

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PUBLIC COMMENT-Attendees

12/8/21

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PUBLIC COMMENT - Attendees
12/8/21

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South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting – Beaufort, NC

Public Comment - December 8, 2021

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Circle all that apply:

- Private Recreational
 - ☒ Commercial
 - For-Hire
 - Wholesale/Dealer/Retailer
 - Non-Govt Org (NGO)
 - Other
-



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting – Beaufort, NC

Public Comment - December 8, 2021

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 - Other
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South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting – Beaufort, NC

Public Comment - December 8, 2021

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Circle all that apply:

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 - Other
-



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting – Beaufort, NC

Public Comment - December 8, 2021

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Circle all that apply:

- Private Recreational
 - ☒ • Commercial
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South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting – Beaufort, NC

Public Comment - December 8, 2021

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Circle all that apply:

- Private Recreational
 - Commercial
 - For-Hire
 - Wholesale/Dealer/Retailer
 - Non-Govt Org (NGO)
 - Other
-

Not sure if he
wants to speak.



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting – Beaufort, NC

Public Comment - December 8, 2021

Name: _____

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Circle all that apply:

☒ Private Recreational

☐ Commercial

☒ For-Hire

☐ Wholesale/Dealer/Retailer

☐ Non-Govt Org (NGO)

☐ Other

Did not want to speak.



South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting

Wednesday, December 8, 2021

Beaufort, NC

PLEASE SIGN IN -

In order to have a record of your attendance each day of the meeting we ask that you sign in.

Name:	Mailing Address/E-mail: <i>(If your information is currently on file, just check the box.)</i>	How do you participate in South Atlantic fisheries? <i>(Check all that apply)</i>	
Richen Brame	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On File	Commercial <input type="checkbox"/>	NGO <input type="checkbox"/>
		Recreational <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Govt. <input type="checkbox"/>
		Charter/ For-hire <input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____ <i>Describe</i>
	<input type="checkbox"/> On File	Commercial <input type="checkbox"/>	NGO <input type="checkbox"/>
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		Charter/ For-hire <input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____ <i>Describe</i>
	<input type="checkbox"/> On File	Commercial <input type="checkbox"/>	NGO <input type="checkbox"/>
		Recreational <input type="checkbox"/>	Govt. <input type="checkbox"/>
		Charter/ For-hire <input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____ <i>Describe</i>
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		Charter/ For-hire <input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____ <i>Describe</i>
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		Recreational <input type="checkbox"/>	Govt. <input type="checkbox"/>
		Charter/ For-hire <input type="checkbox"/>	Other _____ <i>Describe</i>

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