

SAFMC
MARINE FISHERY RESERVE
ACTION PLAN

March 1998

Background

The suggestion to consider use of Marine Fishery Reserves within the snapper grouper fishery management plan first originated within the Council's Snapper Grouper Plan Development Team (PDT). This technical group prepared a report entitled "The Potential of Marine Fishery Reserves for Reef Fish Management in the U.S. Southern Atlantic" (Attachment 2). The PDT offered this approach because it kept surfacing as the only viable option for maintaining the size/age/genetic structure of slow growing, long-lived species over the long-term. The PDT recognized the difficulties in proposing marine reserves but had no other viable option. The Council received presentations at the February/March 1990 Council meeting. This represented an opportunity for the Council to discuss marine fishery reserves as a concept and to hear experiences in other areas without having to make a decision on whether or not such reserves were appropriate for the snapper grouper fishery.

Scoping meetings were held during 1992 at the following locations: Savannah, GA on February 26, 1992; Charleston, SC on April 27, 1992; Key West, FL on June 22, 1992; and New Bern, NC on October 26, 1992. During the scoping process, support for and against the concept surfaced. Some felt including examples of potential marine reserves off of each state generated lots of negative public reaction. Others felt some idea of potential areas was necessary for the public to evaluate and comment on the concept. The Council reviewed the scoping information at the January 1993 meeting and approved motions to (1) recommend to NMFS that they convene a scientific review panel to review the concept of marine reserves and (2) drop the large marine fishery reserve concept at this time.

The scientific review was conducted in 1995 and is included as Attachment 2 in the separate Marine Fishery Reserve briefing package distributed in November 1997. The Panel concluded:

1. 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, social and economic impacts of

reserves in the context of other fishery management measures have been estimated for various constituents.

- (c) The development of marine reserve proposals proceed with the involvement of all constituencies and stakeholders.

2. 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.

At the November 1997 meeting, the committee requested staff develop options for improving enforcement of the Oculina Bank HAPC. The committee also requested a one-day workshop be held during the June 1998 Council meeting. The Council approved a motion to expand the Oculina HAPC area by an additional two miles on all sides, have all existing HAPC restrictions apply within the expanded area, and to have the expanded 2-mile area implemented as an interim request.

Results:

- A. The interim request is to be submitted prior to the March Council meeting.
- B. A Marine Fishery Reserves Workshop has been scheduled for Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning during the June 15-19, 1998 Council meeting in at the Ponce de Leon Hotel in St. Augustine, Florida (904-824-2821).

In conjunction with the briefing material for the November 1997 Council meeting, a separate briefing package (dated November 1997) of material extracted from the full scoping package was distributed to all Council members. Copies of the full scoping package (dated January 1993) were provided to the Marine Reserves Committee members during December 1997. Copies of the almost 2-inch thick full scoping package and the smaller extracted package are available from the Council office.

At the March 1998 meeting, the committee and council decided to not proceed with the interim request and approved the following action plan:

ACTION PLAN

Goal

Develop the concept of Marine Fishery Reserves to enhance the biomass of resources and provide greater biodiversity within areas under the jurisdiction of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

Phase I. Planning/Criteria Development

Criteria

Criteria are to be developed working from the list proposed in the original PDT report (see Attachment 2). Questions include: Can we develop a general type

of location well suited for reserves? Should we encourage states to consider reserves in barren bottom and establish protection to build artificial reefs? What areas support the objectives and criteria of Marine Fishery Reserves (i.e., enhance biomass and increase biodiversity)? What size should they be? Who can go into the reserves? Reserves could be created to (a) allow no take, (b) allow scientific surveys which may or may not involve taking, and (c) allow non-consumptive use.

Law Enforcement

Request the Law Enforcement Committee and Advisory Panel to prepare a written report to the SAFMC on ways to enforce Marine Fishery Reserves within the South Atlantic Council's area of jurisdiction. The question to be addressed is, "If we have a Marine Fishery Reserve, how best can it be enforced with the resources we have?"

Recommend NOAA GC increase the fines for violating closed areas under the penalty schedule.

Educational Program

What can be done to better educate the public and promote knowledge about marine fishery reserves? The SAFMC is publicizing the experimental closed area and the Oculina Bank HAPC using brochures, newsletters, press releases, etc. What additional resources, outside of the SAFMC, can be identified and tapped to improve public education? Work with existing groups to utilize outside funding sources to improve outreach.

Phase II. Decision Phase

Step 1. Research, discuss, and approve the criteria to be used in evaluating Marine Fishery Reserves. The committee and Council will draw on: (a) the input received during the first scoping process (see January 1993 Scoping Package), (b) the proposed criteria contained in the original PDT Report (see Attachment 2 in this briefing book), (c) the recommendations from the February 4-6, 1998 Snapper Grouper Assessment Group meeting (see Attachment 3 in this briefing book), (d) the workshop scheduled for June 15-16, 1998, and (e) the Advisory Panel which will meet at or before the September 1998 Council meeting.

The Marine Fishery Reserves committee will meet during the March 2-6, 1998 Council meeting at the Jekyll Island Club, Jekyll Island, Georgia (912-635-2600), immediately following the workshop at the June 1998 Council meeting, and during the September 21-25, 1998 Council meeting in Charleston, South Carolina (Town & Country Inn; 803-571-1000; 800-334-6660).

The result will be a "blueprint" of what a Marine Fishery Reserve would look like. If one was to use school construction as an example, the blueprint would include things like the types of rooms, number of class rooms, number of teachers,

traffic flow, etc. This ‘blueprint’ will be debated and voted on at the September 21-25, 1998 Council meeting.

Step 2. The approved “blueprint” will form the material for a second series of scoping meetings beginning in late 1998 or more probably early 1999. One scoping meeting will be held within each South Atlantic State requesting public input on which locations under the jurisdiction of the South Atlantic Council support the approved Marine Fishery Reserve criteria. Written comments will also be requested.

Material from the scoping process will be compiled and presented to the committee and Council in mid to late 1999.

Step 3. Based on the first scoping process, the workshop, Advisory Panel and Scientific & Statistical Committee input, and the second scoping process, the committee and Council will decide whether to establish specific sites as Marine Fishery Reserves to enhance the biomass of resources and provide greater biodiversity within areas under their management authority.

Phase III. Implementation

Step 1. If the decision is to establish specific sites as Marine Fishery Reserves, then staff would develop an amendment to the snapper grouper fishery management plan specifying these sites. This amendment would go through the established process (Advisory Panel and Scientific & Statistical Committee Review, Public Hearings, and NMFS Informal Review) used for all plans and/or amendments.

Step 2. Based on all the review comments, the committee and Council would modify the proposed sites taken to public hearings and approve the amendment for formal Secretarial Review **OR** they could determine not to proceed any further.

Step 3. If the decision is for formal Secretarial Review, there will be another opportunity to comment on the amendment and the proposed regulations during this review phase.

Step 4. Amendment approved, partially approved, or disapproved by Secretary of Commerce. If approved or partially approved, final regulations are published in the federal register implementing the specified Marine Fishery Reserves.

Phase IV. Monitoring

The amendment would specify the data to be collected and how often sites should be evaluated. This would then become an ongoing activity as would education and outreach.