

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SNAPPER GROUPE AMENDMENT 14 (MPA) PUBLIC HEARING

**Brunswick, Georgia
February 10, 2004**

Summary Minutes

The Marine Protected Area public meeting for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened in Brunswick, Georgia, on Tuesday, February 10, 2004, and was called to order by Susan Shipman, SAFMC Council Member. Also in attendance were Rick DeVictor, staff Environmental Impact Scientist and Bridgett Vergara, Administrative Assistant.

Ms. Shipman: This is an informational public hearing. The purpose of this hearing is to get your comments on the social and economic impacts of the areas that are proposed to be included in Snapper Grouper Amendment 14. Specifically, we want Georgia public or proposed areas.

Did everyone get a copy of the document? The Georgia information specifically is on pages 31 and goes over to 33, and what we are going to be doing tonight is trying to get information from you that is not from traditional sources; information that isn't in traditional log books, you wouldn't find it in recreational data. etc.

We have questions that we are going to propose to you tonight and those are located on page 33. If you know other people who would be interested, we're looking for answers from them as well for what kind of fishing they do at these specific sights. We're interested in knowing about bottom fishing, seasonal or any other kind. Any other sites or areas you would fish if this area was closed. In other words, that's the type of information that we would want to know. Ms. Vergara will be recording this hearing tonight and we will be presenting the information to the Council.

There will be a formal set of public hearings on Amendment 14, which will include the management measures, biological measures, fishing definitions, optimal definitions that are required by federal law to be included in the Snapper Grouper Amendment 14 as well as the sites that will be going forward. Those hearings I think will be held in the fall.

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Mr. DeVictor: Yes, I was planning to say that in my presentation that we are planning that in the end of this year or at the beginning of 2005 to go ahead for the second round of public hearings.

Ms. Shipman: This informational public hearing will just be held virtually the same way as the others, in that Council staff will be making a recommendation.

Although Kerry O'Malley is on bed rest because of her pregnancy, Rick DeVictor has graciously volunteered to present this information on her behalf. Vishwanie Maharaj will be presenting tomorrow night, and we have another meeting in Richmond Hill.

Mr. DeVictor will be making his presentation and then we will take comments from the audience, and hopefully you will answer the questions that are purposed on page 33. If any of you want to comment on the Georgia sites as well as any others we would like to hear from you as well, Florida, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Mr. DeVictor: Thanks. My name is Rick, I think I have met most of you, I am here tonight to represent the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

What I am going to do is a presentation on Amendment 14 and, more specifically, on MPA's. There are many tools to protect the deep water species and the Council has used these in the past and will continue in the future. These include bag limits, gear restrictions, quota, etc, for the purpose of this amendment.

The Council is going to go ahead and use marine protected spots to protect the size, age, and genetic structure on the deep water snapper grouper species. As Susan said, the types of MPA's the Council must bring this fishery in line with the Sustainable Fisheries Act where we have to end over fishing and re-build the overfished stocks.

Deep water species, what is the Council talking about when it says, deep water species? You may all have something in mind when you think deep water snapper grouper species but the Council has said these seven are what they think they are: speckled hind, snowy grouper, warsaw grouper, misty grouper, yellow-head grouper, golden tilefish, and blue line tilefish.

Why do these species need special consideration? They are slow growing, long lived and once you bring them up and then put them back in the water they won't swim away as most of you probably know. An example of how they live a long time, yellow head grouper was aged to I think 75 years of age in a study conducted by the Gulf Council.

A few things I would like to say tonight about the public hearing. Like Susan said, this is the first one, the second will be held at the end of this year or in the beginning of 2005.

This is not a typical public hearing as you may have been to. A final choice on these sites will not be made after this public hearing; it will be after the second. In addition,

something's in the Snapper Grouper Amendment 14 will not be brought up such as: optimum yield, etc. we're only going to be concentrating on these marine protected sites. We have a tape and the Council will review the tape before making any decisions.

Here's a definition of what we are talking about in MPA. It's a network of specific spots of marine environment reserved and managed for the primary purpose of helping in the recovery of the overfished stocks and to insure the persistence of healthy fish stocks, fisheries and habitats. This is what the Council has defined as a marine protected area.

The Council has further defined these in four types: type one is a permanent closure and has a no-take year round, the second one is highlighted because this is the one that Council has gone forth and decided all the sites are type one or type two.

Type two is no snapper grouper fishing, but trolling would be allowed.

Type three is a spawning season closure, if a snapper grouper species were known to spawn there then it would be closed two to three months out of the year, but during that time no fishing would be allowed.

Type four is a spawning closure in a certain area and during that time fishing for Snapper Grouper would be closed but trolling for say dolphin or wahoo would be.

Type two is what the Council is recommending would be closing down the fishing for the deep water Snapper Grouper, but allow trolling for Dolphin and Wahoo.

Here's a brief history relating to the Council's actions it's all started in 1990 when a team of scientists came out and said that the Council should look at this type of tool to see if it could help the deep water species.

In 1992 scoping meetings were held and the Council, at that time, showed maps of sites, and the public didn't like the sites because they were controversial. The Council decided to take a step back and spend some more time considering it as a tool. The Council then learned that choosing sites in a "top-down" manner was not the way to go.

In 1997 probably affected everyone in this room, Amendment 8 instituted limited entry program for the commercial fishery and Amendment 9 added stricter size and bag limits.

In 1998 Council formed the MPA Committee and Advisory Panel. The AP is made up of scientists and fishermen that help the Council with MPA's.

In 2000 the Council went out and held these scoping meetings and the informal ones, again but they didn't have the specific sites outlined yet. They only had the concept. based upon the information, the Council voted to go ahead and move forward with the concept of MPA's, and that is where we are now in 2004; which have come from the Advisory Panel which are coming from scientists and fishermen.

Now what I would like to do now is run through these sites; this one is 150 square miles in size. It's about 55 miles south east of Southport, NC and it's depth is 128 thru 148 fathoms. They are calling this one snowy wreck because the snowy grouper used to be on this. Again this is a type two.

You may see more than one option up here, but the Council will only choose one option for each site. So you may see options one, two and three.

Moving on down to South Carolina, it's about 60 miles southeast from Murrell's Inlet, South Carolina and it's about 50 square miles in size and 20-90 fathoms. The next one is about 45 miles southeast of Charleston, South Carolina. It's about 50 square miles and it's 26-92 fathoms.

This is the one where you may be most concerned about, because it's the one in Georgia. Like I said, there are some alternatives here. You can see that one of the boxes is slanted, and that came from the fishermen. They said it goes along with the break. They said that they like that one better because they could avoid the box. It would be easier to avoid the MPA's because they fish on the break.

Now this is in Georgia, about 70 miles south east of Warsaw Sound. It's depth is about 39-115 fathoms and the size is about 88 nautical square miles in size.

This is north Florida, there's two options here; they are both approximately 100 nautical square miles in size. One option is 57 miles east of Jacksonville, Florida. Option two is 55 miles east of St. Augustine, Florida. Both boxes are a depth of 20-150 fathoms.

This next box called the Sea Bass Box, only has one option at this site; this is the smallest box and the one closest to the shore. It's 9 miles from St. Lucie Inlet, Florida. It's depth is 40-60 fathoms and it's about 8 square miles in size. This is in the Florida Keys, it's 13 miles of Long Key, Florida. It's also about 50 nautical square miles in size.

Again, all of these that I have talked about so far are all Type 2, so trolling for dolphin, wahoo and sailfish would be allowed. This is in a depth of 108-139 fathoms.

The next two are experimental MPA's, this is the Type 1, which the Council would be going forward with for future consideration is this small one.

It's anticipated that artificial reef material in that site is to test the feasibility and to see if it's enforceable. If they make it a Type 1, can this be enforced so close to shore.

The size is 4 square miles. It's 12 miles off Beaufort Inlet, NC and it's depth is 10 fathoms. We moved the slides around and we left off one; this is on page 44 of the handout that you received.

This is the second experimental reef. It's off the coast of South Carolina. This is called the Charleston Deep Reef, I don't have the size or the depths of that. I'm sure it's in the document. This is what they would call the second experimental area and they were anticipating putting reef material in this site.

Here are the five questions that Ms. Shipman pointed out that we would like to get from you. What we'll first do is bring you up to the podium, and I'll leave this slide up and we'll hear about Georgia, and then we will hear about the other sites.

The first one is, what kind of fishing do you do at the specific site and what kind of gear? The next is, where do you fish out of your homeport? How many bottom fishing trips do you make in a year to this site? What are the main species that are caught at this site? What other sites would you fish if this area was closed?

That's the end of my presentation. I'll be happy to answer any questions.

Ms. Shipman: Does anyone have any questions or comments before we go any further?

I also wanted to recognize that we have folks here that have a part of sorts in the Council process Carolyn Belcher, as many of you know she's on our SSC Committee; Scientific and Statistical Committee. They reviewed this information when the Council was trying to decide what to go forward with.

Dr. Doug Rader heads our Habitat and Environmental Protection Committee. They were very involved. They met with the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel as well at the time. I think what 2001 and formulated the purpose that you see here, not only for Georgia but for all the sites as well.

Chris Woodward is here as well. He's on our Information and Education Advisory Panel, so I did want to acknowledge all of you and thank you all for coming.

Lindsey Parker who has been a great source to us, was working with Henry Ansley to get information that we in-turned took to the varies AP's. I'm hoping you can give us more insight.

Lindsey Parker: One question. You probably already went through this but, what is the timeline for Amendment 14? If all of this goes on, when would it come into play?

Mr. DeVactor: The schedule has moved. The second round of public hearings, I guess it would be called the true public hearings, which would be held this year or the beginning of 2005.

That is the plan. It will be a series of public hearings, this makes nine at the end, or will be nine. So it will be a handful of hearings.

Mr. Parker: So after that it will still be a year?

Mrs. Shipman: Yes, in that round Lindsey, we will not only cover the sites again, but we will also get the public input on the discrepancies for the various options that you saw up here.

We'll also look at the biological reference points that are required by federal law for deep water snapper grouper, the optimum yield definitions, the over fishing definitions, and all of those.

It will be an intense public hearings because we will be looking at all those species that are also included in this document. Doug?

Dr. Doug Rader: I apologize for the lack of geographic specifications in conjunction with this, but is there direct evidence that snowy wreck is a wreck?

Ms. Shipman: Up in North Carolina?

Mr. DeVactor: I believe that there is a wreck there. Is that your question? I'm sorry, you wanted to know if there was an actual shipwreck there?

Mr. Rader: Is there really a shipwreck there?

Mr. DeVactor: Kerry may have it in the document.

Mrs. Shipman: I don't think it's in this. But it was speculated that there was artificial something there, could've been ship or whatever. But, I don't know.

Mr. Parker: The Coast Guard is pretty good about all those things. If they call it a wreck on their chart, then they probably got something because there are a lot of wrecks that are on the chart and there's very little if anything left of them but they leave them on the charts.

Ms. Shipman: Any other questions? What we would like to do is get your inputs and comments for the relative for the areas of Georgia. We will put the Georgia site back up and if everyone can look at the questions on page 33 that might be the easiest way to do it.

I know we had some folks that stepped in after we collected the cards. Did everyone fill out a card? If we could ask you all to do that, you can do it when we're speaking. Just let us know. Because I only have 3 cards. Does anyone want to comment on this site?

Unidentified Speaker: We have a question.

Ms. Shipman: Sure, go ahead.

Unidentified Speaker: I'm just curious that this red danger area, I guess you might call it that its that red dotted box around it. Does that have any relevance to this or is that just for the nautical chart? Lindsey you probably know that.

Mr. Parker: Back ground on the nautical chart, I think that it might be something explosives.

Unidentified Speaker: Isn't that where the Navy plays around out there and puts it in perpetual warning that they might be there, and you don't need to be there?

Mr. Parker: I think that's what it is, I can probably find a chart and find out for sure.

Ms. Shipman: I know we ran into that a lot in North Carolina obviously, with their charts, but it didn't have ant bearing on these options.

These options largely came from the old data from Fanning.

Mr. DeVictor: We have maps containing all the habitat and the catch information in the document on all the sties.

Ms. Shipman: If you look at the catch information for each one, for instance, it will tell you what percent of the deep water species were in those wreckers in the year 2000 came from that area.

Mr. DeVictor: That's why we went ahead with the public hearings, because those grids are so large that we don't really know what the impact would be to close these specific areas. We don't know the catch in these areas.

Mrs. Shipman: Comments?

Unidentified Speaker: How are they planning to enforce these things?

Ms. Shipman: Well the Law Enforcement Committee met last week.

Unidentified Speaker: Do they have radar towers set up out there that they can keep an eye out there?

Mr. DeVictor: I can't speak on how the Coast Guard is planning to do this I don't think that they have a specific plan yet. This was discussed at the meeting last week. This has been discussed and been discussed. One of the main concerns from the public is how are you going to enforce this?

Mr. Parker: I can remember being out there a week at a time and not seeing a soul. It's probably different today. I'm curious.

Ms. Shipman: I would assume that there is some kind of directed aerial sights that have been established at these sites. But with the issue of allowing other fishing in there, obviously you're going to run into that. That is a concern, because of allowing it. Did you have a question?

Mr. Parker: What is going to be required of transit commercial boats? Stay out completely?

But you get caught in possession in the MPA are they going to be running across it?

Mr. DeVictor: I thought that but in the laws of the "*Oculina*" closure it says that no retention of the snapper grouper species.

I'm not sure how that is going to play out if that's going to be the wording involved, but if it says that, then you're probably not allowed to have any snapper grouper on your boat.

Ms. Shipman: Typically the Council works that out depending on what the size is, what the closure is. Will they be fishing on the east of that area and have to come in or go around it, depending on the size of it? That's one of the things that we will be deliberating on.

But you all may have some input and we certainly welcome that. Any comments on this site? Can you answer any of these five questions for us?

Mr. Parker: What page are those on?

Ms. Shipman: They're are on page 33.

Mr. Parker: You mean, tell you what I can about the areas?

Mrs. Shipman: Yes.

Mr. Parker: What do I know? Well back when I was there commercial activity was limited east of Georgia because of the distance to any of the ports.

Dr. Rader: What year was that?

Mr. Parker: Up through probably 86-90. I wouldn't swear to it. Since we were messing around there is still one charter boat that has a couple of resident boats that I don't know here. They fish but you would see commercial boats in that area, but for the most part you hardly saw commercial boats out there.

Today, I would think with the restrictions, I don't know what the commercial fisheries are doing these days. They may be, I know there's fewer of them. Rather they get you this

way or not, a few out there then, as far as bottom looks like it may be the 50 thousand curve it covers good bottom, the weather buoy used to be in that neighborhood.

It covers snapper grouper bottom to golden tile fish, somewhere in that neighborhood. There are a few wrecks. They are called wrecks but no one really knows that or exactly what they are. Big pile of good stuff that hold some snowy grouper occasionally if you can get a hook down to the bottom to get to them.

With the tides, it's probably not often with recreational fishermen getting there. I know a few that try, or intended to try, I haven't heard. Getting a tide can be hard out there. Generally I think it's a little offshore.

Majority of rock shrimp since the rock shrimp got into the plan or not. The deeper water of it, blueline tile fish. I don't do any commercial or recreation, and when we do fish we work out here. None per year. I would say if I was going to that area, I'd be looking for grouper and tilefish, or trawling for yellowfin tuna.

If that was closed, well you got everything around it. It's a time to go from Brunswick to there. I don't know how many recreational boats that you'll see because they will have to come back.

Ms. Shipman: Charlie Phillips was really helpful, he came up with the trapezoid.

Mr. Parker: I don't remember where in that box or above, but we got some good snowy there.

Ms. Shipman: I don't have any one that indicated that they wanted to speak tonight on this form. But I asked Lindsey because I knew that he was familiar with that area.

Doug you said you wanted to comment? Questions? Comments?

Mr. Parker: The experimental artificial reef sites. You want to make them no activity, no trolling or otherwise?

Mr. DeVictor: That would be for the one of North Carolina which is a type one, and it would be shut down completely. The other one is off South Carolina, and that one, type two, and would allow trolling.

Mr. Parker: And all the others are a Type Two trolling, Ok but no plans for anchoring?

Ms. Shipman: We haven't really looked at that; not like the Oculina Bank, unless the AP has.

Dr. Rader: We actually dealt with the question a lot. Regulating non-fishing activity, anchorage if it was in a sanctuary, managed by the sanctuary program, then it could do that.

They are proposing that for the Gray's Reef site in Georgia but there is a debate about if non-fishing anchoring had been approved by the Council.

Ms. Shipman: I think that we did say that there was no anchoring fishing boats on the Oculina Bank. But Doug's right, it has to be related to fishing.

Maybe Dan can help us get around that figure out, we welcome any legal council' comments.

Unidentified Speaker: Basically, you've chosen these by lack of activity, by any particular party, or because of presence?

Ms. Shipman: Presence of the deep water snapper grouper species. Evidence from the historical record, and some of this was data.

Mr. Parker: I don't know anyone that goes out there bottom fishing on a regular basis unless they are commercial.

Ms. Shipman: Does anyone here fish those areas? Does anyone know anyone that fish those areas?

Mr. DeVictor: if that site was proposed, do you think that people would fish those boxes along the edges or and fish up and down the break? What do you think would happen if it were put in place tomorrow?

Mr. Parker: I don't know. Golden tile fishermen would fish the edge.

On the outside and on the inside, I can't even remember where the break is, but it's scattered and probably would be fishing on the edge. If there's fish there, they are gonna fish.

Ms. Shipman: Did anyone have any more questions?

Mr. Parker: I wanna say, its' kind of broken up there little further south, is a nice spot, a good 20-30 fathoms drop, but as you get further up there it's a little here and a little there and a little bit off here and a little bit back up there. I haven't been up there in so long, I don't know.

Ms. Shipman: I'm hoping that Charlie and some of his guys that are going to be here at tomorrow night's hearing, but Charlie looked at the data, looked at the charts.

I know that Henry's been up to the dock sat down with those captain's and tried to really pinpoint what they fish for out there.

Now just in the inside, they said that they fish for vermilion, reds, porgies and that's one reason why they wanted to move to the break because they thought that you could really target the deep water species better. There was clearly an interest in tile fish bottom.

No other questions or comments, then we'll adjourn the hearing. We'll be more than happy to stay around and talk with anybody that wants to. Thank all of you very much for coming out, we appreciate it.

(Whereupon, the MPA public hearing adjourned on Tuesday, February 10, 2004.)

Tape of Proceedings On File (1)

**Transcribed By:
Jennifer Page
May 6, 2004**

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John Wallace
Spud Woodward

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