

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SNAPPER GROUPEL AMENDMENT 14 (MPA) PUBLIC HEARING

**Little River, South Carolina
February 17, 2004**

Summary Minutes

The Marine Protected Area public meeting for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened in Little River, South Carolina, on Tuesday, February 17, 2004, and was called to order by Chairman Henry Ellis "Pete" Pearce, Jr.

Mr. Pearce: I'm Pete Pearce, a member of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and I'm going to chair the meeting tonight on behalf of the full council. The staff members, are: Kathi Kitner on my right and Bridgett Vergera at the end of the table over here. When Bridgett stands up, you still might not see her, but she is in charge of all our technical doings here tonight.

The purpose -- and I'm going to read this statement for the record -- the purpose of this informational public hearing is to give you, the public, the opportunity to comment on social and economic impacts that may be associated with specific marine protected area sites that are proposed to be included in Snapper Grouper Amendment 14.

It is the council's intent to gather information that is not normally available through traditional sources such as logbooks, surveys, and so forth so that the council has the best possible information before any final decision is made.

This meeting is different from a traditional public hearing in that the council will not be making any final decisions after these informational public hearings are held, and not all measures expected to be included in Snapper Grouper Amendment 14 are included for comments during these public hearings.

A second round of public hearings will likely be held either late this year or in early 2005 and will take the more traditional format and enable you to comment on all alternatives, including the proposed MPAs.

Your input concerning social and economic impacts of specific proposed marine protected area sites will be collected and used in developing Amendment 14 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan

This informational public hearing will be conducted in the following manner:

First, Kathi Kitner of council staff will present a brief overview of the issues. Following the

presentation, there will be a period of time that you may ask questions.

We will be basically starting with proposed MPA, South Carolina A, which is on Pages 26 and 27 and 28 of the handout that most of you have. Those that wish to make a statement on the specific impacts of the proposed areas will be welcome to do so.

I have two so far that said that they would like to make statements and maybe a couple of others that might want to. But everybody will have the opportunity, if you so desire, whether you've checked yes or no on the form.

You don't have to limit your comments to the South Carolina A. We will take up as many of them as you might have comments for. We basically would like, when you make your statements, to know what type of fishing you do at this proposed site, whether you're charter or private recreational or commercial and what type gear, what is your home port, and how many trips would you make in a year to this particular site or any of these particular sites, and tell us the main species which you fish for and what other areas or sites would you fish if this were closed.

So, with that, I'm going to turn the presentation over to Dr. Kitner, and we'll go from there.

Dr. Kitner: I would like to welcome you and thank you for taking the time to be here and listening to what I have to say.

Tonight we're going to talk about Snapper Grouper Amendment 14 and that is to develop marine protected areas, using South Atlantic as a management tool to protect the deep-water snapper grouper species.

We're going to talk about the areas that are off shore. The first one is South Carolina A. It's close to this area _____. We have to begin development of the Snapper Grouper Amendment 14 to the fishery management plan.

(Some words spoken by Dr. Kitner for about 5 minutes could not be transcribed at this point on the tape.)

The deep-water species, which ones are they? We have them listed up there: speckled hind, snowy grouper, Warsaw grouper, misty grouper, yellowedged grouper, golden tilefish and blueline tilefish.

Most of you probably know why they need special consideration, because they're slow growing. They're long-lived. They're late maturing. And if you catch them, particularly under bag limits, you have to turn them back, because of the high mortality rates because of the deep _____.

What are we talking about when we say, "MPA, marine protected area"? They are, according to the council definition, a network of specific areas in the marine environment reserved and

managed for the primary purpose of aiding in the recovery of overfished stocks and to ensure the persistence of healthy fish stocks, fisheries and habitats.

The council has considered four types of MPAs in the whole process, which we've gone through in considering these things. One would be a permanent closure with no take absolutely. It would be closed off permanently and no fishing allowed whatsoever.

The highlighted, Number 2, a permanent closure, some take allowed. It's the type that they're considering on discussing tonight, so if there is some take allowed, there would be no bottom fishing for snapper grouper species, but you could still troll through the area for mackerel, wahoo, dolphin, et cetera.

Type 3, well, the last two are two types of limited durations, spawning area closures with no take, but it would be closed during certain seasons, especially in spawning seasons, and there would be no take, whatsoever, similar to Type 1.

And the Type 4 is a spawning area closure; some take allowed, which would be similar, again, to the Type 2, which could be trolled through the area but no fishing for mackerel.

I'm going to not spend a lot of time on this unless everybody wants me to, but basically, the council started looking at marine protected areas back in 1990. And you can see each of the years that we did different things through to 1998, when we formed the MPA Committee and the advisory panel.

I can go back to that if you really want to. The dates here got cut off. But January through April 2000, we held informal meetings throughout the South Atlantic, anyone that wanted to come; council staff would come down and talk to them.

We sent, usually, two staffers, to explain what we were thinking about input. In May of 2000, we held scoping meetings on the whole concept of MPAs. They were held in more of a round-table type forum, and every one gave their input.

In 2001, we held more formal scoping meetings to get recommendations on where we should site these MPAs. And commercial fishermen, party boats, headboats, private recreational, environmental groups, et cetera, all came together and tried to give input on the best choice.

Then in May 2001, the MPA Advisory Panel met as a part of the scoping process and helped identify possible MPA sites. At that time, they did two rounds of public hearings. This is the first round of those requested public hearings.

A few things about tonight's meeting, like I said, this is the first of two series of public hearings on Snapper Grouper Amendment 14. These are not traditional public hearings in the sense that the council is going to meet after we get back from these. Like I said, this is the first of two rounds.

All of this is going to be recorded, and every council member will get a transcript of what was said tonight by the public, and we're also videotaping it. Then each council member, whether they're from North Carolina or Florida, will get a copy of that so they can hear what you have to say. So what you have to say is important. It will be recorded and it will be looked at with special interest.

The primary purpose of this is for you to tell us what -- if it were to go ahead with the proposed MPA sites, what would be the impact on you, individually, something like that. How would that impact you both economically and socially? Would it pose an extreme hardship? Would it pose a little hardship?

And just think about it, because if you don't have the data for it, I could go out and talk to everybody individually and run a poll and this and that and still not get real data, and this is one way _____.

No, we're not talking about anything inshore. We're only talking about _____. All the management measures that may be in Amendment 14 are not going to be addressed tonight, because we don't even know what those management measures might be. So that's still somewhere in the future.

Like I said, a final decision will not be made after these hearings. There will be another round in either late this year or early in 2005. Okay, I already kind of addressed this slide.

I'm going to show you the same charts that I'm going to show you projected up here are in the public hearing document that you should have in your hands, beginning on what page?

Mr. Pearce: Twenty-two, the Snowy Wreck, on Page 23.

Dr. Kitner: On 23. Okay, this is off the coast of North Carolina. And we've held public hearings up there. We got not too much information and didn't register a lot of impacts in some of these places. Not a lot of people are fishing, apparently, this particular area right now or are very worried.

Well, I don't know but wait until I get to that part and wait for the questions, okay? Wait, just hang on one second. This is the one we're talking about tonight, primarily, or the one that located a little closer to Little River, Merle's Inlet and Myrtle Beach.

But one thing I wanted to tell you about is you see, there are three different boxes on there. It's not that we're proposing three separate sites. The council would choose one of those boxes as to where they would actually have the MPA, so there are three alternatives for one particular area right there but not three different types for the area.

That's pretty much the same for all of these _____. And I can come back to that. This is off of Charleston, called "South Carolina B." And, again, the two boxes would be a choice between one of those two. This is off of Georgia. And, again, it will be one of those two.

This is the North Florida MPA. This is right around St. Augustine or so. When they held the hearings down there, the public came back and wanted them -- and we don't have this drawn on yet -- to instead have a third option down here which would have less impact on the fishing practices because they said the other two were too close to the inlets.

This inlet is around St. Lucie, again, off the East Coast of Florida, Sea Bass Rock. And this is South Florida, approximately around Marathon. This was proposed by one of the charter boat captains association.

This is an experimental artificial reef that's right there off Morehead City and Beaufort, experimental in the sense they're trying to get an idea of what law enforcement did they dream up, can you enforce the _____ so they put this in. This was proposed by some of the states _____ up there. It's an experimental-type area to see how MPAs actually would work.

And then lastly, the South Carolina B. This is an artificial reef, and they're building the new one. So it would be an artificial reef. Again, there has been a lot of input from the public of why can't we do this with artificial reefs, so this is one of the responses to that.

What we would like you to address tonight is to tell us first, what type of fishing you do; if you fish in that particular site; is it charter? Private recreational? Commercial fishing? What kind of gear you use; when you would go and fish there, is there a certain time of year, and would it impact you more than at other times? How many bottom fishing trips do you make a year at that site? The main species targeted and caught at that site, and what other areas and sites would you fish if it were closed and really anything else that you think is important for us to know if you'd like -- Map's.

Then after we get everybody's input, if there are other questions, we'll try to answer them. I think that's the end. Yes, I'll go back and I'll leave those -- I think those questions are in the document on Page --

Mr. Pearce: I think they're on Page 27, the items that we would like for you to comment on for those of you who want to comment -- the last bullet points on the bottom of Page 27.

Dr. Kitner: Does anybody have any questions at this point before we -- that you think I might be able to answer? Who's going to help me do that?

Mr. Pearce: The depth in South Carolina A seems to run from 74 on Page 26. Options 1 and 3 kind of ride over, but 27 to -- and then Option 2 looks like about 74, but coming up into the 27-28 fathom area.

Dr. Kitner: Yes, that's right. Do you want my glasses?

Mr. Stowysz: I'm not too familiar with all this stuff. I'm not a charter boat captain. I'm a recreational fisherman. But a real simple question, how did you -- what did you use to determine where you put _____?

Dr. Kitner: Can you state your name for the record?

Mr. Skowysz: Ed Stowysz.

Dr. Kitner: When we brought together all these different advisory panels, we brought together _____ to come to some sort of agreement called a "mega advisory panel". There was a lot of studying the habitat, drawing lines on them, and they came to some sort of agreement.

There are different options because _____ that we want to protect and stuff. That's how it all came to _____. Doug is on our marine protected advisory panel. I don't know if he would want to add -- I don't _____.

Dr. Rader: I'm Doug Rader. I'm a scientist with the _____.

Unidentified Speaker: These three options, these locations, are they written in stone?

Dr. Kitner: No, we don't know.

Dr. Rader: The consensus right now is one of these _____. Obviously, I'm aware of that. I'm a biologist. I am a volunteer. The council has a number of species that are _____.

Dr. Kitner: I'll just add that, yes, that's a fair characterization. We're obligated by law to protect these species.

Unidentified Speaker: Well, are you all not seeing any increase in the stocks already from the logbooks?

Dr. Kitner: Some of the data says yes; some if it says no. It depends, and right now they have a process called SEADOGS that we are going to be stock assessing the southeast data -- assessment reviews, thank you.

I'll get to you in just a second, which is a three-part process of reviewing the existing data as it comes in and trying to determine the recreational status of a certain species.

Unidentified Speaker: I've been in one for two years. I expect a year increase, especially in the last 7-8, actually the last couple years; it just goes up every year.

Dr. Kitner: And we've been hearing that from a lot of people that are out on the waters, that things are getting better. Well, wait, before you go any further, what I'd like to do is be able to get this on the record, so that it will count, and so the other council members will be able to hear

either your pleasure or disgust, et cetera. What I'm going to do is ask that if you want to speak, and I think there was one more question in the back —

Unidentified Speaker: Like I was saying a while ago, I mean, I don't see any sense to close any area because beyond 50 fathoms, you're allowed 30 boxes of tilefish and 25 boxes of grouper in a trip. That, to me, is putting a closure on right there. I mean, you used to go out and catch 100 boxes, but now you catch 30 boxes of tilefish and you've got to leave the bottom and go try to fish for something else. It just doesn't make a lot of sense, not as far as I'm concerned.

Me, myself, I don't. But I mean, I have boats right beside us. I've been fishing all my life commercially, mostly sea bass, grouper and snapper. I don't do any longlining. I'm not saying that I won't one day, but I don't plan to. But I know the boys that do and they have a struggle right now.

I mean, they can catch 30 pots of tilefish, but the weather is the biggest concern. That, 90 percent of the closure, I mean, like them boys out there right now, you know, they can't fish.

And the days you do get out, I think you should be able to fish anywhere you want to for 30 pots of tilefish. I mean, that's bad. You should catch 100 pots of tilefish. Now it's hard to get 30. It's not because of lack of fish. It's because of lack of the weather and stuff, you know. And that's all I've got to say.

Unidentified Speaker: My experience in this area here in Option 1 and Option 3 is that there is very little snowy grouper coming from that area. And there has never been very much snowy grouper that comes from that area. You need to look closely at your depths, and they don't exist very much in that depth, definitely not golden tile by any means.

What I see right there is vermilion and triggerfish, some speckled hind, some red groupers, some black or gag grouper, and really, I haven't been able to quite determine where Option 2 is. Is that possibly what we consider with the Loran 59-600s or 700s? I'm not really sure.

If you wanted to fish in that same depth of water, by the way, I bottom fish with bandit reels, and I've been doing it for approximately 25 years or better. Your area there, if you wanted to move from one area to another because of tide situations or not being able to catch fish in an area north of there and have to run to the south of there, you're looking at a run of approximately 15 to 20 miles before you can hit bottom again.

I'm primarily looking at Options 1 and 3. This could take four hours for some of the slower boats. To invest four hours of your day simply in travel to go somewhere else and bypass, it will put an impact on me. Let's put it that way.

Like I say, the depths are -- very few snowies have ever come from there. I fish there approximately, on the average of about 18 trips a year. And I fish there probably four to five of those trips if the fish are biting in that area.

(Question asked away from microphone)

My home port is Southport, North Carolina. And as I say, I'm a regular in those particular areas and have been for years. And I can kind of even tell you some of the things of the evolution of the area.

That's pretty much all I have to say about that right now. This would impact me relatively severely, and I'd have to move on and put pressure on other areas besides that.

(Question asked away from microphone)

To cross over that bottom, that's another question I have is how are we going to know where this is? Like somebody else also pointed out, we're quite familiar with Loran positions and by reading your charts here, it's very difficult to tell exactly by the Loran lines that are there where that is.

You have to really study it. And how long would I? I mean, your area there shows to be approximately 10 miles across if you're going across it the long way. And then you may have to go another five miles before you hit bottom again after you've crossed out of that zone so now you're talking 15 miles and maybe there was three miles in front of that that you had to cross over before you even got to that zone where there was no fish if you were talking sand desert.

So now you've got an 18-mile stretch of bottom you've got to cross to go from one -- to bypass that area. That's pretty significant for some of the slower boats, such as myself. I'm not really sure what else. There is a lot I could say with as many years as I've been doing this.

Unidentified Speaker: I'm a recreational fisherman. I don't commercial fish. But I like to fish. I like to be able to go fishing. I think I have a right to fish, and I'm in support of a right to fish organization. I believe that -- shit, this is a deep-water thing. It ought to be kept in deep water.

I think he said that you all don't know much about the species, where they aggregate to spawn or if they change in sex or what -- all they're doing out there, and I surely don't, so I think you really should take a little bit more time, study the situation.

We've got these great fishermen here, who are saying that the spots are coming back, getting better. I just don't see where there's any need to close anything at this time. I think you ought to at least give two more seasons.

(Questions asked away from microphone)

Unidentified Speaker: Little River.

(Questions asked away from microphone)

Unidentified Speaker: I primarily fish.

(Questions asked away from microphone)

Unidentified Speaker: Well, it depends on where I am. If I'm standing on the beach, I'm looking for pompano and white. And if I go offshore, then I'm looking for something to stretch the string.

(Questions asked away from microphone)

Unidentified Speaker: I wish I could think about this a little bit more. Let me ask this question. Does North Carolina have a closure area? I didn't see one designated in the book.

(Away from microphone)

Unidentified Speaker: So there are two in North Carolina proposed, also? Well, let's just keep it that it's going to be deep water. It doesn't need to be in 20 fathoms. In fact, I really don't know why there's any need. I stick to my main statement, which is it should be studied further because even your scientist over here says that he doesn't know all the answers.

Unidentified Speaker: Another thing that scares me with this type of a situation is once you get your foot in the door and you say, well, we've got to work on these deep water species, well, the next thing you know you're moving on in here to the shallow water.

The next thing you know you're telling me standing on the beach saying, well, you can't fish out here. I just think that if you're going to propose this, there should be some kind of limit as to encroachment into shallower water.

(Speaker away from microphone)

Tom Dietrich: My name is Tom Dietrich. Charter and I commercial fish fish out here. In every other fishery that I've ever read about in national waters, international waters and all over the world, any type of closure that has been implemented or suggested or talked about, every other fishery has always had marine observers on the boat.

I went through this in Oregon, Washington and Alaska with the salmon fisheries and in Northern California. Why hasn't that been done here before anybody talks about closing down? I mean, you all should ride on a trip for a week one time and see exactly what happens, how it goes down, what the tide does, what the weather does.

I mean, there have been a lot of times where some of the guys only had three day's fishing time, and they make their whole trip in that time and come in, and everything that whole time that they've been judged out as far as the time that they've been out has been judged on what they bring in.

Sometimes they're only bringing in the last three days of trips. Sometimes they just take a long.

But, you know, sometimes the fish are there. You can mark them on the screen, but they don't bite and you've got to move on. Why hasn't anybody suggested observers going out before anything else like that happens?

(Speaker away from microphone)

Dr. Kitner: Yes, Mike, Mr. Pierce said, ideally, we could put observers on every boat, but also, the commercial boats, many of them are a lot smaller, so it's harder to carry some of these on board. On top of that, it's a financial issue.

Everybody would love to have somebody go out. I would love to see people go out on boats. I would love to go out on a boat and see what's going on and be able to document what's going on and also be doing other things that are out there. It would be a great data gathering. But it's a lack of time and a lack of money that probably _____.

Ricky Long: I'm Ricky Long out of Little River. Where I live now, Option 1 and 2. You're talking about snowies and tilefish and stuff. The deepest part of that water is like 77 fathoms. There are not many snowies and tilefish caught in there, so that would actually kill the grouper, beliner fishing and all the others, I mean, if that's, if this is an accurate scale.

Most snowies and tilefish are caught from 95 to 130 fathoms. And what's marked off, I don't see anything deeper than 77 fathoms. So that's not, folks, helping that species of fish. It will be killing the beliner fishing, the gag grouper.

There are only a few longliner fishermen here. There are a lot of bottom fishermen, and I don't think it's far enough offshore what they're showing as far as what you're closing. I mean, better than 55 miles square is -- you're not talking about golden tile and stuff. You probably wouldn't catch one in a month there.

Beliners and groupers and stuff, you can catch there though. I've been fishing, like I say, in Little River all my life. Born and raised there. My daddy did it 75 years -- first one to start it -- and I've got four brothers and we all do it.

And I know the deep-water fishing you're talking about, too. I don't think what you're talking about; this is not just longline fishing. I think it's more beliner, grouper, and snapper according to the depth of the water.

Ed Skowysz: Yes, my name is Ed Skowysz. Like I said before, I'm not a charter boat skipper or a commercial fisherman. I like to recreation fish. I'm the president of the Grand Strand Saltwater Anglers Club down in Murrells Inlet. I'm a little confused.

I understand what you folks are trying to do with these proposed optional management areas or whatever the acronym is. I don't know. But there is another group out there, too, that want to have a no fishing zone. And when I proposed this question -- I asked it before the meeting got started -- I didn't get an answer. I mean, I guess what I'm afraid of -- there is your group out

there wanting to regulate the fish, and then this other group is coming in, and they want to have a proposed no- fish zone.

Could it get all covered up out there where the commercial guys can't do anything and the recreational guys, I mean, we're always in the back there. We've got a nice boat and we can't even use it -- go drive it. Am I confused or am I missing information or what?

Mr. Pearce: (Away from microphone) Can anyone shed any light on that?

Mr. Skowysz: See, well, just give me a minute. A few months ago, I subscribed to the "Soundings" magazine. They had a big article in there about the PEW Foundation and PETA. I know everybody has heard of PETA.

They're going through, and I think they've completed a survey, a "save the oceans," this type of deal. And they just want us to make a recommendation for no fishing, permanent no fishing zones. And if you don't have any idea about it -- yes.

(Speaker away from microphone)

Mr. Skowysz: Yes, sir, I understand that at this point. But these folks that did this big survey have a lot of money in back of them, apparently. They're going to do something with their report and make recommendations.

(Speaker away from microphone)

Mr. Skowysz: Yes, ma'am.

Dr. Kitner: Because I'm an anthropologist, I look at people and what people look at and how they perceive things, et cetera. I know what you're referring to, because a lot of this comes out in the press as we're going to close 20 percent of the ocean. You've heard that and you hear that 90 percent of predatory fish are gone in the oceans.

And a lot of that are buzz words to use and good copy and get the people excited and things like that. It's easy to think -- I'm agreeing completely because this is the only entity at this point in time that has any legal authority, to create MPAs in that zoned federal box.

Mr. Skowysz: Right, I understand that.

Dr. Kitner: But that doesn't mean that you're not going to hear a lot of things from other people. All of those other people and groups and organizations, ideally, have no more pull with this council and have no more right to talk to us than you do --

Mr. Skowysz: Maybe not with the council but with the Congress.

Dr. Kitner: I mean, I don't know.

Mr. Skowysz: I know we could argue this all day long.

Dr. Kitner: Yes.

Mr. Skowysz: All I'm saying is --

Mr. Pearce: We could argue what Congress is going to do ----

Mr. Skowysz: I'm just expressing my concern.

Mr. Pearce: --- anything that seems to pose legislation that would allow that to happen.

Mr. Skowysz: No, I know, not right now. But I'm just expressing my concern that -- other states have passed "freedom to fish", or yes, "freedom to fish" zones, but they only go out to three miles. South Carolina is working on one right now.

The other states are concerned about this, too. I just can't help but think that if everybody is -- "everybody" meaning the different states smell smoke, so-to-speak, that something is in the wind. Over the horizon in a few years, maybe ten years, I don't know. I'm going to be around for ten, I hope. But I just want to express that. That's all.

Mr. Pearce: Questions or comments by anyone?

Mr. Long: My name is Chris and I fish out of Little River. I just want to say, I think Option 1 and 3 are definitely too close inshore. And closures, all they do is put more pressure on other areas. That's it.

Mr. Pearce: What area are you dealing with?

Mr. Long: I would fish Option 1 and 3.

Mr. Pearce: One and three.

Mr. Long: Yes, sort of like beliners and groupers. I mean, that's where I do now.

Dr. Kitner: That's where you fish.

Mr. Long: Yes, too close to shore. I do hook-line fishing for beliners and groupers and trapping and a little bit of charter fishing, is all, yes.

Milton Muellerweiss: I'm Milton Muellerweiss, and I guess a lot of you might know me, but I've been fishing since I got out of the service in 1981 and I do both. I longline for golden and snowy grouper, and I catch beliners and the gags and I do it all.

I heard you ask about how did you decide what kind of fishing you want to do. It's like the longlining; I've tried to do mostly longline for golden tile and snowy grouper during the summertime, because you have more daylight hours. See, that's the only time you can catch them is in the daytime.

In the wintertime I try to do some bandit trips and catching the beliners. I target mainly beliners and grouper. And by looking at your closure areas, those are the areas that I've been putting in my logbook since 1981.

It seems like maybe that's where you got the locations from, where everybody in here is putting in logbooks, and then they go and they report it down to Florida and whatever is being fished the most, that's what it looks like to me that you've closed or are proposing to close.

Yes, I think it would be a hardship on me because like at one area where that wreck is at, that snowy wreck, there is not any grouper left on that snowy wreck so that don't matter. I mean, they might not ever show up.

And when they did catch them, they could have been just a school of snowies that swam by and was on the wreck at the time when they found it, so you don't know if they're going to be there or not. I mean that's like 130 fathoms and you don't catch many snowies in 130 fathoms.

Then back up on the Break, you've got it closed down from just north of the steeples to about the 180s and that's -- everybody that fishes out of Southport rides the beach. And Little River, they all go up there and fish that break, every trip.

It's not one trip or one trip a month. It's every trip they go up there. And they fish from like the -- I've fished from the Devil's Hole or off of Savannah, off Morehead City in one trip. That's like another guy said, you go out there and the tide is running in one area, you might have to run a day to a day and a half to get up there to go fishing another area.

You don't want to run a day and a half and then have to run through a closed area where the current is not running to go somewhere else that the current is running where you can't fish. I think it would put a hardship on everybody.

I don't know nothing about Florida, but I believe that if they put these closures on the bass down in Florida, within a year or two they're going to be right up here in closed areas, right here.

I was listening on the radio to the headboats and everybody catching these bass this last year and they -- everybody is catching five-ten times as many bass, so I just think really they need to investigate it for a couple more years.

They can put people on the boats. I can volunteer my boat. It's big enough. Four people can go. They can go longlining or they can go bandit fishing. And I can show them anything they want to know.

I can go out there and show them all these pinkies that are out there, too. There are pinkies from three miles out there to 95 fathoms, everywhere. And that's a predator fish. If they're worried about trying to protect the beliners and the grouper you can't just shut off one species of fish, because pinkies are eating all the baby beliners and eating the baby groupers.

You've got to manage all of them together. But I agree with everybody. I think that the pinkies and the kitties are about the stupidest law they came up with, because what it is, it's hurting the other fish more than the fishermen, because I believe the federal permits have already been cut in half since they've closed them where they can't do it.

It's already been cut in half. I mean, I think the closure is just doing too much. I think it's going to make it too difficult for all the fishermen.

(Question away from microphone)

Mr. Muellerweiss: That's a little inlet right now but I fish out of Morehead, Little River, Murrells Inlet, Southport, fished out of all of it.

Dr. Kitner: The council just formed a new committee to look and address just what you were talking about, the pinkies eating everything else and that you have to manage them as a group and it's called Ecosystem Based Management.

It's a bunch of jargon, but basically, it's to try in the future to manage these fish species and to look at all the input, not just looking at the fish, but also the people that fish for the fish and to try to manage them in a more holistic way and hopefully to then do a better job.

This committee was just formed. It just met for the first time. There was a lot of discussion about a lot of different things, but realizing that those kinds of interaction are very important and now trying to realize, trying to figure out how to address them in light of the fact that we have _____. We have certain kinds of information -- a lot if it and other times, we have very little.

Yes, this council, in particular, is fairly well balanced between commercial, recreational and trying to get better on environmental, scientific component so we get input from _____, it's fairly well-balanced.

(Questions asked away from microphone)

Dr. Kitner: _____. We need a remote microphone.

Unidentified Speaker: Yes, I think everybody is kind of scared, like you'll close your pinkies, a 50-pound per trip. But we've got more pinkies now than we ever had, but you all haven't increased the amount. It's still 50 pounds.

I mean, you have to take -- in deep water you have to ride and leap. So, I mean, if you all are not

going to do anything about that, we're scared to give you an inch, because we don't know what - if you take an inch, you're going to take a whole mile.

You can ask any fisherman. I mean, I can tell you the fishermen that are here. There is not a reason. We don't understand why you don't let us fish for more pinkies, or if you want to lighten up on the other types of fish, then open up what you've already closed, stuff like under the bag limits.

I mean, 50 pound of pinkies, that's two drops and that's it. And then we don't know what to do. If you don't show us that you're doing something with the pinkies, though, that we can catch more than 50 pounds per trip, then nobody is going to trust you for anything else, so I mean, I'm speaking for myself and pretty much everybody in here, I'm sure.

Everybody is scared. They don't know what -- We're scared. If we give you an inch, we're afraid you're going to take the whole mile and then we just don't want to go. I'm sure you're going to take what you want to, but if you do it like you did the pinkies --

Well, I mean, I've got to, and do you all have any answers for the pinkies? Are we ever going to be able to catch more than 50 pounds of pinkies?

Dr. Kitner: There is a proposal right now to increase the allowable catch to 100 fish, because we realize we can't weigh them.

(Speaker away from microphone)

Dr. Kitner: Right. We want one more copy -- Doug wants to comment on that. Yes, you need to introduce yourself.

Dr. Doug Rader: Yes, I'm Doug Rader, chair of the Habitat Advisory Panel and a member of the MPA Advisory Panel. But Amendment 13B is looking specifically at the Sustainable Fisheries requirements and the management measures for all of the shallow and mid-shelf complex.

And that includes vermillion snapper, beliner, red porgy, and pinky, all of those species. So I recommend that as that goes forward, that you look at it and look at it closely. There will be a preliminary draft that will have a wide array of alternatives.

As I said, it will be coming out, I don't know if it will actually be --

Dr. Kitner: _____ Fishing effort and landings et cetera that we requested some of the species until August so maybe by the September meeting, they might be able to have that first draft put together.

Dr. Rader: And so for those of you that are worried -- not just about the direct fisheries management for those mid-shelf and inshore species, please put that on your radar screen. And

the second issue related to that is there are no marine protected area recommendations now or probably that will be considered at all in that amendment.

So if you're worried about the "camel's nose under the tent" syndrome, that would be at best way, way, way down the road and after a demonstrated need were shown to exist. So for now, we really are looking at the deep water species, and actually, I've heard a lot of really important input to that myself tonight and so there is an opportunity on the other issue to weigh in. Thank you.

Dr. Kitner: Also, I don't know if I mentioned it, if you're a bit shy of speaking, not many of you seem to be, but some of you don't like to speak in front of other people, we will take any kind of input if you want to give us over the telephone if that's easier.

Ideally, what we had wanted to do was get out -- I would have gotten here, let's say, yesterday and gone down to the docks so I could talk to people on your own turf where you might feel more comfortable. You can also, if you e-mail people, you can e-mail us anything.

You can send us a letter. We're gathering input in any way that is kind of best for you, realizing that you can't always come to meetings because you're out fishing, and you have other jobs to do working, so I want to underline that and emphasize that our phone lines are open from 8:00 a.m. in the morning until about 5:00 in the afternoon. You can send us an e-mail anytime. And I have some business cards here ----- I'm not shutting you down now.

Mr. Pearce: No, we're not.

Dr. Kitner: I'm not closing it.

Mr. Pearce: Anyone else have any more questions? Does anyone else wish to speak? Well, that simplifies it. It has to go through the federal bureaucracy, which I can't say, but I'm going to try to answer your questions.

The council may or may not decide to try it. Let's just say that the council does decide that they're going to implement one or all of the sites, that recommendation would then go to NOAA Fisheries in Washington for their review, which would then take Lord knows how long. At that point, if there is something in that plan that they don't like, it comes back to the council and it goes back through the process of changing the plan, amending it and resubmitting it.

At NOAA Fisheries, though, if NOAA decides to accept the plan, then it goes to the Secretary of Commerce for his approval. It's not something that will happen overnight, but it is something that can happen. So you have what the process is and it may be an oversimplification, but that is the way it's covered.

The South Atlantic Council has proposed a _____ plus the _____, right off the Department of Natural Resources, so you have 3 voting members, South Carolina, North Carolina, _____. The South Atlantic Council is composed of members from South Carolina,

North Carolina, Georgia and the East Coast of Florida.

Dr. Kitner: The council was formed in 1973 by Congressional mandate.

Mr. Pearce: They are mandated under several statutes.

Matt Ruby: Matt Ruby, Little River, South Carolina. And I was just wondering, when the NOAA people come down from Charleston or somewhere, they've come down and measure a boat, might be a bandit boat or a longline boat, and they might measure one or two tubs of fish that might be smaller in the group of fish.

Then they'll get their information, and then they'll go back to Charleston and then the rest of the fish coming off the boat might be all large, and then they go back with the information saying, "Well, the species is being overfished, there's nothing but small fish coming off the boat".

Then they'll sit there and measure them, two or three tubs, and then they've got how many fish they're supposed to do that day; and then maybe they have to go to Murrells Inlet or Southport; and then they leave and don't do the whole boat; then the rest of the fish might be all large.

You know, it might be a good catch. But when they go back, is that the information that they give, that all the fish on that boat, the majority of them, were small and it was a bad catch? How do they present that information to the marine fisheries?

Dr. Kitner: Ideally, they wouldn't just use that one-day's catch from that one boat. That would be a continual process of going out and in being somewhat random, you hope that you're covering the whole spectrum, so that some days you might get smaller catches that you measure and other days you get the larger catches, so that it will hopefully even out over time. That's my understanding.

There are other sources of data. They just don't use fish measurements like that. They use the logbooks. They use fishery-independent _____, which are gathered through MARMAP and other things, so that they're not coming from the fishermen, themselves, they're actually coming from an independent source.

There are problems. I will of the first to admit, and there are other people on the council that will also admit that some of the data that has been collected is representative of the fishery. There are holes in the data.

There are problems sometimes with the way it is collected. After all, it's being collected by human beings and they're not perfect, but realizing that there are these problems allows you then to, hopefully, go ahead and fix it, but it's not just one little pinpoint of information that they use.

In some cases, they have very good ways to use, and then it does become -- that's the only thing they can go by. So we're mandated to use what they call the "best available science."

What's available out there sometimes becomes the best by virtue of the fact that it's the only. And I'm giving you – that's the way I see it. Things have definitely improved an awful lot in data collection.

This meeting has been, like Doug said, extremely helpful to me, because I'm getting a lot of good information, but it's not enough, obviously. We're skimming the top of it.

(Speakers away from microphone)

Unidentified Speaker: I applied for a position for five years and haven't had a call yet. Obviously, it's been a waste of my time to do it. It seems like what you're doing here is not really important to the individual or the recreational fisherman. You ask the question, well, what do you fish for and where do you fish?

Well, recreational fishermen just like to go fishing. I'd sure as hell hate to drive 65 miles off shore and then come up to a sign that says you can't fish here. You know what I'm talking about? I finally got this day off. I spent all the money on the gas and I got here and you say you can't fish.

(Speaker away from microphone)

Unidentified Speaker: Well, now that's an option. That's an option. That's an option. That's not a guarantee. Seems like to me the best way to manage -- I fished my whole life. Seems like the best way to manage fisheries is to give them an opportunity to spawn before you catch them.

And if you do that, then there's going to have to be a heck of a lot of hooks out there to take them. Now this crowd in here has got some good hooks, I'll assure you.

Chris Long: Like, you know, the longliners -- I'm Chris Long. If there's no stock, there are no fishermen. I mean, doesn't that kind of balance out, like the amount of fish there. I mean, as long as there are boats able to make a living at it, there's obviously enough stock.

Yes, and like every year, every new commercial fisherman, there are two who quit for one to become a fisherman. Like I say, I've been doing it a long time, and I see stocks improving and like every year, there's less and less fishermen. And I just think the ocean is being managed right like it is without these closures.

Dr. Rader: I don't have any position, and our organization doesn't have any position on when and how MPAs ought to be used. I believe, after having looked at all the science on it, that marine protected areas having been properly designed based on the best available science, are a necessary part of management for deep water groupers, especially those that aggregate the spawn and especially those that are sequential hermaphrodite, who become male only after they've been female.

Because all of the other measures that will achieve the same results will be more hurtful to you,

and, in fact, if you look at the efficacy of the measures and also what the alternative would do to you, I think probably you would like them, too, in that context.

But that is when they're properly designed, based on the best available science, in the right place now meaning that we agree that there's a vested interest in putting them there and that you're not going to try to get around and screw the pooch on finding those places and be the bad guys and make them not work for everybody else.

So having the enforcement mechanisms that work, science-based plans and plans that are implemented effectively in the context of meeting overall restoration goals for species and from ecosystems from which they depend, the answer is absolutely -- and I almost put a bad word in there -- in the right context, in the right context.

(Speaker away from microphone)

Dr. Rader: No, we do. In fact, wait a minute, and in fact, that's part of the way you design these things to work, because a lot of the things that aren't known actually make these things more vulnerable, less likely to rebuild, and there is a long history of actually having exactly that outcome.

Just for instance, all these things that you're catching in these waters, many of them are actually in shallower waters as juveniles and are being captured by people that are fishing. There's mortality in those shallower waters of the same species.

So if I were designing an ecosystem-based management approach to this system, as this council is in the forefront of doing, you take those things into account and factor them into the design. In other words, the answer, as I said, it depends. For a lot of goals, a lot of purposes, marine protected areas make no sense. For a lot of other purposes, they're among the best tools in the toolbox. It just depends.

(Speaker away from microphone)

Mr. Muellerweiss: The black fish, they just turn solid male, and then goes right back to the ocean. It took care of itself because the black fish is ten times more populated now than they were three years ago. I believe they're all official or will take care of itself, because the ocean is so big and the boats that we're all running, and the biggest ones are about 20 foot wide. You can go out there and you have a whole ocean, and you're covering a 20-foot-wide section at a time.

It's like me when I was stringing my longline cable out there, that cable is only 16 tenths wide, the leader is only two feet long, and you can't wipe out all that bottom. It would be like stringing a little piece of thread on the carpet and putting a little glue on it to pick up all the fleas that may be on the floor. You can't do it.

And it's just like longliners. You'll never clear out all the fishermen in the bottom. There's bottom out there that's so rugged that it's just like protected areas. There are naturally protected

areas out there right now. It's just like in the Steeples. You go out there and there are two or three places I can tell you that if you go anchor up down there, you might as well kiss your anchor good-bye. You ain't going to get it back. It's just naturally protected.

I don't think man need to put his foot in it and mark off areas and say that we can't, because that would be like a dictatorship. That's it. That's my talk on it. If I'd listen a little bit longer I could come up with something else, too.

Wayne Hill: My name is Wayne Hill, again, and Milton makes a great point. He says how much the black fish has been biting or hermaphrodite, anyway they change sexes. And this was accomplished by a size limit.

And getting back to the pinkies, these guys say if you let me keep a pinky that's over 14 inches long, we'll never run out of pinkies. Man, there's more than one way to manage the fish and this MPA -- and this man just stated the same thing -- it has to be done ethically. It has to be done efficiently. We have to know what we're doing when we do it. We have to put it in the right place.

I also like what Milton said, the way you know, the way it was discovered in the right place, I looked at your logbooks for the last five years.

(Speaker away from microphone)

Mr. Hill: These guys are fishermen. They ain't dumb.

(Speaker away from microphone)

Mr. Hill: If it looks like a duck, it walks like a duck and it quacks like a duck --

(Speaker away from microphone)

Mr. Hill: I mean, Doug, how much time do you spend in the ocean fishing?

(Dr. Rader not at microphone.)

Mr. Hill: Science-ing?

(Dr. Rader not at microphone.)

Mr. Hill: The other two moderators here, do you all fish? Do you all spend any time in ocean fishing?

(Responses not at microphone)

Mr. Hill: So you're a recreational.

(Response not at microphone.)

Mr. Hill: I'm leading you in the wrong crowd to be talking about a fishing ride. You can get one in here.

(Response not at microphone.)

Mr. Hill: Here, let me turn this over.

Unidentified Speaker: I think you've got everybody's opinion, really. There's only one person _____, the rest are all commercial fishing. I think fish will take care of themselves. I mean, there were fish before our time. There will be fish after we're gone.

I just feel like that every fish, between the size limits and the bag limits and everything else and the weather, I don't think -- and, like I said, I mean, I've got a son who wants to go fishing. If I don't have my vessel, he has got to buy two boats and two permits to make one.

I mean, the average person growing up can't do that, you know. And the only way he's going to be one is for me to give him mine. That's all he does right now is fish. He's always going to be working with _____ boat, because he doesn't have enough money. If you put any more rules and regulations in, he's going to make less money.

But Wayne Hill, don't let Wayne kid you. He can fish as well as I can. But there's more money in selling real estate -- but I'll be honest with you. We're all going to be selling real estate if you all put any more laws in.

(Multiple speakers away from microphone)

(Whereupon, the MPA public hearing adjourned on Tuesday, February 17, 2004.)

Tape of Proceedings On File (1)

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SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

**SNAPPER GROUPE AMENDMENT 14 (MPA)
PUBLIC HEARING**

**Little River, South Carolina
February 17, 2004**

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Staff Members:

Dr. Kathi Kitner

Bridgett Vergara

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