

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SNAPPER GROUPE AMENDMENT 14 (MPA) PUBLIC HEARING

**Richmond Hill, Georgia
February 11, 2004**

Summary Minutes

The Marine Protected Area public meeting for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened in Richmond Hill, Georgia, on Wednesday, February 11, 2004, and was called to order by Chairman Susan Shipman.

Ms. Shipman: Thank you all very much for coming out on a sort of rainy and snowy night. It's a chilly night and I thank you all for taking the time to come. My name is Susan Shipman and I'm going to be acting as chairperson tonight.

We have a hearing board with me that I want to introduce. To the far right is Duane Harris. Duane is a council member from Georgia. Next to Duane and next to me is John Wallace, from Georgia, myself and then on my left, my left -- your right, is Spud Woodward, who is my proxy designee and a council member from Georgia and Dr. Vishwanie Maharaj, who is on council staff. She is with us tonight and will be making a presentation.

Bridgett Vergara is over here cut down, and she will be reporting this to you. She is with the council staff out of Charleston, so we really want to thank you all for coming here tonight.

This is an informational public hearing. It's a little bit different from other public hearings that we've done. And the purpose tonight is to ask you to comment on the social and economic impacts that may be associated with specific proposed marine protected areas in the Snapper Grouper Amendment 14. And we're going to show those to you.

We're particularly interested in hearing your input on the two options that are based in Georgia. I'm going to call those to your attention. If you look on Pages 31 through 33, it starts on Page 31.

Those are -- that's a discussion of the two sites for specifically Georgia. And then there is a graph -- and we'll be projecting this in a larger format on Page 32. And then on Page 33, we'll have discussion about that.

In particular, we want to call your attention to those questions. There are eight there. That's what we're trying to do through this series of public hearings is find out from the individuals who attend, what type of fishing is done at these specific sites, if you do fish there, what type of fishing it is. Is it recreational? Charter? Headboat? Commercial? Where you fish out of? How

many bottom fishing trips do you make a year at this site?

We would like you to tell us the main species that you target at this site and also what other areas or sites would you fish, if this were closed and you weren't able to fish it, either hypothetically or introducing your thoughts.

So what we're going to be asking you to comment on tonight, there won't be any decisions made following tonight's meeting about selecting a particular preferred area. What we're going to do is we'll have another round of public hearings, and we will be bringing back to you these sites again and asking you to comment on them again.

But tonight, really, the purpose is more to get economic and social information we are not able to get out of the logbooks, the headboat surveys, et cetera. That's really kind of our focus tonight.

Also, Amendment 14 is going to include what we call the dialogue and reference _____. And the focus of this amendment is our deep-water _____.

We're going to need to come up with definitions of overfishing, optimum yield, maximum sustainable yield that meets the criteria of that federal law, so that will be included in this amendment, in Amendment 14.

When we come back to you at public hearings, we'll be taking comments on that. It will be a more traditional public hearing. We estimate that the next round of public hearing would be either late fall, possibly early 2005, so we're still a ways out as we work through this process.

Again, I want to thank you all for taking the time to come tonight, and I'm going to turn this over to Vishwanie and she's going to make a presentation to you, kind of lead you through what the focus of tonight's meeting is, the questions, the areas. We'll be walking through all the areas in North Carolina down to _____ Beach.

Dr. Maharaj: Good evening. I'm a staff economist with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. And the presentation I'll give is fairly brief, and I'll spend some more time leaving sites up for you to look at.

Also, I want to point out that we've got two large maps. One is the sites in Georgia that we're considering and also on the other side, we've got the North Florida sites. We do have these large maps of the other sites that we're considering in Amendment 14.

And if you'd like to take a look at that further on, please ask Bridgett or myself, and we will certainly do that. I just want to give you a brief background on Amendment 14, and then we will get into the sites, and then I'll leave a slide up with the questions, as Susan described.

As Susan mentioned earlier, Amendment 14 for the Snapper Grouper Plan will contain measures not only relating to the various MPA sites but also other measures, other perhaps traditional fishery management measures that would help rebuild our deep water snapper grouper stock.

The council wants to put a little bit more emphasis on protecting some of the deep water species for a variety of reasons, which I'll get into a little bit later.

These are the lists of deep water snapper grouper species: speckled hind, snowy grouper, Warsaw grouper, misty, yellowedged, blueline and golden tilefish. That's what the council is considering as their deep water complex.

One of the major reasons for giving some special consideration to these species is because they're slow-growing, long-lived. Again, their release mortality is pretty high. As an example, there were estimates that yellowedged grouper have lived to be about 85 years old, so there is some additional concern that the council has about these particular species for those reasons.

As Susan mentioned earlier, this hearing tonight is not one of our traditional public hearings. It's an informational public hearing. She also mentioned that we will have a second round of public hearings, perhaps early next year or later on this year.

It really depends upon our timing factor. We have two amendments for snapper grouper. One is Amendment 13B that we're currently developing, and alongside that we're developing Amendment 14. So, with this particular hearing we would like to get your input on the information that would allow us to calculate some of the social and economic impacts.

The other thing that we -- there are many definitions of marine protected areas, marine reserves, and the council has their definition. When they refer to MPAs, they're referring to sort of a network of areas that will be closed for the primary purpose of aiding in the recovery of overfished stocks.

Another purpose for their consideration of MPAs is certainly, as an insurance policy, to ensure that these fish stocks are healthy, their age and size structure are maintained in these areas and also to afford some protection to their unique habitat.

Again, to move along with a definition of MPAs, the council has different definitions of what they're considering to be marine protected areas. There are four sort of classifications, if you will, that the council has developed.

One is sort of a permanent closure where there is no take at all. And that's considered a Type 1 MPA. Most of the sites that we're considering right now under Amendment 14 are Type 2 MPAs, which are closures but some fishing is allowed. The consideration right now is to allow fishing for pelagic species and only prohibit bottom fishing within these sites.

There are other closures. There is what we might want to classify as limited duration closures, and those are more familiar sort of areas that are closed for a spawning season, for example.

Again, there are two types of those. One is sort of a no-take spawning area closure which is a Type 3 and one with some take is allowed, again, Type 4 MPA. But what we're talking about

here tonight primarily is the Type 2 MPA type.

Some of you may have already -- the council has had a long process in terms of developing MPAs. I guess they first started back in 1990. I was not even -- I was certainly not employed with the council when we started discussing MPAs.

It has been a long deliberative process. Some of you may have been to a number of meetings where we've discussed MPAs. I know I can recall a couple years ago, having a round-table in Georgia.

The Plan Development Team began in 1990. Initially, scoping meetings were held. There was sort of an initial plan, if you will, for MPAs. That was the reaction I think we got from the initial plan over MPAs. Some re-thinking took place.

In the meantime, we had a number of other key amendments to the Snapper Grouper Plan, Amendments 8 and 9. That took the council's attention away from MPAs and then really started thinking about them in terms of deep water, protection of the deep-water species probably from 1998.

There were a number of -- like I said, about two years ago, we began with, once the purpose and need was refined to those MPAs, as protection of the deep water stocks.

January of 2000 we started with a number of informal meetings to obtain a lot of the public input in terms of their reactions to this, negative, positive, neutral, as well as to indicate to us sites to be potential for the council consideration.

We started with numerous sites. There was a lot of discussion throughout the last two years with the eight advisory panels and a number of other scientists providing data on spawning, spawning areas in close association with these sites and we whittled it down to the nine sites that you see, and there are some alternatives to these nine sites as well.

So this has been quite a long process. And we're at the stage now where we've got these sites, and what we're finding -- we're looking at some of the information we have to assess the costs and benefits, if you will, of putting in these MPAs.

We're here tonight because we've got some information gaps. And before I get into the questions I just want to go through the -- okay, this last slide that I've added sort of explains a little bit more of why we are conducting these informational public hearings.

Again, the council is required by law to consider socioeconomic effects, and they do consider the socioeconomic effects of any management regulations. We have to weigh the costs and benefits of all the alternatives that we have on the table.

Some of our existing data collection programs, as Susan mentioned earlier, they really don't provide the refined, site-specific data we need for recreational-commercial-for-hire sectors. So

that's why we've been conducting these information public hearings right throughout the range of the South Atlantic Council's area of jurisdiction.

I'm going to get into the actual sites. The first one, if you turn to, I guess Page 23, that's the one off of, the first one is the North Carolina site. And that's the Snowy Wreck. I'm not going to spend a whole lot of time on that one.

The second site, I think, is the one on Page 26, and that is one off of South Carolina. It's kind of the northern, I believe, the northern area. While I'm going through this, just carefully look at these sites, determine whether you think of, if you do fish at these sites, think of the questions that we've asked earlier.

The third is on Page 29. That's the Site B off of South Carolina, and for some of you, that's just south of Charleston, so some of you may fish at that site. This one would be Page _____. I'm going to leave that up for a while.

The next ones we really want your comments on and that's the Georgia MPAs. Again, the large map is -- I'll leave that up for a bit. That's on Page 32. There are two options for drawing that box, if you will. On Page 33, we do have some data that, again, came out of our logbooks.

The logbook area is a very large grid area that covers that entire -- the catch that's represented is really from a larger area. I think it's 60 by 60 square mile area. It's difficult for us to determine what would be the proportion of activity that occurs in this box or the level of landings that comes out of these two boxes.

It would be helpful, if you have any information, if you could take a look at that Table 9, I guess, on Page 33, and give us your reactions to that as well as the list of questions that are under Page 33.

The other one is on the map as well. That's North Florida. And we have two options for that particular site on Page 34. The next one on 37 is Sea Bass Rock. The other site in Florida is East Hump in Florida and that's on Page 39.

Our last two sites that we're considering are areas where we want to establish artificial reefs. We've been to public hearings -- I'm sorry, the information gathering process, the scoping meetings, we've heard a number of comments on or suggestions to set aside an area that's not being utilized and establish an artificial reef in addition to some of these other MPA sites.

There are two areas, two of these types of MPAs, artificial reef sites that the council is considering. One is off of North Carolina. That would be, I guess, a Type 1 MPA. The correct definition for these is sort of experimental artificial reef MPAs. That's on Page 41.

The last site, and we would certainly like your comments on this as well, is to establish a similar experimental artificial reef off of South Carolina. And that's on Page 44. Since this is in fairly close proximity to Georgia, if you do fish there we certainly would like to get your opinion on

that one as well.

These are the types of questions we want you to answer, and I can either leave this slide up or go back to the South Carolina -- I'm sorry, the Georgia site.

Ms. Shipman: Before we do that, does anybody has questions about the presentation? Back in 2000 when we were working on this, some members of the public and I think the -- pardon me if I'm wrong, Vishwanie -- but I believe the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel as well was interested in seeing us establish and set aside some areas.

Actually, we're interested in two things tonight. It's the artificial reef potentially built that would be put off limits to fishing, hoping that they might be surrogates, if you will, to setting aside natural bottom. So that was one thing that we were interested in.

Then there were other people interested in seeing us build artificial reefs to mitigate for areas that people do this to replace rock. Now the North Carolina one, I think North Carolina actually includes the delegation from North Carolina. Yes, they proposed this particular site. They have had an interest, evidently, in putting an artificial reef there.

But what they are interested in is Type 1, where there would be no fishing. They're interested in building it and seeing what it's like. The other one, the South Carolina actually is a deeper site.

South Carolina and the people, particularly, the scientists on the Scientific and Statistical Panel the Snapper Grouper Assessment Committee have had a keen interest in trying to build some deep water reefs to see if we could establish some strong aggregation of deep-water snapper grouper.

This particular one is supposed to be a Type 2 where you would have off limits to bottom fishing -- no bottom fishing allowed -- but you would be allowed to troll _____. Yes, and they're not permitted yet, either. They will be new reefs.

As some of you may know, we have had a discussion with -- South Carolina has actually made a proposal to the Maritime Administration. We'd like to get a large ship, aircraft carrier, whatever, and build a deep-water reef.

We would have to get a permit and all of that. We'd have to _____. But we have an interest in establishing a deep-water reef. It's up in the air. The question is up in the air whether that would be fished, not fished, set aside. We, too, are interested in some deep-water bottom _____. Other questions?

First, some history because I have been involved since 1990 when we started talking about this. Several of you will remember the plan development team in the early 1990s came out, and they said we needed to set --

That's where that magic 20 percent that many of you heard about -- that's where they said, 20

percent of the bottoms need to be set aside in order to be kind of an equivalent of a 20 percent spawning potential ratio. They were equating area to reproductiveness and that was their best effort.

They literally just -- I think their illustrations put areas on the map. There was this very adverse reaction from the public to that. So as a result, the council went back to the drawing board and wanted to do more of a bottom-up approach.

This has got, we believe and I think the fishermen believe and the scientists believe, this has merit as far as rebuilding overfished deep-water stocks. So what would be the best way to go about this?

That's why we kind of went back to the drawing board and started from the bottom up. Now the Oculina Bank, which was set aside, I believe in either '92 or '93 as a marine reserve, that emerged from the first one.

But in '98, '97-'98 when we sat down with the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel, and it was realized the type of cut fishermen would have to make in either seasonal closures, quota closures, whatever, to achieve where we needed to get to meet federal law, many of the commercial fishermen largely said we need to go back and look at this marine protected area to see if we could couple that with some traditional measures and not have to take a Draconian effect of seasonal closures.

As you'll recall, we were looking at three month and four month closures in the commercial fishery and total closures, which would have undermined the fish houses, the markets, and just _____ everything. So in many ways, the request to go back and look at marine protected areas came out of those amendments in 1997 and '98 when they saw how severe measures were.

So we've been really working on this since about 1998. I guess I've been working on it for about 14 years. It's been a long, long wait. In answer to your question, we could still go back and look at the minutes and various meetings and get a _____. It's in there.

(Unable to hear speaker)

Ms. Shipman: You mean the landlord edge of it? The western edge?

(Unable to hear speaker)

Ms. Shipman: Which one, because there are two? Option 1 or Option 2?

(Unable to hear speaker)

Ms. Shipman: The square box or the triangle? Yes, right.

(Unable to hear speaker)

Ms. Shipman: Well, the enforcement committee met last week and I wasn't there. I don't know whether Vishwanie has any comments, but certainly enforcement has been a topic through the whole system of how to set this up.

Dr. Maharaj: That was one of the discussions that they had last time and they were considering - I'm not sure -- there was a heated discussion on requiring VMS across all fisheries, one way of aiding enforcement. Boat tracking devices primarily for the commercial fisheries.

(Unable to hear speaker)

Ms. Shipman: Well, they're required on the Oculina Bank. I mean, VMS is required now on many of the vessels largely because of the incursion into that area. But I wasn't at the Law Enforcement Committee meeting, and I can't -- Duane, were you there?

Mr. Harris: I was there part of the time.

Ms. Shipman: But it's clearly something that everybody is looking at. With regard to the square box, that was drawn from the data we had, and then fishermen on the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel, largely the commercial guys who fish out there, they suggested the trapezoidal, moving it into that deeper water for just the reasons you mentioned.

So, really, the trapezoid is their suggestion, which we thought was a good one and had merit to come to the public hearing. So that's why we brought those options. You know, the Oculina Bank, I mean, it's a Type 2, basically.

You can troll through it. And there has certainly been lots of discussion through the years of you either close the whole thing down or you don't. We've looked at the social and economic impacts and decided not to close it down, recognizing there are a lot of enforcement issues.

That's like way off shore, as you know, and it's going to be a hard one to do, unlike Oculina Bank which is 16 miles off of Ft. Pierce. They had enough trouble with that.

(Unable to hear speaker)

Ms. Shipman: Yes, exactly.

(Unable to hear speaker)

Ms. Shipman: It's a very valid comment. It's something that we're going to have to struggle with on many these _____ way up there. Other questions? Yes, sir.

(Unable to hear speaker)

Ms. Shipman: We've moved off of that 20 percent spawning potential ratio so we're not really looking for an equivalency, if you will. We're more concerned about what the known, or what

we believe, historically, was a known spawning area of held deep- water groupers, what was a favorite habitat by those fish that we think has the potential to support those populations again. We don't have any magic number in mind. But I can't answer what percent that is of spawning bottom, yes.

(Unable to hear speaker)

Ms. Shipman: That's an excellent question. And that's the type of thing we try to quantify.

Dr. Maharaj: Again, Amendment 14 will deal with the entire complex of regulations for rebuilding the species in addition to some of these closed areas, more than likely. I can't speak for right now because we're still developing Amendment 14, likely you can see in other management regulations -- Pardon?

(Unable to hear speaker)

Dr. Maharaj: Could very well be. Could very well be. Yes. Again, these sites are primarily to maintain the age and size structure. The purpose behind selecting these sites, and the council's consideration is to protect the -- to have certain areas set aside to protect the age and size structure, so you know that if there some management failure elsewhere, that you have a site set aside where these species are protected.

(Unable to hear speaker)

Ms. Shipman: We're going to have to couple that with those other traditional measures. We will have very complex mathematical models and assessments that will give us an estimate of what we're achieving with the traditional measures, and then it will be more difficult to add that factor into that equation.

But we do know qualitatively, just from historical information or information from where people are fishing now, that those are known spawning sites, so to speak, or were, historically. We know they held fish at one time, so if we can get some escapement, if you will, of fish into the adult sector, we believe they would go back to those sites or establish on those sites and establish spawning aggregations again.

That's the best goal, I guess I should say. But it's going to be very hard to quantify it. And it will have to be coupled with these other measures.

(Unable to hear speaker)

Ms. Shipman: No, because right now we're trying to figure out where the targets -- we've got to figure out the overfishing definition, the maximum sustainable yield, the optimum yield.,

Unidentified Speaker: (Began off microphone) -- and then what you do is you collect data on the fish population from fishermen and from scientists, then you run that through an analysis and

then you see where you're at with relevance to your reference points.

I mean, the doctor takes your temperature. It's supposed to be 98.6. Well, if it's not 98.6, it's either above or below and something's wrong. And it's sort of the same thing. In its simplistic terms that's what you're looking for.

So, you've got to -- because the MPAs are not going to fix the deep-water grouper problem by themselves. They've got to be done in concert with controlling fishing mortality or the removals by fishing and then making sure that you keep enough spawning population out there to populate these areas and to produce offspring.

And then you measure by going back out and looking at the population conditions and seeing whether or not there is a response in the population. Well, they've been overfished because they just -- from commercial -- you know.

And mainly, commercial fishing and a little bit of recreational fishing in areas like the Black Sea Bass Rocks down there. I mean, those are places that are accessible to recreational guys and up off North Carolina to some degree, they're accessible.

But you know, any animal that -- and we're dealing with a lot of these species' chain effect. They've got a very complicated life cycle, and they become males as they grow older. They're more aggressive, and they're the first ones to get pulled out of the population.

And so you've got a lot of really strange things going on that hinder conventional management. You know, most of the species we deal with don't do that. But these snappers and groupers have this annoying habit of changing sex, and so you've got to start dealing with that.

So, one of the simplest responses in a lot of these populations is looking at the sex ratio, males to females. And you start seeing one of the first signs of it being unhealthy is more females in the population than you should have in a healthy situation.

It's actually the reverse of what we have in most situations where you're worried about egg production. In groupers, you worry about sperm production being a limiting factor in the population. So the other advantage of the MPA is it gives them a place to go do their thing uninterrupted and undisturbed by fishing activities.

(Unable to hear speaker.)

Unidentified Speaker: Yes, I mean, the commercial harvest, it comes in as samples. There are samples. We do it here in Georgia for the few places where they're landed. So it's sampled that way.

I mean, there are actually other specific scientific surveys that go out, and they're using these submersible -- deep water submersibles. You go down and actually look at densities of fish on areas and be able to confirm.

You may be able to go back with these MPAs over time ago, there are fish here when there used to not be fish here. Granted, that's not an accurate measurement, but at least it tells you that's a sign that says the population is responding. It all comes down to your ability to see whether the population is responding to the management actions.

Ms. Shipman: There's an intensive survey that has been going on, gosh, for years, that run – it's called MARMAP. And it runs from Charleston, I guess, Charleston down to Cape Canaveral, I believe. And they've also done some work down in the Oculina Bank. Once that area was closed they have been able to go down with the submersibles and see the re-establishment of those large groupers.

(Unable to hear speaker)

Ms. Shipman: Yes, oh, yes. If you will get in touch with the council office.

Dr. Maharaj: Yes, if you get in touch with our office, we can give you or you can give us your – we've got a little card to fill out, a little green card. You give it to me at the – okay, yes. If you can give it to me, I'll take it back to the office and make sure you get our report. There is a report on the Oculina area. We can certainly ensure that gets to you.

Ms. Shipman: And there's some MARMAP reports, too.

Dr. Maharaj: Right, that's right. Kerry O'Malley is the staff person, who normally handles MPAs, and I'm sure she'd be willing to chat with you. She's more of an expert on the biologist's aspect – I'm not a biologist. I'm an economist. And she certainly could provide you with any additional information.

Ms. Shipman: Vishwanie is very graciously stepping in tonight and pinch hitting. Kerry O'Malley, who is not with us, Kerry is expecting and she is on bed rest, and so the doctor wouldn't let her travel. So we appreciate Vishwanie coming down and handling a subject that she normally is not the one to handle.

If there are no other questions, I'm going to go through the cards. We don't have a lot of people who have indicated they want to speak, but we will go through the cards that are "maybes" and also those of you who checked no.

You may have changed your minds since we've been talking and taking questions and answers, and we want to make sure everybody has a chance to speak. And what we're going to do. First, is the microphone? Where do we have it? Okay, so there is a mike.

If we could actually do this, I hate to impose upon you, but so that we can make sure we do get your comments if you would come up to the podium when I call your name, and you'll need to state your name for the record. And if you're representing an organization, we need to know that as well. I have William Anderson. Do you have any comments? Okay. David Newlin.

David's a pro. He knows the drill here.

Captain David Newlin: I'm David Newlin. I've been in the charter fishing business off here since the late '70s. I have been opposed to permanent fishery experimental closures ever since we had a meeting at the Hyatt in 1990.

And I just -- this word "permanent" going in on this stuff is real scary, because these boys that make a living out there fishing on -- well, I'm looking at that map out there -- that's some of the hardest work that any man on the face of this earth could ever do.

I did some in 1980 and it was vicious. Had to be close to that. I'm still thinking Loran numbers and looking at your lat-long. It still doesn't quite _____. I know it's right in that closed spot.

And the enforceability of this, I'm just deathly afraid that three years into this, somebody is going to come up with the idea that we don't need to allow boat traffic through this. I don't make a lot of trips out there.

This past year, I didn't make any. But in years past, I've made bunches of trolling trips out into, probably into both of those boxes, because we fished out in 500-600-700 feet of water. And I know, once the bed has gone bad, the fish weren't biting, we backed off up into that 150-160-180 feet of water, dropped the bottom rigs down and did catch a few tilefish, not no hundreds of them. I'm talking two, three, four of them, and we couldn't believe it when we caught them.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Captain Newlin: I'm not talking many, Duane. I'm talking about four. But we were mainly trying to catch the porgies and _____ go along there, and you'd catch a bunch of big beliners. I mean, you'd hit them, what I'm calling a "bunch," and that ends up ten or twelve, but when it's 1:00 in the afternoon and you hadn't had a bite all day trolling, that's a lot of fish.

And it's just -- they're a charter business and all. We've taken a lot of hits the last few years and I just want to know that next year -- because this is a done deal. There are no ifs, ands, buts about it. This is a done deal.

But the next year, year and a half from now, everything I fish off here, this is going to be in one of these little boxes at the next public hearing. I mean, we've got to draw the line somewhere, because I know some boys that fish for that stuff down below Key West down there that is closed now and it has kind of hurt us.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Captain Newlin: When David Murphy had a commercial boat back in '80-'81, I made a trip out there with him in February and like to froze to death. Now we did catch some of those groupers. I can't honestly tell you what they were, but they were grouper like I hadn't every caught before fishing back in close. That's just basically -- I'm just scared of this stuff where it's here

permanent.

I am still very interested in getting on any of the committees you all have open though for some reason, I keep getting bypassed.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Captain Newlin: I wasn't then. Well, I fished all over the place. I'm fishing out of _____ down there.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Captain Newlin: Five. And they were adjustable. And that was just -- they had called days for an hour goofing off.

Captain Newlin: Mainly trying to catch those red porgies and the beliners. We fished in that area.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Captain Newlin: Inshore or there.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Captain Newlin: The only other deep water stuff I've done is stuff back, it would be seven or eight miles south of there, what we call the "Triple Ledge Cut." I've played around, being out there 1:00 in the afternoon on dead calm days with five pounds of weight on something.

A lot of days you couldn't get to the bottom of 180 feet of water. But we honestly put five pounds of weight on a Red 60 reel and it would gimp with four hooks on it, just goofing off, you know. My main concern is I just don't want to see, three-four years down the road, them come up and say no fishing in those boxes.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Captain Newlin: To a permanent all fishing closure. That was what we were discussing back in the '90s.

Ms. Shipman: Oh, sorry. Okay, and I hate to burden you, but since you do fish, can you come to the microphone so we can get that on the record. I know, but it will be very helpful. Okay, the type of fishing you're doing there --

Unidentified Speaker: It's just all trolling.

Ms. Shipman: Is it private, recreational?

Unidentified Speaker: Yes, private. I'm sorry.

Ms. Shipman: And where are you fishing out of?

Unidentified Speaker: Forest River.

Ms. Shipman: And how many -- you're doing all trolling trips so how many trip did you say you make a year?

Unidentified Speaker: I think I was out there about three times last year.

Ms. Shipman: How many years have you been fishing?

Unidentified Speaker: I've only been here three years.

Ms. Shipman: So each year you've fished there?

Unidentified Speaker: Yes.

Ms. Shipman: All right, and the main things you're trolling for?

Unidentified Speaker: Oh, everything.

Ms. Shipman: Are you just blue water trolling?

Unidentified Speaker: Yes, blue water trolling, dolphin.

Ms. Shipman: Are you having any luck out there?

Unidentified Speaker: Yes. That's a good question. All right, you know, it is a great fishing area for trolling.

Ms. Shipman: And what other site -- if this were to go to a Type 1, which is not proposed, but if it were, where would you be displaced to?

Unidentified Speaker: Down on Triple Ledge.

Ms. Shipman: Okay.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Ms. Shipman: How many other boats, other people do you know that fish off there?

(Comments made away from microphone)

Ms. Shipman: That's very helpful. Thank you. Rich Hallman. Oh, okay. And Stan Kane. Come on up, Stan. I feel like you've got some comments.

Ms. Shipman: Thank you, thank you very much. Let me see, I think that was all of the undesignated cards, the potential maybes. I'm just going to run through this real quick. These are the "nos." But please do feel free to indicate if you want to make a comment. Mike Zabarc. Mike, can you come to the microphone. Sorry.

Mike Zabarc: You need a portable mike.

Ms. Shipman: Yes, we do. Is the mike portable?

Mr. Zabarc: Same as some of the others. I do fish out there, probably, weather allowing, three-four times a year early in the year, all trolling, no bottom fishing. I don't think I know a lot of people that go out there, and I don't know anybody that tries bottom fishing in that area.

If that area was closed permanently, I'd go to South Ledge, which I do go to South Ledge and Triple Ledge. My big scare is these were to become off limits. Some of the suggestions, as far as some of the stuff up in North Carolina and the one in South Carolina as far as taking MPAs, which I call more inland waters in the 20-30 mile range, where I think a majority of us like to do fishing would greatly impact a lot of the, I guess, "fun" fishermen.

You know the commercial guys, I have seen them out there, mostly off Brunswick, off some of those banks off Brunswick in the 130 foot water. But most of those guys are drifting, also, so I don't -- kind of like David said, I really don't know how an area like that is going to be able to be enforced.

You can drift back and bottom fish. You could be stopping. You know, it's just very hard to enforce. Another thing is if you do surveys, like Spud said, and you look today and say, the population is, say, 300 fish, and you look at it again with the bottom being closed a year from now and say, well, now there are 200 fish. What happened?

It's not being monitored correctly, and people are still taking fish off the bottom. I'm worried about how that's going to be monitored and that it is a correct reef.

Ms. Shipman: How many years have you been fishing this area?

Mr. Zabarc: Probably since '85.

Ms. Shipman: Did you all have any questions?

Mr. Zabarc: South is what? Twelve miles? You know, 10-12 miles. You come to _____ and you get to South Ledge.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Mr. Zabarac: Same type of fish.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Mr. Zabarac: Yes, most people -- during the time of the year that that area is most fertile with trolling, you would usually start your troll either up the ---- way and start and go all the way down Triple Ledge to South Ledge and basically find the fish that you're going to be in.

Most people, if they go to those areas that are blue water fishing, they could get both areas in the same day, start a troll either at South Ledge or start a troll at _____ and either work south or work north.

Ms. Shipman: Thanks, Paul and Donna Popour. Can you come to the microphone? If you all can stretch those things back there, you're welcome to take the mike back there.

Paul Popour: I don't like to stand. I'm a little too small right now to get out there, at least boatwise. And my main concern is seeing MPAs come in closer than the 40-mile _____.

Ms. Shipman: And just a comment to that, I mean, we're really -- one reason Georgia sites are so big is because this is targeted at deep-water grouper so that automatically pushes us pretty far out just in order to get to those fish. So we have not contemplated pulling back in at all. What you see is, I mean, where -- it's one of those _____. Yes, the first document is on, I think.

Dr. Maharaj: Right, it's on the -- this document is on our Website, the council Website and URL is on our material.

Mr. Popour: Then you actually _____

Dr. Maharaj: Yes.

Unidentified Speaker: I stay on my boat, the one I'm working on right now, It will be bigger but it will be about a year before it's ready. Well, bigger than the one that's sitting next to you. That's a good thing.

I haven't made it out there at all this past year and only once the year before. Other years, three times maybe, four at the most. Never on my own, obviously, so as to your last question, where would I fish? Present boat landing.

As far as what I've done out there, I've done everything from going out with someone who was paying their way out there, so I'm cranking and cranking the fish -- it was a free trip -- to spending overnight on a 24-foot boat.

And out of all that, all we've done is twice we tried dropping probably real close to the inside

edge of _____ and didn't do squat. Trolled for dolphins, tried for wahoo, I wanted to one, myself. The biggest problem I see is enforcement.

I've actually seen more of this when I was fishing out of Fort Pierce, the Oculina Bank. I was there for some of the scariest, as far as "We're going to close it off to all fishing". They were going to close it off to all fishing because you can't enforce the bottom fishing. Down there, it's obviously bigger because it's so close. You know, we get out there in our boats.

So this is not going to affect me personally as much, this one. But what worries me is we're talking deep-water grouper now. I don't know what's next, so as far as the next marine protected area, I know off the Keys it's had more of an effect.

And just an idea about the permanent part, "permanent" in government makes me scared. Also, just seeing what happened down there, and it hasn't happened which is good as far as putting these Oculina Banks off limits, but I just don't know how long it's going to last.

And one part you cleared up for me tonight was about the artificial reefs, and that you're not looking at current artificial reefs, because those were put there for a reason and it wasn't for this. Other than that, like I say, I've actually never caught anything bottom fishing in that area, but it's just not that much fun to me.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Unidentified Speaker: Three fishing tournaments, a couple times out of Savannah. When I got out of St. Catherine's, what do most people consider "marginal," a single-engine 24-foot makeup.

And we would spend the night out there, because it's a long ride on that thing for one half hour's anchor up in 140 foot, wake up in the morning, pull up the anchor. Well, that's about, that's all I've done out there.

(Microphone turned off)

John Duren: I'll start over. I'm John Duren. I'm a recreational fisherman from Savannah and I'm representing also Coastal Conservation Association of Georgia. I have fished several times - in fact, several times per year for the last few years in that area, all trolling. I've never done any bottom fishing out there.

And if the MPAs are established, I would like for the council to provide for a review to occur no less than 10 years after the MPAs are established, and that in advance, criteria be established for the measurements that will be taken to determine if the MPAs are achieving the desired effect on fish stocks and habitat improvements. So those are my comments. Thank you.

(Questions asked off microphone)

Mr. Duren: Yes.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Mr. Duren: Dolphin, tuna, wahoo.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Mr. Duren: No, my partners catch them. I just clean them.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Mr. Duren: Well, the places named north and south of there.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Mr. Duren: We go through both, that's true.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Mr. Duren: Thank you.

(Microphone turned off)

Pete Herber: I'm Pete Herber and I also represent CCA at the state level and skid-a-way level. John and I are boat partners, have been for two and a half years. We operate out of -- we're private recreational fishermen, rod and reel only.

And our home port is Landings Harbor on the Wilmington River. We've definitely not bottom fished these two areas. We only troll tuna, wahoo, sailfish, kings and dolphins, that thing.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Mr. Herber: My log shows that I fished 70 trips last year. Now that's nearshore, offshore, and tidal rivers as well. The normal routine out there is, we run to like the Triple Ledge or some place in that area and then go north, and we would definitely troll through this area if the weather was good enough. We didn't get out there a lot, unfortunately.

Our normal areas are, we fish the Navy towers and the snapper banks and a little bit of the Gulf Stream. We could find other areas to fish. That wouldn't be any hardship or problem at this point. The same thoughts, again, I would like to have some reviews and not make this thing permanent for ever and ever. I kind of favor the sundown laws. But you can structure it different ways so if you have any questions for me.

(Comments made away from microphone by Ms. Shipman)

Mr. Herber: Yes, including tidal rivers.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Mr. Herber: That particular area, not very many. If I include the snapper banks and the towers, could be 30 trips or so.

(Comments made away from microphone by Ms. Shipman)

Mr. Herber: Yes, probably, yes, in that particular area. What's that?

(Comments made away from microphone)

Mr. Herber: We would have to -- we would think about running back to the snapper banks, because it's a lot easier depth-wise. It's so deep out there, and we don't have electric gear, nor do we care to fish for them. But we would run out of the area if it was really bad.

(Comments made away from microphone)

Mr. Herber: Most of the times we'll target a certain kind of fish for the day and get the equipment, rods and reels, set up and we'll go for kings or coastal stream, whatever.

(Microphone turned off)

(Whereupon, the MPA public hearing adjourned on Wednesday, February 11, 2004)

Tapes of Proceedings on File (1)

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SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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

**Richmond Hill, Georgia
February 11, 2004**

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John Wallace**

Duane Harris

Staff Members:

Vishwanie Maharaj

Bridgett Vergara

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