

# South Atlantic Update



Published for fishermen and others interested in marine resource conservation issues

Fall 2005

## Council Scheduled to Approve Amendment 13C for Snapper Grouper Fishery During December Meeting

*Public comment and recommendations from advisory panel crucial for final amendment*

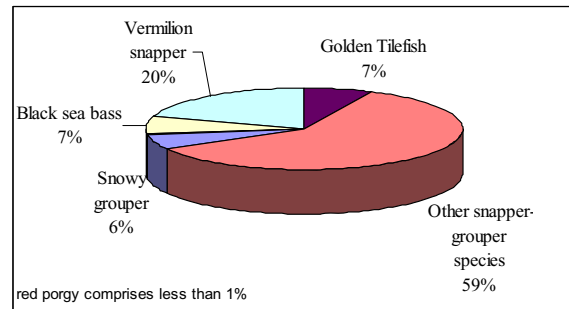


It is a challenge that fishery managers have faced across the country – how to meet mandates to end overfishing for certain species while minimizing social

and economic impacts. Factor into the equation such complex issues as inadequate data needed for decision making, uncertainty in existing data, regulatory discards, and possible shifts in fishing activity - and the task may seem monumental.

In September, the Council completed choosing preferred management alternatives and approved a Public Hearing Draft of Amendment 13C to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. The amendment addresses overfishing for four economically important species – snowy grouper, golden tilefish, vermilion snapper, and black sea bass. In addition, the amendment allows for a moderate increase in the harvest of red porgy consistent with the stock's rebuilding program. Strict harvest restrictions have been in place for red porgy since 1999.

Collectively, snowy grouper, golden tilefish, vermilion snapper, and black sea bass make up 40% of commercial revenue in the snapper grouper fishery. While snowy grouper and golden tilefish are primarily harvested by commercial fishermen, vermilion snapper are also a mainstay of the headboat fishery, comprising



**Harvest reductions are proposed for snowy grouper, golden tilefish, vermilion snapper, and black sea bass. These species make up 40% of the commercial snapper grouper landings.**

24% of the harvested snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic. Excluding the east coast of Florida, black sea bass are important to recreational fishermen targeting snapper and grouper, making up 16% of the total harvest.

The reductions in fishing mortality needed to end overfishing immediately are substantial, ranging from 66% for snowy grouper to 31% for vermilion snapper. In order to address overfishing while achieving optimum yield from each fishery, the Council has considered all reasonable ways to reduce this mortality. The result is a broad range of management alternatives in Amendment 13C. These include establishing or reducing commercial quotas for all four species, reductions in commercial trip limits and

*(Continued page 4)*

### Council Seeks Public Comment on Amendment 13C

Public hearings are currently underway. For a complete list of dates and locations, visit [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net). or contact the Council office.

Written comments are being accepted until **November 28, 2005.**  
See page 4 for details.

### Inside This Issue:

Council Elects Chair, Vice-Chair .....	2
<i>In The News</i> .....	3
MPAs Added to Amendment 13B .....	3
Control Date Set for S/G Fishery .....	5
Chairman's Testimony .....	6
Oculina Mission Update .....	8
Advisory Panel Openings .....	9
December Meeting Agenda .....	11
Calendar .....	12

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Executive Director

**Gregg T. Waugh**  
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#### Designated State Officials

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Morehead City, NC  
(252) 726-7021

**Mark Robson**  
Tallahassee, FL  
(850) 487-0554

**Susan Shipman**  
Brunswick, GA  
(912) 264-7218

**Robert Boyles**  
Charleston, SC  
(843) 953-9300

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Grassy Key, FL  
(305) 743-7162

**Rita Merritt**  
Wrightsville Beach, NC  
(910) 256-3197

**Charles Duane Harris**  
St. Simons Island, GA  
(912) 638-9430

**Frank E. Gibson, III**  
Beaufort, SC  
843/524-2913

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Sebastian, FL  
(561) 388-3183

**John Wallace**  
Meridian, GA  
(912) 437-6797

**David Cupka**  
Charleston, SC  
(843) 795-8591

**Benjamin M. Currin**  
Raleigh, NC  
(919) 881-0049

#### NMFS Regional Administrator

**Roy Crabtree**  
St. Petersburg, FL 33702  
(727) 570-5301

#### Non-Voting Members

**ASMFC**  
Washington, DC  
(202) 289-6400

**U. S. Fish & Wildlife**  
Atlanta, GA  
(404) 331-3588

**U. S. Coast Guard**  
Miami, FL  
(305) 415-6778

**State Department**  
Washington, DC  
(202) 647-2883

### *Editor's Note*

The South Atlantic Update is published by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Its purpose is to report developments in fisheries management that would be of interest to its readers. Please credit the Council when reprinting articles used in this newsletter. Anyone wishing to submit information or articles pertaining to fishing or fisheries management, or letters to the editor on a pertinent issue, is invited and encouraged to do so. Submissions may be mailed to Kim Iverson, Editor, South Atlantic Update, One Southpark Circle, Suite 306, Charleston, SC 29407-4699, or may be sent via the internet; Email address: kim.iverson@safmc.net.

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## Council Reelects Chair, Vice-Chair



**Chairman Louis Daniel**

Dr. Louis Daniel was elected to serve a second term as chairman of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council during the Council's September meeting in Charleston, SC. Dr. Daniel serves as a representative for the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Division of Marine Fisheries. George Geiger of Sebastian, Florida was reelected as vice-chair.

As a Council member, Dr. Daniel has long been an advocate of sound science for management. Dr. Daniel has a strong background in stock assessment biology and recognizes the problems that exist with current data gaps and the resulting consequences. As Chairman, he has led the Council in the past year as difficult management decisions have been made.

Chairman Daniel recently testified on behalf of the Council before the U.S. House of Representative's Committee on Resources regarding the South Atlantic Council's management activities and recommendations regarding the upcoming reauthorization of the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. While acknowledging the Council's accomplishments, he also provide frank testimony regarding current data problems and impacts of management decisions sometimes based on inadequate or incomplete data. A complete version of his testimony can be found beginning on page 6.



**Vice-Chairman  
George Geiger**

"I appreciate the confidence this Council has shown in me," stated Daniel. "It has been a difficult year, but I'm proud of the accomplishments we've made.

Dr. Daniel acknowledged the support and hard work of Council Vice-Chairman George Geiger, also appointed to serve a second term. An inshore charter captain and environmental advocate, Mr. Geiger strives to educate the public about the importance of habitat to marine fisheries, emphasizing the Indian River Lagoon ecosystem that surrounds his home. He has been instrumental in the development of an evaluation plan for the Oculina Habitat Area of Particular Concern and Experimental Closed Area off the east coast of Florida, supporting research and monitoring activities. As Chairman of the King and Spanish Mackerel Committee, Mr. Geiger works closely with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council in the development of joint management measures for mackerel.

## IN THE NEWS:

### 3rd Annual Symposium on Deep-Sea Corals

The Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science in Miami, FL will be the site of the 3rd annual Symposium on Deep-Sea Corals from **November 28-December 2, 2005**.

The Council's involvement in deep-sea coral research and management will be represented during an oral presentation focusing on the Council's ecosystem-based approach to management. A poster has also been accepted that highlights outreach efforts for the Oculina Bank protected area. This international symposium will facilitate global exchange of current scientific knowledge of deep-sea corals and discussion of possible statutory means available to conserve and protect deep-sea habitat.

For more information on the Deep-Sea Coral Symposium, visit <http://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/coral>.

### Southeast Regional Bycatch Workshop Postponed

The Southeast Bycatch Workshop, originally scheduled for November 8-10, 2005, has been rescheduled for **May 16-18, 2006**. The Workshop is postponed because many of the participants were impacted by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The workshop will be held at the Hilton, St. Petersburg, Florida, beginning at 1:00 p.m. on May 16 and ending at 12:00 p.m. on May 18, 2006. The goal of the workshop is to provide a better understanding of bycatch issues, identify potential solutions that can reduce bycatch, and enhance ability to measure bycatch.

To register for the workshop or for more information, contact Mark Godcharles, SERO Outreach Coordinator, [mark.godcharles@noaa.gov](mailto:mark.godcharles@noaa.gov) or 727/551-5727 or Jack McGovern at [john.mcgovern@noaa.gov](mailto:john.mcgovern@noaa.gov) or 727/824-5383.

### Control Date for Commercial Spanish Mackerel Fishery Proposed

NOAA Fisheries and the South Atlantic Council is establishing a revised control date of **June 15, 2004**, for the commercial Spanish mackerel fishery in the Atlantic exclusive economic zone. This control date replaces an existing July 2, 1993, control date for the fishery. The Council is concerned about the potential for excess harvesting capacity in this fishery. The Council may, in the future, consider management measures to limit participation or effort in the fishery, using the June 15, 2004, control date as part of a management strategy.

**Comments regarding the establishment of the revised control date must be submitted before December 9, 2005.** For more information, contact Dr. Steve Branstetter, 727/824-5305, or email [steve.branstetter@noaa.gov](mailto:steve.branstetter@noaa.gov).

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## Council Approves Inclusion of Marine Protected Areas as Management Alternative for Amendment 13C to Snapper Grouper FMP

In September, the Council determined that marine protected areas should be included as a management alternative in Amendment 13B to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. While the focus has recently been on Amendment 13C to end overfishing for four key species, work has also continued on Amendment 13B to the Snapper Grouper FMP. This amendment addresses stock status criteria and rebuilding schedules all of the 73 species included in the fishery management complex. Using an innovative approach, Amendment 13B divides the species into management groupings or "units", with an indicator species for each unit. Management units include groupings of deepwater species.

The Council proposes using eight *deepwater* marine protected area sites as a critical tool in protecting the size, age, and genetic structure of deepwater species. The Council has deployed an open process since 1990 to develop the current list of sites proposed as "Type II" marine protected areas, where fishing for and retention of snapper grouper species will be prohibited but trolling for pelagic species such as tuna, dolphin, and billfish would be allowed. A total of nine MPA sites ranging in size from 8 square miles to approximately 150 square miles, have been developed through multiple public scoping meetings, workshops, and advisory panel meetings over the past several years. A shallow water artificial reef MPA site off the southeastern coast of North Carolina would not be included in Amendment 13C. MPA site locations range from North Carolina to the Florida Keys.

Issues associated with incorporating MPAs into Amendment 13B were addressed during the joint meeting of the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel and Committee and the Scientific and Statistical Committee during meetings in October. Recommendations will be included in the Committee's reports to the Council during its December meeting. The Council is currently planning to approve Amendment 13B for public hearings during its 2006 February/March meeting in Georgia.

A copy of the Council's *Public Scoping Document for Marine Protected Areas* can be found online at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net) in the Library section. The document contains site descriptions and maps for all areas. Note that only the 8 deepwater sites will be included for consideration in Amendment 13C to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.



**Table 1. Preferred changes to commercial regulations in Amendment 13C. Purchase and sale, and harvest and/or possession over the bag limit are prohibited after the annual quota is met. All pounds are gutted weight.**

	Annual Quota	Trip Limit	Size Limit
<b>Snowy Grouper</b>	84,000	10 fish <sup>1</sup>	-----
<b>Golden Tilefish</b>	295,000	4,000 lbs. (gw) 300 lbs.(gw) <sup>2</sup>	-----
<b>Vermilion Snapper</b>	821,000	-----	-----
<b>Black Sea Bass<sup>3</sup></b>	347,000	-----	11" TL
<b>Red Porgy</b>	127,000	120 fish <sup>1,4</sup>	-----

<sup>1</sup>Until quota is met.

<sup>2</sup>Higher trip limit until 75% of quota is taken then reduce to 300 lbs. Do not adjust trip limit downwards unless 75% is captured on or before September 1.

<sup>3</sup>Also require use of at least 2" mesh for the entire back panel of black sea bass pots and change fishing year to June 1 through May 31.

<sup>4</sup>Trip limit effective May through December.

**Table 2. Preferred changes to recreational regulations in Amendment 13C.**

	Bag Limit	Size Limit	Seasonal Closure	Annual Allocation
<b>Snowy Grouper</b>	1/person/day <sup>1</sup>	-----	-----	-----
<b>Golden Tilefish</b>	1/person/day <sup>1</sup>	-----	-----	-----
<b>Vermilion Snapper</b>	-----	12" TL	Jan. through Feb.	-----
<b>Black Sea Bass<sup>2</sup></b>	15/person/trip	12" TL	-----	459,000 <sup>3</sup>
<b>Red Porgy</b>	3/person/trip	-----	-----	-----

<sup>1</sup>Within the 5 grouper/person/day aggregate recreational bag limit.

<sup>2</sup>Change fishing year to June 1 through May 31.

<sup>3</sup>Gutted Weight

## Public Comment on 13C

The Council is soliciting public comment on management alternatives proposed in Amendment 13C. The comprehensive document contains detailed biological, social, and economic analysis of each management alternative under consideration. In addition to the Council's preferred alternatives, the amendment contains alternatives for a "step-down" approach to establishment and reductions in annual quotas over a 3-year period for some species, as well as various combinations of other regulatory measures. A copy of the document and the public hearing summary is available on the Council's web site at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net) or by contacting the Council office.

**Written comments on Amendment 13C must be received in the Council office on or before November 28, 2005.** Written comments should be submitted to: Robert Mahood, Executive Director, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, One Southpark Circle, Suite 306, Charleston, SC 29407-4699. Email comments to [snappergroupercomments@safmc.net](mailto:snappergroupercomments@safmc.net).



### Snapper Grouper (Continued from p.1)

recreational bag limits, seasonal closures, fishing year changes, and increases in size limits for some species.

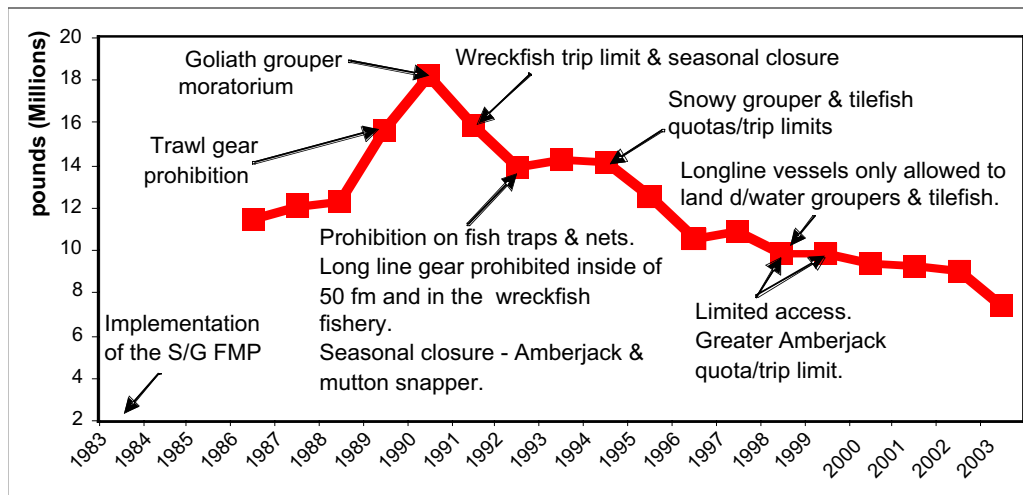
In considering these management measures, the Council has decided to try and establish regulations that can be implemented as early as 2006 and that will allow a year round fishery to occur. In order to begin addressing overfishing as quickly as possible and keep from extending rebuilding times, any quotas established in the amendment would be retroactive to begin January 1, 2006 (for species where the fishing year begins January 1).

Amendment 13C also includes alternatives to change the fishing year for black sea bass to June 1 through May 31 to help reduce negative economic impacts to the commercial fishery if a quota is established. Black sea bass pot

fishermen in the Carolinas harvest 85% of the commercial landings in the south Atlantic region, primarily during the winter months.

A total of 11 public hearings are being held throughout November, ending with a final hearing during the Council's December 2005 meeting in Carolina Beach, North Carolina. Members of the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel will meet to provide additional recommendations during the December meeting. The Council will also receive reports and recommendations regarding the amendment from recent meetings of its Law Enforcement Advisory Panel and Committee, and the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee. The Council is expected to approve Amendment 13C for Secretarial review in December and anticipates measures to be in place by early next summer.

"The Council has faced difficult decisions in selecting preferred management alternatives in Amendment 13C. None of the viable options are painless. But it is necessary to reduce the harvest to end overfishing of four economically important species", said Mac Currin, Chairman of the Snapper Grouper Committee. "There will be substantial economic and social impacts with these reductions." The Council would like to hear from fishermen regarding those impacts and receive comments from interested stakeholders on the management alternatives in the amendment," stated Currin.



**Figure 1. Major events in the regulatory history of the snapper grouper fishery superimposed on total snapper grouper landings during the period 1983-2003.** Source: Accumulated landings system, Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Beaufort Lab.



Fishermen face increasing competition for dock space as waterfront property values continue to increase. Rises in fuel prices affect both recreational and commercial fisheries, while ever increasing imports determine market values and the availability of local product.

**43 Million Pounds**  
 Volume of snappers and groupers imported into the United States in 2004, with a value of \$75.6 million dollars. Imports are classified into two product forms: fresh and frozen. Fresh fish comprised 70% of imports in 2004.

**23.4 Million Pounds**  
 Domestic harvest of snappers and groupers landed at ports in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic states in 2003.

### Control Date Set for Commercial Snapper Grouper Fishery

A new control date of **October 14, 2005** has been set for the commercial snapper grouper fishery (excluding wreckfish) in the south Atlantic region. A limited access program for the commercial fishery (2 for 1 permit system) was instituted in 1998 to address overcapitalization. The Council is exploring management options to implement a program that further limits effort or participation in the commercial fishery. As the Council considers these management options, some fishermen who do not currently harvest snapper grouper, or harvest small quantities, may decide to begin or increase participation for the sole purpose of establishing or improving their recorded commercial landings. This type of speculative behavior may rapidly increase fishing effort for a fishery that is already overdeveloped. In order to avoid this problem, the Council is considering October 14, 2005 as the control date. After that date, anyone entering the commercial fishery may not be assured of future participation in the fishery if a management regime is developed and implemented that further limits the number of participants.



The control date does not commit the Council to any particular management regime or criteria for entry into the commercial fishery. The Council may subsequently choose a different control date, or it may choose a management regime that does not use a control date. ↕

## Council Chairman Testifies Before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Resources

On October 27, 2005, Chairman Louis Daniel presented testimony on behalf of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to the U.S. House of Representative's Committee on Resources. Each of the eight Regional Fishery Management Councils were invited to provide the House Resources Committee with information on fisheries within the council's jurisdiction and how those fisheries are managed. Committee members were interested in how stock assessments are developed and peer reviewed, how science is integrated into management, specific recommendations for reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and what new challenges the councils face in the future.

Chairman Daniel's detailed written testimony provides answers to these questions and provides a comprehensive oversight to issues currently facing the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Copies of the written testimony can be obtained by contacting the Council office or at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net). His oral testimony is included here.

"Chairman Pombo and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to appear before you today to discuss these issues that are so important to the Councils. My name is Louis Daniel and I represent North Carolina's marine fisheries management agency on the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. We have addressed the questions posed and have provided the information requested by Chairman Pombo in my written testimony. These comments are made with the sincere intent of providing a clear understanding about how our Council functions and how we believe marine fisheries management under the Act can be improved. My oral testimony will focus on science and management.

The South Atlantic Council has developed nine fishery management plans: snapper/grouper, shrimp coral, golden crab, red drum, Sargassum, dolphin/wahoo, coastal migratory pelagics, and spiny lobster. The Council also developed a Habitat Plan and Comprehensive Amendment (mandated by the Sustainable Fisheries Act) that amended these FMPs. There are a total of fifty-two amendments to the nine FMPs currently in place. Of the nine fisheries represented by the FMPs, only two contain species that are considered overfished – red-drum and snapper/grouper. The Council

has and continues to take aggressive action to rebuild these overfished stocks. Recreational and commercial harvest of red drum from the EEZ has been prohibited since 1990. Both the recreational and commercial sectors in the snapper/grouper fishery are highly regulated and progress continues to be made in stopping overfishing and rebuilding snapper grouper stocks.

The FMP for the snapper/grouper resource was first implemented in 1983. Because of its mixed-species nature, this fishery offers the greatest challenge to the Council for successful management. Initially, the FMP regulations consisted of minimum sizes, gear restrictions, and a provision for the designation of special management zones (SMZs). Attempts to develop effective management measures have been thwarted by lack of data on both the resource and the fishery. The condition of many of the species within the snapper/grouper complex is still unknown.

Currently, there is a universal application of the Best Available Data and this has created a significant problem in regions like the southeast. Commercial fisheries in the south Atlantic, with the exception of our shrimp fishery, are generally small with landing that in no way compare to the large-scale fisheries of the northeast and pacific regions.

However, the impacts of fishing regulations on individuals and fishing communities are very similar. This is also true for our extremely valuable recreational fishery and the infrastructure that it supports.

Acknowledged data gaps for our southeast fisheries, specifically a lack of representative, baseline fisheries data, result in significant uncertainty in the result of population models. In many instances, and as a result of the considerable uncertainty in the assessment results, the empirical data and the observations of the fishermen often conflict with the stock assessment.

The southeast Councils and NMFS have developed the SEDAR process, an excellent peer-reviewed stock assessment process that is outlined in detailed in my written testimony. This exhaustive, public

*(Continued next page)*



*Testimony (Continued)*

process includes extensive review of the data and the methods involved in conducting the population assessment. Reviewers, however, are often hamstrung by the ‘best available data’ clause, resulting in the acceptance of the assessment with many caveats in regards to the critical data needs as well as the shortcomings of the available data. Without good sound data to drive the SEDAR process, it will not produce the positive management results we want to achieve.

At the conclusion of a SEDAR stock assessment, the Council does not take any management action until after the SEDAR reports are reviewed by our Scientific and Statistical Committee to ensure the relevance and scientific credibility of the data, analyses, reports, and summary findings for species and stocks assessed. In some instances, the assessment results agree with the empirical, biological, and fisheries data as well as the public testimony from our constituents and advisors. This circumstance makes our job easy.

In many instances, however, we have observed disconnects between the assessments, the empirical data and the public observations and testimony. This results in imprecise management guidance and puts Council members in the unenviable position of having to make decisions affecting the fishery stocks, and individual’s lives and livelihoods, based on poor or non-existent data. Also, under these circumstances, fishermen and other constituents often do not believe or agree with stock assessments. Even scientists may disagree with each other on the status of the stocks or the impact of regulatory measures, leaving managers in a very difficult position. It is this situation where the councils must have the

flexibility to consider all legitimate sources of information and make decisions that are responsible for the resource and the fishery.

Blanket requirements to end overfishing in a time certain and rebuild overfished stocks is an excellent goal, however, flexibility and the use of informed judgement must be afforded in the many data poor circumstances, especially in the southeast.

To that end, I suggest a specific definition of the Best Available Data either in the Act itself or in guidance prepared by NOAA in consultation with the councils. Most importantly, there is a critical need to prioritize the science being funded by Congress to ensure it meets the needs of the Council and NMFS stock assessment processes. It is critical that sound baseline fisheries data are collected in all regions. While this might require some additional funding, redirecting some of the existing efforts would likely allow us to fill many of these significant data gaps. Congress has moved in this direction in recent years by appropriating additional funds to specifically improve stock assessments. Increased funding for this purpose must continue if we are to successfully manage our resources in the future.

Perhaps the Council’s greatest challenge in the future will be dealing with more and more fishermen chasing too few fish. Coastal populations are growing at an incredible rate. This translates into more resource users and increased pressure on marine fish stocks and the habitat that supports them. Since this influx of new entrants is primarily recreational anglers, allocation issues will continue to arise and commercial fishing activities and the



communities they support will be affected.

In summary, it is critical as we continue to impact the coastal communities through the development of fishing regulations, that we have some level of confidence in the representative nature of the data and the subsequent assessments. In a recent population assessment in the southeast, the peer review concluded that there was “considerable uncertainty in the data, the model, and the biology of the species, yet, because this was the only data available to the peer review, the went on to conclude that the assessment was based on the best available data and useable for management purposes. It is not enough to base our decisions on the Best Available Data; those data must be sound and representative of the fishery for management under the Magnuson-Stevens Act to be successful.

Mr. Chairman, in closing I would like to thank you again for allowing me to appear before you on behalf of the Council. We appreciate you holding this hearing and for your Committee’s interest in the Fishery Management Councils.¶

## Oculina Coral Research and Monitoring Cruise

### *Weather Delays Don't Dampen Project*

High winds and heavy seas delayed the NOAA funded research and monitoring cruise to study the Oculina Bank deepwater coral reefs off the east coast of Florida, but failed to dampen the enthusiasm for the project of everyone involved. Delayed by a week, scientists aboard the 176' NASA vessel, *Liberty Star*, conducted habitat mapping surveys and collected data on coral cover and fish populations in and around the 300 square mile area designated at the Oculina Habitat Area of Particular Concern (OHAPC) and the smaller Experimental Closed Area. To protect the ivory tree coral (*Oculina varicosa*) and restore declining fish stocks, the Council prohibited the use of damaging fishing gear in the OHAPC and subsequently created the 92 square mile Experimental Closed Area where fishing and retention of snapper grouper species is prohibited. Research conducted during the mission on the *Liberty Star* will aid fishery managers in better understanding the coral ecosystem and evaluate the effectiveness of the Closed Area.



Students test their skills at using the Remotely Operated Vehicle, the Phantom S2 during Port Day. The ROV is used to gather information about the coral and fish populations during the cruise to the deep waters of the Oculina Bank. A total of 19 ROV dives, 20 grab samples and 3 acoustical surveys were made during the 7-day cruise in October.

### Port Day

The 7-day cruise kicked off on October 12, 2005 with a "Port Day" at the Port Canaveral Cruise Ship Terminal. Information stations provided local students, teachers, media, and others interested in the project, an opportunity to learn first-hand from scientists about the the Oculina Bank and research that would take place on the cruise.

The stations included an introductory overview by John Reed, chief scientist with Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution. Mr. Reed has been the leader in researching the Oculina Bank since discovering the coral area in the 1970's. Dr. Grant Gilmore demonstrated his work using acoustical monitoring devices to record sounds made by various species of fish. Students listened intently as different recordings were played, each sound providing an insight into the various fish species found in an area. Acoustical monitoring will help scientists identify larger fish that may run away from the Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV).

The *Liberty Star* presented an impressive site as participants ventured onto the huge concrete dock to meet with the Chief Scientist for the cruise, Andy Shepard with NOAA's Undersea Research Program. The captain of the *Liberty Star*, Capt. Bren Wade with the United Space Alliance was also onhand to answer questions.

Visitors to Port Day were also treated to an onboard tour of the law enforcement vessel, the *C.T. Randall*, operated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The 65' patrol boat is dedicated to law enforcement efforts in the Oculina Bank area, working cooperatively with NOAA Office for Law Enforcement and the U.S. Coast Guard.



Port Day participants view the research vessel, the *Liberty Star* and meet with Andy Shepard, Director for NOAA's Undersea Research Program at UNC-W and chief scientist for the cruise mission. Bren Wade, captain of the *Liberty Star* was also on hand to answer questions.

Visit [www.at-sea.org](http://www.at-sea.org) for cruise details and dispatches from the Oculina mission

Port Day concluded with a brief overview of management efforts by the Council in establishing the OHAPC and Experimental Closed Area to protect the coral and associated species found in the area.

### Research Cruise

The *Liberty Star* departed later that evening, setting course about 20 miles offshore, as scientists began their 7-day research and monitoring cruise. "The Council has led the nation in managing deepwater coral ecosystems by setting up this reserve," said expedition leader, Andy Shepard, Director of NOAA's Undersea Research Center at UNC-Wilmington. "It is now up to us to provide the information needed to evaluate its effectiveness."

Scientists worked diligently, collecting data to help ground truth earlier mapping activities and collect fish population data in various locations throughout the coral reef area. Using the ROV, researchers were especially excited to observe juvenile black sea bass

*(Continued page 10)*

## Open Seats for Advisory Panels, New Members Appointed

### *Get Involved! New Seats Now Open*

Advisory panels allow grassroots input into the management process. The Council has 14 separate advisory panels comprised of experienced and knowledgeable members of the public that provide information and guidance in the development of fishery management plans. The following seats are currently open for applicants. Applications can be found at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net) or by contact Kim Iverson, Public Information Officer at the Council office for additional information.

**Habitat** – North Carolina Commercial Seat

**King and Spanish Mackerel** – South Carolina Recreational Seat

**Shrimp Advisory Panel** – 2 Open Seats

The following advisory panels have open seats for NGO (non-governmental organizations) representatives – **Coral, Calico Scallop, Golden Crab, Rock Shrimp, Shrimp, and Spiny Lobster**

### **Congratulations to the following members appointed in September:**

#### **Habitat Advisory Panel    Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel**

Dr. Charles Belin  
Savannah, GA

Jeff Oden (reappointment)  
Hatteras, NC  
Tom Burgess  
Sneads Ferry, NC

### **Advisory Panel Restructure Emphasizes Ecosystem Focus**

The Council recently approved a major modification in the membership of its Coral Advisory Panel in order to better meet the needs of an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management. The change includes an increase in number and diversity of members, including representatives from state and federal agencies, academic institutions, and research facilities. “This change will facilitate information exchange and input as we move forward with development of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan and Comprehensive Amendment, said Duane Harris, Chairman of the Ecosystem Committee. The Coral Advisory Panel often meets in conjunction with the Habitat and Environmental Protection Advisory Panel to make recommendations for the Council. Agencies now represented include:

Miami-Dade Co. Dept. of Environmental Resource Management  
Skidaway Institute of Oceanography  
U. S. Geology Service  
Oregon Institute of Marine Biology  
FL Sea Grant Extension Program  
FL Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Nova Southeastern University  
U.S. Minerals Management Service  
FL Dept. of Environmental Protection  
Duke University  
NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office  
Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary  
NOAA's Undersea Research Program  
Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution  
UNC-Wilmington, Center for Marine Science  
SC Dept. of Natural Resources - Marine Resources Division

## New SSC Appointments

The Council recently appointed two new members to its Scientific and Statistical Committee. Throughout the management process, the SSC provides a critical review of the scientific information necessary to make management decisions, such as stock assessments and reviews, reports on stock status, socio-economic impacts of management measures, sustainability of fishing practices, and habitat and ecosystem status. The SSC is composed of experts in the biological, statistical, economic, social, and other relevant disciplines who are knowledgeable in the technical aspects of fisheries in the South Atlantic. Welcome!

### **Dr. Jeffrey A. Buckle**

Center for Marine Sciences and Technology  
N.C. State University  
Morehead City, NC

As both an oceanographer and biologist, Dr. Buckle has a strong background in conducting studies on fish behavior and population dynamics on many of the finfish found offshore of North Carolina. He has worked closely with N.C. Sea Grant Extension on projects that often involve local fishermen, including studies to reduce fishing mortality in the snapper grouper fishery.

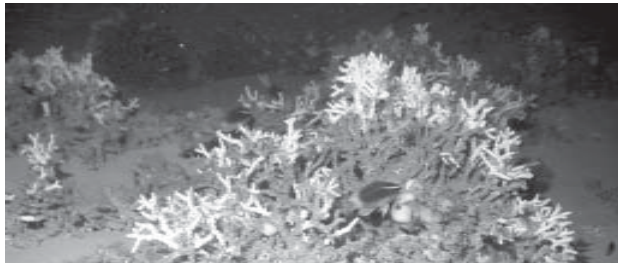
### **Dr. John Mark Dean**

Professor Emeritus  
University of South Carolina  
Columbia, SC  
Specializing in Highly Migratory Species and international policy, Dr. Dean has first hand experience in management, having served multiple terms as a member of the South Atlantic Council. He served as the Council representative to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) and advocate for international cooperation and accountability in fisheries management.

in the area. According to John Reed, black sea bass were once the most abundant species found on the reef, but haven't been observed there since 2000. Scientists speculate that their appearance may be an indication that the protected areas may be working to reduce overfishing and prevent further habitat destruction.

Acoustical monitoring devices were tested during the evening hours in the Oculina Experimental Closed Area. Dr. Gilmore explained that deploying permanent monitoring stations may allow scientists to listen for fish such as gag and scamp grouper during winter spawning seasons when weather and strong currents make surface research more difficult. The monitoring stations may also provide additional methods to identify the presence of fish that normally shy away from the ROV.

"While we've only covered a very small percentage of the area, this mapping and data collection are critical steps in building a long-term monitoring program to address the Council's needs over the next 10 years," said Shepard. †



Data collected during the research and monitoring cruise will help managers better understand the complex ecosystem of the Oculina Bank.

### Oculina Evaluation Team Established

The Council has established an evaluation team as part of its Evaluation Plan for the Oculina Experimental Closed Area. The team will assist the Council by reviewing and providing recommendations for the ongoing research and monitoring, outreach, and law enforcement components of the Evaluation Plan. Members include scientists, commercial and recreational fishermen, outreach specialists, and law enforcement personnel. In June 2004, the Council extended regulations, including the prohibition of harvest or possession of snapper grouper in the Oculina Experimental Closed Area for an indefinite period. As part of the extension, the Council will review the size and configuration of the area within three years and perform a complete evaluation within a 10-year period.

## SOUTH ATLANTIC SEASONAL CLOSURE AND POSSESSION LIMITS

### Red Porgy

During **January, February, March and April** each year, the harvest or possession of red porgy in or from the South Atlantic Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) on board a vessel with a Federal snapper-grouper permit (charter/headboat or commercial) is limited to **one per person per day or one per person per trip**, whichever is more restrictive. Also, **red porgy can neither be sold nor purchased during the closed season**. The minimum size limit for red porgy is 14 inches total length.

### Black Grouper and Gag

During **March and April** each year, the possession of black grouper and gag in or from the South Atlantic EEZ on board a vessel with a Federal snapper-grouper permit (charter/headboat or commercial) is limited to **two black grouper or gag, combined, per person per day or two per person per trip**, whichever is more restrictive. Also, black grouper and gag **cannot be purchased or sold during the closed season**. The minimum size limit for black grouper and gag is 24 inches total length.



### Amberjack

During **April** each year, the possession of greater amberjack in or from the South Atlantic EEZ on board a vessel with a Federal snapper-grouper permit (charter/headboat or commercial) is limited to **one per person per day or one per person per trip**, whichever is more restrictive. Also, greater amberjack **can neither be sold nor purchased during the closed season**. The recreational minimum size limit for greater amberjack is 28 inches fork length; the commercial size limit is 36 inches fork length.

### Mutton Snapper

During **May and June** each year, the possession of mutton snapper in or from the South Atlantic EEZ on vessels with a commercial snapper-grouper permit is limited to **10 per person per day or 10 per person per trip**, whichever is more restrictive. The minimum size limit for mutton snapper is 16 inches total length.

### Cobia

No person may possess more than **two cobia per day** in or from the Gulf, Mid-Atlantic, or South Atlantic EEZ, **regardless of the number of trips or duration of a trip**.

The prohibitions listed above on sale/purchase do not apply to fish that were harvested, landed ashore, and sold **prior** to the start of the seasonal closure and were held in cold storage by a dealer or processor. **The trip restrictions apply to all federally permitted vessels regardless of where harvested. Bag limits also apply to recreational fishermen.**



Watch for additional information about the results of the Oculina Bank research and monitoring cruise onboard the *Liberty Star* and the follow law enforcement officers on the *C.T. Randall* as they patrol "The Bank" in the next issue of the South Atlantic Update.

## SAFMC Meeting Dates and Locations 2006 Schedule

<b>February 27 - March 3, 2006</b> Jekyll Island Club 371 Riverview Drive Savannah, GA 31527 800/535-9547	<b>September 18-22, 2006</b> South Carolina location to be determined
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<b>June 12-16, 2006</b> Wyndam Grand Bay Hotel 2669 South Bayshore Dr. Coconut Grove, FL 800/996-3426	<b>December 4-8, 2006</b> Sheraton Atlantic Beach Hotel 2717 W. Fort Macon Road Atlantic Beach, NC 28512 800/624-8875
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### Acronyms

**ACCSP** - Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program

**AP** - Advisory Panel

**ASMFC** - Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

**BRD** - Bycatch Reduction Device

**CPUE** - Catch Per Unit Effort

**DAPP** - Dedicated Access Privilege Program

**EEZ** - Exclusive Economic Zone

**EFH** - Essential Fish Habitat

**EFH/HAPC** - Essential Fish Habitat/Habitat Area of Particular Concern

**FMP** - Fishery Management Plan

**HMS** - Highly Migratory Species

**ITQ** - Individual Transferable Quota

**MSY** - Maximum Sustainable Yield

**MRFSS** - Marine Recreational Fishing Statistics Survey

**NMFS** - National Marine Fisheries Service

**OY** - Optimum Yield

**SEDAR** - Southeast Data, Assessment and Review

**SSC** - Scientific & Statistical Committee

**SFA** - Sustainable Fisheries Act

**TAC** - Total Allowable Catch

**VMS** - Vessel Monitoring System

## South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting



### December 5-9, 2005

**Courtyard Marriott**  
**100 Charlotte Avenue**  
**Carolina Beach, NC 28428**  
**1-800/458-3606 or 910/458-2030**

For a detailed agenda contact the Council office toll free at 1-866 SAFMC-10 or 843/571-4366. The agenda is also available on the Council's web site [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net)

### AGENDA OVERVIEW

<b>Monday</b>	<b>1:00 - 12:00</b> <b>1:30 - 5:30</b> <b>6:00 PM</b>	<b>Council Session</b> <b>Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel Meeting</b> <b>PUBLIC HEARING -</b> <b>SNAPPER GROUPE AMEND. 13C</b>
<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>8:30 - 12:00</b>  <b>1:30 - 5:00</b>	<b>Joint Snapper Grouper Committee and AP Meeting</b> <b>Joint S/G Committee, AP and Controlled Access Committee Meeting</b>
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>8:30 - 12:00</b> <b>1:30 - 3:30</b> <b>3:30 - 5:30</b>	<b>Snapper Grouper Committee Meeting</b> <b>Controlled Access Committees Meeting</b> <b>Scientific &amp; Statistical Selection Committee Meeting</b>
<b>Thursday</b>	<b>8:30 - 10:30</b> <b>10:30 - 12:00</b> <b>1:30 - 5:00</b>	<b>SEDAR Committee Meeting</b> <b>Joint Executive/Finance Committee Meeting</b> <b>Council Session</b>
<b>Friday</b>	<b>8:30 - 12:00</b>	<b>Council Session</b>

*Mark your calendar...*

Nov. 28 - Dec. 2      *3rd Annual Symposium on Deep-Sea Corals*  
Miami, FL    <http://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/coral>

Dec. 5-8              *Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Meeting*  
Atlantic City, NJ    [www.mafmc.org](http://www.mafmc.org)

Jan. 9-12, 2006      *Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Meeting*  
Corpus Christi, TX    [www.gulfcouncil.org](http://www.gulfcouncil.org)

Feb. 13-16, 2006    *Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Meeting*  
Arlington, VA    [www.asmfc.org](http://www.asmfc.org)

**South Atlantic Fishery  
Management Council  
Meeting  
December 5-9, 2005  
Carolina Beach, NC**



**Council Solicits Applications for Advisory Panel Seats - See page 9 for details.**

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**Visit the Council's Web Site at [www.safmc.net](http://www.safmc.net)**

2005 - 06