UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PROGRAM PLANNING AND INTEGRATION
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

To All Interested Government Agencies and Public Groups:

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an environmental review has been performed on the following action.

TITLE: Amendment 20A to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 20A)
(RIN 0648-AY74)

LOCATION: Exclusive economic zone off the South Atlantic coast

SUMMARY: The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) submitted the subject amendment for review and implementation by the Secretary of Commerce on December 19, 2011. Amendment 20A addresses the commercial sector of the wreckfish component of the snapper-grouper fishery, which is managed under an individual transferable quota program. The current total allowable catch for wreckfish for the commercial sector is 2 million pounds. In November 2011, the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed new data analysis regarding wreckfish, and revised their acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendation from 250,000 pounds whole weight (ww) to 235,000 pounds ww. The Council reviewed the recommended ABC in December 2011, and passed a motion to concur with the process of adjusting the wreckfish annual catch limit (ACL) to reflect the revised ABC. NOAA Fisheries Service approved the Comprehensive ACL Amendment on January 18, 2012. This revised ACL for wreckfish will be implemented through the final rule for the Comprehensive ACL Amendment on April 16, 2012. Furthermore, 95 percent of the ACL (223,250 pounds ww) will be allocated to the commercial sector for wreckfish. With this reduction in the commercial sector's allowable catch, the annual allocation each wreckfish shareholder will receive under the revised ACL will also be reduced by approximately 89 percent. Thus, active shareholders, captains, crew, and dealers who depend on a certain level of wreckfish production to maintain their operations will be particularly affected by the reduction in the amount of wreckfish the sector may harvest.

The actions contained in Amendment 20A would: (1) Define and revoke inactive wreckfish shares; (2) redistribute revoked shares to active shareholders; (3) define a cap on the number of shares one entity may own; and (4) establish an appeals process for determinations of share status and redistribution. The intended effects of Amendment 20A are to promote the management provisions of the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region and to allow commercial fishermen with wreckfish shares to maximize harvest potential within the constraints of the ACL.

RESPONSIBLE
OFFICIAL: Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
Southeast Regional Office
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701
727-824-5301

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The environmental review process led us to conclude that this action will not have a significant impact on the environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement was not prepared. A copy of the finding of no significant impact (FONSI), including the environmental assessment (EA), can be found at the NOAA Fisheries Service Web site at: http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/SGAmendment20A.htm.

Although NOAA is not soliciting comments on this completed EA/FONSI we will consider any comments submitted that would assist us in preparing future NEPA documents. Please submit any written comments to the Responsible Official named above.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Montanio
NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure

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