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

APR 26 2012

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: Regulatory Amendment 11 to the Snapper-Grouper Fishery Management Plan of the South Atlantic Region (Regulatory Amendment 11) (RIN 0648-BB10)

LOCATION: Exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off the Southeast coast

SUMMARY: At their August 2011 meeting, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council approved Regulatory Amendment 11 for review by the Secretary of Commerce by a unanimous vote. The proposed action in Regulatory Amendment 11 is the elimination of a possession prohibition for six deepwater snapper-grouper species (snowy grouper, blueline tilefish, yellowedge grouper, misty grouper, queen snapper, and silk snapper) harvested in depths greater than 240 feet (40 fathoms) in the South Atlantic EEZ. The closure was implemented on January 31, 2011, through Amendment 17B to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 17B).

The purpose of the harvest prohibition approved in Amendment 17B is to reduce discards of speckled hind and warsaw grouper. However, there is evidence, from both public comments and new analysis of data, that the prohibition is not effective at its stated purpose and comes at a higher economic cost to fishermen than originally anticipated. A new analysis of landings data following the implementation of the prohibition indicates that different measures would be more appropriate to reduce discards of speckled hind and warsaw grouper than those implemented through Amendment 17B. Therefore, the Council has developed Regulatory Amendment 11 to remove the harvest prohibition implemented through Amendment 17B. The Council intends to approve a new amendment with more effective measures to reduce discards of speckled hind and warsaw grouper at its December 2012 meeting.

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RESPONSIBLE
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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, is enclosed for your information.

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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