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: Regulatory Amendment 21 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Regulatory Amendment 21) [RIN: 0648-BD91]

LOCATION: South Atlantic exclusive economic zone

SUMMARY: Regulatory Amendment 21 redefines the overfished threshold for red snapper, blueline tilefish, gag, black grouper, yellowtail snapper, vermilion snapper, red porgy, and greater amberjack. The current definition of the minimum stock size threshold (MSST) for these species, which is used to determine if a species is overfished, is a function of the natural mortality rate (M). MSST equals SSB_{MSY}*(1-M or 0.5, whichever is greater), where SSB_{MSY} is the biomass when the stock is at the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) level and considered to be rebuilt. When the natural mortality rate is small (less than 0.25) there is little difference between the threshold for determining when a stock is overfished (MSST) and when the stock is rebuilt (SSB_{MSY}). Thus, for species that have a low rate of natural mortality, even small fluctuations in biomass due to natural conditions rather than fishing mortality may cause a stock to be classified as overfished. Regulatory Amendment 21 redefines MSST for the species listed above as 75% of SSB_{MSY}, which is expected to help prevent overfished designations when small drops in biomass are due to natural variation in recruitment or other environmental variables such as extreme water temperatures, and ensure that rebuilding plans are applied to stocks when truly appropriate.

RESPONSIBLE
OFFICIAL: Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Southeast Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
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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), is enclosed for your information.

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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,

TRONVIG.KRISTEN.A.1365886012

Digitally signed by TRONVIG.KRISTEN.A.1365886012
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Date: 2014.09.22 13:14:22 -04'00'

Patricia A. Montanio
NOAA NEPA Coordinator

Enclosure

for