UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Southeast Regional Office
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505
(727) 824-5305, Fax: (727) 824-5308
http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov

F/SER:KM

OCT 27 2010

Mr. David M. Cupka, Chair
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Dr. Suite 201
North Charleston, South Carolina 29405

Dear Mr. Cupka:

By this letter, I am approving Amendment 17A to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (Amendment 17A). As you know, Amendment 17A includes measures to end overfishing and rebuild red snapper in the South Atlantic. Amendment 17A will:

1) Specify the numerical value of the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) of red snapper as 2,431,000 lbs whole weight (ww) based on pre-defined reference points (MSY = yield associated with fishing at F_{MSY} or $F_{30\%SPR}$);
2) Specify the numerical value of the minimum stock size threshold (MSST) of red snapper as 12,247,000 lbs (5,555,146 kg) (ww) based on pre-defined reference points (MSST = (1-M)*SSB_{MSY});
3) Define a rebuilding schedule for red snapper equal to 35 years;
4) Define a rebuilding strategy for red snapper that sets the rebuilding goal equal to SSB_{MSY} and sets the catch rate equal to F_{OY}, which is 98%F_{MSY} (98%$F_{30\%SPR}$);
5) Establish an annual catch limit of zero based on landings and establish three accountability measures for red snapper including tracking catch per unit effort (CPUE) via fishery-independent monitoring, tracking the biomass and CPUE via fishery-dependent sampling, and evaluating CPUE every three years to determine if management measure adjustments are necessary;
6) Prohibit all harvest of red snapper in the South Atlantic exclusive economic zone and in state waters for vessels holding any federal snapper-grouper permit;
7) Establish a closed area that extends from southern Georgia to Cape Canaveral, Florida, within which harvest and possession of all snapper-grouper species will be prohibited except when using black sea bass pot gear or spearfishing gear to fish for species other than red snapper;
8) Require the use of non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing for snapper-grouper species with hook-and-line gear north of 28 degrees N. latitude; and
9) Require a fishery-independent monitoring program to track the progress of red snapper rebuilding efforts in the South Atlantic.

The final rule to implement Amendment 17A will likely publish in the second-half of November.

On behalf of the agency, I thank the Council for their continued dedication to ending overfishing of red snapper in the South Atlantic. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

James E. Weaver

for Roy E. Crabtree, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator