



July 8, 2010

The Honorable Gary Locke
Secretary, United States Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue
Washington, DC 20230

**Florida Fish
and Wildlife
Conservation
Commission**

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*Managing fish and wildlife
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RE: South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Amendment 17A

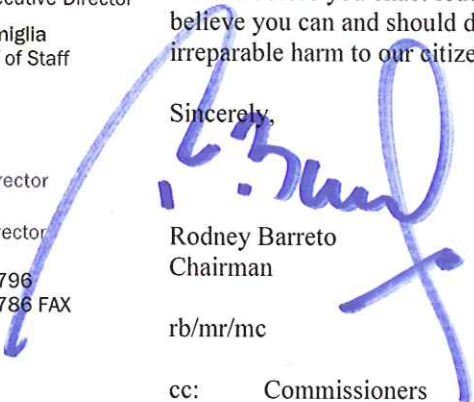
Dear Secretary Locke:

On behalf of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), I urge you to delay implementing a large-area closure off of northeast Florida that is a feature of Amendment 17A recently approved by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council). The large-area closure would prohibit the harvest and possession of 73 species of snapper and grouper that are under federal fishery management. The purpose of this area closure is to address the reported discard mortality of red snapper that is contributing to the overfishing status of the south Atlantic population.

We recognize the difficulty faced by the Council and by NOAA Fisheries Service in meeting the tough new standards and deadlines that are a part of the reauthorized Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Act). In this case, we believe the Council and NOAA Fisheries Service are complying with the Act through actions already taken. These include: 1) implementing an interim rule effective January, 2010 that prohibits all harvest of red snapper in federal waters of the south Atlantic region; 2) Council approval of long-term management actions in June 2010 to continue the prohibition of all red snapper harvest after the interim rule expires; and 3) adjustment of the federal stock assessment schedule to conduct a new benchmark stock assessment for south Atlantic red snapper that is now underway, and may significantly alter the management actions needed to continue rebuilding red snapper stocks. Furthermore, we believe that in implementing the Act, Congress fully intended that management actions to end overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks should, to the maximum extent practicable, avoid the kind of devastating economic impacts we are facing.

That is why we are urging you to delay implementation of the proposed large-area closure, allow for the completion of the stock assessment currently underway, and then reconsider the need for such a large area closure before you enact federal regulations for the management of red snapper in the south Atlantic. We believe you can and should do this in the interest of managing our fisheries in a way that doesn't cause irreparable harm to our citizens and our economy.

Sincerely,


Rodney Barreto
Chairman

rb/mr/mc

cc: Commissioners
SAFMC Members
Jackie Fauls
Greg Holder
Gil McRae
Mark Robson
Karen Ventimiglia
Nick Wiley

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