



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701

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FB09-047

Opportunity for Public Comment on a Draft Environmental Impact Statement Proposal to Protect South Atlantic Deepwater Coral Ecosystems

Comment Period Ends September 8, 2009

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) is seeking public comment on the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for the Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1 (CE-BA 1) evaluating the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) proposal to establish deepwater Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (CHAPCs). The Environmental Protection Agency announced the availability of the DEIS on July 24, 2009 (74 FR 36706).

Proposed actions in the DEIS would include the establishment of deepwater CHAPCs to protect what is believed to be the largest contiguous distribution (>23,000 square miles) of pristine deepwater coral ecosystems in the world. In the South Atlantic region, deepwater coral ecosystems are deepwater coral, coral reefs, and live/hardbottom habitat in waters extending from 400 meters (1,300 feet) to the seaward boundary of the exclusive economic zone. Currently, these CHAPCs are relatively undisturbed by the impacts of fishing.

Actions in the amendment propose the establishment of deepwater CHAPCs, where the possession of coral species and the use of all bottom tending gear would be prohibited; including bottom longline, trawl (bottom and mid-water), dredge, pot or trap, or the use of an anchor, anchor and chain, or grapple and chain by all fishing vessels. CHAPCs are proposed in the following areas:

- Cape Lookout Lophelia Banks;
- Cape Fear Lophelia Banks;
- Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms, and Miami Terrace (Stetson-Miami Terrace);
- Pourtales Terrace; and
- Blake Ridge Diapir Methane Seep.

Currently, the only commercial fisheries that operate in the areas are the wreckfish, golden crab, and royal red shrimp fisheries. The CE-BA 1 proposes the creation of "allowable gear areas" for the golden crab fishery and

"shrimp fishery access areas" for the deepwater shrimp fishery. The establishment of these areas would allow for the continuation of these fisheries in their historical fishing grounds with little or no negative impacts to protected deepwater coral habitat.

The CE-BA 1 would also provide updated spatial information on designated essential fish habitat in the Council's Habitat Plan.

Request for Comments

Written comments on this DEIS must be received no later than September 8, 2009, in order to be considered by NOAA Fisheries Service. See the **Addresses** section for information on where and how to submit comments.

Addresses

Electronic copies of the DEIS may be obtained from the e-Rulemaking Portal at <http://www.regulations.gov> and the Council's Web site at <http://www.safmc.net>, or:

NOAA Fisheries Service
Southeast Regional Office
Sustainable Fisheries Division
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505

You may submit comments by any of the following methods:

- Electronic Submissions: Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. All comments received are part of the public record and will generally be posted to <http://www.regulations.gov> without change. All personal identifying information (for example, name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter may be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information. NOAA Fisheries Service will accept anonymous comments. Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

- Mail: Karla Gore
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- Fax: 727-824-5308, Attention: Karla Gore

If you would like to receive these fishery bulletins via e-mail as soon as they are published, please e-mail us at sero.communications.comments@noaa.gov and include Request for Electronic Fishery Bulletins in the subject line, and your preferred e-mail address in the body of the e-mail.

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