



# *South Atlantic Fishery Management Council*

## *News Release*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### **Council Seeks Input on MPA Use for Species Protection**

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council will hold two public workshops in April and May to solicit information regarding the use of marine protected areas (MPAs) to help protect speckled hind and Warsaw grouper, two species currently listed as undergoing overfishing. The first workshop will be held April 18, 2012 in North Charleston, SC and the second on May 16, 2012 in Pooler, GA (see back for details). Three additional workshops will be scheduled for North Carolina and Florida later this year.

The workshops are designed to give the public the opportunity to provide data on locations of speckled hind and Warsaw grouper and important habitat for the two species. Council staff will provide an overview of the issues and outline of the approach being taken by the Council for soliciting public input. Workshop participants will be asked to provide input on areas where speckled hind and/or Warsaw grouper may have been encountered during their fishing or diving experiences and suggestions for possible sites for MPAs.

Both speckled hind and Warsaw grouper are extremely vulnerable to overfishing because of their complex life histories - they are slow growing, long-lived, and change sex from female to male as they grow larger and older. Although harvest is currently prohibited, both speckled hind and Warsaw grouper suffer high rates of release mortality because of the water depths at which they are encountered. Speckled hind are thought to form spawning aggregations, which can also increase vulnerability to fishing pressure.

“We are asking fishermen, divers, and other members of the public that may be familiar with speckled hind and Warsaw grouper to share their information during the workshops,” said Council Chairman, David Cupka. “These workshops are designed to help the Council in making management decisions to help protect these two species. This is not the time to debate whether MPAs are the correct approach. The goal of these workshops is to give the public the opportunity to provide data on locations that are important to be protected to end overfishing of speckled hind and Warsaw grouper.”

Restrictions on harvest of the two species were implemented by the Council in 1994, when a possession limit of 1 fish per vessel was implemented for both commercial and recreational fishermen. To meet the mandates of the Magnuson-Stevens Act to end overfishing by 2010, the Council prohibited all harvest of speckled hind and Warsaw grouper and implemented restrictions on the harvest of additional deepwater species in waters greater than 240 feet to help address bycatch mortality. The measures were implemented in January 2011. Since that time, the Council has requested that NOAA Fisheries remove the deepwater harvest restriction, known as the “240 closure”, citing concerns that the closure does not provide the intended protection of the two species while having negative impacts on both commercial and recreational fishermen. The request is still under review by the Secretary of Commerce.

The Council is considering the use of MPAs as part of its Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 3. Public scoping meetings were held on the amendment earlier this year and the Council further refined the management alternatives in the amendment during its March meeting.

*(Continued)*

**MPA Workshops (continued)**

The Council will consider input from the first two public workshops during its June 11-15, 2012 meeting in Orlando, Florida. In addition to the information received at public workshops, the Council will receive recommendations from its Scientific and Statistical Committee, advisory panels, and from an Expert MPA Workgroup meeting scheduled in conjunction with the public workshop in May.

**MPA Public Workshops – 6:00 PM**

**April 18, 2012**

Hilton Garden Inn  
5265 International Blvd.  
**North Charleston, SC 29418**  
(843) 308-9330

**May 16, 2012**

Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum  
175 Bourne Avenue  
**Pooler, GA 31322**  
(912) 748-8888

The April 18<sup>th</sup> public workshop will be held in conjunction with a meeting of the Council's Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel. The second public workshop on May 16<sup>th</sup> will be held in conjunction with a two-day MPA Expert Workgroup meeting of scientists and fishermen. There will be a public comment session as part of the MPA Expert Workgroup beginning at 5:00 PM on May 16, 2012. All meetings are open to the public. The Council will also accept written comments until 12:00 noon on May 21, 2012. Comments may be mailed to: Bob Mahood, Executive Director, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201, N. Charleston, SC 29405 or via email at [MPAWorkshopComment@safmc.net](mailto:MPAWorkshopComment@safmc.net).

**The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, one of eight regional councils, conserves and manages fish stocks from three to 200 miles offshore of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and east Florida.**