



Chairman Rodney Barreto
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Farris Bryant Building
620 South Meridian Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600

Submitted electronically on April 7, 2009

RE: State Consistency with Federal Gulf Grouper Regulations (68B-14, F.A.C.)

Dear Chairman Barreto,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input regarding the proposed change to grouper regulations in the Gulf of Mexico. We recognize the important role that the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) plays in jointly managing the grouper fisheries off the Florida coast. We offer our support for the staff recommendation to make regulations for gag and red grouper in the Gulf of Mexico consistent with federal regulations.

Gag has been determined by the latest stock assessment to be undergoing overfishing, or fished at an unsustainable rate. Indications from a recent stock assessment update point to a continuing downward trend in gag populations. The proposed regulations are designed primarily to protect gag from overfishing but also include provisions to increase fishing opportunities for red grouper in response to data that show this species is in better shape than in years past.

Consistent federal and state regulations are important to bring fishing rates for gag to a more sustainable level and can make monitoring and enforcement more effective while minimizing confusion for the fishing public.

Since most of the Gulf landings for gag and red grouper occur in Florida, the FWC has a particularly important role in the management of these species. By enacting consistent regulations, the FWC can help ensure that Gulf grouper populations are managed at sustainable levels.

Sincerely,

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cc: Commissioner Kathy Barco
Commissioner Ronald Bergeron
Commissioner Richard Corbett
Commissioner Dwight Stephenson
Commissioner Kenneth Wright

Commissioner Brian Yablonski
Mr. Ken Haddad
Mr. Mark Robson
Mr. William Teehan
Dr. Roy Crabtree