



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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April 30, 2015

Gary D. Goeke
Chief, Regional Assessment Section
Office of Environment (GM23E)
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
Gulf of Mexico OCS Region
1201 Elmwood Park Boulevard
New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394

Dear Mr. Goeke,

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) is providing the following comments concerning the potential environmental effects of conducting seismic surveys in the South Atlantic Region. The Council, pursuant to authority granted by the Magnuson-Steven Act, is charged with conservation of fish stocks and fish habitat and management of recreational and commercial fisheries dependent on those resources in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (3-200 miles) off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and the East Coast of Florida through the Florida Keys.

The Council has a standing Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Policy Statement on Energy, Exploration, Development, and Transportation (see included Policy Statement). The present policy statement is clear that seismic testing will directly impact benthic ecosystems, essential fish habitat, managed species, and the fisheries which depend on them. Therefore, the Council recommends that seismic surveys not be conducted in areas that will impact EFH and especially areas designated as EFH- Habitat Areas of Particular Concern including but not limited to deepwater snapper grouper Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), Special Management Zones, tilefish EFH- HAPC, other snapper Grouper EFH-HAPCS including but not limited to (the Georgetown Hole EFH-HAPC, Hoyt Hills EFH-HAPC, Deepwater Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (CHAPCs), and the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern which encompasses the Oculina Experimental Closed Area (see chart included).

The Council appreciates BOEMs willingness to provide input on all related Energy activities in the region but is concerned about the impact of potentially multiple independent surveys being conducted on hard live bottom habitat essential to species in our snapper grouper complex.

Multi-million dollar recreational and commercial fisheries in our region may potentially be affected by seismic testing.

The Council shares the concern over the impact these activities would potentially have on our managed resources and fisheries in concert with our counterpart in the Mid-Atlantic region, the Mid-Atlantic Council.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Hartig". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Ben Hartig, Chairman

Enclosures

cc: Council Members & Staff
Habitat and Ecosystem AP
Bonnie Ponwith, Theo Brainerd & Tom Jamir
Jack McGovern