



**Testimony before the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
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Stuart, FL**

Good evening. My name is Leda Dunmire, with The Pew Charitable Trusts. We have been closely following the VMS issue and appreciate the opportunity to comment on Snapper Grouper Amendment 30. Vessel monitoring systems are a widely used tool across the country to improve data collection, fishery monitoring and law enforcement. The Gulf of Mexico successfully integrated VMS into its reef fish fishery and our rock shrimp fishermen here in the South Atlantic use it to reduce damage to critical deepwater coral habitat.

These systems reduce uncertainty in stock assessments and provide spatially-referenced data to improve model outputs. They increase enforcement and reduce illegal fishing, which steals from law-abiding fishermen and presents major management challenges through inaccurate or false catch reports, exceeding bag or trip limits and fishing inside marine protected areas. This is particularly important given the Council's commitment to protecting and rebuilding our snapper and grouper populations through a network of eight deepwater MPAs and its current consideration of reconfiguring and expanding that network.

In the South Atlantic, our snapper and grouper populations are highly patchy over time and space. Since traditional fishery models used to set regulations here often assume uniformity, we need better ways to understand trends in fishing effort and preferred fishing grounds to help managers design regulations that more accurately reflect how fisheries work on the water.

The Council's history of continuously adjusting catch limits and opening and closing seasons highlights the difficulty of managing fisheries in an environment of uncertainty. We've heard many fishermen express concern about year-to-year ACL instability hampering their efforts to run an efficient business. It is critical that the Council employ cost-effective tools to reduce uncertainty and improve assessments in a timely, transparent and responsive manner.

We have listened to the VMS conversation unfold through the April public hearings and heard considerable opposition ranging from functionality issues to privacy concerns. The public has also repeatedly asked for better data and more enforcement. We join these stakeholders in calling your attention to the critical deficiencies in data collection, fishery monitoring and law enforcement in the region and pose a simple but important question: If not VMS, then what?

We urge the Council to conduct a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of all available technology to address these deficiencies as soon as possible. The status quo will not work for fishermen or the resource. We look forward to working with you to pursue, as quickly as possible, viable solutions that ensure healthy fisheries for the future.