



**Testimony before the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council  
Leda Dunmire, The Pew Charitable Trusts  
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Charleston, SC**

Good afternoon. My name is Leda Dunmire, with The Pew Charitable Trusts. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 17 and other issues. The Council took an important step this week to protect speckled hind and warsaw grouper where they live and spawn. We are pleased that you adopted a strong Purpose and Need statement and have laid out a reasonable timeline for its development with ample opportunities for public input.

Scientific literature recommends protecting at least 20% of adult fish habitat for healthy populations and optimal benefits to fisheries. A new peer-reviewed study released last week indicates that modifying the existing system of South Atlantic marine protected areas per the recommendations of the Council's MPA Expert Work Group would protect up to 24% of habitat preferred by speckled hind and warsaw grouper, up from the 8% conferred by the existing system.

That is a 3-fold increase in protections for these struggling fish with an increase of less than 40% in total MPA footprint, from 785 square miles to 1,093. These areas could also help snowy grouper, red grouper, red snapper, and red porgy rebuild after decades of overfishing. And they provide refuge for other co-occurring fish and marine life species, enhancing overall ecosystem health and resilience. In short, you've chosen a moderate, targeted approach that gets you high conservation value for your management investment.

You have solicited and incorporated stakeholder input throughout the development of Regulatory Amendment 17. Members of the fishing, business, and conservation communities have taken advantage of the opportunities provided to participate constructively and collaboratively. Fisheries are a public trust resource managed for the public good. It is appropriate and indeed necessary that you continue to engage directly with representatives from across the spectrum.

We also commend the Council on its work to develop a vision and strategic plan for a healthy future of the snapper/grouper fishery. Protecting critical habitat and spawning grounds should be a pillar of that plan. So should ongoing research on the MPA sites and monitoring and evaluation of their effectiveness in meeting their goals.

An additional core element of long-term fishery planning is reducing bycatch. Wasting fish is bad for the resource, bad for fishermen, and bad for the ecosystem. Stepping down trip limits as a percentage of the quota is met could reduce bycatch mortality and extend the fishing season in some commercial fisheries, as proposed for gag in Amendment 14. We encourage you to explore this and other strategies for reducing dead discards further through the visioning process.

Finally, I'd like to welcome the three newest members to the Council: Mr. Bowen, Mr. Conklin, and Mr. Cox. We appreciate your thoughtful participation in this week's meeting and look forward to working with you. I'd also like to recognize your predecessors, Mr. Amick, Mr. Burgess, and Mr. Swatzel, for their service to the resource and stakeholders. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. We look forward to continuing to work together to promote healthy fisheries to support the coastal communities that depend on them.