

Lee Hewitt
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Committee:
Agriculture, Natural Resources and
Environmental Affairs



House of Representatives

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Dr. Michelle Duval, Chair
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, SC 29405

Dear Dr. Duval,

I write to express my opposition to limiting the number of charter and head boats in the snapper-grouper fishery.

Based on the data I've seen, there is no scientific justification for for-hire limited entry in the South Atlantic. According to NOAA Fisheries, for-hire fishing effort in angler days has dropped 40 percent since 2007, so there is no excessive fishing pressure from this sector.

The number of snapper-grouper for-hire permits has been flat for years, with nine less permits issued this year than in 2009.

It's clear to me that the opposition to for-hire limited entry is overwhelming from fishery stakeholders. The charter and head boat operators I know are very concerned about the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council creating a stock market for for-hire permits with limited entry, one that would dramatically raise the cost for expansion or new entrants into the fishery. Additionally, there is legitimate concern about limited entry being a step toward for-hire catch shares, which would likely result in fleet consolidation and the loss of many fishing jobs.

I believe the SAFMC has an obligation to abide by the wishes of fishery stakeholders in how they want the snapper-grouper for-hire fishery managed. The SAFMC promised to do so in developing the long-range "Vision" snapper-grouper management plan.

In my youth, I worked as a deckhand on numerous charter and head boats out of Murrells Inlet, so I'm very familiar with the business and its economic importance to the coastal district I represent, which stretches from Murrells Inlet to Mt. Pleasant. As the fishing effort data shows, for-hire businesses have had a difficult time, particularly head boats. Years ago there used to be at least a dozen large offshore head boats in the district – now there is just one.

The last thing that is needed now is a limit on the number of charter and head boats.

On behalf of the constituents I represent, I ask the SAFMC to stop any further consideration of imposing for-hire limited entry in the snapper-grouper fishery.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lee Hewitt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "L".

Rep. Lee Hewitt

CC: Alvin Taylor - SCDNR