COMMITTEE REPORT

February 26, 2014

**H. 4596**

Introduced by Reps. Goldfinch, Sottile, Hardwick, Barfield, Williams, Kennedy, Harrell, V.S. Moss, Loftis, Ryhal, Quinn, Hamilton, Bedingfield, McCoy, Hosey, Newton, Patrick, Funderburk, Limehouse, Burns, Clemmons, Hardee, Hiott, Hixon, Hodges, Horne, Owens, Pitts, Sandifer, G.R. Smith, J.E. Smith, Spires and Wells

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Read the first time February 5, 2014.

**THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NATURAL**

**RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**

To whom was referred a Concurrent Resolution (H. 4596) to oppose any additional live bottom marine protected areas off the coast of South Carolina associated with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council’s proposed, etc., respectfully

**REPORT:**

That they have duly and carefully considered the same and recommend that the same do pass:

NELSON L. HARDWICK for Committee.

**A** **CONCURRENT RESOLUTION**

TO OPPOSE ANY ADDITIONAL LIVE BOTTOM MARINE PROTECTED AREAS OFF THE COAST OF SOUTH CAROLINA ASSOCIATED WITH THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL’S PROPOSED REGULATORY AMENDMENT 17 OR ANY FUTURE AMENDMENTS TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE SNAPPER‑GROUPER FISHERY OF THE SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION.

Whereas, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) is considering Regulatory Amendment 17 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper‑Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region; and

Whereas, actions and alternatives within Regulatory Amendment 17 could result in the establishment of more than one thousand square miles of additional Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) for speckled hind and warsaw grouper in the South Atlantic, in which all bottom fishing would be prohibited; and

Whereas, up to forty square miles of additional MPAs are proposed off South Carolina, including the Georgetown Hole, one of the most productive fishing areas for recreational and commercial fishermen on the east coast of the United States; and

Whereas, SAFMC’s own Scientific and Statistical Committee has advised the council that it finds no scientific justification for these MPAs, stating in an April 2012 report to the council that it, “…cannot determine what benefits an additional closure will provide to the stocks of speckled hind and warsaw grouper, what amount of area closure is necessary to reduce bycatch mortality, or if additional closed areas are even necessary. … Given all of the current regulations that affect other snapper grouper species, it is possible overfishing for speckled hind and warsaw grouper is no longer occurring.”; and

Whereas, despite the lack of scientific information on speckled hind and warsaw grouper, SAFMC has already implemented significant management measures to protect them, imposing in 1994 a prohibition on the commercial sales of speckled hind and warsaw grouper and a recreational bag limit of one for each species, and in 2011 the fisheries for both species were closed as a precautionary measure; and

Whereas, in 2009, eight MPAs, totaling over five hundred square miles, were established by SAFMC in the South Atlantic to protect deep‑water snapper‑grouper species, particularly speckled hind and warsaw grouper, with nearly 150 square miles located off South Carolina; and

Whereas, in the five years these MPAs have existed, no systematic monitoring has occurred to evaluate their effectiveness in protecting speckled hind or warsaw grouper; and

Whereas, South Carolina fishermen are already burdened by numerous fishery closures, overly restrictive catch limits, high fuel prices, costly U.S. Coast Guard regulations, growing seafood imports and the ongoing economic recession; and

Whereas, these proposed MPAs would cause unnecessary economic harm to recreational and commercial saltwater fishing activities, which are vital to the coastal economy of South Carolina and employs thousands of state residents directly and indirectly; and

Whereas, according to a 2008 University of South Carolina study, coastal tourism in South Carolina had a total economic impact of over seven billion dollars, employed nearly eighty‑one thousand South Carolinians, and generated over two billion dollars in salary and wages; and

Whereas, according to a 2011 American Sportfishing Association study, saltwater fishing in South Carolina attracted over three hundred thousand anglers, had a retail sales economic impact of over four hundred thirteen million dollars, employed nearly twelve thousand South Carolinians, and generated over one hundred thirty million dollars in salary and wages; and

Whereas, according to a 2008 University of South Carolina study, commercial fishing in South Carolina had a total economic impact of nearly thirty‑four million dollars, employed nearly seven hundred South Carolinians, and generated nearly thirteen million dollars in salary and wages; and

Whereas, the State of South Carolina, through the Department of Natural Resources, has a vote on SAFMC; and

Whereas, South Carolina has two additional representatives that are voting members of SAFMC. Now, therefore,

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives, the Senate concurring:

That the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina opposes any additional live bottom Marine Protected Areas off the coast of South Carolina associated with SAFMC’s proposed Regulatory Amendment 17 or any future amendments to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper‑Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region.

Be it further resolved that the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina urges SAFMC to cease all work on Snapper‑Grouper Regulatory Amendment 17 and to focus on ensuring that stock assessments are conducted for speckled hind and warsaw grouper and on implementing a monitoring and evaluation plan for the existing deep‑water MPAs in the South Atlantic.

Be it further resolved that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, all South Carolina representatives on SAFMC, SAFMC, and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

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