

August 2, 2019

Marcos Hanke, chair of Caribbean Fishery Management Council

Mr. Hanke,

Recognizing your concerns and commitment as council member over the years, we bring to your attention to the fisheries regulations at Bajo de Sico. We are pursuing that the CFMC consider modify the regulations within the Bajo de Sico seasonally closed area. We request that fishing in the areas deeper than 60 fathoms be allowed 12 months. Areas shallower than 60 fathoms should be prohibited from all fishing during 12 months; however we support continuation of the current regulation that allows for pelagic species in the water.

The reasons for this petition as based on our experience are the following:

1. Bajo de Sico is a seamount of great importance for local fishers due to its position relatively nearshore and during most of the year weather is favorable, when other areas are limited due to unfavorable sea conditions.
2. It is also an important area where Nassau grouper spawn and reside all year, but only in shallow areas as learned by years of research funded by the CFMC and NOAA in the habitats used by this endangered species.
3. Areas within the Bajo de Sico closed area can range to 260 fathoms and include productive areas of deep water snappers and groupers. The areas deeper than 60 fathoms are not used by Nassau grouper as a researcher evidenced and has been validated by fishers that commonly use the area.
4. Most of the fishers that use this area currently have GPS and sonar on their vessels, for this reason the regulations can be changed to be based on depth and or a modified latitude/longitude that includes all areas less than 60 fathoms.
5. Fishing with jigging gear is known to reach the seafloor. When the gear is used at less than 60 fathoms it captures Nassau grouper and other groupers that aggregate to spawn in Bajo de Sico as evidenced in social media posts. Groupers brought to the surface after incidental capture and released would not survive due to very strong currents, abrupt changes in depth and sharks.
6. Lack of enforcement and problems with interpretation of regulations as well as the limited resources for implementation.
7. There is a need for compatible regulations within the area of Bajo de Sico to facilitate compliance.
8. The general public, including foreign tourists, are not aware of the regulations that apply in our waters, specifically at Bajo de Sico and unknowingly violate the law.

Thanking you for your attention on this important matter,



Edwin Font Acevedo, 'Pauco'