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UNITED STATE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
75 Virginia Beach Drive  
Miami, Florida 33149 U.S.A.

September 18, 2006

Mr. Robin Riechers, Chairman  
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council  
2203 North Lois Avenue, Suite 1100  
Tampa, FL 33607

Dear Mr. Riechers:

*Robin*

Thank you for your letter to me of September 14, 2006 requesting advice about goliath grouper. At this time, an assessment update would not provide any new information regarding the status or condition of goliath grouper under the MSA. We have no new information on reproduction including age of first reproduction or fecundity and the abundance indices represent only two years of new information beyond the latest update completed in 2004. It is highly unlikely that two years of additional abundance indices will allow for a measurable detection in change in abundance. This would require 5 years of new data which translates into an update not before 2009. While we believe that at an appropriate level of take could occur for scientific purposes, it is clear that such a take would have to be conducted under a very structured proposal that will identify and control the harvesting. For example, we would like to be able to augment our information base on life history such as age of reproduction or refine the spatial and temporal distribution of fish by age/size. To accomplish this would require a proposal organized around these working hypotheses and implemented in a way that we would be able to provide defensible scientific results, meaning that takes would have to be guided by a framework that would allow for sampling appropriately across age classes and throughout the species range. I propose that if you can identify appropriate persons that we can work with to develop a cooperative research proposal, we would be happy to develop a plan that we would then implement as funding is available as principal investigator.

Sincerely,

Nancy B. Thompson, Ph.D.  
Science Director

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SEP 25 2006

GULF FISHERIES COUNCIL