

# OVERVIEW

## Habitat and Environmental Protection Committee

Doubletree by Hilton New Bern/Riverfront  
100 Middle Street  
New Bern, NC  
December 1, 2014

The Committee will: (A) Receive a status report on Coral Amendment 8; (B) receive a briefing on updated VMS analyses and bycatch information for the rock shrimp fishery; and (C) discuss a recently submitted proposal for establishment of an Oculina National Marine Sanctuary.

### **A. Status of Coral Amendment 8**

Coral Amendment 8 actions include expansion of the northern and western boundaries of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC); expansion of the Stetson-Miami Terrace and Cape Lookout Coral HAPCs; and establishment of a transit provision through Oculina Bank HAPC for vessels with rock shrimp onboard. Within the expanded HAPCs, use of bottom longline, bottom trawl, dredge, pot or trap is prohibited, and if aboard a fishing vessel, anchor, use of anchor and chain, and grapple and chain is prohibited. Mid-water trawl is also prohibited in the Coral HAPCs, including Stetson-Miami Terrace and the Cape Lookout Coral HAPCs. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council approved the amendment during their September 2013 meeting and sent the document for formal review on November 26, 2013. The notice of availability for Coral Amendment 8 published in the Federal Register on May 20, 2014, and the comment period ended on July 21, 2014. The proposed rule for Coral Amendment 8 published on June 3, 2014, and the comment period ended on July 3, 2014. Coral Amendment was approved on August 20, 2014. A final rule, which gives effect to the actions and regulations, will be published in the Federal Register shortly.

### **(B) Updated VMS analyses and bycatch information for the rock shrimp fishery**

As follow-up to direction to staff from the September Council meeting, additional analyses of updated Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data were conducted and bycatch information was further reviewed for the rock shrimp fishery. A chart of Northern Extension of the Oculina Bank including a table highlighting fishing activity over various time periods as related to those shown in Coral Amendment 8 is included as **Attachment 1**. This was in part developed to address claims by industry of the predominant fishing effort occurring inside the eastern boundary of the Northern Extension. While greater fishing east of the boundary may have occurred, fishing points inside the boundary accounted for only 4% of all fishing points that year which was not that different from previous years or the impacts shown in Coral Amendment 8.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** The Committee will provide guidance to staff on whether or not to begin an amendment to modify the Coral HAPC included in Coral Amendment 8:

- Option 1.** Do not begin a new amendment to modify the Coral HAPC included in Coral Amendment 8.
- Option 2.** Direct staff to begin work on Coral Amendment 9 to modify the Coral HAPC included in Coral Amendment 8.
- Option 3.** Others??

**(C) Proposal submitted to establish an Oculina National Marine Sanctuary**

On September 2, 2015, The Friends of Matanzas Inc., submitted a proposal to the National Marine Sanctuary Program Office to establish a Eubalaena Oculina National Marine Sanctuary (**Attachments 3 & 4**). Dr. George Sedberry, NOAA, will give an overview of the request and the letter of insufficiency (**Attachment 5**). Chip Collier, Council staff, will review how the proposed area impacts SAFMC Managed Areas (**Attachment 6**). The Committee will discuss the issue and how the proposal interacts with existing Council Managed Areas. The Committee will provide guidance as to how the Council may respond to the proposal.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** The Committee will provide guidance to staff as appropriate.