

DRAFT
Summary of the SAFMC Habitat and Environmental Protection Committee Meeting
December 1, 2014
New Bern Double Tree Hotel
New Bern, NC

Members:

Wilson Laney, Chair
Chris Conklin
Doug Haymans
Charlie Phillips

Anna Beckwith
Lt. Morgan Fowler
Robert Beal (not present)

The agenda was adopted, and the minutes of the September 2014 meeting were approved.

Coral Amendment 8

Jack McGovern reported on the status of Coral Amendment 8. The amendment was approved by the Secretary on August 20, 2014; however the final rule has not been published. The delay of the final rule is due to a change in the ping rate when crossing the OHAPC and the estimated cost to the fishermen for this increased ping rate requirement. There is potential for fishermen to increase the ping rate using the older versions of VMS units, which was not analyzed in the amendment. Once the estimate is completed, the final rule will be published.

Updated VMS Analyses and Bycatch Information for the Rock Shrimp Fishery

Chip Collier presented a map with the updated VMS points for the rock shrimp fishery and bycatch in the fishery. The committee discussed the increase of fishing effort during 2014, relative to past years, in the area that will be closed in Coral Amendment 8. It was pointed out that there was a greater percentage of effort in the area but the 2014 effort in the area was still relatively low overall. The rock shrimp are likely moving due to the dynamic environment in the area. Since the 2014 VMS data analysis did not include the entire year, the committee requested updated maps with all of the 2014 VMS points be compiled and presented to the committee in June 2015. There was also a request to include information on vessels that are capable of fishing in the depth of the area that will be closed in Coral Amendment 8 and updated economic information for the area from Mike Merrifield.

Proposal for an Oculina National Marine Sanctuary

George Sedberry with the National Marine Sanctuary Program gave a presentation on the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, the revised process for nominating marine sanctuaries, and the Friends of Matanzas nomination of the Eubalaena Oculina National Marine Sanctuary. The National Marine Sanctuaries Program primary objective is to protect the resource while maintaining access to the extent possible. Because an area is designated as a sanctuary does not mean fishing will not be allowed. Management of fisheries in proposed sanctuaries would defer to the Council through the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Within the sanctuary, there would be restrictions on disturbing the sea bed by preventing drilling and dredging and prohibiting exploring for, developing, or producing oil or gas. The Matanzas nomination was found insufficient by NOAA. The group is revising their nomination. It is expected that the application will be resubmitted in the summer of 2015. The Council will be updated on the

proposal when it is resubmitted. There was concern that some of the Council members were not aware of the proposed sanctuary until after the nomination had been found insufficient. Staff was requested to update the Council if new sanctuaries are proposed in the South Atlantic. Staff was also requested to develop a document that describes all the management actions taken by the Council to protect habitats and manage fisheries off the east coast of Florida.

Other Business

Plaintiffs sued the USACE because of alleged harm to endangered Staghorn corals resulting from Miami harbor deepening and sought a preliminary injunction. USACE found more listed corals in the potentially impacted area by the dredging project than previously thought and worked with NOAA to get an agreement to fund NOAA restoration center's relocation of the corals. The plaintiffs dropped the motion for preliminary injunction. The corals were moved to nurseries and will be outplanted later at USACE's expense.

Motions

There were no motions.

Timing and Task Draft Motion

The following motion has been developed based on direction from the Committee:

MOTION: APPROVE THE TASKS AND TIMING AS PRESENTED:

1. Direct staff to provide an updated VMS analysis using all of 2014 data and include information on vessels that are capable of fishing in the depth of the area that will be closed in Coral Amendment 8 and updated economic information for the area from Mike Merrifield. Present results to the Habitat and Environmental Protection Committee by the June 2015 Council meeting.
2. Direct staff to update the Council if new sanctuaries are proposed in the South Atlantic.
3. Direct staff to develop a document that describes all the management actions taken by the Council to protect habitats and manage fisheries off the coast of northeast Florida. Present results to the Habitat and Environmental Protection Committee by the March or June 2014 Council meetings.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my report.