

DECISION DOCUMENT
OCULINA EXPERIMENTAL CLOSED AREA 2014 EVALUATION

JUNE 2014

Background

The Final Evaluation Plan for the *Oculina* Experimental Closed Area (OECA) was completed in March 22, 2005. The Summary is as follows:

“In April 2004, regulations were implemented through Amendment 13A to the South Atlantic Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan that extended the fishing restrictions for the designated 92-square mile *Oculina* Experimental Closed Area for an indefinite period. The amendment was developed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to address the 10-year sunset provision for the closure of the area to snapper/grouper fishing. Located off the coast of Ft. Pierce, Florida, the area is part of the larger *Oculina* Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) designed to protect the *Oculina* coral found there. In addition to extending the closure, the amendment requires that the size and configuration of the Experimental Closed Area be reviewed within three years of the implementation date of Amendment 13A and that a 10-year re-evaluation be conducted for the area. The Council also stipulated that an Evaluation Plan be developed to address needed monitoring and research, outreach, and enforcement efforts within one year of implementation of the Amendment.”

The 3-year review was completed in February 2007. The Executive Summary is as follows:

“The Council established the *Oculina* Evaluation Team (OET) as part of its Evaluation Plan for the *Oculina* Experimental Closed Area (OECA). The team -- comprising law enforcement representatives, research scientists, resource managers, commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen, outreach experts, and non-governmental organization representatives -- was charged with reviewing and providing recommendations for the ongoing research and monitoring, outreach, and law enforcement components of the Evaluation Plan. These recommendations will assist the Council in completing a required 3-year size and configuration evaluation and a 10-year complete evaluation of the OECA.

The OET convened for the first time August 21-23, 2006 in Port Canaveral, Florida to address the following topics and questions:

- (1) What has been accomplished so far on research and monitoring, information and education projects, and law enforcement strategies and timelines?
- (2) What has been the effectiveness of research and monitoring, outreach, and law enforcement efforts and how do these need to be improved before the Council’s deadline to make a decision on whether or not to continue the regulations in their 10-year review (2014)?
- (3) Review and evaluate the current size and configuration of the OECA and provide recommendations to the Council.
- (4) Provide recommendations to assist the Council in their 10-year evaluation of research and monitoring, law enforcement and outreach efforts supporting fishing regulations. The OECA review is scheduled for 2014.

This Oculina Evaluation Team Report is based on discussions and recommendations obtained during the August 2006 meeting. Members of the Team received presentations and updates on research and monitoring activities, outreach projects, and law enforcement efforts. Following the presentations, break-out sessions were held for each of the three components of the OECA Evaluation Plan: 1) research and monitoring, 2) law enforcement, and 3) outreach and education, to develop the respective sections of this report. The report, approved by the Team by consensus on August 23, 2006, is provided to support the South Atlantic Council's review of the size and configuration of the Oculina Experimental Closed Area in March 2007. **The overall recommendation from the Oculina Evaluation Team regarding the size and configuration of the OECA is that no changes be made at this time.**"

The Evaluation Teams met in a series of webinars earlier this year and produced the following documents that are included here as attachments:

- Attachment 1a. Oculina Evaluation Team – Outreach Report
- Attachment 1b. Oculina Evaluation Team – Outreach Presentation
- Attachment 1c. Oculina Evaluation Team – Outreach Deliverables
- Attachment 1c. Oculina Evaluation Team – Outreach Evaluation Team
- Attachment 2a. Oculina Evaluation Team – Law Enforcement Report
- Attachment 2b. Oculina Evaluation Team – Law Enforcement Presentation
- Attachment 3a. Oculina Evaluation Team – Research & Monitoring Report
- Attachment 3b. Oculina Evaluation Team – Research & Monitoring Presentation
- Attachment 3c. Oculina Evaluation Team – Research & Monitoring Deliverables

Reviews by Advisory Panels

The Information and Education Advisory Panel reviewed the draft 2014 evaluation plan at their May 5, 2014 meeting. The AP reviewed the recommendations of the Outreach Team and provided the following additional recommendations:

Objective 2. Develop a focused campaign targeting recreational/commercial fishermen in the central eastern Florida area.

Project 1. Provide SAFMC regulation brochures to area fishermen

Recommendations from the AP:

- Include USFWS Wildlife Refuges in the area for distribution of materials.
- Recommend purchasing advertising space on fishing forums.
- Work with other NGOs, e.g., CCA to provide information on regulations.
- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

Project 2. Work with fishing chart manufacturers and or vendors to improve available information for the *Oculina* Experimental Closed Area.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

Project 3. Work with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to provide written information regarding the *Oculina* Experimental Closed Area in (a) their publications targeting both recreational and commercial fishermen and in (b) mailings for fishing licenses and permits.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

Project 4. Develop and distribute news releases to focus on law enforcement activities, research and monitoring projects, and the ecological importance of the area.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Capitalize on the 20-year anniversary of the OECA for media purposes.
- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

Project 5. Develop a Powerpoint presentation about the *Oculina* Experimental Closed Area, distribute on CD, post at Web site, and present to fishing clubs, environmental groups, local governments etc.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

Project 6. Develop and distribute posters and rack cards/brochures at area bait and tackles shops, marinas, fish houses, boating stores, fishing tournaments, boat shows, etc.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Develop a current list of boating/fishing stores and tournaments to target for future distribution.
- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

Project 7 (NEW): Develop kiosk for target boat ramps/landings.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Work with marinas that participate in the Clean Marina program to display/place kiosks and/or signage.
- Work with USFWS wildlife refuges as well to develop and place new or existing kiosks/signage within refuge boat landings/ramps.
- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS

Objective 3: Coordinate a broader media campaign with partners to reach central Florida residents and visitors using newspaper, radio, TV, Internet, and existing environmental education network (e.g. environmental centers, schools, academia, area businesses).

Project 1: Develop an *Oculina* Web site or work within the existing site to establish a comprehensive web-based outlet to include access to useful education and outreach products. Publicize availability of information from new site by having links posted on other fishing/Non-Governmental Organizations/tourism related web sites.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Use FWC "Gone Coastal" for distribution of information on OECA.
- Partner with University of Miami RASMAS for student production of videos – Beneath the Waves Film Festival.
- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

Project 2: Develop education products for teachers (K-12) and informal educators, post on Web site, and develop packet for distribution to science teachers.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Identify Oculina scientist or researcher spokesperson to do Skype interviews with current or past NOAA Teacher at Sea participants. Work with NOAA Fisheries on getting contacts and help facilitate the exchange.
- Florida Marine Science Educators Association may be a target audience to help distribute education products for teachers and informal educators (www.fmsea.org). Also ask them to post information on OECA on their website.
- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

Project 3: Create media packet targeting ecological importance of area; packet should include popular news items about *Oculina* Experimental Closed Area.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

Project 4: Develop a traveling portable exhibit that can be displayed at fishing tournaments, tradeshows, seafood/maritime festivals, aquariums, science museums, libraries, government centers, etc.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Consider the USFWS wildlife refuges for use of the portable exhibit (especially Merritt Island, FL). Jennifer Koches, AP member, offered to help make connections.
- Consider creating panel style, pop-up displays that could be shared among partners; low cost, easy to travel, and can be changed out more frequently.
- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

Project 5: Offer media excursions to the *Oculina* Experimental Closed Area and HAPC/ tours and interviews regarding enforcement activities onboard the *CT Randall* law enforcement vessel.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Science Online blogging events may be a good outlet for reaching a wider audience during media excursions.
- June 27, 1994 was when the rule was implemented. Upcoming 20th anniversary could be good time to push a social media campaign highlighting the OECA; Collaborate with NOAA Fisheries, FL FWC and other partners to coordinate a social media campaign the week of June 27th, 2014.
- Include an agenda item during the Habitat Committee at the upcoming June 2014 SAFMC meeting to highlight the 20th anniversary of OECA. (Recommendation from Council staff, Gregg Waugh.)
- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

Project 6: Develop TV documentaries working with environmental TV outlets (e.g., Discovery Channel, Public TV).

Recommendations from the AP:

- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

Project 7: Work within existing program to deploy a real time data buoy in the *Oculina* Bank area to provide weather and sea-state information for boaters and fishermen and integrate information into web site.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

Project 8: Assist with the continued development of an interpretive *Oculina* coral display at the Smithsonian Marine Station in Ft. Pierce, Florida.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

Objective 4: Evaluation

Project 1: Develop a survey tool to assess the effectiveness of the campaign and widely distribute before, during and after majority of activities underway.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Consider using pre and post surveys (web-based or print) with teach workshop participants.
- Use social media posts and measure the “likes” and comments received as a measure of the effectiveness of using social media for outreach on OECA; also consider using Q&A type social media posts to gauge stakeholder knowledge about OECA and outreach efforts.
- Use electronic survey – GoDelivery, Survey Monkey, and other survey software – as a mechanism to evaluate education projects for OECA.
- Send an evaluation survey to participating teacher workshop participants.
- Consider using law enforcement violations as a measure of effectiveness of the outreach campaign. (Work with law enforcement to calculate the number of violations since the OECA was implemented to see if violations have declined; make linkages with outreach campaigns and law enforcement.)
- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

****NOTE:** Kim will send a copy of the survey that was previously used so that the AP can provide further recommendations about the survey and use of a survey as an evaluation tool.

Project 2: Continue to receive input from local constituents (through the database established from the June 2004 outreach meetings) regarding the development of materials and level of community awareness.

Recommendations from the AP:

- Develop a list of area constituent groups for targeting outreach campaigns.
- Develop a list of area festivals, fishing tournaments, etc. for targeting outreach campaigns.
- _Consider use of a survey that asks questions of fishermen about their offshore fishing activities (general locations, types of fishing, etc.) that may coincide with areas around the OECA and other types of survey questions designed at targeting an audience for outreach efforts.
- Support the recommendations of the Evaluation Team.

The Coral Advisory Panel reviewed the 2014 evaluation of research objectives presented in the Oculina Experimental Closed Area Evaluation Plan at their May 7-8, 2014 meeting. Their review provided both refined specifics on research accomplished to date or planned, as well as identified their priorities associated with addressing specific objectives of the Plan. Their output in the form of a refined spreadsheet is still being finalized. Council staff proposes that the Coral AP recommendations be added to the final report.

In addition, the following statement was provided by the Panel responding to a request provided during the review: The Coral Advisory Panel Reaffirms the Research and Monitoring Team's opinion that a proposal opening areas for trawling in the CHAPC/OECA would be extremely counterproductive and would put the remaining dense stands of *Oculina varicosa* at risk. ... The anticipated additional data collected during the 2015 through 2017 research cruises will provide information for improved habitat characterization for this area.

The Deepwater Shrimp Advisory Panel reviewed the draft report at their May 6-7, 2014 meeting.

- The transit provision is important to the industry and since this is new and was highlighted in the LE Report, they are concerned about how transit will be enforced with the VMS and increased ping rate. The AP worked with LE to develop the proposed method and they support the transit provision. Would like to see an Implementation Plan for exactly what needs to happen for this to be implemented.
- Clarify that if want to transit a closed area, you need the VMS with the increased ping rate but if not interested in transiting, then the existing VMS unit is ok. Industry will need a period of time after the regulations are approved to purchase and install the new capability so a delayed effective date would be helpful.
- Very interested in cooperative research to meet the research/monitoring needs
- Completion of 6 of 33 projects in 10 years is kind of rough information-wise
- NMFS should use the shrimp vessels to carry instruments similar to what the Navy is doing
- Use citizen scientists similar to what has been done in the avian world
- Research & Monitoring report states that shrimp trawls moved the artificial reef blocks but no evidence to document this
- Coral is important to the industry as habitat for rock shrimp. There are more impacts beyond any from trawls. Many factors are contributing to changes in coral health and the distribution of rock shrimp and studying the impacts from these stressors needs to be a higher priority:
 - Freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee
 - Dade County is putting millions of gallons of treated sewer water into the ocean every day
 - Last year shrimpers caught a thick brown leafy seaweed that was so thick it loaded the nets; took days to clean nets; this occurs in the southern end near the nutrient discharges; nothing living down on the southern end of the OECA (no bat fish or lizard fish and crabs)
 - Oil and chemical dispersants from the BP oil spill

- Closed area was put there to study snapper and grouper and the work is not being done
- Work examining the stressors on coral is not being done
- The industry has requested trawling be allowed in the offshore portion of the OECA, deeper than 100 m which is all soft substrate without any coral; don't feel this would harm any *Oculina*; question the science used to close and keep closed when there is no coral there.
- *The Deepwater Shrimp AP requests a specific response on what information or science justified the initial closure and justifies this area remain closed.*
- Research on spawning fish – reports states difficult to get ship time but the industry can provide the platforms to do research during the spawning season
- Research & Monitoring report should summarize work done and not just provide a reference; the AP requests this be added in the final report
- Funding is limited and you should take the little funding available and complete the projects in the OECA before moving to areas outside. Let's try to figure out really what is in the experimental closed area, which was set aside over 20 years ago and almost no research has been done inside that.
- Research on commercially harvested fish needs to be included in the highest priorities
- Number 4, Objective 4 needs to be elevated
- Rock shrimp industry can provide lots of knowledge of the changes over time; oral interviews with captains or written reports; scientists need to work with the industry
- Hard to continue outreach with all the lost funding/research/outreach activities:
 - Andy Shepherd's program at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington gone
 - Harbor Branch gone
 - Deep equipment from Harbor Branch gone
 - Funding gone
- The industry is very willing to work with the education efforts of the Smithsonian Marine Center
- The AP questioned what outreach would be done if Coral Amendment 8 is approved and how would this impact the outreach effort in the OECA?
- The AP noted that the impact of monofilament line on corals needs to be examined
- Should publicize what the penalties are for fishing in the OECA
- The AP expressed thanks for the excellent job done on outreach

COMMITTEE ACTION

The Draft 2014 Review of accomplishments associated with OECA Evaluation Plan are based on the individual Outreach, Law Enforcement, and Research & Monitoring Teams' input and constitutes the Council-specified 10 year review. At the June 2014 meeting, the Council will confirm completion of this review and provide staff editorial license to finalize the document to refine both descriptions of accomplishments and updates to prioritizations as provided by reviews conducted by the Council Advisory Panel.

OPTION 1. ACCEPT THE DRAFT 2014 EVALUATION TEAM REPORT AND PROVIDE STAFF EDITORIAL LICENSE TO COMPLETE THE FINAL REPORT.

OPTION 2. OTHERS??