



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Habitat Protection and Ecosystem-Based Management Advisory Panel Meeting April 7-8, 2015

**Crowne Plaza
Charleston, South Carolina**

The Habitat and Environmental Protection Advisory Panel met April 7-8, 2015 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Charleston South Carolina. Issues addressed during the meeting included: 1) FEP II Development Session - Threats to Habitat; 2) Updating Information on Impacts of Fisheries on Habitat; 3) State Sub-Panel Break-Out Sessions; 4) Scope of and Structure for Food Web and Connectivity Section of FEP II and EFH Policy Statement Development; 5) EFH Issues - NOAA Fisheries- Removal of Species from Management Units; 6) South Atlantic Fisheries Oceanography and Climate Variability; 7) South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative Regional Conservation Blueprint Development; 8) Renewable Energy in the South Atlantic Energy Exploration, Development and Transportation Policy Statement; and 9) OCS and G&G Activities in the South Atlantic.

FEP II Development Session - Threats to Habitat

The Advisory Panel was provided a presentation from Council staff on updating the FEP Section on non-fishing impacts on habitat.

Updating Information on Impacts of Fisheries on Habitat

The Advisory Panel was provided an introduction to updating FEP Section on Fishing Impacts on Habitat from Panel Chair Pat Geer, GDNR. Presentations were also made on new or developing fisheries including; the Calico Scallop Fishery, by Chip Collier, SAFMC staff and; the Jelly Ball fishery by Pat Geer.

State Sub-Panel Break-Out Sessions

State Sub-Panel breakout sessions were conducted to discuss and prioritize threats to fish habitat in each state. Lists were compiled for each state and provided the Chair. These will be used to facilitate a further review, prioritization and subsequent development of a habitat/species/threat matrix at the November AP meeting.

Scope of and Structure for Food Web and Connectivity Section of FEP II and EFH Policy Statement Development

The Advisory Panel held a roundtable discussion on development of an FEP II Section on Food Web and Connectivity.

EFH Issues - NOAA Fisheries

The Advisory Panel received a presentation from NOAA Fisheries Habitat Conservation on EFH issues related to removal of species from FMP Management Units as proposed in Snapper Grouper Amendment 35.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Council consider the EFH ramifications of removing schoolmaster snapper from the snapper grouper management unit considering the level of detailed life history and habitat association information available for the species makes it routinely highlighted enhancing the EFH consultation and the permit review process.

South Atlantic Fisheries Oceanography and Climate Variability

The Advisory Panel received presentations on: the Draft NOAA NMFS Climate Science Strategy; and 2) Building on the Rapid Assessment Document Developed for SAFMC Managed Species. The Panel held a roundtable discussion on development of FEP II Section on South Atlantic Fisheries Oceanography and Climate Variability and considerations for the South Atlantic.

South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative Regional Conservation Blueprint Development

Council staff provided an update on the SALCCs efforts in development of Conservation Blueprint Version 2.0 and supporting State of the South Atlantic Report.

Renewable Energy in the South Atlantic

The Advisory Panel received presentations from BOEM Renewable Energy Division Staff on: 1) Technologies Being Evaluated; 2) Mapping and Characterization Efforts off South Atlantic; 3) Review of Information on the Impacts of Sound on Fish; and 4) Process and Timing for Region and by State.

Energy Exploration, Development and Transportation Policy Statement OCS and G&G Activities in the South Atlantic

The Advisory Panel received presentations from BOEM G & G and OCS staff on: 1) Supported Mapping and Characterization Efforts off South Atlantic; 2) Permit Proposals for Seismic Testing in the South Atlantic; and 3) Process and Timing for Region. The Panel raised concerns over known and potential impacts seismic testing would have on managed species especially species in the snapper grouper complex and the complex benthic ecosystem and essential fish habitat they depend on.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Send a letter to BOEM with our concerns with the seismic testing (completed by the Council)
- Send a letter to BOEM outlining the importance of support for bathymetric surveys on the Southeast Atlantic (under development with AP member input)
- Begin discussions with BOEM (and permit holders) related to obtaining any and all bathymetry data associated with seismic testing if conducted (this seems to be a common theme among many groups including NOAA Fisheries)