

HABITAT AND CORAL ADVISORY PANEL MEETINGS

NOVEMBER 17-19, 2008

I. Joint Habitat and Coral AP Recommendations:

1. The Habitat and Coral APs recommend that Alternative 2 and all of its sub-alternatives be chosen as preferred for Action 1. Approved by APs

Action 1. Amend the Coral, Coral Reefs and Live/Hardbottom Habitat FMP to establish deepwater Coral HAPCs (CHAPCs)

Alternative 1. No action.

Alternative 2. Establish deepwater CHAPCs in one or more areas proposed in sub-alternatives 2a - 2e

Sub-alternative 2a. Establish the Cape Lookout Lophelia Banks CHAPC;

Sub-alternative 2b. Establish the Cape Fear Lophelia Banks CHAPC;

Sub-alternative 2c. Establish the Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms, and Miami Terrace (Stetson-Miami Terrace) CHAPC;

Sub-alternative 2d. Establish the Pourtales Terrace CHAPC; and

Sub-alternative 2e. Establish the Blake Ridge Diapir Methane Seep CHAPC.

2. The Habitat and Coral APs support the Council's Preferred Alternative 2 for Action 2. Approved by APs.

Action 2. Create a "Shrimp Fishery Access Area" (SFAA) within the proposed Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms, and Miami Terrace (Stetson-Miami Terrace) CHAPC boundaries

Alternative 1. No action.

Preferred Alternative 2. Create a "Shrimp Fishery Access Area" (SFAA) within the proposed Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms, and Miami Terrace (Stetson-Miami Terrace) CHAPC boundaries where fishing with a shrimp trawl and/or shrimp possession is allowed by any vessel holding a rock shrimp limited access endorsement and equipped with an approved vessel monitoring system (VMS).

Alternative 3. Move the west boundary of the proposed CHAPC 6 nautical miles to the east between the following points: (a) 30 degrees 16 minutes 35.354 seconds N and (b) 26 degrees 12 minutes 56.273 seconds N.

3. The Habitat and Coral APs support the Council’s Preferred Alternative 2 for Action 3.

Action 3. Create “Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Areas” within the proposed Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms, and Miami Terrace (Stetson-Miami Terrace) CHAPC and Pourtales Terrace CHAPC boundaries.

Alternative 1. No action.

Preferred Alternative 2. Create “Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Areas” in one or more of the areas as described in sub-alternatives 2a - 2c:

Sub-alternative 2a. Create an Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Area in the Northern Golden Crab Fishing Zone -- within the Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms, and Miami Terrace (Stetson-Miami Terrace) CHAPC boundaries.

Sub-alternative 2b. Create an Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Area in the Middle Golden Crab Fishing Zone -- within the Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms, and Miami Terrace (Stetson-Miami Terrace) CHAPC boundaries.

Sub-alternative 2c. Create an Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Area in the Southern Golden Crab Fishing Zone -- within the Pourtales Terrace CHAPC boundaries.

Alternative 3. Move the western boundary of the proposed Northern and Middle Zone Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Areas west to include the proposed Shrimp Fishery Access Area.

However, the APs recommend:

- a. Limit the fishery to traditional (allowable) gear
- b. Effort be capped at (or near) status quo levels
- c. Bycatch be quantified
- d. Resources be found to evaluate opportunities to reduce gear impacts
- e. Resources be found to improve habitat characterization

Approved by APs

4. The Habitat and Coral APs recommend that the Council adopt the No action alternative for Action 4 but support opportunities to develop technologies to ensure compliance and adopt these through the Golden Crab FMP. Approved by APs.

Action 4. Amend the Golden Crab FMP to require vessel monitoring

Alternative 1. No action.

Alternative 2. Require use of an approved vessel monitoring system (VMS) by any vessel with a limited access golden crab permit and approved crustacean traps fishing for golden crab within designated areas in the Stetson-Miami Terrace CHAPC and Pourtales Terrace CHAPC.

Alternative 3. Require use of an approved vessel monitoring system (VMS) by any vessel fishing with a limited access golden crab permit in the South Atlantic Council's area of jurisdiction.

II. Coral AP Recommendations:

1. Request that NMFS provide octocoral landings by region (South Atlantic vs. Gulf) and jurisdiction (state vs. federal) in order to better track landings and report numbers of colonies.
2. Request that the state of Florida re-evaluate reporting requirements for octocoral landings to distinguish between regions (South Atlantic vs. Gulf) and jurisdiction (state vs. federal waters).
3. The Coral AP recommends to the Council that a Lease Program not be considered for limiting the wild harvest of octocorals in South Atlantic waters. This recommendation does not preclude growing octocorals in existing lease sites (such as those established to culture live rock). In addition, a Lease Program for the wild harvest of octocorals would present enforcement challenges.
4. Coral AP requests that the Council consider allowing the take of the erect forms of *Briareum sp.* and *Erythropodium sp.* Approved by AP.
5. Coral AP requests that the Council consider the feasibility and implications of establishing a permit system to harvest the invasive scleractinian coral species *Tubestrea coccinea*. Approved by AP.

III. Habitat AP Recommendations:

A. Recommended Items for Comprehensive Ecosystem-based Amendment 2 Scoping

1. Designate new EFH and EFH-HAPCs for SAFMC managed species.
2. Refine EFH and EFH-HAPC designations for SAFMC managed species.
3. Prohibit all harvest of *Sargassum fluitans* and *S. patens*.

B. General Recommendations

1. The Habitat AP recommends that:
 - a. the SAFMC endorse the SA Governor's Alliance, and communicate the need for and importance of that effort to agencies and to governors.
 - b. SAFE reports should be produced annually to help inform FEP development and to guide FMP amendments, including discussions of improving knowledge about habitat requirements and inter-specific interactions,
 - c. priority data and information gaps, as reflected in the SAFMC's annual research plan and funded as possible.
 - d. the HEPAP's continuing role in developing programs to protect habitat and support ecosystem interactions be reflected in appointments of at least two representatives of the HEPAP to the SSC.
2. HEPAP working groups be appointed to develop collaborative plans to address key habitat and ecosystem elements over the next six months to define priorities for information development and possible management actions, as follows: 1) ecosystem interactions and 2) place-based management.
 - a. Ecosystem interactions (initial priorities)
 1. Assessment of predator-prey interactions to identify key information gaps that limit the effectiveness of management of fisheries and of protected species
 2. Assessment of information priorities needed to assess and limit cumulative impacts of habitat losses, as a step towards developing habitat targets adequate to sustain fully rebuilt populations of target species and their prey.

3. Assessment of key information gaps about factors limiting recruitment, and implications for fisheries management.

4. Implications of changing climates, including setting flow targets for coastal watersheds and other strategies to build resilience.

b. Habitat distribution and place-based management (initial priorities)

1. Inventory of existing habitat mapping activities

2. Development of an appropriate habitat classification scheme

3. Inventory of existing place-based management

4. Identification of priority habitat mapping and characterization needs (for example, the area between P and M Ts)

5. Identification of priority place-based management needs

6. Opportunities for further HAPC designations.

7. Pilot contained ecosystem study? (Examples: New River, Albemarle Sound)