



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Coral Amendment 11 and Shrimp Amendment 12

Establish a SFAA within the Oculina HAPC

Decision Document, June 2025



Background

In 2021, the Council submitted Coral Amendment 10 to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for formal review. The amendment proposed establishing a shrimp fishery access area (SFAA) within the eastern edge of the Northern Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern (OHAPC) where trawling for rock shrimp occurred historically but is currently prohibited. In 2022, the Council received a letter of disapproval on Coral Amendment 10. Among the reasons for disapproval, NMFS stated that the amendment did not include adequate analysis to ensure that the proposed action would minimize adverse effects of fishing on essential fish habitat (EFH) and minimize bycatch. In 2023, the Council made a motion to resubmit the amendment incorporating updated information and a [predictive mapping study](#) and possible additional alternatives; and directed staff to begin developing a joint amendment to modify both the Coral and Shrimp Fishery Management Plans.

Objectives for this Meeting (June 2025)

- Review and approve the purpose and need
- Review draft effects
- Select a preferred alternative
- Approve the draft amendment for public hearings

Tentative Amendment Timing

June 2025	Draft amendment and preliminary analysis (if all data required is available). Select preferred alternatives and approve for public hearings.
Summer/Fall 2025	Conduct public hearings.
September 2025	Review public hearing comments.
December 2025	Review the final draft amendment and consider approval for formal review.
Early 2026	Amendment submitted.

Draft Amendment Highlights

- A new mapping study from the R/V *Nancy Foster*'s April 2025 survey of the SFAA has been included as an appendix. The study found no coral within the proposed SFAA.
- Development of chapter three is underway but has been delayed due to data availability issues.
- This amendment would directly respond to the recent Executive Order 13921 Restoring America's Seafood Competitiveness.

Purpose and Need Statements

Approved in March 2024:

Purpose: The purpose of this amendment is to reinstate commercial access to this historically important fishing ground for the Rock Shrimp fishery by creating a Shrimp Fishery Access Area along the eastern edge of the Northern Oculina Habitat Area of Particular Concern boundary in an area where the rock shrimp fishery operated historically while minimizing impacts to deepwater coral.

Need for Action: The need for this amendment is to allow the rock shrimp fishery to attain OY while minimizing negative impacts to deepwater coral in the Council's jurisdiction.

Discussion

- IPT recommended the following edits to the purpose and need:

Purpose: The purpose of this **action** is to reinstate ~~commercial~~ access **for vessels with a valid Commercial Vessel Permit for Rock Shrimp South Atlantic EEZ (Limited Access)** to a historically important fishing **area** **where the commercial rock shrimp fishery operated** by creating a shrimp fishery access area along the eastern edge of the northern boundary of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern, while **also** minimizing impacts to deepwater coral.

Need for Action: The need for this **action** is to **achieve optimum yield in the** rock shrimp fishery while minimizing negative impacts to deepwater coral ~~in the council's jurisdiction.~~

Committee Action

- **DRAFT** MOTION: APPROVE MODIFICATIONS TO THE PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENTS

Proposed Action and Alternatives

Action 1: Establish a shrimp fishery access area (SFAA) along the eastern edge of the northern Oculina HAPC boundary.

NOTE: Refer to Chapter 2 of the draft Amendment (Attachment 1b) for the coordinates of the alternatives.

Alternative 1 (No Action). No person may use a bottom longline, bottom trawl, dredge, pot, or trap in the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern. If aboard a fishing vessel, no person may anchor, use an anchor and chain, or use a grapple and chain. There are no shrimp fishery access areas within the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern.

Alternative 2. Establish a shrimp fishery access area ~~that is 16.61 nautical miles (NM)²~~ along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern, **that is 16.61 NM²**. Allow a shrimp vessel with a valid **Commercial Vessel Permit for Rock Shrimp South Atlantic EEZ (Limited Access)** to bottom trawl for rock shrimp within the established area bounded by the following coordinates.

Alternative 3. Establish a shrimp fishery access area ~~that is 24.16 NM²~~ along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern **that is 24.16 NM²**. Allow a shrimp vessel with a valid **Commercial Vessel Permit for Rock Shrimp South Atlantic EEZ (Limited Access)** to bottom trawl for rock shrimp within the established area bounded by the following coordinates.

DRAFT MOTION: APPROVE THE MODIFICATIONS TO ALTERNATIVE 2 AND ALTERNATIVE 3.

Visual Comparison of the Three Alternatives

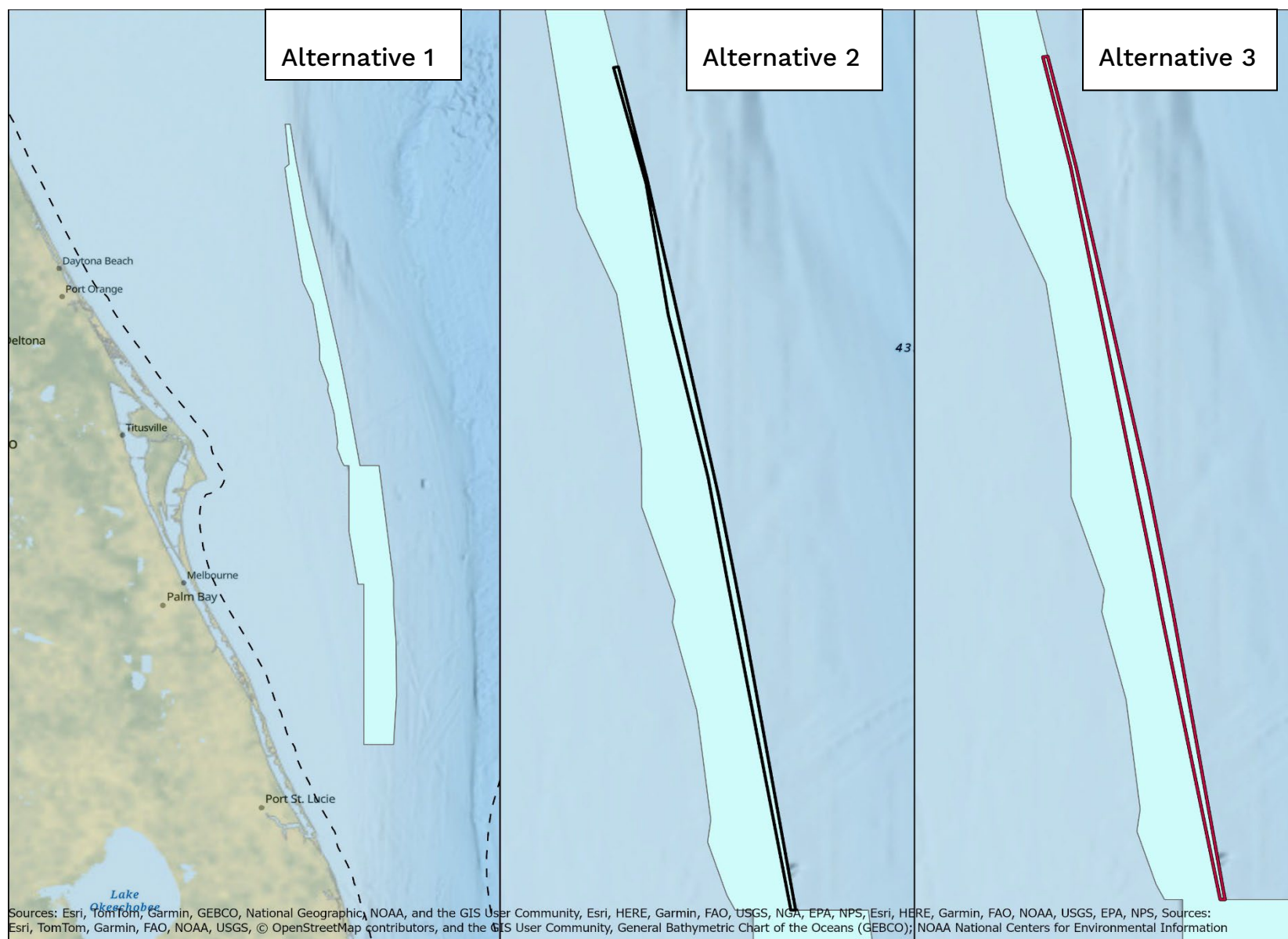






Figure 1: A visualization of Alternatives 1-3: Alternative 1: No action, Alternative 2, and Alternative 3.

Effects Summary

This table summarizes the effects for each alternative. For full details on the biological, economic, social, and administrative effects, see **Attachment 1b (Draft Amendment) Chapter 4**.

	 Biological Benefit	 Economic Benefit	 Social Benefit	 Administrative Burden
Alternative 1 (No Action)	No Change	No Change	Minimal	None
Alternative 2	Direct: minimal negative impacts to shrimp Indirect: Sedimentation from trawling could impact coral; snapper grouper may be bycatch	Positive: Would allow access to 22 mi ² of a commercially important historical shrimping area	Slightly more Positive impact than Alt 3: allows shrimpers to access historical fishing areas; the shrimpers have historically supported this option	Minimal changes to admin burden: there will be a need for enforcement within the SFAA
Alternative 3	Direct: slightly larger negative impacts to shrimp compared to alt 2. Indirect: Sedimentation from trawling could impact coral; snapper grouper may be bycatch	Slightly more Positive than Alt 2: Would allow access to a larger (32 mi ²) of a commercially important historical shrimping area	Positive impact: allows shrimpers to access historical fishing areas	Minimal changes to admin burden: there will be a need for enforcement within a larger SFAA

Discussion

- **Alternative 1 (No Action)** does not support the purpose and need of this action.
- **Alternatives 2 and 3** support both the purpose and need, and recent EO to reduce obstacles for American commercial fishermen by reopening historic rock shrimp fishing grounds.
- Mapping studies conducted by the SEFSC in 2022 and the NOAA Ship *Nancy Foster* in 2025 did not note the presence of live, standing dead, or coral rubble within the proposed SFAA for **Alternatives 2 and 3**.
- **Alternative 3** is wider than **Alternative 2**, which decreases the distance from known coral pinnacles by up to .3 km (.16 NM), depending on the location of the coral pinnacles and the coordinates of each of the proposed SFAAs.

Updated Mapping Information (Appendix F, Attachment 1b)

- In April 2025 the NOAA Ship *Nancy Foster* collected bathymetry and backscatter data across the 22 mi² proposed SFAA (**Alternative 2**).
- While the presence of *Oculina* coral was noted within the OHAPC it was observed to the west of the proposed SFAA (Figure 2).
- The newest NOAA BlueTopo compilation also suggests that *Oculina* mounds extend along the same north-south line just west of the entire proposed SFAA (Figure 3).

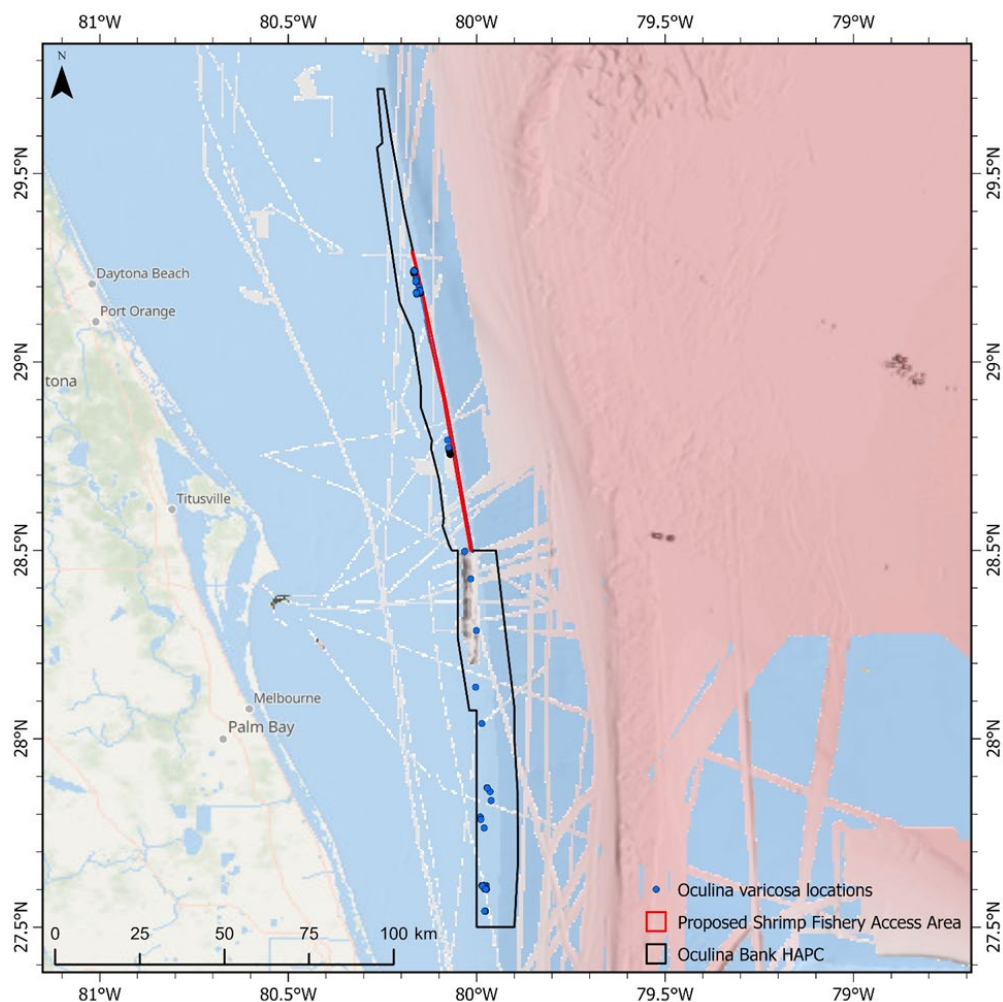


Figure 2. Locations of the *Oculina* Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC, outlined in black) and proposed Alternative 2 Shrimp Fishery Access Area (outlined in red) offshore South Florida. Spatially precise (± 20 m) known locations of *Oculina varicosa* occurrence (blue circles) are included from the [NOAA National Database for Deep-Sea Corals and Sponges](#). Available multibeam bathymetry (pink shading) from the [NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information](#) is also shown. There is very limited contiguous multibeam bathymetry data available within the OHAPC, since much of the existing coverage comes from vessel transits.

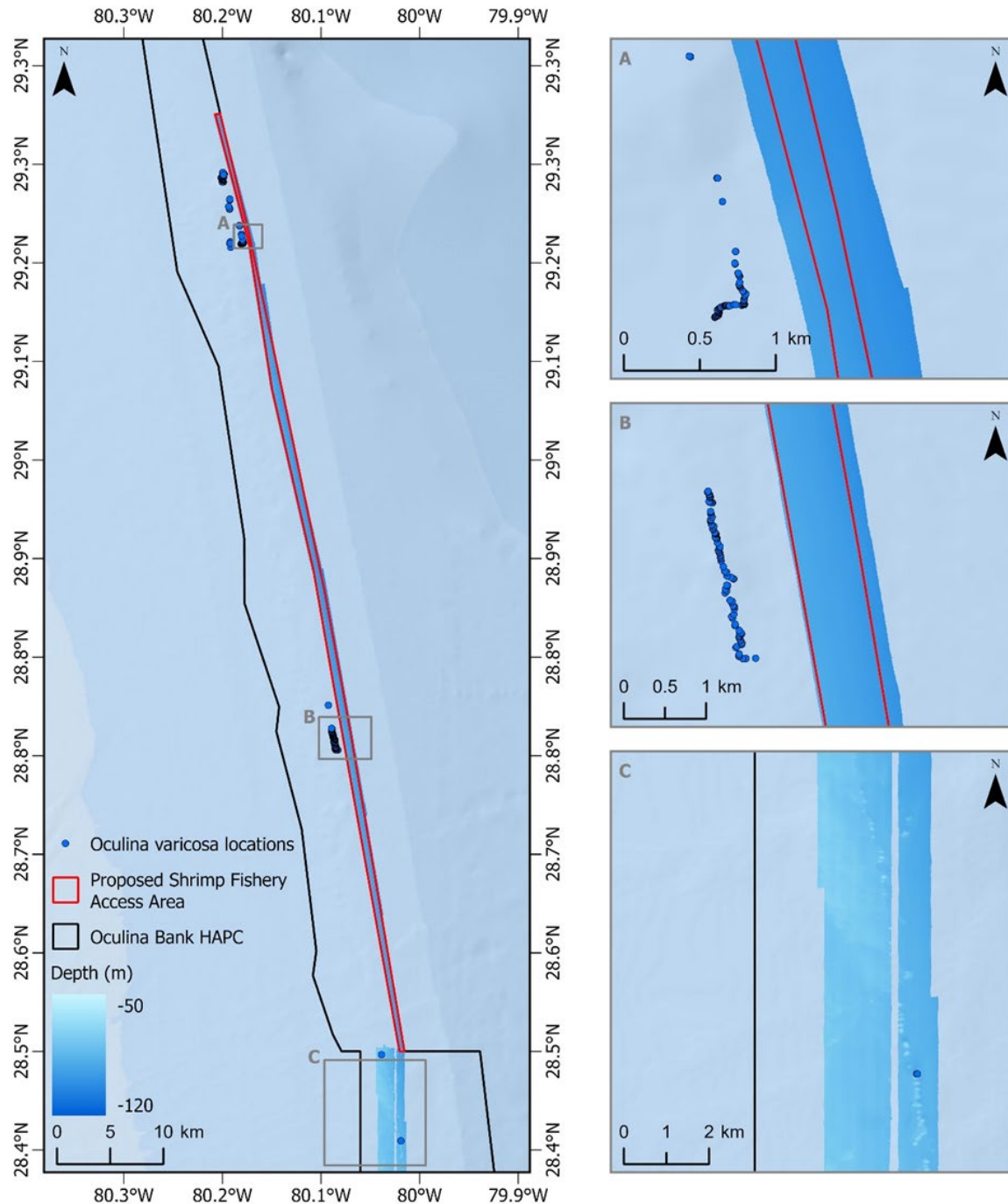


Figure 3. *Oculina varicosa* colonies have been observed 360-1580 m west of the proposed **Alternative 2** SFAA. *Oculina* mounds are not evident in multibeam bathymetry collected by NOAA Ship *Nancy Foster* in April 2025 inside the proposed Alternative 2 SFAA (e.g., panels A and B). In contrast, coral mounds are visible as lighter colored circles in the multibeam bathymetry collected by NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center in 2005 to the south of the proposed SFAA (panel C).

Committee Action

- REVIEW SUMMARY OF EFFECTS
- SELECT A PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

DRAFT MOTION: SELECT ALTERNATIVE **X** AS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTION 1.

DRAFT MOTION: APPROVE CORAL AMENDMENT 11/ SHRIMP AMENDMENT 12 FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS

Next Steps

Public Hearings

- Would the Council prefer online or in person public hearings?
- If online, would the Council prefer live webinars or posted materials (such as how scoping was conducted for the Comprehensive For-Hire Reporting Improvement Amendment)?