

Recommendations from the SAFMC Coral Advisory Panel to the Council, based on information and discussions of the October 25-26, 2011 meeting of the Coral Advisory Panel (Charleston, SC)

1. Recommend that the boundaries of the present C-HAPCs in areas of Cape Lookout, NC, Oculina- Daytona, FL, and Jacksonville, FL, be modified based on information and research that has identified new areas of deep-water coral resources. Specific areas of C-HAPC boundary modification recommended include:

- a. Oculina mounds off Daytona: John Reed is providing a proposed boundary revision map prior to the December Council meeting that will be a recommendation based on NOAA Bathymetric charts indicating probable extent of mounds which were ground-truthed and mapped in part during the 2011 Pisces cruise (<http://cioert.org/xcorals2011>).
- b. Lophelia areas off Jacksonville, FL: area west of the existing Stetson-Miami C-HAPC bounded approximating by the 200 m depth contour between lat 30°45.0' to the north and Lat. 29°52.0' to the south (new boundaries provided by Steve Ross and Sandra Brooke)
- c. Cape Lookout areas off North Carolina: extend the northern boundary to encompass area identified by the following coordinates provided by Steve Ross

<u>Latitude</u>	<u>Longitude</u>
34°24.6166'	75°45.1833'
34°23.4833'	75°43.9667'
34°27.9'	75°42.75'
34°27.0'	75°41.5'

- d. Other areas where multi-beam mapping and ROV surveys have indicated presence of deep-water coral resources. These areas would be proposed based on information provided by the NOAA Deep-Sea Coral Team Working Group, whose Final Report on the progress and investigations associated with the Deep Water Coral Research and Monitoring Plan for work off the Southeast US will be finalized in summer 2012, and subsequently submitted to Council.
2. Recommend re-convening the Oculina Evaluation Team to review accomplishments of the NOAA Deepwater Coral Projects, accordingly update the Research Portion of the Evaluation Plan for the Oculina Experimental Closed Area that was presented to the Council in March 2007, review membership as needed, and develop plan for preparation of 2014 assessment report.
 3. Recommend to the Snapper-Grouper AP to consider and assess vulnerability of the Black Belly Rose Fish to commercial/ recreational exploitation, inclusive of potential regulatory and protective measures for the species. The Coral AP offers to work with the Snapper-Grouper AP to provide specific background and support information relating to this concern.
 4. Recommend that the Council seek/provide support for continued investigations at the Snowy Wreck MPA (particularly on the Snowy Wreck itself) including:
 - Specific and targeted ROV/HOV investigation for mapping, biological and archeological surveys of the wreck

- Environmental (i.e., CTD, currents, turbidity, dissolved oxygen) Monitoring to aid understanding of conditions favorable to observed deep-sea coral development on the wreck
 - Passive acoustical monitoring for fish and vessel activity
 - Assessment of strategic and appropriate habitat enhancement activities in deep sand areas of the MPA
5. Recommend that the Council seek and provide support for investigations to define the location and variation in the cold water (e.g., 8-12 C isotherm, recognized as the thermal limit of *Lophelia*) along the western boundary of the Stetson-Miami Terrace C-HAPC. Such investigations should include assessment (sonar surveys and ground-truth observations) of areas not yet mapped. This recommendation accompanies the Jacksonville area boundary expansion noted above.
 6. Recommend that the Council coordinate with NOAA to:
 - Ensure the information as presented in, or reported through SEADESC and DSCRTP, be provided to the Council for inclusion in their IMS as appropriate, and, to the extent possible, continue support and cooperation with those projects
 - Ensure coordination with NOAA vessels that have multi-beam sonar capability, to assist where possible, with mapping of un-surveyed sections of C-HAPCs
 7. Recommend that the Council work to have a single location, available and apparent on its website, for accessing information on all regulated areas and regulations for the protected areas within the SAFMC, including access to related information regarding their location (i.e., maps, shapefiles, GPS files).
 8. Recommend that the Council coordinate with federal agencies that review requests for usage/lease of areas within C-HAPCs to ensure any approved activities have sufficient and appropriate habitat mapping and resource characterization, monitoring and assessment plans, and installation and removal plans that avoid deep-water coral resources and habitats within the leased areas.
 9. Recommend that the Council review and revise, as necessary, the Council's Energy Policy Statement, based on recent increased interest in alternative energy-based activities within C-HAPCs.
 10. Based on information in Spiny Lobster Amendment 11, as presently written, the Coral AP does not believe sufficient information is presented to allow this to go forward at this time. The Coral AP recommends that the Spiny Lobster AP (and Habitat AP) review the draft of Amendment 11 to the Spiny Lobster FMP. The Coral AP offers to work with the Spiny Lobster AP to revise the draft. Suggested information needs to be addressed in this review include:
 - a. Develop or define a process to address/protect Acroporids based on changes in distribution (i.e., new areas that become established, or present areas that lose coverage/presence),

- b. Include more complete information regarding how the baseline assessment was conducted, how the absolute location of the boxes were determined, and as well as the specific information relative to the bounding coordinates for the boxes
- c. Ensure all areas to be protected have been mapped with appropriate resolution (minimum mapping unit) and ground-truthed
- d. Further coordination with law enforcement relative to 'enforceability' of the plan

Notwithstanding the items noted above, the Coral AP would agree that it would be preferable to:

- Use geometric (boxes) descriptions for the protected areas
- There should be exclusion of all spiny lobster fishing within the areas to be protected and
- Encourage FWC to take a similar approach in state waters as SAFMC is taking in federal waters

We further recommend that the Council seek to review and assess the need, effect and appropriateness of the 'trap marking' as defined in the NMFS Biological Opinion, prepared under the ESA, for the spiny lobster fishery.

Action Items

- The AP will develop a 'white paper' on the potential ecological and economic impacts of the presence, persistence and expansion of the Orange Cup Coral (*Tubastrea*).
- The Council will prepare a presentation for the next Coral AP meeting regarding the explicit process for the 'drawing of boundaries' for the Stetson-Miami Terrace C-HAPC, to allow assessment of areas of apparent deviations and irregularities of the boundary.