



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

4055 FABER PLACE DRIVE, SUITE 201
NORTH CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA 29405
TEL 843/571-4366 FAX 843/769-4520
Toll Free 866/SAFMC-10
Email: safmc@safmc.net Website: www.safmc.net

George Geiger, Chairman
Duane Harris, Vice Chairman

Robert K. Mahood, Executive Director
Gregg T. Waugh, Deputy Executive Director

OVERVIEW

Ecosystem-Based Management Committee Meeting

June 9-10, 2008
Renaissance Orlando Airport Hotel
5445 Forbes Place
Orlando, Florida

The Ecosystem-Based Management Committee needs to: (1) Review written and email comments (Attachment 8) on the Fishery Ecosystem Plan (Attachments 2-7/FEP Volumes I-VI); (2) Review SSC comments on the FEP; (3) Review public hearing comments on the FEP (Attachment 9); (4) Discuss the recommendations and take action on the FEP as necessary; (5) Review written and email comments (Attachment 14) on the Comprehensive Ecosystem Amendment (CEA) (Attachments 10-13); (6) Review SSC comments on the CEA; (7) Review public hearing comments on the CEA (Attachment 15); and (7) Discuss the recommendations and take action on the CEA as necessary.

BACKGROUND FISHERY ECOSYSTEM PLAN AND COMPREHENSIVE ECOSYSTEM AMENDMENT DEVELOPMENT

The development of a South Atlantic Council Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) (SAFMC 2007) provides the first regional opportunity to compile and review available habitat, biological, social, and economic fishery and resource information for fisheries in the South Atlantic Bight ecosystem in context. Development of the plan expands and significantly updates the SAFMC Habitat Plan (SAFMC 1998) incorporating comprehensive details of all managed species (SAFMC, South Atlantic States, ASMFC, and NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species and Protected Species) including their biology and food web, and economic and social characteristics of the fisheries prosecuted in those resources. In addition, development of the FEP has initiated coordination and integration of information from other developing regional initiatives including but not limited to the Southeast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association (SECOORA) and the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) under the National Habitat

Action Plan. The FEP development process has provided the Council with the opportunity to build on the existing comprehensive compendium of the habitat, fisheries, and ecosystem information in the South Atlantic Council's Habitat Plan. This effort has resulted in the development of a FEP that describes the South Atlantic Ecosystem and the impact of fisheries on the environment. The FEP also updates available information on designated Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern, expands descriptions of biology and status of managed species, presents ecosystem considerations for managed species, and describes the social and economic characteristics of the fisheries in the region. In addition, it expands the discussion and description of existing comprehensive habitat research needs to include all biological, social, and economic research needed to fully address ecosystem-based management. This FEP serves as a living source document of biological, economic, and social information for all Fishery Management Plans (FMP). All future Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Statements would be developed through subsequent amendments to those FMPs.

Fishery Ecosystem Plan for the South Atlantic Region encompasses the following volume structure:

FEP Volume I	Introduction and Overview of FEP for the South Atlantic Region
FEP Volume II	South Atlantic Habitats and Species
FEP Volume III	South Atlantic Human and Institutional Environment
FEP Volume IV	Threats to South Atlantic Ecosystem and Recommendations
FEP Volume V	South Atlantic Research Programs and Data Needs
FEP Volume VI	References and Appendices

This first Comprehensive Ecosystem Amendment (CEA) is being supported by this FEP and updates EFH and EFH-HAPC information and addresses the Final EFH Rule (e.g., GIS presented for all EFH and EFH-HAPCs). Management actions proposed in the CEA include the establishment of deepwater Coral HAPCs to protect what is thought to be the largest continuous distribution (>23,000 square miles) of pristine, untouched, deepwater coral ecosystems in the world.

The CEA development process serves as the vehicle to move the Council to a new era of ecosystem-based management. While this first CEA focuses on deepwater coral ecosystem conservation and EFH related action, future FMP actions will be addressed by having a full review of management needs to initiate preparation of a new CEA to address all FMP amendment needs in the coming year. This effort will not only draw from and build on the biological, economic, and social information presented in the FEP, but will also address possible issues or future management actions identified in the FEP. This process will provide the Council with the opportunity to evaluate needed actions across multiple fisheries, evaluate the impacts of management, and facilitate development of FMP amendments or measures that could apply across FMPs.

While this iteration of the CEA has been focused on addressing immediate needs for deepwater coral conservation, the Council acknowledges the combined development of

the FEP and CEA establishes a process to facilitate the transition from single species to ecosystem-based management.

FEP and CEA Completion Schedule

Two rounds of public hearings are being held for the FEP and CEA to refine proposed actions intended to protect deepwater coral ecosystems and highlight the Council's move to ecosystem-based management. The first public hearings were held May 5-16, 2008 to provide public input on the proposals and additional input from advisors from the golden crab and royal red shrimp fisheries. The Council will select preferred management alternatives for completion of a revised draft CEA including a Draft Environmental Impact Statement during the September 2008 meeting. The FEP and CEA will be brought to a second set of public hearings in October 2008. The Council is scheduled to approve the FEP and CEA for Secretarial review at the December 2008 Council meeting.

Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP)

A. Review Written and Email Comments on FEP

Roger Pugliese will review written and email comments received on the Fishery Ecosystem Plan presented in Attachment 8.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss the recommendations and take action as necessary.

B. Review SSC Comments

Carolyn Belcher, SSC Chair, will summarize comments on the FEP provided by SSC members during their meeting Sunday June 8, 2008.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss the recommendations and take action as necessary.

C. Review Public Hearing Comments

Roger Pugliese will review public hearing comments received on the Fishery Ecosystem Plan. Public hearing minutes (Attachment 9) will be distributed with the second Briefing Book distribution on June 8, 2008.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss the recommendations and take action as necessary.

FEP Comprehensive Ecosystem Amendment

A. Review Written and Email Comments

Roger Pugliese will review written and email comments received on the Comprehensive Ecosystem Amendment (CEA) presented in Attachment 14.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss the recommendations and take action as necessary.

B. Review SSC Comments

Carolyn Belcher, SSC Chair, will summarize comments on the FEP CEA provided by SSC members during their meeting Sunday June 8, 2008.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss the recommendations and take action as necessary.

C. Review Public Hearing Comments

Roger Pugliese will review public hearing comments received on the CEA. Public hearing minutes (Attachment 15) will be distributed with the second Briefing Book distribution on June 8, 2008.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: Discuss the recommendations and take action as necessary.

Description of the Alternatives Being Considered

These alternatives were identified and developed over a number of years, with input from numerous sources, and through multiple processes, including the scoping process conducted for the FEP Comprehensive Ecosystem Amendment and meetings of the Council, the Council's Habitat and Ecosystem Committees, Habitat and Environmental Protection Advisory Panel, Coral Advisory Panel, Deepwater Shrimp Advisory Panel, Golden Crab Advisory Panel and Scientific and Statistical Committee.

Each alternative retained for analysis is designed to accomplish the following:

- Establish deepwater Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern.

Description of Alternatives

Amend the Coral, Coral Reefs and Live/Hard Bottom Habitat FMP to Establish Deepwater Coral HAPCs

In October 2004, at a joint meeting of the Council's Habitat and Environmental Protection and Coral Advisory Panels six areas were proposed as new deepwater coral HAPCs. Subsequently the Council, at their December 2004 meeting, approved establishing the new deepwater coral HAPCs through the developing Comprehensive Ecosystem Amendment. At their joint meeting in Miami in June 2006, the Habitat and Coral Advisory Panels received updated reports from John Reed and Steve Ross on

recent research on the status and distribution of deepwater coral systems in the region. Based on this new information, the Panels proposed to consolidate and expand the six original areas into four. The Council subsequently voted to adopt the Panel's proposal and take action to establish the four new deepwater coral HAPCs through this Comprehensive Ecosystem Amendment. At their November 2007 meeting, the Habitat and Coral Advisory Panels recommended an additional Methane Seep Coral HAPC. In December 2007 the Council approved adding consideration of a fifth Coral HAPC (methane seep) and removed any designation of a preferred alternative.

Alternative 1. No Action. Do not establish additional coral HAPCs.

Alternative 2. Establish Deepwater Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern:

Sub-Alternative 2a. Cape Lookout Lophelia Banks HAPC;

Sub-Alternative 2b. Cape Fear Lophelia Banks HAPC;

Sub-Alternative 2c. Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms, and Miami Terrace HAPC;

Sub-Alternative 2d. Pourtales Terrace HAPC; and

Sub-Alternative 2e. The Blake Ridge Diapir Methane Seep HAPC.

In the deepwater coral HAPCs (Figure 2-1), no person may:

1. Use a bottom longline, trawls (mid-water and bottom), dredge, pot or trap.
2. If aboard a fishing vessel, anchor, use an anchor and chain, or use a grapple and chain.
3. Possess any species regulated by the coral FMP.
4. Fish for golden crab in designated areas without an approved VMS.

Alternative 3. Create "allowable golden crab fishing area" within the proposed Coral HAPC boundaries (Alternatives developed by Golden Crab Advisory Panel):

Sub-Alternative 3a. Create an "allowable golden crab fishing area" in the Northern Golden Crab Fishing Zone within the proposed Coral HAPC boundaries;

Sub-Alternative 3b. Create an "allowable golden crab fishing area" in the Middle Golden Crab Fishing Zone within the proposed Coral HAPC boundaries; and

Sub-Alternative 3c. Create an "allowable golden crab fishing area" in the Southern Golden Crab Fishing Zone within the proposed Coral HAPC boundaries.

Alternative 4. Move the western boundary of the Middle C-HAPC east to exclude royal red fishing areas represented by the Vessel Monitoring System (Alternatives developed by Deepwater Shrimp Advisory Panel):

Sub-Alternative 4a. Move the west boundary of the proposed C-HAPC 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.;

Sub-Alternative 4b. Move the west boundary of the proposed C-HAPC eastward to exclude all VMS points from the C-HAPC;

Sub-Alternative 4c. Move the west boundary of the proposed C-HAPC eastward 5 nautical miles from the eastern boundary of the polygon from Alternative 2; and

Sub-Alternative 4d. Move the west boundary of the proposed C-HAPC eastward 6 nautical miles from the eastern boundary of the polygon from Alternative 2.

Amend the Golden Crab Fishery Management Plan 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 HAPC and Pourtales Terrace HAPC where fishing has occurred historically and does not impact deepwater coral habitats.

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.

Alternative 4. Require monitoring of golden crab vessels using acoustic monitoring. The monitoring of vessels and/or trap sets using acoustics was discussed with the Advisory Panel recommending it be considered for public hearing.