

# **Final Summary Report**

## **Protected Resources Committee**

Beach House Resort  
1 South Forest Beach Drive  
Hilton Head, SC

September 2015

The Protected Resources Committee met on September 14, 2015 in Hilton Head, SC. The agenda was adopted, and the minutes of the June 2015 meeting were approved.

### **South Atlantic Protected Resource-Related Updates**

Andy Herndon, SERO Protected Resources Division, updated the Committee on protected resources activities in the South Atlantic region. Updates were given on the Nassau Grouper listing, North Atlantic Right Whale critical habitat, Coral recovery plan, Green Sea Turtle DPS, Shrimp TED Compliance Policy, and Marine Mammal Protection Act actions. Andy also updated the committee on the status of the biological opinion for fishery independent studies in response to a question. The BO is currently undergoing a second review and has several more steps to go before completion.

### **Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Biological Opinion**

Andy Herndon, SERO Protected Resources Division, presented the Biological Opinion for the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Fishery of the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. The Biological Opinion was released in August. The fishery was not found to cause jeopardy for any ESA listed species and no new Council actions were needed. The Biological Opinion listed take numbers for ESA listed species and re-initiation will be needed if take numbers are exceeded.

### **ESA/MSA Integration Agreement**

Chip Collier, Council staff, presented the draft ESA/MSA Integration Agreement with comments from SERO PR staff. The integration agreement outlines a tiered approach for Council involvement in each step of the formal consultation process, the role of SERO Protected Resources staff in the IPT process, expectations of SERO Protected Resources staff in communicating and informing the Council during Protected Resources Committee meetings, and communication standards between Council staff and SERO Protected Resources staff. There was some discussion regarding whether to also address Marine Mammal Protection Act involvement in the same document. Some members of the committee favored including it. The decision was left up to the two staffs to decide whether or not to include the MMPA. The two staffs will have a meeting to discuss and make final recommendations on the integration agreement. A more finalized version will be presented in December.

### **Updates on American Eel Status Review, Atlantic Sturgeon Stock Assessment and Red Knot Listing**

Wilson Laney, US Fish and Wildlife Service, indicated that the American Eel 12-Month Finding will be published within the next two weeks in the Federal Register. Wilson and Bob Beal briefed the committee on the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's progress on the benchmark Atlantic Sturgeon stock assessment. The goal is to have the assessment completed by 2017. Current work focuses on analysis of acoustic tagging data. Red Knot Critical Habitat is under preparation by the US Fish and Wildlife Service but Wilson doesn't know when it will be forthcoming.

#### Other Business

No other business was discussed

The Committee did not make any motions:

#### MOTION.

STAFF REVISE THE INTEGRATION AGREEMENT AND WORK WITH SERO PROTECTED RESOURCES STAFF TO FURTHER DEVELOP THE DOCUMENT AND PRESENT THE DOCUMENT AT THE DECEMBER COUNCIL MEETING. BY MICHELLE DUVAL AND SECONDED BY BEN HARTIG. MOTION APPROVED BY COUNCIL

#### Timing and Tasks

The committee recommended staff revise the integration agreement and work with SERO Protected Resources staff to further develop the document and present the document at the December Council Meeting.