Deepwater Shrimp Advisory Panel and Coral Advisory Panel Meeting Via Webinar November 10, 2020

The Coral AP approved the minutes from May 2018. The Coral AP and Deepwater Shrimp AP approved the agenda.

1. Coral Amendment 10

The AP was provided an overview of the draft options for scoping for their review and recommendations. Coral Amendment 10 would address expanded fishing area access identified by rock shrimp fishermen. These fishermen requested access to historic fishing areas along the eastern boundary of the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern (OHAPC), implemented in Amendment 8 to the Fishery Management Plan for Coral, Coral Reefs and Live Hard Bottom Habitat in the South Atlantic Region.

During the March 2018 Council meeting, the Council requested staff begin development of an amendment to address requests from Golden Crab Advisory Panel for additional access areas in the Northern Zone and from Deepwater Shrimp fishermen to revise the eastern edge of the Oculina Bank expanded in Coral Amendment 8, add an option to require VMS on golden crab vessels, and review transit provision for shrimp trawlers. During the September 2019 meeting the Council voted to remove the golden crab and shrimp amendment actions from the Amendment and directed development of a coral amendment to address two areas, the industry request relative to the Oculina Bank northern extension and the possible expansion of the *Lophelia* coral CHAPCs to encompass newly discovered extensive distribution of deepwater coral habitat. The Shrimp transit action was addressed and implemented through Shrimp Amendment 11.

The Council, during their September 2020 meeting, directed staff to proceed to develop Coral Amendment 10 to include one action considering establishing a Shrimp Fishery Access Area (SFAA) along the eastern boundary of the Northern extension of the Oculina Bank CHAPC. The Council requested the shrimp fishery access area be reviewed by the Habitat and Ecosystem AP, Deepwater Shrimp AP and Coral AP and comments be provided in December where they will review options and consider approval for scoping.

Deepwater Shrimp AP Preliminary Summary Comments/Discussion:

The Deepwater Shrimp AP addressed their previous recommendation regarding the location of the proposed Shrimp Fishery Access Area (SFAA) incorporated into the draft scoping document.

- The proposed fishery access area includes an area rock shrimp fishermen have historically fished and since they are using VMS, the buffer between the high relief coral habitat and access area boundary could be reduced to give them access to this area.

- Industry representative provided coordinates used in the proposed SFAA eastern boundary because several fishermen came back after Amendment 8 was completed and provided information to him indicating it was an important area.

- The eastern side of the northern extension of the bank will be important and considering the variability of where rock shrimp are available to the fishery from year to year.

- The area is extremely variable from year to year and hard to put a monetary value or productivity value.

- Multiple AP members stated their support for re-opening the proposed access area.

- Fishermen responded to a question from Coral AP members on the location of the boat versus the rig indicating they always knew precisely where the rigs were relative to the vessel.

- Fishermen know where they are putting gear down and are requesting additional working area claiming their intent is not to destroy any habitat because they acknowledge its benefit to their fishery.

- According to fishermen, in 300 feet of water and one thousand feet of cable out, the rigs are approximately 500 feet straight down behind the boat.

- Fishermen indicate they often drag very close to obstructions and know how to keep equipment safe and not damage bottom habitat and want to fish in areas where there is no coral.

- Dragging takes place east of and parallel to the pinnacles, so sediment should drop back down onto the bottom and not be a problem.

Deepwater Shrimp Advisory Panel Motion:
Motion #1: Alternatives for consideration for scoping:
To adopt the 2014 coordinates Eastern boundary of the northern extension of the OHAPC developed by industry and staff as proposed boundary move.

To adopt the 2014 coordinates Eastern boundary of the northern extension of the OHAPC developed by industry and staff as a Shrimp Fishery Access Area as represented in Alternative 2a.
(Option 2. Alternative 2a. SFAA boundaries based on coordinates presented by fishermen as part of March 2014 public comment.)
Approved by AP

Coral AP Preliminary Summary Comments/Discussion:
Chair requested members share their thoughts and perspectives on the question about how far fishing activities occur from important deepwater habitats without impacting them.

- The issue of how far fishing activities should occur from important habitat is fairly well articulated in the public comments that John Reed (a former member of the Coral AP) provided to the Coral AP before the meeting (included in Appendix 1 to this report).

- There is a need to have a sufficient protective buffer in place to protect the corals from sediments that become suspended in the water column because of the fishing gear interaction with the mud bottom.

- The muds are composed of clays and very small particles that can become suspended in the water column for considerable distances and sediment plumes can travel up to 20 kilometers.

- Allowing fishing gear interactions within 100 to 2,000 meters would be putting corals at risk.

- The maps indicate the presence of low relief less than one meter which could include hard bottom communities that are providing EFH for deepwater species managed under the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan.

- It was recommended that the protective buffer would help protect the coral pinnacles and also low relief hard bottom.

- Fishing less than one thousand meters from the coral habitat is too close, however the work has not been done to know exactly what the optimal distance should be.

- A margin of error is needed considering current might not be running the way you think, stronger than you think, or an upwelling occurring so you may not know ahead of time exactly where your gear or sediment plume will go.

- Mapping is limited and funding is scarce to map the Oculina banks.

- Members supported a establishing a substantial buffer of possibly one thousand meters from the habitat as an approach that would the address and account for uncertainty as directed by the Magnuson Stevens Act.

- It is important to protect the whole Oculina coral ecosystem from the impact of fishing and having a substantial buffer around that ecosystem will accomplish that goal.

- Creating marine protected areas that are too small results in everyone fishing right up to the edge and fish populations inside the protected areas are no different than the fish populations outside the protected areas not accomplishing anything other than reducing some impacts from fishing gear.

- Use numbers for relief on maps instead of low and high to provide greater context and more information.

- When measuring/evaluating distances between the new proposed fishery access area boundary and where the reef resources are, horizontal lines shouldn't be drawn from the pinnacle base where we know they're still living habitat important for snowy grouper and other important fishery species in that area and should be drawn from the extent of the reef resources including low relief habitat.

- There is uncertainty about the location of the rig on the bottom. National Marine Fisheries Service data indicates that the ratio of scope to depth for shrimp trawlers is, typically somewhere between 3 to 4.3 ratio in these depths and these kinds of current. So, taking a conservative estimate means that the horizontal distance between the boat and the rig can be anywhere from about 230 meters to 510 meters.

- Concern was raised over the distance between the location of the boat versus the rig and if we had track points on the rigs at all times, they could be identified and the precision would be increased.

- Based on hydrodynamic drag, if you had the prominent direction of the current exactly parallel to the high relief feature, the reef feature causes drag which is going to create eddies that would spin off on the left or western side. If a sediment plume was created, that would cause entrainment of particles up onto the reef even if you were dragging off in the soft bottom east of the reef.

- Protecting areas around the base of the pinnacles is important because growth of damaged Oculina on the Banks is slow, very spotty and low and when it does come back, it tends to be on the marginal areas or base around the main Pinnacles.

- When you reduce a species down to the extent that the Oculina in the Banks have been reduced, it is going to take time to recover since you don't have the population to produce the larvae to bring it back quickly.

Coral Advisory Panel Motion:
The Panel indicated the present boundary provided a buffer and approved a motion supporting the no action alternative.

Motion #1: Consider Option 1 status quo. (Do not develop an action to address the issue) Approved by AP

Other Business:
Deepwater shrimp AP members wanted to go on record as some in the industry support operator cards. An operator card is good because it carries a history of that person's actions including violations.