FINAL

SUMMARY REPORT
HABITAT PROTECTION AND ECOSYSTEM-BASED MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

September 12, 2016

The Committee met September 12, 2016 and addressed the following items: (A) Report on the May 11-12, 2016 Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Advisory Panel Meeting (B) Summaries of FEP II Sections on South Atlantic Food Web and Connectivity and South Atlantic Climate Variability and Fisheries (C) Summaries of policy considerations related to FEP II Sections on South Atlantic Food Web and Connectivity and South Atlantic Climate Variability and Fisheries Sections and (D) Update on habitat and ecosystem tools and modeling.

Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Advisory Panel Report Council staff provided a summary of the May 2016 Advisory Panel meeting.

Summaries of FEP II South Atlantic Food Web and Connectivity and Climate Variability and Fisheries Sections
Council staff reviewed Executive Summaries for FEP II Sections for South Atlantic Food Web and Connectivity and South Atlantic Climate Variability and Fisheries.

Summaries of Policy Considerations: South Atlantic Food Web and Connectivity and Climate Variability and Fisheries
Council staff provided summaries of policy considerations related to FEP II Sections for South Atlantic Food Web and Connectivity and South Atlantic Climate Variability and Fisheries. This input will lead to cooperatively developing and refining respective Policy Statements during the November Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel meeting.

Habitat and Ecosystem Modeling and Tool Development
Council staff provided an update on activities supporting habitat and ecosystem tool development and modeling in cooperation with regional partners.

Chairman Duval who served as member of the Advisory Panel for the Lenfest Fisheries Ecosystem Task Force updated the Committee on the pending completion of the Task Force Report which is anticipated to provide a practical blueprint that managers can use to make ecosystem-based fisheries management operational. Launch is expected in mid-November.

No Motions were made by the Committee

TIMING AND TASK MOTION:

- Council guidance will be addressed in developing draft EFH Policy Statements for South Atlantic Food Web and Connectivity and South Atlantic Climate Variability and Fisheries. The Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Advisory Panel will

complete a draft during the November meeting for Council consideration during the December Meeting.

- Staff will coordinate with FEP II writing team/policy development teams supporting the Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel development of draft EFH Policy Statements for review at the December Council Meeting.
- Staff will continue to coordinate with regional ocean observing partners to advance integration of oceanographic information with fisheries information.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Attachment 1

Committee/Council Direction Supporting Advisory Panel Development of Policy Statements:

South Atlantic Food Webs and Connectivity

ADD- Highlight current dynamics and eddy formation in the South Atlantic ecosystem considerations and migratory patterns including extensive migrations of Amberjack, King Mackerel and Gag Grouper for spawning and recruitment suggestions (per B. Hartig).

REMOVE specified text from the Executive Summary and do not include in policy statement (per J. McCawley recommendation). Unless there were new funding sources there would have to be trade-offs between gathering data for forage species and gathering data for a priority species like Red Snapper.

…."prior to any opening of new directed fisheries or expansion of current fisheries for forage species, essential science and monitoring information must be obtained and management plans developed that explicitly account for the dietary needs of predators when establishing management goals and fisheries rules."

REVISE- Statement: *To do so, managers must invest in essential scientific research and monitoring to improve our understanding of the role of forage fish in the ecosystem in order to develop environmentally sound harvest strategies.*

Managers are not able to make those investments directly but, may support research through NOAA Fisheries and our regional partners including Universities, Federal and State Agencies, USGS SE Climate Science Center and other organizations. However, this should not be at the detriment to funding of data collection for priority species managed by the Council.

Rephrase!

To do so, managers should support and encourage collection of essential scientific research and monitoring to improve our understanding of the role of forage fish in the ecosystem in order to develop environmentally sound harvest strategies. However, research should not be at the detriment to funding research and data collection for priority species managed by the Council.

CLARIFY- Food Web and Connectivity Executive Summary. Species "winners and losers" may not be real and in the South Atlantic could be mostly winners (per B. Hartig). The level of impact depends on environmental variability which may be good for some species bad for other species. Also there probably will be limited wholesale migration out of the South Atlantic.

South Atlantic Climate Variability and Fisheries

REMOVE – The example presented is not accurate. Sea cucumber landings and action taken by the FWC was not due to changing ocean conditions (per J. McCawley).
For example, due to recent changes in the market demand, sea cucumber landings in Florida nearly quadrupled from 2012 to 2013. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission had to act swiftly to put appropriate management measures in place and minimize the impacts to the sea cucumber population and ecosystem.

ADD- Highlight ocean acidification potential impact on shellfish mortality
(e.g., clam seed, per C. Phillips). Note the impact of ocean acidification potentially changing the food webs. Ocean acidification could have tremendous consequences for food pathways when you consider that many species which depend on calcium metabolism serve as prey or provide habitat, including mollusks, diatoms, soft and hard corals, and other species needing appropriate pH in water (per W. Laney).

ADD- If populations shift distribution, food webs may be impacted when the shift in species distribution changes prey composition or availability.

ADD- Highlight the consideration of the impacts of invasive species.

ADD- Research needs should include the characterization of offshore ocean habitats used by estuarine dependent diadromous species (per W. Laney) – may be useful in model development.

REMOVE 1c in Climate Policy Considerations
Careful scientific and management evaluation must be undertaken prior to the initiation of new fisheries, including consideration of how to avoid harmful impacts on critical habitat.

REVISE/CLARIFY- Statement on Black Sea Bass.
In the South Atlantic, fishermen have observed changes in the black sea bass population. Historically, this fish was most abundant off the coast of North Carolina, but today they are caught as far north as the Gulf of Maine.
This may be misleading since the Black Sea Bass management unit includes two separately managed populations, north and south of Cape Hatteras (per M. Duval). In the South Atlantic Black Sea Bass are being caught further south into Florida which is thought to be related to cooler water influenced by more frequent upwelling events in recent years.

CLARIFY/ADD- Managing for a higher level of uncertainty.
Identify other approaches. Note that new fisheries can develop before managers are able to adequately monitor or control them. One avenue to avoid uncontrolled removal where species have no limits is to include them in an aggregate bag limit.

ADD- Sea level rise is occurring and habitats will retreat until human development precludes retreat (i.e., shoreline development). When that point is reached, significant loss of essential fish habitat is inevitable.

ADD- It is important to capture fishermen's observations and information documenting climate variability and change in fish distribution (per W. Laney). Council could possibly use a web portal to capture on the water observations leading to designing studies to verify change. (e.g., Bluefin Tuna, Scamp, cigar minnows)

ADD- Make sure you note differences in shift in species distribution, between expansion and third is back to original range.