

OVERVIEW

Habitat Protection and Ecosystem-Based Management Committee Meeting

Doubletree Grand Key Resort
3990 S. Roosevelt Boulevard
Key West, Florida

The Committee will: (A) Receive a report on the April 7-8, 2015 Habitat Protection and Ecosystem-Based Management Advisory Panel Meeting; (B) Be provided a status report on FEP II Development; (C) Receive a report on the February 2015 South Atlantic Ecosystem Modeling Workshop; and (D) Receive updated analyses associated with Oculina Bank CHAPC Northern Extension: An updated rock shrimp VMS analyses; and an analyses of rock shrimp catch information.

(A) Report on the April 7-8, 2015 Habitat Protection and Ecosystem-Based Management Advisory Panel Meeting

The Habitat Protection and Ecosystem-Based Management Advisory Panel met in Charleston, SC on April 7-8, 2015. Issues addressed during the meeting included: 1) FEP II Development Session - Threats to Habitat; 2) Updating Information on Impacts of Fisheries on Habitat; 3) State Sub-Panel Break-Out Sessions; 4) Scope of and Structure for Food Web and Connectivity Section of FEP II and EFH Policy Statement Development; 5) EFH Issues - NOAA Fisheries- Removal of Species from Management Units; 6) South Atlantic Fisheries Oceanography and Climate Variability; 7) South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative Regional Conservation Blueprint Development; 8) Renewable Energy in the South Atlantic Energy Exploration, Development and Transportation Policy Statement; and 9) OCS and G&G Activities in the South Atlantic. Pat Geer, GDNR, Panel Chairman will provide an overview of the items covered and recommendations developed.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: The Committee will take action and provide guidance to staff as appropriate

(B) Status report on FEP II Development

Council staff will provide an overview of the status and updated timing for the FEP II development process and associated regional ecosystem coordination efforts facilitating its completion.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: The Committee will provide guidance to staff as appropriate.

(C) Report on the February 2015 South Atlantic Ecosystem Modeling Workshop

Brett Boston, with Group Solutions and facilitator of the February South Atlantic Ecosystem Modeling Workshop will provide an overview of the effort and next steps with regional partners in facilitating the development of an Ecosystem Modeling Suite. The focus is to develop tools to support SSC review and enhance Council evaluation and management. Regional Partner collaboration through the South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative (SALCC) and the Southeast Coastal and Ocean Regional Association (SECOORA) are being engaged to develop proposals to support and foster the joint effort.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: The Committee will provide guidance to staff as appropriate.

(D) Receive updated analyses associated with Oculina Bank CHAPC Northern Extension

Updated rock shrimp VMS analyses: As follow-up to direction to staff from the December Council meeting, additional analyses of rock shrimp Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data through 2014 were conducted and catch information was further reviewed for the fishery. A chart of the Northern Extension of the Oculina Bank including a table highlighting fishing activity over various time periods as related to those shown in Coral Amendment 8 is included as Attachment 6. This chart was developed to address statements by industry that the predominant fishing effort occurred along the edge of the existing eastern boundary of the Northern Extension. While greater fishing east of the existing boundary occurred, fishing points inside the edge of the boundary accounted for 1.76% of all fishing points during 2003-2014, 2.20% of points during 2013, and 8.50% of points during 2014. Fishing points occurring in the edge totaled 126 for 2013 and 125 for 2014; the percentage increased in 2014 due to the decreased total number of rock shrimp fishing points. The Council, in development of the existing approved Northern Extension of the CHAPC area, shifted the boundaries and reduced the overall size of the CHAPC two separate times to address industry concerns. The analyses provided in Attachment 6 focus on the difference between the existing eastern boundary and a later boundary recommendation and shows that significantly less overall impact is associated with the edge of the existing eastern boundary than is shown as an overall impact in Coral Amendment 8.

Analyses of rock shrimp catch information:

Council directed staff to work with industry to analyze additional information from the trip ticket and other databases to determine the number of vessels that potentially fish in depths associated with the eastern boundary and to re-analyze the catch data from 2013 and 2014. Trip-level information was provided for 17 vessels that accounted for greater than 90% of the South Atlantic rock shrimp landings from 2013 and 2014. Catch information was analyzed based on trip ticket data with reported depths greater than or less than 200 feet. The number of fishermen that reported catch from the deeper depths could potentially fish depths on the eastern boundary of the HAPC extension in Coral Amendment 8. The average trip length was longer (16 days) for vessels fishing in depths greater than 200 feet compared to the trip length (12.5 days) for vessels fishing in depths 200 feet and less. Sixty-five percent of the vessels reported fishing in depths greater than 200 feet. Rock shrimp landings were lower in 2014 compared to 2013 although landings of rock shrimp from reported depths greater than 200 feet were similar between the two years. Tow-level information is being gathered by industry.

REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION: The Committee will provide guidance to staff as appropriate.

Other Business:

Report on Oculina Evaluation Team Report: In 2004, the Council requested a 10-year review be conducted of the *Oculina* Experimental Closed Area (OECA). The *Oculina* Evaluation Team made up of law enforcement representatives, research scientists, resource managers, commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen, outreach experts, and non-governmental organization representatives reviewed the objectives listed in the *Oculina* Evaluation Plan and commented on the progress of meeting the objectives. After the completion of the reviewing the objectives, the team discussed the size, configuration, and regulations for the OECA and also responded to a Council request for comments on a shrimp access area in the *Oculina* Habitat Area of Particular Concern and

the OECA. The team did not recommend any changes to the OECA and did not support the shrimp access area in the OECA.

Committee will provide guidance to staff as appropriate.