

HABITAT PROTECTION AND ECOSYSTEM BASED MANAGEMENT

Advisory Panel Report

November 2022

NOAA FISHERIES HABITAT CONSERVATION DIVISION EFH CONSULTATION UPDATE

- NMFS SERO HCD EFH review workload has shifted and the number of public notices being reviewed has declined. However, by focusing on large-scale infrastructure projects, HCD is still able to review and provide EFH recommendations on the majority of acres being impacted.
- State agencies rely on Federal partners in the review process and it would be good to see USFWS permit review numbers.
- EDNA sampling was used to determine that Atlantic sturgeon are spawning above fish passage restoration project at the Cape Fear Lock and Dam Number 1.



NOAA FISHERIES EFH 5 YEAR REVIEW

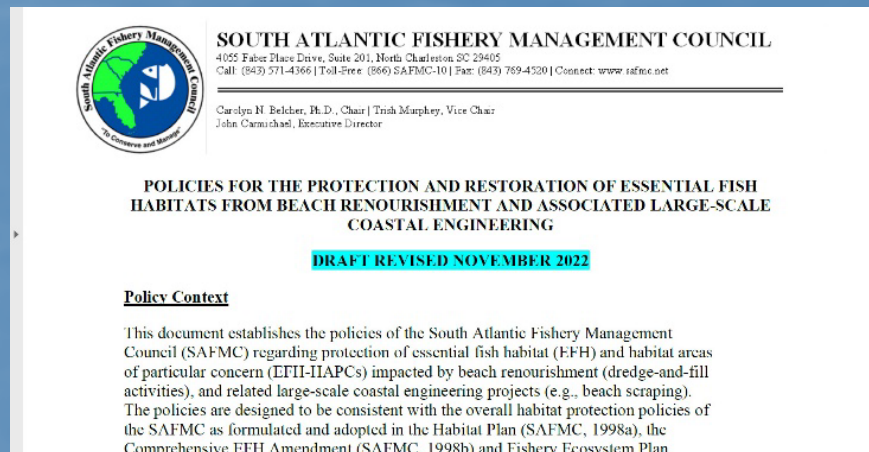
- The South Atlantic EFH 5 Year Review is due in 2024 and the AP would like to begin planning for the review.
- An initial step would be to evaluate the current designations and determine how best to conduct the EFH 5 Year Review – options include updating the existing User’s Guide, revisiting FEP II, or amending the EFH designations if needed.
- Recommend the AP, directed by the Council, start planning for the Spring AP meeting to take a deep dive on one federally managed species complex and their EFH designation – Penaeid shrimp.



Source – SC DNR

EFH POLICY STATEMENT UPDATE: BEACH DREDGING AND LARGE-SCALE COASTAL ENGINEERING

- Formed a Subcommittee of the AP to update the existing Policy
- Members of Subcommittee: Wilson Laney, Paula Keener, Cindy Cooksey, Anne Deaton, Rene Baumstark, Paul Medders, and John Ellis.
- The Chair and Sub Committee reviewed the policy, integrated members comments in the draft provided and reviewed and updated the draft by the Panel during the session.
- Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel members completed the review and revision of the EFH Policy Statement for Council consideration for approval.

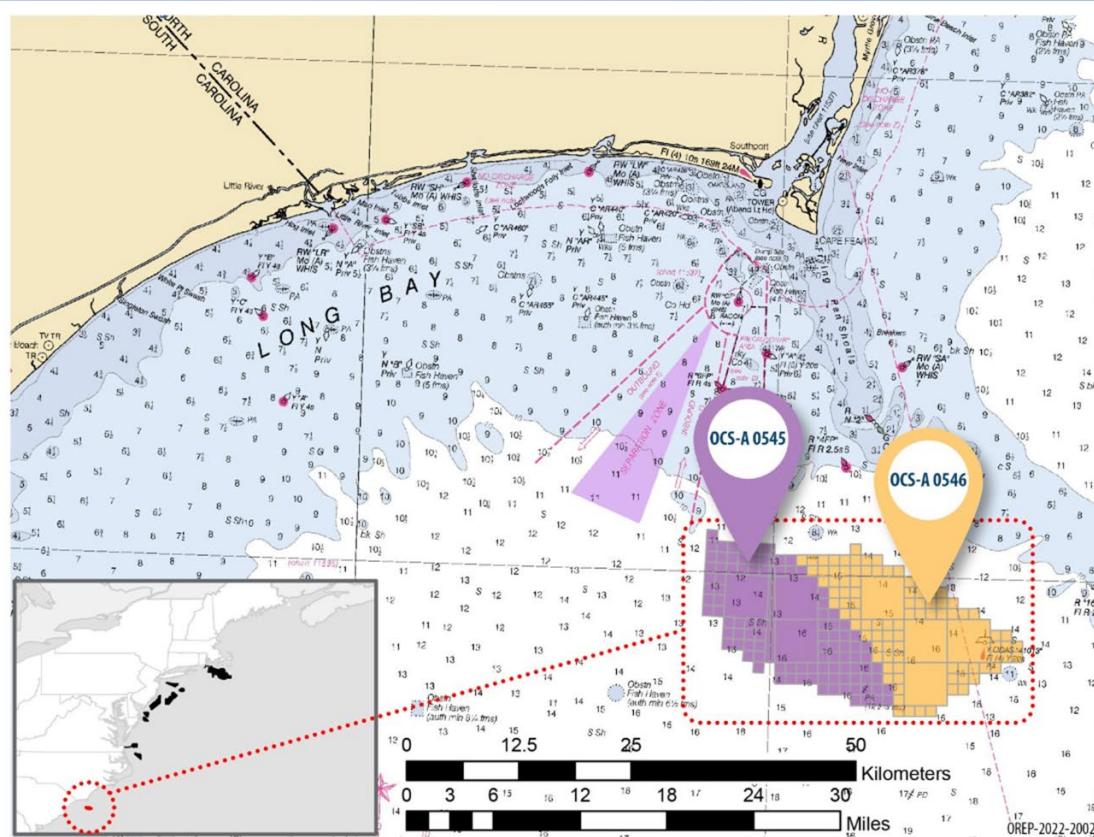


BOEM OFFSHORE WIND ACTIVITIES IN SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION

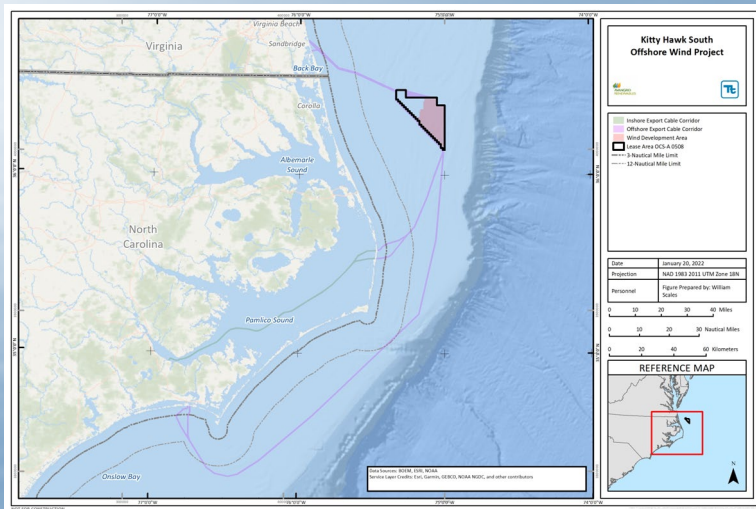
**Provisional Winners
of the CAROLINA
LONG BAY Lease
Areas, \$315M
in High Bids**

**OCS-A 0545
TotalEnergies
Renewables USA, LLC
\$160M**

**OCS-A 0546
Duke Energy
Renewables Wind, LLC
\$155M**



BOEM OFFSHORE WIND ACTIVITIES IN SOUTH ATLANTIC REGION



Member Comments and Recommendations:

- Members discussed how to ensure future efforts minimize impact on essential fish habitat, associated fisheries and the value of the new structures could provide new research platforms and fishing opportunity for Council managed species.
- Members raised concern over the routing into North Carolina estuaries and suggested they coordinate with others on shared routes to reduce the impact on habitat. From a NC Coastal Management perspective, it is recommended not going through Pamlico Sound considering it will have significant impact on coastal habitat and resources.
- Members were concerned if cables should be shielded if they cross migratory routes. BOEM noted their EMF studies conducted to date have shown there was no impact to fish movement.
- BOEM funded site characterization assessments headed up by Chris Taylor with National Centers Coastal and Ocean Science to define the original area and avoid the most delicate habitat. Members recommend industry follow up with Chris Taylor and NCCOS since it provides a good starting point to support survey planning and further identify and reduce the impact on sensitive habitat.

EFH POLICY STATEMENT ON ENERGY



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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POLICY FOR THE PROTECTION AND RESTORATION OF ESSENTIAL FISH HABITATS FROM ENERGY EXPLORATION AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES (December 14, 2015)

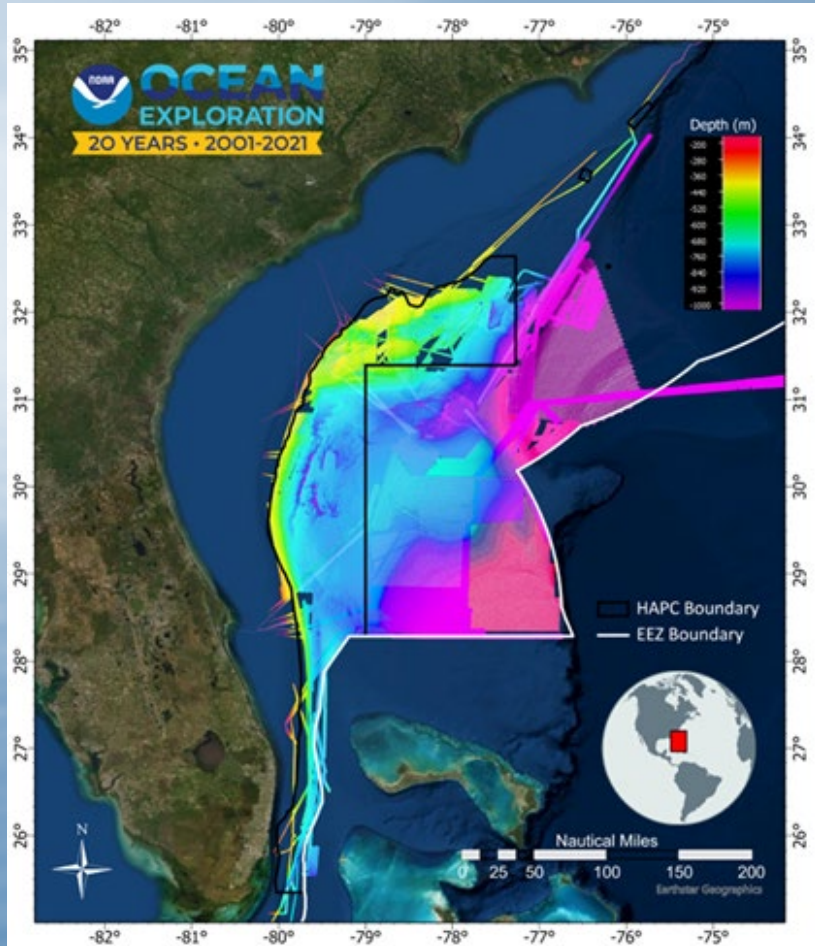
Introduction

This document provides guidance from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) regarding the protection and restoration of essential fish habitats (EFH) from energy exploration and development activities.

Member Comments and Recommendations:

- Considering the rapidly developing renewable wind/energy in the South Atlantic region, the Panel recommends the Council direct the Panel to initiate an update and refinement of the EFH Policy Statement on Energy Exploration and Development.

MAPPING/CHARACTERIZATION: SOUTH ATLANTIC DEEP WATER ECOSYSTEMS

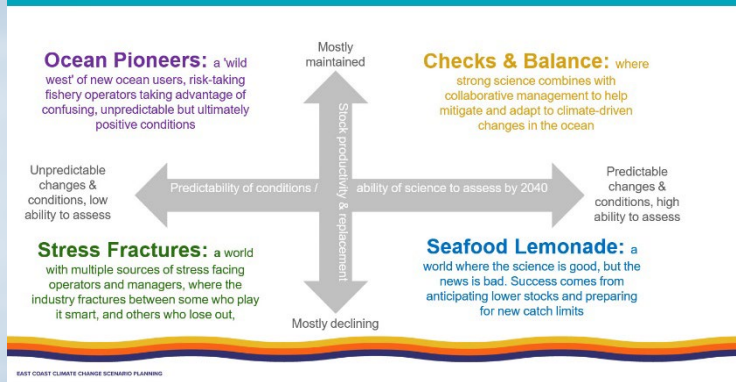


Member Comments and Recommendations:

- Panel members provided comments on the research and mapping conducted in the South Atlantic region and discussed recommendations on additional research and avenues the Council may consider in the long-term conservation of these newly discovered deep-water *Lophelia* habitats.
- Members noted mapping has shown the initial boundaries of the Coral HAPC did an excellent job capturing the many of the deepwater habitats. However, new concentrations of deepwater corals have been discovered.
- Recommend the Council look at potentially expanding the Coral HAPC boundaries to include the newly discovered documented areas.
- The Coral AP at their next meeting be briefed on the new research and mapping and consider the Habitat AP recommendation.

EAST COAST CLIMATE SCENARIO PLANNING UPDATE

Scenario Framework: East Coast Fisheries in 2040



Member Comments and Recommendations:

- The Panel discussed how the efforts can advance our coordination, understanding and planning to address future conditions associated with climate change in the region and coastwide.
- Members noted climate change is already impacting species such as Atlantic Migratory Striped Bass are no longer being caught in North Carolina and black sea bass in range shift north of the NE/MA region.
- AP members discussed considering managing comprehensively and shifting away from managing species by species to possibly management by fish guilds.
- Once completed, the South Atlantic Climate Vulnerability Assessment could help identify species vulnerability which would affect future management challenges in various scenarios.

East Coast Scenario Planning Initiative Timeline


Steps in this Multi-Year Initiative



REGIONAL RESEARCH AND TOOLS SUPPORTING EFH CONSERVATION

SouthEast Reef Fish Survey (SERFS)

- MARMAP + SEFIS + SEAMAP-SA Reef Fish
 - Long-term fishery-independent survey (est. 1972)
 - Abundance and life history of U.S. South Atlantic snapper/grouper



R/V Palmetto

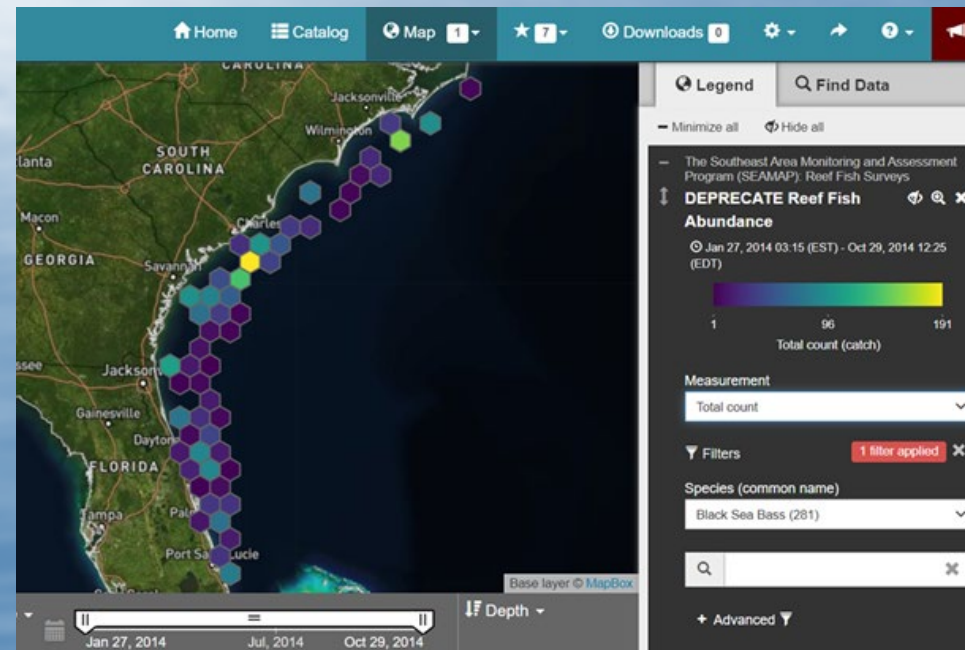
R/V Savannah

NOAA Ship Pisces

- Update on Regional Surveys
- SEAMAP-SA/SECOORA Data Portal- Integration biological surveys
- Provides long term habitat and species information needs supporting the Council habitat conservation efforts.

Member Comments and Recommendations:

- Members appreciated the updates and encouraged the continued integration of this information into FEP II and other council applications.
- Members discussed the information provided in the FEP II Dashboard that is not currently available online. This information is valuable and while presently under review the Panel recommends the information be added back to the website when possible.



FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY RESTORATION BLUEPRINT

Member Comments and Recommendations:

- Given the cascading adverse impacts the Sanctuary is experiencing, the proposed rule seems to be a well-balanced approach and address the comments the Council submitted on the DEIS.
- Important to emphasize the NMS staff are actively engaged in commenting on water quality impacts which does help.
- General consensus of support for the proposed rule.

