

**FINAL**  
**SUMMARY REPORT**  
**HABITAT PROTECTION AND ECOSYSTEM BASED MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**  
**SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**  
**March 9, 2023**

The Committee approved the minutes from the September 2021 meeting and the agenda for the March 2023 meeting.

**Habitat Blueprint Update:** Council staff provided background on the development of the Habitat Blueprint, an overview of Habitat Blueprint Workgroup progress and work for 2023 highlighting a meeting schedule starting with the first Workgroup meeting to be held on March 29, 2023. The Committee discussed and approved draft process and timing for Blueprint development in 2023. It was clarified that other Council members will be able to listen in on the Habitat Workgroup meetings.

**Review of Essential Fish Habitat Policy Statements:** Staff in cooperation with Cindy Cooksey Habitat and Ecosystem AP Chair provided background on overall EFH Policy statement history, process, intent, and structure including the MSA mandate that non-fishing threats are identified, and research needs be addressed. She also provided the history behind and development and update of the Council's standing Policy on Beach Dredging, Filling and Renourishment and Large-Scale Coastal Engineering. The Committee recommended the Policy be brought back to the AP for additional review to refine as needed to address individual state needs.

Staff provided an overview of the structure and background history on the development of the standing EFH Policy Statement on Energy Exploration and Development with a focus on oil and gas development and the need for an update to more comprehensively address renewable energy and offshore wind development. The Committee reviewed a timeline for the AP to develop an update with the help of an already named workgroup throughout 2023 with a complete draft for review during their October 2023 meeting. Committee encouraged reviewing and possibly drawing on other Council energy policies. Staff noted that was in the plan to help advance the process. Cindy Cooksey also clarified that she is also the NMFS HCD staff dedicated to all three advancing offshore wind leases in the SA region.

Council members also addressed the developing issue of expanding space exploration and development and the need to develop a more comprehensive standing policy to address impacts on habitat and fisheries operations. Staff noted the Council is already gathering input from species advisory panels on how their fisheries are being affected. Staff also noted that there is a proposed joint session of the Coral AP and Habitat Ecosystem AP which would include a discussion on expanding space operations, potential habitat and ecosystem impacts and considerations for policy development.

**Essential Fish Habitat 5 Year Review:** Cindy Cooksey provided the Committee background on EFH mandates including the EFH 5-Year Review, SAFMC EFH designation and past EFH review and the resulting EFH User Guide. Council staff laid out the proposed process utilizing the Habitat and Ecosystem AP and workgroups, and timeline to initiate the EFH 5-Year review during 2023. Cindy Cooksey indicated the AP would flesh out the process further at their May

meeting.

**CCC Area-Based Management Subcommittee Update:** Staff provided an overview of the America the Beautiful (ATB) directive and the CCC Area Based Management Sub-Committee coordination in developing a report on Area Based Management (ABM) for the CCC. Committee members noted concern that some areas including conservation areas in state waters will not be counted towards the “conservation” areas under the ATB effort. Staff highlighted while the ABM Subcommittee report will focus primarily on the EEZ, areas outside of the EEZ (nearshore, inshore, land-based, etc.) could also be included but it was not clear yet how those areas will be evaluated. State members noted concern that states are not being engaged in the process. Council members expressed gratitude for the work Roger has done over the years to advance the Council’s work on habitat and ecosystem-based management.

**Coral Research and Monitoring:** Staff noted research and mapping on deepwater coral ecosystems was presented during the Council January 2023 seminar series. Council staff highlighted timing for further discussion and review. The SSC will be reviewing the recently completed deep sea coral distribution modeling during their April 2023 meeting. This will subsequently be discussed during a future joint Coral and Habitat Ecosystem AP webinar.

**Agenda topics for Spring Habitat and Ecosystem AP Meeting:**

Agenda items noted below to be covered during the May 16-18, 2023, Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management AP meeting.

List of Agenda Items:

- NOAA Fisheries South Atlantic Climate Vulnerability Assessment
  - NOAA Fisheries HCD EFH Consultation Update
  - EFH 5-Year Review - EFH Designation History, EFH User Guide,
  - Research Needs for EFH Review and Council Research Plan Update
  - Update on SAFMC Habitat Blueprint
  - BOEM Update on Offshore Wind Activities in South Atlantic Region
  - Update EFH Policy on Beach Dredging, Filling and Renourishment and Large-Scale Coastal Engineering
  - Update EFH Policy Statement on Energy Exploration and Development
  - East Coast Climate Scenario Planning Update\*
- \* Possibly cover during joint Coral and Habitat APs webinar

**Agenda topics for Joint Coral AP and Habitat and Ecosystem AP Meeting/Webinar**

Agenda items noted below to be covered during a future joint Coral AP and Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management AP webinar.

List of Agenda Items:

- SSC review of recently completed deep sea coral distribution modeling.
- Initial discussion on avenues to consider for conservation of newly discovered deep water coral ecosystems.
- Expanding space operations, potential habitat and ecosystem impacts and

considerations for policy development.

**MOTION: ADOPT THE FOLLOWING TIMING AND TASKS:**

**Timing and Tasks:**

- Beach Policy to Habitat Ecosystem AP for additional review.
  - Obtain POC from FWC to engage FL Department of Environmental Protection on beach renourishment
  - Engage other appropriate state agency personnel to obtain input on beach renourishment
- Set up a joint Habitat Ecosystem AP and Coral AP webinar to discuss overlapping agenda items.
- Provide point of contact for ATB to Jessica for FWC team so they can engage further at state level.
- Request a presentation from the fisheries liaison officer updating the Council on Carolina Long Bay Offshore wind lease.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL