

**FINAL**  
**SUMMARY REPORT**  
**JOINT HABITAT PROTECTION AND ECOSYSTEM BASED MANAGEMENT**  
**COMMITTEE, SHRIMP COMMITTEE AND GOLDEN CRAB COMMITTEE**

**Jekyll Island, Georgia**  
**March 5, 2018**

The Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Committee addressed habitat and ecosystem issues first and approved minutes from the December 2017 meeting and the agenda.

**SAFMC Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) II Implementation Plan and Two Year Road Map**

Council staff provided an update on the further refinement of the previous draft FEP II Implementation Plan which incorporated edits, revisions and priority actions developed during the last Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Advisory Panel meeting. The latest version was further updated and refined based on coordinated Council member input provided after the December Council meeting. In addition, staff highlighted the FEP II Two Year Roadmap which was developed based on priority actions presented in the FEP II Implementation Plan.

**SAFMC FEP II and FEP II Dashboard**

Council staff provided an update on the latest updates incorporated into the FEP II Dashboard. Staff noted continually developing Webservices and refinement of the Dashboard to provide even quicker access to species, habitat and fishery information as well as tools. Members were encouraged to use the Dashboard to input on further refinement was requested. Draft FEP II Sections were provided and will be activated on the Dashboard following the March 2018 meeting.

**Habitat and Ecosystem Model Development and Tools**

Staff provided an overview of the status and further development of the next generation South Atlantic ecosystem model noting recent coordination with NOAA Fisheries SEFSC to ensure inputs from all South Atlantic single species Stock Assessments are comparable between efforts. Staff discussed recent collaboration on Ocean Observing in the region including integration of Ecosystem and Fisheries needs into Strategic plans for Southeast Coastal and Ocean Observing Regional Association (SECOORA) and the National Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) program. In addition, an updated User Guide for EcoSpecies, an integral part of FEP II enhances our access to detailed species information online.

**MOTION 1: APPROVE FEP II IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**  
**APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**  
**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**MOTION 2: APPROVE FEP II TWO YEAR ROADMAP**  
**APPROVED BY COMMITTEE**  
**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**MOTION 3: APPROVE OUTSTANDING FEP II SECTIONS (SOUTH ATLANTIC FOOD WEBS AND CONNECTIVITY, SOUTH ATLANTIC CLIMATE VARIABILITY AND FISHERIES, SHALLOW WATER CORAL, ARTIFICIAL REEFS) FOR INCORPORATION INTO THE FEP II DASHBOARD  
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE  
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**MOTION: APPROVE FEP II LIVE BOTTOM HABITAT SECTION  
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**MOTION: APPROVE FISHERY ECOSYSTEM PLAN II AND FEP II DASHBOARD  
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

The Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Committee, Shrimp Committee and Golden Crab Committee met jointly to address possible adjustments to Golden Crab Allowable Fishing Areas and Rock Shrimp Fishery Access Areas.

The Shrimp and Golden Crab Committees approved minutes from June 2015.

**Allowable Fishing Areas**

Council staff presented a draft options paper on possible adjustments to Golden Crab Allowable Fishing Areas and Rock Shrimp Fishery Access Areas based on previous minutes from Golden Crab and Deep-water Shrimp Advisory Panels. The golden crab fishermen requested additional access areas in the Northern Zone, where there have been some reports of fishing in the past. The rock shrimp fishermen requested the eastern edge of the Oculina Bank Northern Extension be revised to allow access to historical fishing areas. The Council indicated there was interest in developing an amendment to address the golden crab access area and the boundary for the Oculina Bank Northern Extension established in Coral Amendment 8. The Joint Committee also discussed the current managed area transit provisions for shrimp vessels and requested a document that would describe different provisions for the South Atlantic region (cold-water shrimp closure, MPA, and OHAPC), Mid-Atlantic and New England transit provisions for deep-water coral, and Gulf of Mexico shrimp transit provisions.

**MOTION 4: BEGIN AN AMENDMENT FOR SHRIMP AMENDMENT 11 AND CORAL AMENDMENT 10.  
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE  
APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**Other Business:**

After the committee meeting an issue related to a comment letter surfaced. A draft letter is attached to the Committee Report proposing SAFMC comments on the 2019–2024 National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program and Programmatic EIS. Comments and supporting documentation are to be submitted online by March 9, 2018. The draft letter relays the Council’s official position as shown in previous correspondence (4/30/15 letter BOEM, 7/1/16 letter to Eileen Sobeck, and 4/25/17 letter to Secretary Zinke). The draft letter and previous letters relay concerns about sound impacts as reflected in the Council’s Policy on

Energy Exploration and Development Activities (approved 12/14/15). The NEFMC and MAFMC have commented.

**MOTION: COUNCIL SUBMIT COMMENT LETTER TO BOEM ON THE 2019-2024 NATIONAL OCS DRAFT PROPOSED PROGRAM AND PROGRAMTIC EIS APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

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**Note:** Council staff drafts the timing and task motion based on Committee action. If points require clarification, they will be added to the draft motion. The Committee should review this wording carefully to be sure it accurately reflects their intent prior to making the motion.

**Timing and Task(s)**

**MOTION. ADOPT THE FOLLOWING TIMING AND TASK(S):**

- 1) Staff will finalize the FEP II Implementation Plan and Two Year Roadmap for posting the FEP II Dashboard.
- 2) Staff will finalize remaining FEP II Sections for activation on the Dashboard and further refine and enhance the format and capabilities of the FEP II Dashboard.
- 3) Staff will collaborate with SALCC supporting South Atlantic Ecosystem model workgroup and Ecopath model development so a fully parameterized model will be presented during the fall SSC meeting.
- 4) Staff will continue to work with regional partners and SECOORA to refine regional ocean observing priorities and long-term build out planning by integrating Council needs for ocean observing data, tools and new technology to better characterize and monitor fish, fish habitat and fisheries operations.
- 5) Staff will continue developing a Joint Coral and Shrimp Amendment and bring back a scoping document at the June 2018 meeting including options for VMS.
- 6) Staff will develop a document outlining the different transit provisions for the shrimp vessels regarding gear storage.
- 7) Send comment letter to BOEM by 3/9/18.
- 8) Others??

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**



## SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Charlie Phillips, Chair | Captain Mark Brown, Vice Chair  
Gregg T. Waugh, Executive Director

March 9, 2018  
LN#201816

Ms. Kelly Hammerle  
Chief, National Oil and Gas Leasing Program  
Development and Coordination Branch  
Leasing Division, Office of Strategic Resources  
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management  
45600 Woodland Road, Mailstop VAM-LD  
Sterling, VA 20166

Dear Ms. Hammerle:

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) is providing the following comments and attached supporting documentation on the **2019–2024 National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program and Programmatic EIS** to clarify our position on energy exploration, development, and transportation including specifically the potential environmental effects of conducting seismic surveys in the South Atlantic Region. The Council, pursuant to authority granted by the Magnuson-Steven Act, is charged with conservation of fish stocks and fish habitat and management of recreational and commercial fisheries dependent on those resources in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (3-200 miles) off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and the East Coast of Florida through the Florida Keys.

The Council has a standing Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Policy Statement on Energy, Exploration, Development, and Transportation (see Policy Statement included in the Council's 2017 letter to Secretary Zinke). The present policy statement is clear that seismic testing has a high likelihood of directly impacting benthic ecosystems, essential fish habitat, managed species, and the fisheries which depend on them. The Council, considering the multi-million dollar recreational and commercial fisheries in our region that would be affected by seismic testing, continues to recommend that seismic surveys not be conducted in areas that will impact EFH and especially areas designated as EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern. These areas include but are not limited to deep-water snapper grouper Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), Special Management Zones and recently approved Spawning Special Management Zones, tilefish EFH-HAPC, other snapper grouper EFH-HAPCS including but not limited to the Georgetown Hole EFH-HAPC, Hoyt Hills EFH-HAPC, Deep-water Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (CHAPCs), and the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern which encompasses the Oculina Experimental Closed Area (see chart included in the Council's 2017 letter to Secretary Zinke).

The South Atlantic Council further highlighted concerns over the broader issue of sound in the ocean and provided the attached comments on the NOAA Ocean Noise Strategy Roadmap to

support the agency’s use of its capabilities and authorities to more effectively understand and address the effects of noise on Council-managed species and soundscapes or acoustic habitat associated with essential fish habitat of managed species.

Therefore, the Council supports the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management’s (BOEM) past denial of geophysical and geological permit applications to conduct airgun seismic surveys in the Mid- and South Atlantic Planning Areas of the Atlantic Ocean and re-iterates its previous request to remove the Atlantic Program Area from the Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program now in the 2019–2024 National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Proposed Program. We draw attention to former BOEM Director Abigail Ross Hopper’s position that “... we believe that the value of obtaining the geophysical and geological information from new airgun seismic surveys in the Atlantic does not outweigh the potential risks of those surveys’ acoustic pulse impacts on marine life,...” The Council, in an attempt to avoid the negative effects of offshore oil and gas development, has worked closely with BOEM, NOAA Fisheries, and state partners, to highlight regional research needs and avoid impacts on EFH and managed fisheries through cooperative development of alternative energy capacity, specifically offshore wind energy, in the region.

In conclusion, the Council is concerned about the impact these activities would have on our managed resources and fisheries and the coastal communities generating billions of dollars of revenue in our region.

Still digging,



Charlie Phillips  
Chair

cc: South Atlantic Council Members and Staff  
Executive Directors  
Habitat Protection and Ecosystem-Based Management Advisory Panel  
Jack McGovern and Rick DeVactor  
Monica Smit-Brunello  
Cisco Werner, Theo Brainerd, Peter Thompson, Larry Massey, and Erik Williams  
LeAnn Hogan