

OVERVIEW

Habitat and Environmental Protection Committee

Charleston Marriott
170 Lockwood Boulevard
Charleston, South Carolina, 29403
September 18, 2014

The Committees will: (A) Receive a status report on Coral Amendment 8; and (B) receive a briefing on conservation issues associate with Miami Harbor dredging.

A. Status of Coral Amendment 8

Coral Amendment 8 actions include expansion of the northern and western boundaries of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC); expansion of the Stetson-Miami Terrace and Cape Lookout Coral HAPCs; and establishment of a transit provision through Oculina Bank HAPC for vessels with rock shrimp onboard. Within the expanded HAPCs, the use of bottom longline, bottom trawl, dredge, pot or trap is prohibited, and if aboard a fishing vessel, anchor, use of anchor and chain, and grapple and chain is prohibited. Mid-water trawl is also prohibited in the Coral HAPCs, including Stetson-Miami Terrace and the Cape Lookout Coral HAPCs. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council approved the amendment during their September 2013 meeting. The notice of availability for Coral Amendment 8 published in the Federal Register on May 20, 2014, and the comment period ended on July 21, 2014. The proposed rule for Coral Amendment 8 published on June 3, 2014, and the comment period ended on July 3, 2014. A final rule, which will give effect to the proposed actions and regulations, should be published in the Federal Register shortly.

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

B. Miami Harbor Dredging Briefing

The Committee will receive a briefing from Pace Wilber, NOAA Fisheries, Habitat Conservation Division, SERO on possible conservation concerns associated with dredging of the Miami Harbor expansion of the entrance channel to the Port of Miami has led to newspaper reports of excessive turbidity and burial of corals and hardbottom habitat as well as a formal notice of a potential permit violation by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Members of the Coral and Habitat and Environmental Protection Advisory Panels were engaged to summarize the essential fish habitat (EFH) and Endangered Species Act consultations the NMFS Southeast Regional Office completed for the Port of Miami channel expansion, the results of the monitoring for coral impacts, and potential paths forward for the Committee to consider.

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