

**FINAL**  
**SUMMARY REPORT**  
**HABITAT AND ECOSYSTEM COMMITTEE**  
**SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

Daytona, FL  
June 11, 2024

The Committee approved minutes from the December 2023 meeting and the agenda for this meeting.

**Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel Report**

Stacie Crowe, SCDNR (AP Chair) delivered the April 2024 Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel Report.

**SAFMC Annual Habitat Report**

Council staff reviewed a draft annual report meant to address habitat activities during the prior calendar year, as outlined in the Habitat Blueprint, and asked for feedback on the content of the report.

The committee did not comment on the report due to time constraints. Staff requested that Council members submit feedback submit via email.

**Coral Management**

Council staff provided an update on the Coral 10 resubmission process and requested feedback from the Council on how the goals and objectives of the Coral FMP are addressed by the proposed action in Coral Amendment 10. The Committee reiterated that opening the Shrimp Fishery Access Area (SFAA) is an issue that was never meant to take this long to correct and should have been a simple adjustment of the Oculina Coral Habitat Area of Particular concern (CHAPC) boundary. This is a historical shrimp fishing area and there is no known evidence of the shrimp fishery causing damage to the coral.

The Committee debated whether modifying the CHAPC boundary could be done as a separate framework amendment. However, doing so would still require addressing the Coral FMP goals and objectives, which was a highlighted issue for Coral 10 in the rejection letter. NOAA General Counsel reiterated that no matter what steps the Council takes with this amendment, the record has been built and there are concerns still in existence. The Council will need to address the disapproval letter and the Coral FMP goals whichever direction they choose to take this amendment. The Committee then debated whether this is the correct FMP to reopen an area of the CHAPC to rock shrimping. Historically SFAAs have been established in CHAPCs through an amendment to the Shrimp FMP. The proposed action would be more appropriate through an amendment to the Shrimp FMP, but since it could involve modifying the CHAPC, also requires amendment the Coral FMP. The Committee expressed interest in a joint amendment to the Shrimp and Coral FMPs but noted that would increase the timeline for development. Finally, the Committee discussed a potential compromise to add a sub alternative that would shrink the proposed SFAA and increase the buffer zone between the SFAA and the coral thereby decreasing the dangers of plume sedimentation. All these options have pros and cons and will involve a lengthened timeline.

**DIRECTION TO STAFF: BRING THE DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL OPTIONS (MOVE FORWARD WITH CORAL 10, ADD IN AN ALTERNATIVE IN BETWEEN NO ACTION AND THE PROPOSED CORAL 10 SFAA, MODIFYING THE BOUNDARY AS A FRAMEWORK, OR HAVING A JOINT FMP AMENDMENT FOR SHRIMP AND CORAL) TO THE CORAL 10 IPT.**

## BRING FEEDBACK LISTING PROS, CONS, AND TIMELINES TO THE COUNCIL IN SEPTEMBER.

To address the rejection letter and the staff request for verbiage for the Coral 10 resubmission process the Committee listed the following rationale:

- To address the concern about minimizing EFH effects
  - The width of the buffer zone between known pinnacle locations and the western most boundary of the SFAA varies between 310-700 m. Determine the required buffer width between active shrimping and the eastern boundary of the CHAPC to address sediment plume concerns.
  - Identify the strict requirements that are in place for the rock shrimp fishery and the complicated technical knowledge and experience needed to operate in this area.
  - Highlight that the fishermen use a self-imposed .25 mile buffer zone to avoid the closed area. This self-imposed buffer will exist no matter where the furthest eastern boundary is, meaning the distance between active shrimping and the eastern boundary of the CHAPC is in effect .25 miles wider than listed in the amendment.
  - Include the illustration of area use provided by Council member Laurilee Thompson
  - Review whether there have been any fisheries violations as the rock shrimp fishery, a heavily regulated fishery.
- To address the concerns about bycatch
  - The IPT is already working on a Bycatch Practicability Analysis
  - Highlight that TEDs and BRDs are required in this fishery
  - Investigate historical bycatch levels
  - Use the bycatch images provided by Laurilee
- Trawling concerns and potential damage
  - Identify sedimentation studies
  - Evaluate plumes and potential damage they cause
  - Research the furthest distance a mud or sediment plume can travel (utilize studies conducted in the Gulf)

Council staff provided a general overview of recent predictive modeling work, visual surveys, and geomorphic characterization occurring along the Blake Plateau. There are existing CHAPCs for deepwater coral that are adjacent to the Blake Plateau. Staff requested feedback on whether the Council would like to move forward with integrating this new data to review and possibly modify the boundaries of existing deepwater CHAPCs in the areas. The Committee was interested in the discrepancies of the studies and potential impacts on the CHAPC boundaries. The Committee highlighted that future steps in technology could involve deepwater mining and identifying deepwater CHAPCs preemptively would be prudent. This is still of interest to the Committee however it would take staff time away from other items.

**DIRECTION TO STAFF: KEEP MODIFYING THE CORAL HAPC ON THE WORKPLAN AS A LOW PRIORITY**

**Agenda Items for Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Based Management Advisory Panel Fall Meeting:** Council staff reviewed a draft list of potential agenda items noted below to be covered during the fall 2024 Habitat and Ecosystem AP meeting:

- EFH 5-year review - finalized
- Tools and Partners Evaluations for the Habitat Program
- Review Progress on the Habitat website.
- Review progress on the Habitat Program Communication Strategy
- Space program impacts on habitat (if the information is available).

- Inclusion of wind energy in the [Energy Exploration, Development, Transportation and Hydropower Re-Licensing policy](#)
- Revision of [Alterations to Riverine, Estuarine and Nearshore Flows policy](#) to address impacts from freshwater discharges and impediments to river flow
- Review of tide gate, living shoreline, beneficial use projects and impacts on habitat
- ~~Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind (CVOW) updates (this is a low priority)~~
- Army Corps of Engineers Project for Reefs
- Offshore wind infrastructure coverage and artificial reef footprint
- Improving EFH tier structure

**MOTION 1: APPROVE LIST OF AGENDA ITEMS FOR OCTOBER 2024 HABITAT AND ECOSYSTEM AP MEETING AS REVISED**  
**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

**Other Business**

There is an up-and-coming movement from the National Resource Defense Council (NRDC) to protect the Blake Plateau under a marine monument designation. They recognize the need to protect the deepwater coral, and they foresee no impacts on fishing activities.

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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 2: ADOPT THE FOLLOWING TIMING AND TASKS:**

1. Bring the discussion of potential options (move forward with coral 10, add in an alternative in between no action and the proposed Coral 10 SFAA, modifying the boundary as a framework, or having a joint FMP amendment for shrimp and coral) to the Coral 10 IPT. Bring feedback listing pros, cons, and timelines to the Council in September.
2. Keep potentially modifying the Coral HAPC on the workplan as a low priority
3. Convene the Habitat and Ecosystem AP in Fall 2024 incorporating approved agenda items.

**APPROVED BY COUNCIL**