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THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Space Industry Activity in the South Atlantic



Background

- The space industry is active in the region, mainly off Florida's east coast.
- Main big players
 - Space X – Private Corporation
 - Space Florida – Public corporation established by the state of Florida
 - NASA – Independent Government agency
 - Space Force – Air Force



Background



- Since 2023:
 - Presentations to Council and HEAP from Space Florida
 - Freedom of Information Act request to USCG for information on area closures, frequency, and duration to start determining impacts to fisheries
 - Comment letters on proposed projects
- What are the impacts of these activities on habitats and fisheries?
- How can the Council address?



Presentations

- June 2023 – Council receives Space Florida Presentation
- November 2023 – HEAP receives the same presentation from Space Florida
 - There were ~90 launches in 2023
 - 85% of launches are commercial
 - Currently, there is no consideration for debris and landing zones for EFH
 - Space Florida is aware of Indian River Lagoon issues, i.e, discharge and development
 - The panel debated the environmental impact of deorbiting structures and debris currently on the ocean floor



Artemis I launch taken from the Space Florida Launch and Landing Facility

FOIA Timeline



October 3, 2023: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) for the number, frequency, and duration of closures off the east Florida coast due to space-related activity for the last 10 years. Request was received on 10/3/2023 and assigned FOIA number 2024-CGFO-00009.



December 7, 2023: USGC responded via email indicating that the initial request was too broad in scope for the USGC to respond.



December 15, 2023: First resubmission FOIA with revised language – We request all Space Operations Rocket Launch Advisories issued by the USCG Sector Jacksonville (see attached example) between January 1, 2013, and the date of this request. For the same time period, provide any analyses or reports, prepared by or for the USCG by any party, addressing the number of launches from Cape Canaveral and the resulting economic or environmental impact of the launches and the resulting areal closures.



December 2023 to April 2025: Numerous follow-ups via email and phone to 6 separate Coast Guard representatives



February 18, 2025: Second resubmission with approved language



June 30, 2025: No information has been provided via FOIA process

Space industry comment letters process



ONE OF THE SPACE PROGRAMS PROPOSES A NEW DEVELOPMENT OR APPLIES FOR A NEW PERMIT



THE DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE DEVELOPS AN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA) OR AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS)



THE REQUESTS FOR COMMENTS IS SENT OUT



SAFMC STAFF DEVELOPS A COMMENT LETTER WHICH IS LATER APPROVED BY THE COUNCIL CHAIR



THE PROPOSING BODY INTEGRATES THE COMMENTS AND MOVES TO THE NEXT STEPS OF THE PROPOSAL

Comment Letters: March 2024



- March 19, 2024: letter commenting on Starship-Super Heavy Operations at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station Environmental Impact Statement submitted.
- Purpose of EIS: advance U.S. space capabilities and provide launch and landing infrastructure to further U.S. policies to ensure necessary capabilities to launch and insert Department of the Air Force (DAF) payloads into space and the need to have access to space without compromising current launch capabilities.

Comment Letters: March 2024



- Letter Highlights

- Include fishery resources including social and economic impacts to be analyzed in the EIS.
- Both proposed Space Launch Complex locations are in proximity to designated Essential Fish Habitat.
- Debris associated with space activities at the site could pose a hazard.
- analyses should include potential economic impacts of temporary disruptions to fishing activity (commercial and recreational) from hazard zones.
- The EIS should include a thorough description of the potential cumulative impacts on the benthic and pelagic habitats supporting local fisheries in the vicinity of the proposed project sites.



Comment Letters: April 2025

- April 24, 2025: letter on the Draft Environmental Assessment SpaceX Falcon 9 Operations at Space Launch Complex 40, Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, Florida, submitted.
- Purpose of the EA: advance U.S. space capabilities and provide increased launches and landing infrastructure to further U.S. policies to ensure necessary capabilities to launch and insert Department of the Air Force (DAF) payloads into space and respond to current and anticipated needs for launch requirements. A new landing zone (LZ) in response to the expectation that the SLD-45 permit will not be renewed.

Comment Letters: April 2025



- Letter Highlights:
 - Need a long-term mitigation plan to improve, enhance, and restore the health of waterways.
 - Concern that increase in rocket launches will exacerbate impacts of climate change.
 - Lack of mitigation for any damage done to EFH, fisheries, and fishing communities.
 - No discussion of the half-life of pollutants or the bioaccumulation in fish and their prey.
 - Concern regarding the conclusion that air mixing and water diluting are sufficient to minimize impacts on EFH.
 - No analysis of the direct or indirect impacts on fishing communities.
 - Request for support from the FAA to obtain information to understand potential impacts to fisheries and habitats.
 - The details of closures should be released well ahead of time and approved by local law enforcement.

Summary

- Space activities are becoming increasingly talked-about and could have large impacts on habitats and fisheries
- To quote a former council member “Space is King in Florida”
- Gathering information on the impacts of the space industry is difficult



Next Steps

- What can the Council do?
- Do you have recommendations or suggestions for contacts?
- Are there alternative data sources that could be tapped to allow us to evaluate the impacts of these programs?
- How can the Council further its goal of protecting EFH considering increased activity related to the space industry?
- Should the Council investigate developing a policy to address potential threats to EFH from space activities?

A wide-angle photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sun is low on the horizon, partially obscured by dark clouds, creating a bright orange and yellow glow. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a lighter, hazy blue near the horizon. The ocean is dark blue with gentle waves, and the sun's light reflects on the water's surface. The text "Thank you" is centered in the middle of the image in a bold, white, sans-serif font with a subtle drop shadow.

Thank you