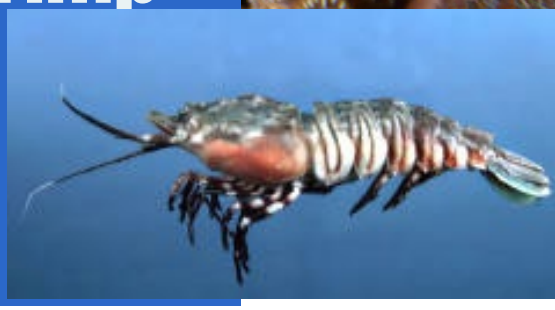
THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Coral Amendment 11 and Shrimp Amendment 12

Establish a SFAA within the Oculina HAPC

Decision Document, September 2025



Background

In 2021, the Council submitted Coral Amendment 10 to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for formal review. The amendment proposed establishing a shrimp fishery access area (SFAA) within the eastern boundary of the Northern Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern (OHAPC) where trawling for rock shrimp occurred historically but is currently prohibited. In 2022, the Council received a letter of disapproval on Coral Amendment 10. Among the reasons for disapproval, NMFS stated that the amendment did not include adequate analysis to ensure that the proposed action would minimize adverse effects of fishing on essential fish habitat (EFH) and minimize bycatch. In 2023, the Council made a motion to resubmit the amendment incorporating updated information, results from a predictive mapping study, and possible additional alternatives; and directed staff to begin developing a joint amendment to modify both the Coral and Shrimp Fishery Management Plans. Coral Amendment11/Shrimp Amendment 12 was presented at the June 2025 Council meeting where the Council selected Preferred Alternative 2 and approved the amendment for public hearings. Public hearings were conducted in August 2025.

Objectives for this Meeting (September 2025)

- Review of the public comment summary document.
- Review and approve edits to alternatives (square mileage clarification).
- Approve the draft amendment for continued development and potential final review at the December 2025 Council meeting.

Amendment Development Timeline

June 2024	Council moves to develop a joint Shrimp 12 and Coral 11 amendment to accomplish the goal of establishing an SFAA
June 2025	Council selects a preferred alternative and approves the draft amendment for public hearings.
Summer 2025	Conduct public hearings.
September 2025	Review public hearing comments and the draft amendment.
December 2025	Review the final draft amendment and consider approval for formal review.
Early 2026	Amendment submitted.

Draft Amendment Highlights (since June 2025)

- Vessel monitoring system (VMS) information will be integrated into Chapter 3 (Affected Environment). This will include vessel location points from 2014-2024 that have been split into two groups; before and after the implementation of Coral Amendment 8. The data will also be limited to boats that are actively trawling and aggregated to ensure confidentiality.
- Chapter 3's social and economic information is expected to be integrated before December 2025.
- Sediment and current information have been integrated into Chapter 4 (Environmental Effects). This includes a description of current directions, sediment bottom type, and a figure denoting the strong north to south current. This analysis is ongoing and will continue to be updated.
- Chapter 4's economic and social sections have been updated to include the ping rate analysis and the impacts this could have on the shrimpers. The economic and social costs are most likely going to be minimal since the increased transmission rate already exists in the OHAPC and shrimpers already have VMS. Analysis is on-going to determine the exact cost to shrimpers to maintain this VMS communication rate while shrimping.
- Possible impacts from space activities have been integrated into Chapter 6 (Cumulative Effects). These are largely unknown, however, given the current proposed 244 launches that would be associated with hazard zones (closures) the proposed SFAA may be very important for shrimpers in the future.
- The Bycatch Practicability Analysis (BPA) has been integrated as an appendix. Analysis is based on observer coverage from 2018 – 2022 and the majority of species are not managed by the SAFMC. Total bycatch for 2018 – 2022 weighed 20,475 kgs and included 10 fish, four invertebrates and one shark. The most observed bycatch species was the Inshore Lizard Fish (5518 kgs), and the least was the red lionfish (5 lbs). For Council managed species bycatch does include Black Sea Bass (5 kgs), Brown Shrimp (2421 kgs), and Pink Shrimp (197 kgs). Ultimately, data are limited and do not have 100% coverage of shrimpers, but the BRDs and TEDs shrimpers are required to utilize, helps minimize bycatch.

Purpose and Need Statements

Committee-approved statements in June 2025:

Purpose: The purpose of this action is to reinstate access for vessels with a valid Commercial Vessel Permit for Rock Shrimp South Atlantic EEZ (Limited Access) to a historically important fishing area where the commercial rock shrimp fishery operated by creating a shrimp fishery access area along the eastern boundary of the northern boundary of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern, while also minimizing impacts to deepwater coral.

Need for Action: The need for this action is to achieve optimum yield in the rock shrimp fishery while minimizing negative impacts to deepwater coral.

Committee Action:

- Confirm the purpose and need for the amendment.

Proposed Action and Alternatives

Action 1. Establish a shrimp fishery access area (SFAA) along the eastern boundary of the northern Oculina HAPC boundary.

NOTE: Refer to Chapter 2 of the draft amendment (Attachment 2c) for the coordinates of the alternatives.

Alternative 1 (No Action). No person may use a bottom longline, bottom trawl, dredge, pot, or trap in the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern. If aboard a fishing vessel, no person may anchor, use an anchor and chain, or use a grapple and chain. There are no shrimp fishery access areas within the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern.

Preferred Alternative 2. Establish a shrimp fishery access area along the eastern boundary of the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern, that is 14.10 NM^2 if the latitude and longitude are projected using a geodesic measurement and a WGS-1984 projection. Allow a shrimp vessel with a valid Commercial Vessel Permit for Rock Shrimp South Atlantic EEZ (Limited Access) to bottom trawl for rock shrimp within the established area bounded by the following coordinates.

Alternative 3. Establish a shrimp fishery access area along the eastern boundary of the northern extension of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern that is 18.87 NM^2 if the latitude and longitude are projected using a geodesic measurement and a WGS-1984 projection. Allow a shrimp vessel with a valid Commercial Vessel Permit for Rock Shrimp South Atlantic EEZ (Limited Access) to bottom trawl for rock shrimp within the established area bounded by the following coordinates.

DRAFT MOTION: APPROVE THE MODIFICATIONS TO PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE 2 AND ALTERNATIVE 3.

Comparison of the Three Alternatives

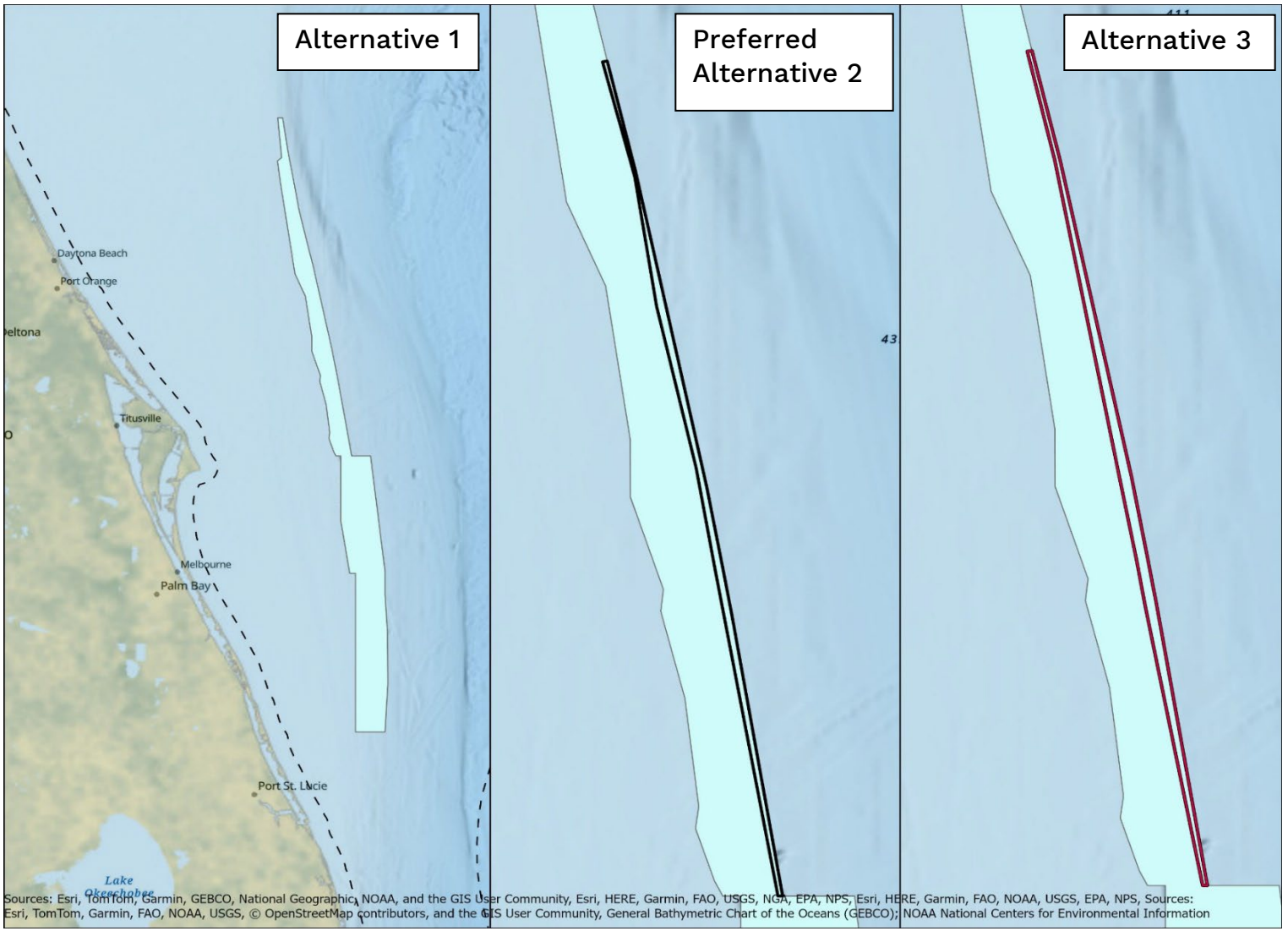


Figure 1: A visualization of Alternatives 1-3: Alternative 1: No action, Preferred Alternative 2, and Alternative 3

Discussion

- VMS Communication rate:
    - Because rock shrimp fishermen transit through the OHAPC to reach fishing grounds, Coral Amendment 8 implemented a transit provision whereby vessels must **increase the VMS transmission rate from 1 ping per hour** (standard VMS requirement for rock shrimp vessels) **to 1 ping per 5 minutes** when a vessel enters the OHAPC.
    - The increased ping rate ensures that the vessel is moving at the **required speed of 5 knots or more** through the OHAPC. Such a speed ensures the vessel is transiting and not trawling. A vessel must also have **gear stowed**[1] when transiting across the OHAPC.
    - Maintaining this ping rate while shrimping in the SFAA would incur a higher cost for the vessel.
    - The other SFAAs are established on the western side of their respective HAPCs. So, the shrimpers do not need to transit across the HAPC to access the SFAA. As such, there is no requirement for a higher ping rate in any other existing SFAA.
    - Maintaining the higher ping rate while allowing fishing within the proposed SFAA would provide more resolution for vessels using the area, which would aid enforcement.
- Sedimentation and EFH:
    - Public comments highlighted concerns over sedimentation from trawling and the impacts on coral health.
    - The currents in the area are described by Dr. Reed: "The clear, warm water of the northerly flowing Florida Current in the region of the Oculina reefs typically only extends down to a depth of 50-60 m. Seldom does this water mass extend to the bottom and the reefs are often inundated with a turbid, bottom nephloid layer. Bottom currents averaged 8.6 cm s-1 but may exceed 50 cm s-1 (1 kn)…" (Reed, 2006)[2].
    - The reef sediment is described as mud (silt and clay) (Reed, 2006).
    - The closest known coral pinnacles to the SFAA are 360-1580 m (.2-.8 NM) west. (Figure F.1.3, Appendix F)
    - Upwellings that can cause east-to-west current movement can occur off the coast of Cape Canaveral and are more likely to occur in the summer months.[3] These

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[1] 50 CFR 622.224(b)(1)(i)(C) For the purpose of this paragraph, transit means a direct and non-stop continuous course through the area, maintaining a minimum speed of five knots as determined by an operating VMS and a VMS minimum ping rate of 1 ping per 5 minutes; fishing gear appropriately stowed means that doors and nets are out of the water.

[2] https://safmc.net/documents/attach2_habitatapnov122006oculinaresearchsummaryreport-1970-2006-pdf/

[3] Smith 1983: https://journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/phoc/13/9/1520-0485_1983_013_1709_tascos_2_0_co_2.pdf

upwellings are dependent on wind direction/strength and Florida Current strength. The exact number of occurrences is unknown; however, a ChatGPT scan of all Surfline and National Weather Service reports off of Cape Canaveral indicates that four upwellings occurred between 2014-2024.
    - Sediment is known to cause damage to coral, and depending on the current strength and direction, dredging plumes can reach hundreds of meters[4] (sometimes further). These plumes can be suspended in the water column for days[5]
- Bycatch Practicability Analysis (Attachment 1c, Appendix D)
    - Bycatch data for this area is extremely limited due to the low percentage of observer coverage and the lack of logbooks.
- Coral and Shrimp FMP Goals and Objectives:
    - Coral Amendment 10 was disapproved, in part, because the analyses didn't show that it was consistent with the *"goals and objectives of the Coral FMP, specifically in regards to protection of EFH...."*
    - The Goals and Objectives (G&O) of the Shrimp and Coral FMPs are attached as Appendices A and B below.
        - Shrimp FMP G&O highlights:
            - Minimize impacts of the rock shrimp fishery on coral, coral reefs and live/hard bottom habitat in the South Atlantic region.
            - Ensure that sufficient effort remains active to sustain rock shrimp fishery and infrastructure.
        - Coral FMP G&Os:
            - Optimize the benefits generated from the coral resource while conserving the coral and coral reefs
            - Minimize adverse human impacts on coral, coral reefs and live hard bottom habitat
            - Designate Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (C-HAPCs) to protect coral and live bottom habitat
            - Increase public awareness of the importance and sensitivity of coral and coral reefs
            - Provide a coordinated management regime for the conservation of coral and coral reefs.

[4] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0278434305001378
[5] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272771406002095

Committee Action:

- Provide direction on the VMS ping rate:
    - Does the Council still want to retain the transit VMS communication (ping) rate in the SFAA?
- Sedimentation and protection of EFH:
    - Discuss how EFH is still protected within the OHAPC if trawling is allowed in the SFAA and how the adverse effect of fishing is minimized by selecting **Preferred Alternative 2**.
- Coral and Shrimp FMP Goals and Objectives:
    - Discuss how establishing an SFAA supports the Shrimp and the Coral FMP Goals and Objectives.
        - June 2025 public in support of **Preferred Alternative 2**:
            - The increased distance to coral pinnacles under Alternative 2, as well as the shrimpers' practice of not trawling along the edge of the HAPC boundary but instead maintaining a .75 mile buffer from the boundary line, should decrease damage to EFH caused by sediment plumes. Technology has improved, and shrimp boats are able to maintain a consistent distance away from coral pinnacles, that helps limit direct or indirect impacts to Oculina coral. Additionally, this amendment responds to EO 13921 by reducing regulatory burden and enhancing economic strength.
        - June 2024 council rationale: To address the rejection letter and the staff request for verbiage for the Coral 10 resubmission process the Committee listed the following rationale (items in red have not been completed):
            - 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 Deepwater Shrimp AP 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 the potential damage they cause
    - Research the furthest distance a mud or sediment plume can travel (utilize studies conducted in the Gulf)

Committee Action:

DRAFT MOTION: APPROVE THE ACTION IN CORAL AMENDMENT 11/SHRIMP AMENDMENT 12 FOR CONSIDERATION OF FINAL APPROVAL IN DECEMBER 2025.

Next Steps

- The Council will be presented with a final draft amendment at the December 2025 meeting and have the opportunity to approve the amendment for submission.

Appendix A: SUMMARY OF SHRIMP FMP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Current (as of July 2024)

1	Eliminate fishing mortality on over-wintering white shrimp following severe winter cold kills.
2	Reduce the bycatch of non-target finfish, invertebrates and threatened, protected and endangered species.
3	Coordinate development of measures reducing bycatch with South Atlantic states to enhance enforceability of both state and federal regulations.
4	Enhance compliance of trawl fishermen participating in a transboundary penaeid shrimp fishery through standardization of bycatch reduction strategies.
5	Encourage states with mariculture facilities to carefully monitor these operations and require safeguards to prevent exotic species from escaping and/or diseases from entering the environment.
6	Reduce or eliminate loss and/or alteration of the habitat on which shrimp depend or degradation of water quality through pollution that would reduce shrimp production.
7	Provide a mechanism to manage rock shrimp under the fishery management plan for the shrimp fishery in the South Atlantic region.
8	Minimize impacts of the rock shrimp fishery on coral, coral reefs and live/hard bottom habitat in the South Atlantic region.
9	Implement permit and reporting requirements needed to ensure necessary data are provided by the rock shrimp industry.
10	Manage the resource to provide for higher sustainable net benefits by taking the first step in reducing the current overcapacity in the rock shrimp fishery.
11	Remove latent permits from the rock shrimp fishery and restrict future entrants so as not to exacerbate the overcapacity problem in the future.
12	Protect the interest of traditional user groups in the rock shrimp fishery. Traditional users also tend to be more familiar with management regulations pertaining to their fishery as opposed to new entrants who enter a fishery and participate infrequently.
13	Decrease fishing mortality on unmarketable small/juvenile rock shrimp with the goal of increasing future yield in the rock shrimp industry from reduced discards of small shrimp.

14	Improve enforcement of current fishery management regulations, particularly with regard to illegal fishing in the Oculina Bank HAPC, by requiring vessel monitoring systems on rock shrimp vessels.
15	Protect the interests of vessel owners who are not operators and increase compliance with management regulations by the requirement for operator permits for rock shrimp vessels.
16	Ensure that sufficient effort remains active to sustain rock shrimp fishery and infrastructure.

Appendix B: SUMMARY OF CORAL FMP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Updated July 2024

Coral FMP Goals and Objectives

- Optimize the benefits generated from the coral resource while conserving the coral and coral reefs
- Minimize adverse human impacts on coral, coral reefs and live hard bottom habitat
- Designate Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (C-HAPCs) to protect coral and live bottom habitat
- Increase public awareness of the importance and sensitivity of coral and coral reefs
- Provide a coordinated management regime for the conservation of coral and coral reefs.

Coral Fishery Management plan - 1984

- Adopt and implement a fishery management plan for coral and coral reefs within the geographical area of authority of the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Councils with the following goals:
    - to optimize benefits while conserving the management unit.
    - to generate sufficient data to assess the feasibility of harvest of coral,
    - to minimize adverse human impacts,
    - to provide special management to particular habitat areas,
    - to increase public awareness of the resource,
    - to provide a coordinated management regime.
- This fishery plan covers over 400 species of coral distributed throughout the management area including species ranging from shallow water, muddy sediment sea whips to deepwater precious corals, and from hard bottom solitary species to outer bank reef corals.
- The most significant unique stocks are the Flower Garden Banks on the Texas/Louisiana outer continental shelf and the Florida reef tract. Much of the coral occurs in hard bottom communities where it contributes habitat and food to many other species, with established recreational or commercial value, e.g., snapper, grouper, shrimp.
- In certain areas, particularly southern Florida, corals also help support important businesses such as diving and charter-boats.

Coral Amendment 1 - 1991

- Inclusion of Octocorals in the management unit as controlled species
- Restatement of optimum yield for the fishery to include octocorals
- Inclusion of a definition of overfishing
- Inclusion of a permit system to take octocorals
- Provide reporting requirements for those taking coral under the federal permit
- Inclusion of an FMP section on vessel safety considerations
- Revision of the FMP section on habitat of the stocks

Coral amendment 2 - 1994

- Defines live rock and adds it to the Coral FMP management unit.
    - Live rock is defined as living marine organisms or an assemblage thereof attached to a hard substrate (including dead coral or rock). For example, such living marine organisms associated With hard bottoms, banks, reefs, and live rock may include, but are not limited to: Sea Anemones (Phylum CNIDARIA: Class Anthozoa: Order Actina11a); Sponges (Phylum PORIFERA); Tube Worms (Phylum ANNEIJDA) :Fan worms, Feather duster worms, and Christmas tree worms: Bryozoans (Phylum BRYOZOA): Sea Squtrts (Phylum CHORDATA): Marine Algae, Mermaids fan and cups (Udotea *spp.),* Corraline algae, Green Feather, Green Grape Algae (Caulerpa spp.), and Watercress (Halimeda. *spp.)* .
    - Allowable octocorals means erect. non-encrusting species of the subclass Octocorallia. Except the prohibited sea fans *Gorgonia flabellum and G. ventalina.* including only the substrate covered by and Within one inch of the holdfast.
- Prohibit all wild live rock harvest north of Dade County Florida. and prohibit chipping throughout the jurisdiction of the South Atlantic Council immediately.
- Cap wild harvest at 485.000 pounds annually until January 1, 1996 when all wild harvest will end.
- Allow and facilitate aquaculture in the Exclusive Economic Zone .
- Require, in addition to any applicable state license or permit. a federal permit required for the harvest and possession of wild live rock in the Exclusive Economic Zone during the phase out period. Permits shall be limited to persons who have commercially landed and. Where required, reported wild live rock landings prior to the control date of February 3, 1994.
- Require a permit for the possession or harvest from aquaculture operations in the Exclusive Economic Zone. Such a permit will be required in order to harvest or possess live rock from an aquaculture site. Harvest from the area may only be done by the permittee or his written designee and an administrative fee will be authorized for the permit.
- Require a federal permit for harvest and possession of prohibited corals and prohibited live rock from the Exclusive Economic Zone for scientific, educational, and restoration purposes.
- Optimum yield (OY) for wild live rock is to be 485,000 pounds annually for the South Atlantic region where harvest is allowed during 1994 and 1995, after which it is to be zero except for that which may be allowed by permit.

Coral Amendment 3 - 1996

- Establish a live rock aquaculture permit system for the south Atlantic exclusive economic zone.
- Prohibit octocoral harvest north of cape Canaveral, Florida
- Prohibit anchoring of fishing vessels in 1the Oculina bank habitat area of particular concern.

Coral amendment 5 – 1999, Comprehensive Sustainable Fisheries Act Amendment

- Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). The Council concluded that No Action is necessary at this time.

- Optimum Yield (OY). The Council concluded that No Action is necessary at this time except the minor adjustment to the wording shown in bold ("and under live rock aquaculture permits") to incorporate Amendment 2 actions.
- Overfishing Level to meet Magnuson-Stevens Mandate. The Council concluded that No Action is necessary at this time.
- Rebuilding Timeframe. The Council concluded that No Action is necessary at this time.
- Overfishing Evaluation to meet the Current Definition. South Atlantic Corals arc listed as unknown in the NMFS September 1997 Report to Congress on Status of Fisheries of the United States. The Council concluded no additional action is required at this time.
- Add a provision to all framework procedures in all Council FMPs that allows the addition of biomass levels and age structured analyses as they become available.

Coral amendment 4 – 2000, Comprehensive EFH Amendment

- Identify Essential Fish Habitat for Coral, Coral Reefs, and Live/Hard Bottom Habitats of the South Atlantic Region.
- Establish Essential Fish Habitat-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (EFH-HAPCs) for Coral, Coral Reefs, and Live/Hard Bottom Habitats.
- Expand the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) to an area bounded to the west by 80°W. longitude, to the north by 28°30' N. latitude, to the south by 27°30' N. latitude, and to the east by the 100 fathom (600 feet) depth contour.
- Establish the following two Satellite Oculina HAPCs: (1) Satellite Oculina HAPC #1 is bounded on the north by 28°30'N. Latitude, on the south by 28°29'N. Latitude, on the east by 80°W. Longitude, and on the west by 80°3'W. Longitude, and (2) Satellite Oculina HAPC #2 is bounded on the north by 28°1 *TN.* Latitude, on the south by 28°16'N. Latitude, on the east by 80°W. Longitude, and on the west by 80°3'W. Longitude.
- No Action to Prohibit All Fishing Within the Experimental Closed Area

Coral amendment 6 – 2010, Comprehensive Ecosystem-Based Amendment 1

- Amend the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Coral, Coral Reefs, Live/Hard Bottom Habitats of the South Atlantic Region (Coral FMP) to establish Deepwater Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (CHAPCs) and prohibit the use of bottom damaging fishing gear.
- Create a Shrimp Fishery Access Area‖ (SFAA) within the proposed Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms, and Miami Terrace (Stetson- Miami Terrace) CHAPC boundaries.
- Create an allowable Golden Crab Fishing Areas within the proposed Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms, and Miami Terrace (Stetson- Miami Terrace) CHAPC and Pourtales Terrace CHAPC boundaries

Coral amendment 7 – 2012, Comprehensive Ecosystem – Based Amendment 2

- Modify management of octocorals in the South Atlantic

- Extend the South Atlantic Council's management unit for octocorals into the Gulf of Mexico Council's area of jurisdiction
- Modify the ACL for octocorals in the South Atlantic
- Modify management of SMZs off South Carolina
- Modify sea turtle release gear requirements for the snapper grouper fishery
- Amend the following FMPs to designate EFH and EFH- HAPCs: Snapper Grouper FMP; Coral FMP; Sargassum FMP

Coral amendment 9 – 2014, Comprehensive Dealer reporting Amendment

- Established a single federal dealer permit to purchase federally managed species
- Required dealer reporting forms to be submitted Weekly. Forms from trips landing between
- Sunday and Saturday must be submitted to the SRD by 11:59 P.M. local time on the following Tuesday.
- During a catastrophe, paper can be used

.Coral Amendment 8 - 2015

- Expand boundaries of the Oculina Bank HAPC
- Implement a transit provision through the Oculina Bank HAPC
- Expand the boundaries of the Stetson-Miami Terrace CHAPC
- Expand the boundaries of the Cape Lookout Lophelia Banks (Cape Lookout) CHAPC