



SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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OVERVIEW

Joint Meeting of the Golden Crab and Deepwater Shrimp Advisory Panels

September 15, 2008
Charleston Marriott
170 Lockwood Boulevard; Charleston, South Carolina

The Golden Crab and Deepwater Shrimp APs will: (A) receive an overview of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan and proposed actions and alternatives potentially impacting the golden crab and deepwater shrimp fisheries in the Comprehensive Ecosystem Amendment 1; (B) receive an overview of actions and alternatives in Shrimp Amendment 7 including the new action added at the June 2008 meeting and its associated analyses; and (C) provide input to the Council as appropriate.

A. Fishery Ecosystem Plan and Comprehensive Ecosystem Amendment 1

Development

The development of a South Atlantic Council Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) provides the first regional opportunity to compile and review available habitat, biological, social, and economic fishery and resource information for fisheries in the South Atlantic Bight ecosystem in context. Development of the plan expands and significantly updates the SAFMC Habitat Plan (SAFMC 1998) incorporating comprehensive details of all managed species (SAFMC, South Atlantic States, ASMFC, and NOAA Fisheries Highly Migratory Species and Protected Species) including their biology and food web, and economic and social characteristics of the fisheries. In addition, development of the FEP has initiated coordination and integration of information from other developing regional initiatives including the Southeast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association (SECOORA) and the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) under the National Habitat Action Plan. The FEP also updates available information on designated Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and EFH-Habitat Areas of Particular Concern and expands

the discussion and description of existing comprehensive habitat research needs to include all biological, social, and economic research needed to fully address ecosystem-based management. This FEP serves as a living source document of biological, economic, and social information for all Fishery Management Plans (FMPs). All future Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Statements would be developed through subsequent amendments to those FMPs.

Fishery Ecosystem Plan for the South Atlantic Region encompasses the following volume structure:

FEP Volume I	Introduction and Overview of FEP for the South Atlantic Region
FEP Volume II	South Atlantic Habitats and Species
FEP Volume III	South Atlantic Human and Institutional Environment
FEP Volume IV	Threats to South Atlantic Ecosystem and Recommendations
FEP Volume V	South Atlantic Research Programs and Data Needs
FEP Volume VI	References and Appendices

This first Comprehensive Ecosystem Amendment (CEA 1) is being supported by this FEP and updates EFH and EFH-HAPC information and addresses the Final EFH Rule (e.g., GIS presented for all EFH and EFH-HAPCs). Management actions proposed in the CEA include the establishment of deepwater Coral HAPCs to protect what is thought to be the largest continuous distribution (>23,000 square miles) of pristine, untouched, deepwater coral ecosystems in the world.

The CEA development process serves as the vehicle to move the Council to a new era of ecosystem-based management. While this first CEA focuses on deepwater coral ecosystem conservation and EFH related action, future FMP actions will be addressed by having a full review of management needs to initiate preparation of a new CEA to address all FMP amendment needs in the coming year. This effort will not only draw from and build on the biological, economic, and social information presented in the FEP, but will also address possible issues or future management actions identified in the FEP. This process will provide the Council with the opportunity to evaluate needed actions across multiple fisheries, evaluate the impacts of management, and facilitate development of FMP amendments or measures that could apply across FMPs.

While this iteration of the CEA has been focused on addressing immediate needs for deepwater coral conservation, the Council acknowledges the combined development of the FEP and CEA establishes a process to facilitate the transition from single species to ecosystem-based management.

Description of Alternatives

ACTION 1: Amend the Coral, Coral Reefs and Live/Hard Bottom Habitat FMP to Establish Deepwater Coral HAPCs

In October 2004, at a joint meeting of the Council's Habitat and Environmental Protection and Coral Advisory Panels six areas were proposed as new deepwater coral HAPCs. Subsequently the Council, at their December 2004 meeting, approved establishing the new deepwater coral HAPCs through the developing Comprehensive

Ecosystem Amendment. At their joint meeting in Miami in June 2006, the Habitat and Coral Advisory Panels received updated reports on recent research on the status and distribution of deepwater coral systems in the region. Based on this new information, the Panels proposed to consolidate and expand the six original areas into four. The Council subsequently voted to adopt the Panel's proposal and take action to establish the four new deepwater coral HAPCs through this Comprehensive Ecosystem Amendment. At their November 2007 meeting, the Habitat and Coral Advisory Panels recommended an additional Methane Seep Coral HAPC. In December 2007 the Council approved adding consideration of a fifth Coral HAPC the Blake Ridge Diapir (methane seep).

Alternative 1. No Action. Do not establish deepwater Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern.

Discussion

This alternative would not provide regulations to protect additional extensive deepwater coral ecosystems, however, regulations established through amendments to the Coral FMP, the Shrimp FMP and Snapper Grouper FMP, established to protect the *Oculina* HAPC, would remain in effect.

Preferred Alternative 2. Establish Deepwater Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern:

- Sub-Alternative 2a. Cape Lookout Lophelia Banks HAPC;
- Sub-Alternative 2b. Cape Fear Lophelia Banks HAPC;
- Sub-Alternative 2c. Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms, and Miami Terrace HAPC;
- Sub-Alternative 2d. Pourtales Terrace HAPC; and
- Sub-Alternative 2e. The Blake Ridge Diapir Methane Seep HAPC.

Discussion

In the deepwater coral HAPCs (Figure 2-1, CEA 1), no person may:

1. Use a bottom longline, trawls (mid-water and bottom), dredge, pot or trap.
2. If aboard a fishing vessel, anchor, use an anchor and chain, or use a grapple and chain.
3. Possess any species regulated by the coral FMP.
4. Fish for golden crab in designated areas without an approved VMS.

This alternative is based on the latest recommendation of the Habitat and Coral Advisory Panels supported by information presented in both the 2004 and 2006 reports (Appendix C and Appendix D, CEA 1) to the South Atlantic Council on deepwater coral habitat distribution in the South Atlantic Region. The Habitat and Coral Advisory Panels expanded their rationale and provided additional justification for these Coral HAPCs at their November 2007 meeting (Appendix B, CEA1). In addition, John Reed provided updated deepwater habitat distribution information that was reviewed in relationship to Deepwater Shrimp and Golden Crab Advisory Panel proposals presented at the March 2008 meeting.

ACTION 2: Amend the Coral, Coral Reefs and Live/Hard Bottom Habitat FMP to Create “Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Areas” within the proposed Coral HAPC boundaries

Alternative 1. No Action.

Preferred Alternative 2. Create an “Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Area”:

Sub-Alternative 2a. Create an “Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Area” in the Northern Golden Crab Fishing Zone within the proposed Coral HAPC boundaries;

Sub-Alternative 2b. Create an “Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Area” in the Middle Golden Crab Fishing Zone within the proposed Coral HAPC boundaries; and

Sub-Alternative 2c. Create an “Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Area” in the Southern Golden Crab Fishing Zone within the proposed Coral HAPC boundaries.

Alternative 3. Move the western boundary of the proposed Northern and Middle Zone Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Areas west to include the proposed Shrimp Fishery Access Areas.

Discussion

The Golden Crab Advisory Panel met formally and informally between January and March 2008 to develop proposals for Council consideration that would allow the fishery to continue to operate while avoiding damaging deepwater coral habitat. The Council approved bringing the alternatives developed by the Advisory Panel to public hearing to collect additional information and input on the proposals. The Advisory Panel chairman clarified at the March 2008 Council meeting that the Panel was recommending the establishment of allowable gear areas for golden crab fishing which lie within the deepwater CHAPC versus moving the boundaries. The Council requested comment on the industry proposal to establish fishing areas where the traditional fishery has operated and can continue to operate without impacting deepwater coral habitat. The Advisory Panel provided a revised recommendation at public hearing (see Appendix K, CEA 1). Panel members collaborated with Council staff to further refine those proposals to focus operation areas on traditional fishing grounds and areas which would not impact deepwater coral habitat. In order to maximize the likelihood of success, a requirement for electronic monitoring of permitted golden crab fishing vessels (e.g., require Vessel Monitoring System) is proposed as a provision to be allowed to fish in the allowable golden crab fishing areas. The Council adopted these alternatives as preferred. The Council also, at the request of industry, added a non-preferred alternative for public hearings (Alternative 3) which is a consideration of allowing fishing for golden crab in the Shrimp Fishery Access Areas.

ACTION 3: Amend the Coral FMP to Create a “Shrimp Fishery Access Area” (SFAA) within the proposed Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms, and Miami Terrace CHAPC boundaries.

Alternative 1. No Action. Do not create “Shrimp Fishery Access Areas” (SFAAs) within the proposed Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms, and Miami Terrace boundaries.

Preferred Alternative 2. Create a “Shrimp Fishery Access Area” (SFAA) (Figures 2-2, 2-3 and 2-4, CEA 1) within the proposed Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms, and Miami Terrace CHAPC boundaries, where fishing with a shrimp trawl and/or shrimp possession is allowed by any vessel holding a rock shrimp limited access endorsement and equipped with an approved vessel monitoring system (VMS).

Alternative 3. Move the west boundary of the proposed C-HAPC 6 nautical miles to the east between the following points: (a) 30 degrees 16 minutes 35.354 seconds N and (b) 26 degrees 12 minutes 56.273 seconds

Discussion

Comments provided at public hearing were reviewed by Council and evaluated the proposals developed. The Council subsequently recommended moving alternatives proposing the movement of the CHAPC boundary to the Considered but Rejected Appendix K (CEA 1). The Council reviewed and adopted an alternative developed as a follow-up to an industry recommendation provided at public hearing. The alternative, developed through cooperation with industry and representatives of the Habitat and Coral Advisory Panels, was developed to both address fishery operation concerns and the fact that a small portion of historic traditional grounds based on VMS points and industry provided royal red shrimp trawl tracks, occurred close to the western edge of the Stetson Reefs, Savannah and East Florida Lithoherms and Miami Terrace CHAPC. Alternative 2 was adopted as a preferred alternative.

ACTION 4: Amend the Golden Crab Fishery Management Plan to Require Vessel Monitoring

Alternative 1. No action. Do not require the use of an approved vessel monitoring system (VMS) by any vessel with a limited access golden crab permit.

Alternative 2. Require use of an approved vessel monitoring system (VMS) by any vessel with a limited access golden crab permit and approved crustacean traps fishing for golden crab within Allowable Golden Crab Fishing Areas within the proposed Stetson-Miami Terrace HAPC and Pourtales Terrace HAPC where fishing has occurred historically and does not impact deepwater coral habitats.

Alternative 3. Require use of an approved vessel monitoring system (VMS) by any vessel fishing with a limited access golden crab permit in the South Atlantic Council’s area of jurisdiction.

For a person aboard a fishing vessel with a limited access golden crab permit to fish for golden crab in the EEZ in South Atlantic Council’s area of jurisdiction, possess golden crab in or from the South Atlantic Council’s EEZ, off-load golden crab from the South Atlantic Council’s EEZ, or sell golden crab in or from the South Atlantic Council’s EEZ,

an approved vessel monitoring system must be on board the vessel, be in operational condition, and be turned on.

B. Shrimp Amendment 7

The APs will receive an overview of all the actions and alternatives included in Shrimp Amendment 7.

At their June 2008 meeting The Council voted to add a new action to Shrimp Amendment 7 to require VMS verification in order to renew, reinstate or transfer a rock shrimp limited access endorsement. Using proposed language submitted by the Shrimp Committee in June 2008, Council and NMFS staff added the new action and conducted the necessary analyses prior to public hearings. Analyses revealed that 21 vessels that currently have active, renewable or reinstatable limited access endorsements *do not* have VMS. Of these, 8 may not be able to support a VMS and were not active in commercial fishing over the period spanning the analysis. Some vessels, however, are large enough to be Coast Guard-registered, have derived a percentage of their revenue from the South Atlantic penaeid shrimp fishery, and do not currently have a VMS. Under the potential new VMS requirement, these 21 vessel owners would have to either (1) purchase, install and activate a VMS on their vessel in order to renew, reinstate or transfer their endorsement or (2) not comply and therefore relinquish their endorsement.

C. Provide Input to the Council

The Council requests that the Golden Crab and Deepwater Shrimp APs provide their recommendations on the Comprehensive Ecosystem Amendment I and Shrimp Amendment 7, as appropriate.