

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

Charleston, SC
September 18, 2025

The Committees approved the Habitat and Ecosystem and Shrimp Committee minutes from the June 2025 meeting and the agenda for this meeting.

Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel (HEAP) Report

Stacie Crowe, SCDNR, Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel (HEAP) Chair, delivered the July 2025 HEAP report. Council staff reviewed the HEAP workplan.

MOTION 1: APPROVE THE HEAP WORKPLAN.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEES

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Coral Amendment 11 and Shrimp Amendment 12

In September 2024 the Council began developing a joint amendment to the Coral and Shrimp FMPs to propose establishing an SFAA within the northern extension of the Oculina Habitat Area of Particular Concern (OHAPC) and incorporate updated information, including a recent mapping study. In June 2025, the Council selected Preferred Alternative 2 and approved Coral Amendment 11/Shrimp Amendment 12 for public hearings. Hearings were held in August 2025. Staff reviewed the decision document and public comment summary.

- Purpose and need
 - **The Committees confirmed that the purpose and need should not change from the approved June 2025 wording.**
- Alternative wording
 - The Committees clarified that the latitude and longitude had not changed from the proposed Coral 10 SFAA.
 - **The Committees approved the changes to the alternatives clarifying how the square nautical milage was measured.**
- Directions on the VMS ping rate:
 - The Committees clarified that no matter where the shrimpers are in the OHAPC the ping rate would be once every five minutes.
 - There will be a cost increase for shrimpers, but they will have access to the historic fishing areas again.
 - The increased resolution on fishing track location is good. The more frequently the points, the better tracking information.
 - When writing the amendment staff need to make certain to clarify that the .25 nautical mile safety buffer is utilized by some fishermen, not all.
 - **The Committees clarified the intent to retain the transit VMS communication (ping) rate in the SFAA**

- **The increased ping rate provides additional resolution on the location of shrimp vessels relative to the coral and thus ensure fishing activity is sufficiently away from the coral to prevent damage.**
- Sedimentation and protection of EFH:
 - The Committees wanted to know about any studies conducted before and after establishment of the OHAPC and the associated coral health. There is only anecdotal information available.
 - The Committees recommended that staff reach out to SCDNR for available depth and temperature sensors to investigate upwelling events.
 - Damage that occurred to deepwater coral in the vicinity of the OHAPC was most likely caused by the scallop fishery not the shrimpers.
 - **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.**
 - According to published literature, the prevailing bottom current in the proposed SFAA is North to South, unless there is an upwelling event, which is rare.
 - Upwellings are more likely to occur in the summer months, which does not coincide with the high season for rock shrimp which is from August through November.
 - There are multiple studies that show no coral in the area.
 - Shrimpers understand that you need to protect water quality to ensure healthy fisheries and shrimping plumes dissipate rapidly.
 - **Preferred Alternative 2 has a larger buffer between the SFAA and the known coral pinnacles which should minimize damage to coral.**
 - Thorough consideration has been made for all options.
 - **Upwellings are isolated and limited so between that and the additional buffer, damage to EFH should be minimized.**
- Coral and Shrimp FMP Goals and Objectives:
 - **Discuss how establishing an SFAA supports the Shrimp and the Coral FMP Goals and Objectives.**
 - **The Committees had a robust discussion on how the Goals and Objectives for both FMPs are being met. Details of the Discussion are below in Appendix 1.**
- Advisory panels
 - The Committees discussed comments that questioned why the Coral and Shrimp Advisory Panels (AP) had not been convened to comment on the amendment.
 - In March 2025 the Committees discussed convening the Coral and Shrimp Aps; however, since the proposed action is identical to the Coral 10 amendment, the Council determined that they had already received feedback from the APs.

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

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

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 NM² 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 NM² 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.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEES
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

MOTION 3: APPROVE THE ACTION IN CORAL AMENDMENT 11/SHRIMP AMENDMENT 12 FOR CONSIDERATION OF FINAL APPROVAL IN DECEMBER 2025.

APPROVED BY COMMITTEES
APPROVED BY COUNCIL

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 Committees should review this wording carefully to be sure it accurately reflects their intent prior to making the motion.

TIMING AND TASKS:

MOTION 4: ADOPT THE FOLLOWING TIMING AND TASKS:

- Staff should start collecting Space Industry information and explore the formation of a working group to explore whether development of a policy is appropriate.
 - Florida FWC staff may be interested in being involved.
- Prepare Coral Amendment 11 Shrimp Amendment 12 for consideration for final approval at the December 2025 Council meeting.

APPROVED BY COUNCIL

Appendix 1: Detailed discussion on how Coral 11 and Shrimp 12 meet the Shrimp and Coral FMP Goals and Objectives

- The joint amendment is meant to optimize both FMPs and therefore must balance meeting both FMP G&Os.
- [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.
 - Fishermen will minimize damage because they rely on the coral for a healthy fishery.
 - If there were large sets of coral, shrimpers would avoid it.
 - The permit is just to the rock shrimp fishery and use is limited.
 - Ensure that sufficient effort remains active to sustain rock shrimp fishery and infrastructure.
 - If you want the rock shrimp fishery to be profitable, they need access to the rock shrimp.
 - Shrimpers will only use the SFAA when the rock shrimp move to the area.
 - Let them be productive (meets the directives of EOs 13921 and 14276).
 - The SFAA opportunity doesn't mean there will be daily effort. Opening the area gives the shrimpers the opportunity to utilize the area if needed.
- [Coral FMP G&Os:](#)
 - Optimize the benefits generated from the coral resource while conserving the coral and coral reefs
 - Focusing effort in previously impacted zones the fishery is able to generate value from the broader coral ecosystem while also conserving known coral and coral reefs.
 - Reduce risk/conflict by allowing limited access strictly to areas shown by mapping and surveys to have no living coral remaining.
 - Minimize adverse human impacts on coral, coral reefs and live hard bottom habitat
 - Creating a buffer between fishing and known coral peaks.
 - The fishery is limited and highly regulated.
 - Effort will be variable.
 - There is no evidence of coral in this area or in the immediate adjacent areas (to a 2-meter resolution).
 - Designate Coral Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (C-HAPCs) to protect coral and live bottom habitat

- Creating the SFAA will continue to maintain strong protection on the most sensitive areas while balancing fishery access in less sensitive areas.
- Increase public awareness of the importance and sensitivity of coral and coral reefs
 - The reopening of the area could pair with outreach that could emphasize that shrimping is only allowed in carefully defined, previously impacted areas because of the coral's sensitivity. This distinction could highlight why most *Oculina* habitat remains closed.
- Provide a coordinated management regime for the conservation of coral and coral reefs.
 - Reopening this area demonstrates adaptive science-based management.
 - Balances conservation with historical fishing access.
 - Strengthens trust between scientists, managers, and the shrimp fishery.