

Overview

Law Enforcement Advisory Panel & Law Enforcement Committee

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The Law Enforcement Advisory Panel and Law Enforcement Committee will: (A) discuss LEAP recommendations on work being done to accomplish the 10-year re-evaluation of the Oculina Experimental Closed Area, (B) discuss LEAP recommendations on Snapper Grouper and Dolphin Wahoo FMP Amendments addressing the issue of transporting fillets from the Bahamas, and (C) address other business as appropriate.

A. Oculina Experimental Closed Area

Background

In April 2004, regulations were implemented through Amendment 13A that extended the restrictions on bottom fishing for the Oculina Experimental Closed Area (OECA) for an indefinite period. The amendment was developed to address the 10-year sunset provision for the closure of the area to snapper grouper fishing. In addition to extending the closure, the amendment required that the size and configuration of the OECA be reviewed within three years of the implementation date of Amendment 13A and that a 10-year re-evaluation be conducted. The Council also developed an Evaluation Plan to address needed monitoring and research, outreach, and enforcement efforts. The Council approved the OECA Evaluation Plan in March 2005. The Plan contains goals and objectives in three broad areas: Outreach, Law Enforcement, and Research/Assessment.

As part of the OECA Evaluation Plan, the Council established the Oculina Evaluation Team (OET) -- comprised of law enforcement representatives, research scientists, resource managers, commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen, outreach experts, and non-governmental organization representatives -- to review and provide recommendations for the ongoing research and monitoring, outreach, and law enforcement components of the Evaluation Plan.

The OET convened in August 21-23, 2006 in Port Canaveral, Florida to:

- Compile up-to-date accomplishments in research and monitoring, information and education projects, and law enforcement strategies and timelines outlined in the OECA Evaluation Plan.
- Review and evaluate the size and configuration of the OECA and provide recommendations to the Council.
- Provide recommendations to assist the Council in their 10-year evaluation of research and monitoring, law enforcement and outreach efforts supporting fishing regulations.

AP guidance

The Oculina Evaluation Team was originally going to convene via webinar on February 13, 2014 to initiate discussions on re-evaluation of the OECA. However, the webinar had to be re-scheduled to March 12, 2014 (1-4 p.m.) due to weather-related problems. A series of breakout groups to discuss the research (March 18th at 1 p.m.), outreach (March 13th at 9 a.m.), and law enforcement (March 14th at 9 a.m.) portions of the Evaluation Plan will be held during March. The OECA Evaluation Team's final report will be presented to the Council at their June 2014 meeting. The LEAP will review the draft report via email or webinar at a later time (but before the June 2014 Council meeting) and comment on the recommendations for this area.

B. Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 7/Snapper Grouper Amendment 33 (Attachments 1a & 1b)

Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 7/Snapper Grouper Amendment 33 proposes to allow dolphin and wahoo fillets caught recreationally to be brought into the U.S. EEZ from the Bahamas as is currently allowed for snapper grouper species. That is, the Council is considering exempting dolphin and wahoo from the regulations that require the fish to be landed with head and fins intact. The Council will also be considering related actions such as how many pounds of fillets would constitute a single fish, whether the fillets must have the skin intact, and reporting requirements. Using the decision document (*Attachment 2b*), the LEAP was asked to discuss the proposed actions and alternatives and offer recommendations to the Council. The LEAP recommendations will be presented to the Law Enforcement Committee and the Law Enforcement Committee will develop recommendations for presentation to the Council.

C. Other Business

The Council has been made aware of mounting interest in the harvest of cannonball jellyfish in federal waters of the South Atlantic to supply primarily Asian markets. Cannonball jellyfish are captured using the same gear used to target shrimp. However, shrimpers are required to use Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs), which are very effective at excluding jellyfish from their catch. Vessels equipped with shrimp nets are reportedly taking advantage of the demand for cannonball jellyfish and targeting them in Federal waters. Since shrimp are not being targeted, fishermen claim they are not required to have TEDs on their nets.

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At their February meeting, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council requested the South Atlantic Council review the document (**Attachment 2**): Framework action to define for-hire fishing in the Gulf of Mexico to determine if there are issues with private vessels operating as for-hire vessels in the South Atlantic waters in exchange for contractual services and provide feedback to the Gulf Council.

The LEAP recommendations will be presented to the Law Enforcement Committee and the Law Enforcement Committee will develop recommendations for presentation to the Council.

Snapper Grouper Regulatory Amendment 21 proposes to change the Minimum Stock Size Threshold (MSST) for a number of species with low natural mortality rates. At the December 2013 meeting, the Council directed staff to prepare this amendment and the Council will be approving for formal review at the March 2014 meeting. This document (**Attachment 3**) will be emailed prior to the meeting.

The LEAP recommendations will be presented to the Law Enforcement Committee and the Law Enforcement Committee will develop recommendations for presentation to the Council.