

# OVERVIEW

## Protected Resources Committee Meeting

**March 3, 2015**

King and Prince Hotel  
201 Arnold Road  
St. Simons, GA

The Protected Resources Committee will meet to discuss South Atlantic protected species, and receive updates on associated regulatory/management actions that the Council should be knowledgeable of when managing South Atlantic fisheries. SERO Protected Resource Division (PRD) staff will report on (A) protected resources-related updates for the South Atlantic region. Next, Council staff will brief the Committee on (B) the NMFS advanced notice of rulemaking and request for information for corals. The Protected Resources Committee will also receive a presentation on (C) the NMFS Policy Directive for ESA/MSA Integration, followed by a discussion of items to be included in the Integration Agreement between the Council and the SERO PRD. Following, the Council will be briefed by PRD staff on (D) the proposed modification to the North Atlantic right whale critical habitat. The Committee will discuss potential action for each item, provide guidance to staff, and address issues under Other Business as needed.

### **A. Protected resources-related Updates (Attachment 1)**

Staff from the SERO Protected Resources Division (PRD) will provide the Committee with an update on protected resources issues in the South Atlantic region, including the ongoing formal consultation for Coastal Migratory Pelagics.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Provide input on the consultation and updates, discuss, and take action as necessary.

### **B. Advanced Notice of Rulemaking and Request of Information for Corals (Attachments 2a/2b)**

On January 13, 2015, NMFS published an advanced notice of rulemaking and request of information on corals (**Attachment 2a**). The notice alerts agencies that NMFS is considering proposing protective regulations for the recently listed coral species and also requests information and input to help identify actions that could impact the threatened status of the corals in addition to information about on-going conservation efforts. Five of the 20 recently listed coral species can be found in the South Atlantic region: lobed star coral (*Orbicella annularis*), mountainous star coral (*O. faveolata*), boulder star coral (*O. franksi*), pillar coral (*Dendrogyra cylindrus*), and rough cactus coral (*Mycetophyllia ferox*). These newly listed species are in addition to two species already listed as threatened: elkhorn coral (*Acropora palmate*) and staghorn coral (*A. cervicornis*). Council staff will review the notice and request for information, and provide a draft comment letter (**Attachment 2b**) to be submitted from the South Atlantic Council.

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Review draft comment letter and provide input as necessary. Approve comment letter for submission.

**C. ESA/MSA Integration Agreement (Attachments 3a-3c)**

In January 2015, NMFS released a policy directive on ESA/MSA Integration (**Attachment 3a**). The directive implemented recommendations from the ESA Working Group (**Attachment 3b**), which was convened by the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC) and the Council Coordination Committee (CCC) to make recommendations on how to improve the involvement of regional management councils in the ESA section 7 consultation process. The ESA Working Group also provided recommendations on how to improve transparency in data used for ESA jeopardy determinations, but these will be addressed by NMFS in a separate document.

Council staff will provide an overview of the policy directive on ESA/MSA Integration. With Council and PRD staff, the Committee will discuss items and topics to be included in the Integration Agreement between the South Atlantic Council and SERO PRD in regards to coordination with and involvement of the Council in section 7 consultations (**Attachment 3c**).

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Review draft list of items and topics to be included in the Integration Agreement with PRD and provide input as necessary. Provide direction to staff on content and timing for the Integration Agreement.

**D. Proposed Modification to North Atlantic Right Whale Critical Habitat (Attachments 4a/4b)**

On [date], NMFS published a proposed rule to revise the critical habitat for North Atlantic Right Whales (**Attachment 4a**). PRD staff will review the proposed modifications to the critical habitat in the South Atlantic region (**Attachment 4b**).

**REQUIRED COMMITTEE ACTION:** Discuss and take action as necessary.