

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

HABITAT PROTECTION AND ECOSYSTEM-BASED MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Webinar

March 2, 2021

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Duane Smith
Dewey Hemilright
Tony Dilernia
Patrick O'Shaughnessy

Dr. Jack McGovern
Dr. Clay Porch
Rick DeVictor
Dr. Erik Williams
Dr. Genny Nesslage

Other observers and participants attached.

The Habitat Protection and Ecosystem-Based Management Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened via webinar on Tuesday, March 2, 2021, and was called to order by Chairman Steve Poland.

MR. POLAND: Good morning, everyone. We're going to start this morning with the Habitat Protection and Ecosystem-Based Management Committee. Before we get started, just a reminder of everyone who serves on this committee, and it's myself as Chair, Carolyn Belcher as Vice Chair, Bob Beal, Mel Bell, Chester Brewer, Tim Griner, Kerry Marhefka, Jessica McCawley, Art Sapp, and Spud Woodward, but, as always, if you don't serve on the committee, you are more than welcome to participate in the discussion.

The first order of business this morning is Approval of the Agenda. Does anyone have any modifications to the agenda? Hearing none, does anyone have any opposition to approval of the agenda? Hearing none, the agenda stands approved.

Next, we'll move on to Approval of the December 2020 Committee Minutes. Does anyone have any modifications to those draft minutes? Does anyone have any opposition to approval of those draft minutes? Hearing none, the minutes stand approved, and so we'll move into our first item of business, and we'll review the scoping comments and the decision document for Coral Amendment 10, and hopefully, by the end of this discussion, we can move this item on to approval for public hearings, and so I will turn it over to Roger. Whenever you're ready, Roger.

MR. PUGLIESE: Thank you. What I'm projecting is Attachment A1b, and it's the decision document for the Coral Amendment 10, and the first actual action was to discuss scoping comments, and we did actually hold scoping meetings on February 8 and February 9. However, we did not receive any comments during those, and we have not received any written comments, and so we'll move directly into the decision document.

This document, a revised version was provided to members, primarily to get -- You will see, when we get into a couple of the additional graphics, that I think it really provides a better indication of the differences between those two alternatives and how significant of a revision the industry made to adjust to what is now the preferred alternative.

With that said, we'll move through the decision document, and we'll jump to -- This is the objectives for the meeting today, to review and approve the draft purpose and need statements, to review and action and alternatives and make modifications, as appropriate. We've already mentioned the scoping comments, and then to retain or modify the selected preferred alternative and consider timing for the amendment.

I'm not going to go over a lot of the frontend detail, and this is pretty much a lot of the original background that was presented to the council when they determined to move forward with scoping, the history of the industry coming forward the council at the end of the development of Coral Amendment 8, the finalization, with some additional recommendations.

It was already finalized. However, there were some additional recommendations in 2014 on the boundary and on areas that they had fished that were not able to be addressed, and this is a follow-up all the way back to some of that original discussion and then some follow-up discussion by the Deepwater Shrimp Advisory Panel, over time, and this is has been brought back to the council,

after holding advisory panel meetings for the Deepwater Shrimp, Coral, and Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panels.

The material here does identify the operations of the rock shrimp fishery, and the biggest highlight on that is the fact that the industry is a variable fishery over time, and I think that's one of the points that the fishermen made, and there's different times where it's operating in different locations and in this northern extension that was created. There were times that -- Sometimes there is a slight movement to the further west, on that fishing area, and the industry did reach a level of 2.7 million pounds in 2017.

This is a quick image showing the different components that were added to the Oculina Bank HAPC in the Coral Amendment 8, with the northern extension and the western component, which now constitutes the overall Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern. I see that Jessica has her hand raised.

MR. POLAND: Go ahead, Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Good morning. When I was going through some of this background, I noted here that it says that the industry came forward after the amendment was finalized, and it's in the -- It's further down, and, on my version, it's right above Table 2, where it says, "during development of Coral Amendment 8", and it's that paragraph. Anyway, in that paragraph, there's a sentence that says, "However, after approval of Coral Amendment 8, some rock shrimp fishermen expressed concern".

I have a timeline prepared and minutes from past council meetings highlighted, if you would like that, but the industry came forward before that previous amendment was finalized, and so I'm just trying to correct the timeline here. It wasn't like those folks only came forward after that previous amendment was approved.

MR. PUGLIESE: Thank you, Jessica, and this is -- It was a continuous discussion with industry, because the amendment actually had a couple of different iterations of changes as we were moving through that, and so I think it was emphasizing that -- So, yes, we can make sure that it's clear that it wasn't just something that was dropped out of the sky, and, no, this is something that came up as the discussions were happening, but then there was additional follow-up after the amendment to address the same issue, and so, yes, that is a consideration, but it was an ongoing dialogue with industry on adjustments and the possibility of shifting, and the amendment did move forward before this last iteration and discussion could be addressed. Thank you. Any other comments or questions about that?

MR. POLAND: Thank you for that, Jessica. If you do share anything with Roger, I would just ask Roger and council staff just to share that with the committee and the rest of the council.

MR. PUGLIESE: Okay. Will do. So that last point I made is that it ultimately ended up with the Oculina Bank, the extended area of the full Oculina Bank HAPC, which now covers the full range of distribution of oculina coral in our region, from north to south, and so what we do have is the information that provided some foundation of the discussion, looking back to some of the historic information that got worked up after the amendment data was finalized, with VMS data just showing how much was actually -- Some activity that was occurring within the area, and it did

highlight that there was -- Over time, there had about 1.76 percent of what were considered fishing points, which, in rock shrimp, the vessel is traveling between two and four knots.

However, in 2014, it had been noted that they had been fishing closer in that area, and it constituted a larger percentage. Now, it was a lower area, but it was more significant for that one specific area of concern, and just an overall image that does at least give you an image of the concentration of some of those areas. Now, this did include all points and all fishing and non-fishing activities.

I want to jump down to, I guess, the first matter at-hand, and that's the discussion of purpose and need. We do have the amendment timing, which right now we had the scoping meetings in February, and we're looking at public input and potential approval here for public hearings, and then that would be spring 2021, and then the consideration of possible approval for you in June.

That first action addresses the purpose and need that has been developed through collaboration with the IPT. The IPT -- A lot of the changes and adjustments and everything are integrated directly into this document, and so there's not a lot of stand-alone individual -- I think this addresses, in working with Frank Helies, we were able to integrate most everything into the document as it stands, and so the first discussion is the draft purpose and need.

The purpose that has been identified, the purpose of Coral Amendment 10 is to create a Rock Shrimp Fishery Access Area along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the Oculina Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern, where rock shrimp permit holders may fish for and possess rock shrimp. The need for the action is the need for Coral Amendment 10 is to increase socioeconomic benefits to the rock shrimp fishermen by increasing access to the historic rock shrimp fishing grounds, while maintaining protection of the oculina deepwater coral ecosystems.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thank you, Roger. From my perspective, that looks fine. Does the committee have any thoughts? I know, typically, we like to go through the decision document and then come back to the purpose and need. Does the committee feel strongly one way or another? If I don't hear anything, I'll just assume the committee is fine with the proposed purpose and need, and we can move on.

MR. PUGLIESE: Okay. That moves us directly into the proposed actions and alternatives.

MR. POLAND: One second, Roger. Go ahead, Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, Steve. Just a question, and so, obviously, I'm kind of getting up-to-speed on South Atlantic Council actions, and so we refer to this -- If you go back up to the purpose and need, the "Rock Shrimp Fishery Access Area" in all capital letters, and are we actually defining this as a specific fishing access area, or are we just reopening the shrimp grounds to this area? It seems odd to kind of have a proper noun for this area.

MR. PUGLIESE: It's an actual location. We've created rock shrimp access areas, or shrimp access areas, in the other deepwater coral HAPCs, and so a Shrimp Fishery Access Area is a specific designation, and what it does is provides an area within the Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern that allows only fishing for -- In this case, only fishing for rock shrimp, and all the other regulations on gears, on anchoring, and everything are retained. The intent is just to address this specific action, and so, yes, it is actually a designation.

MR. STRELCHECK: All right. Thank you for the clarification. I appreciate it.

MR. PUGLIESE: Any other clarifications or points? If not, I will move to the proposed actions and alternatives. The Alternative 1 is no action, and it essentially just is identifying the existing regulations, which identify that no person may fish for or possess rock shrimp that are from the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern, and no person may use -- Then it's all the other regulations, the bottom longline, bottom trawl, dredge, pot, or trap. If aboard a fishing vessel, no person may anchor, use an anchor and chain, or use a grapple and chain. That's your no action alternative, status quo, essentially.

Your preferred alternative is to establish the Rock Shrimp Fishery Access Area along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the Oculina Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern. It would allow shrimp vessels with a valid commercial permit for rock shrimp to bottom trawl within the established area bounded by the following coordinates. No person may use a bottom longline, dredge, pot, or trap. If aboard a vessel, no person may anchor, use an anchor and chain, or use a grapple and chain. I think Chester has a question.

MR. POLAND: Go ahead, Chester.

MR. BREWER: It's more of a statement, really. The last two sentences, I kind of think they need to be tightened up a little bit, something along the lines of a vessel fishing in this area may not use bottom longline, dredge, pot, or trap, nor shall an anchor and chain, or grapple and chain, be used in this area. Right now, it's a little confusing to me, if you're just talking about this one area, or are you talking about Oculina, or are you talking about people that are fishing outside of this area, and maybe it's clear to everybody else, but I had a little problem with it when I was first reading it.

MR. PUGLIESE: Chester, what you've got is wording that is essentially from the way the regulations read, and what it's trying to do here is essentially say that you can shrimp with a valid commercial permit in this rock shrimp fishing area, but it retains all the other existing regulations, the prohibitions on the use of bottom longline, dredge, pot, and trap, within that specific area, and so it's addressing it.

In the entire area, it still all exists, but what you're trying to do is be very prescriptive that you're allowing the shrimping within that one zone, but, within there, all the other existing regulations, and this is the wording that's been pulled out, and this was pulled out of the way the rules are written for the regulations and the prohibitions that exist now, and so that's what it's trying to do, is it's trying to specify the allowance for rock shrimping, but then the continued prohibition of all the other actions within there, and I think Monica may clarify that.

MR. POLAND: Go ahead, Monica.

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: In looking at these alternatives again, I think we need to -- I agree with Chester, and maybe this gets to Andy's question earlier too, and I think we need to make it clear exactly what we're doing, because the no action needs to be changed a little bit, because there is not a Rock Shrimp Fishery Access Area, and so no action needs to say that, and then we can say what no person -- That no person may fish for or possess, the other language.

I think we could probably tighten up and explain better in the Preferred Alternative 2 and then in Alternative 3, exactly kind of along the lines of what Chester was saying, just to make it clear to the public, because, when you first look at this, it almost looks like we were expanding the Oculina Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern, but that's not what we're doing, and so I think, with this discussion, if you give the IPT a little bit of leeway, we can refine that even further, unless you want to discuss it more now and refine it now.

MR. PUGLIESE: I think Mel has a comment or a question on this, and I'm sure the IPT can fine-tune it, with the guidance that both Monica and Chester have provided.

MR. POLAND: Go ahead, Chester. Then Mel.

MR. BREWER: I do want to make it clear though that I do think that what we are attempting to accomplish in Alternative 2 is the right way to go, and I just had a little trouble with the way it was being expressed.

MR. POLAND: All right. Mel, go ahead.

MR. BELL: I was just going to say that I think we understand what we're trying to do, and Chester and Monica are right, and I would trust their eyes on this, from a wording perspective, and so I am comfortable with -- Since we understand what the intent is, allowing the IPT to work to make the language a little clearer and more direct, as they have pointed out, so there's no confusion at all, and I get that it was brought over from the regulations or whatever, but I am fine, myself, with allowing the IPT the ability to clarify that language.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thank you, Mel. I don't see any problem with letting the IPT work with this language a little bit. Is that sufficient direction, Roger?

MR. PUGLIESE: Yes, that's fine, and I understand that, absolutely, it's that game you play with trying to put the rule, the regulations, in there, versus a more commonsense understanding, because it can -- If we can get a little latitude to create that, I think then it will be easier to make it clearer what the intent is of the area and then that those allowances, or those prohibitions, are clear in that specific area, and, also, the no action, that nothing exists right now, and so that can be clarified too, and so yes.

That would apply to this Preferred Alternative 2, and, also, in the way the wording is written, this is based on coordinates provided back in 2014, and the Alternative 3 is providing 2013, and somewhere within there -- Originally, I think we had it on the table identified, but somewhere we just need to make sure it's clear that those two were -- Because the wording right now is the same, because we didn't include the origin of the coordinates, and I think that needs to be -- That can be clarified, too.

Let me -- I guess what would help is the discussion following it provides some context for it, and then what I can do is touch on the new graphics, which I think really clarify the differences between the alternatives. The Alternative 1 essentially would retain protections that exist within the Oculina Habitat Area of Particular Concern already in protecting the system. The second is based on coordinates, and this is where -- The wording is here, but it's not up in the alternative, and I

don't know how we can make sure that it's understood, based on coordinates provided in 2014 regarding the extent of where the fishing occurred in the area.

What we have here is then the information relative to the individual preferred alternatives, and this one gives a good indication, and these are the exact coordinates, and the fishermen coordinates are provided, 1 through 6, and the existing standing point coordinates in the HAPC that are in the rule are the rest of the boundary, and that has some adjustments to make sure that we had those track exactly what is in the rule, as well as in a format which is degrees, decimals, and minutes, that was recommended to be able to be put into rule.

What you see with Preferred Alternative 2 is that, in the original document, it just had a general width of the overall area. This, I think, gives you a good indication that you have widths from a narrow area, from 183 meters, all the way up to -- I think the highest in this area is 692 meters, and so it's a very narrow band along here, and it really is addressing those times where the shrimp just fluctuate into the area.

If you go into the more detailed area, and then, also, in comparison, the overall width of the northern extension is between 6,700 meters and 1,500 meters, and so that's relative to those widths that I have identified for the area, but, if you look at then the mapping relative to it, what you see is the area that was mapped in 2017, in the yellow areas, are showing that that's fairly low-relief habitat along the edge, and you see the one area in the northern area that was mapped that shows the high relief, and what has happened is the intent to push that further offshore, and so that's why those coordinates were adjusted by industry to move it away, further away, from the area. You also have it away from the only other area that's been mapped in the southern portion of the area.

Now, when you look at the Alternative 3, this is where you do see the differences, that width is the same for both, but, when you move in here, this is where the high-relief habitat -- In Alternative 3, it was actually all the way to 438 meters, and it reduced about 300 meters, and you're seeing between a reduction of probably 300 to 400 meters along the boundary, each one of these points, to move it further offshore, and so those are the clear differences.

It does show a really clear difference, and then you can see here, in Alternative 2, how that line does go right up against the base of the tapering on the pinnacle systems in Alternative 3, and so that was taken into consideration by industry when they went back and looked at those coordinates and then provided adjusted ones. Again, even in this, you can see those alternatives, and that's why they were shifted hundreds of meters offshore, to address that issue.

A follow-up on the advisory panel meetings, and this was highlighted earlier, but the Deepwater Shrimp Advisory Panel met in November and did support the Preferred Alternative 2 that's been provided. The Coral Advisory Panel met at the same time, and they approved a motion for no action and leaving that as the buffer to protect the area.

The Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel was a little mixed, in terms of having the same concerns about the modification and the low percentage of historical effort, but then that there's still low-relief habitat, potentially, along that bounded area, and, as I said, the only thing that was shown on the mapping is that that was low-relief habitat, and that didn't necessarily mean there wasn't some other low-relief corals within that zone, but, that said, there were still some members that thought that, given the historical extent of the fishing area, that they potentially supported the

fishing industry. The Law Enforcement was provided it, and they did not have any specific comment at this time. That brings us down to -- There were no specific scoping comments, and so that brings us down to the actions and alternatives discussion.

MR. POLAND: Thank you for that, Roger, and thank you for those additional figures that came in late, and that really helped me really understand how much area we are actually talking about and really show the difference between the two alternatives. Does the committee have any comments? We have already selected a preferred alternative for this action, and so now it's up to us to consider AP input, if we want to make any modifications to either our preferred or the actions, and, if there no changes, then we need to have a discussion about advancing this on to scoping hearings, or public hearings. Excuse me. Chester, go ahead.

MR. BREWER: **With the proviso that those two sentences that caused me a little bit of concern are going to be modified, merely to clear up their meaning, I would like to move that we move this to scoping, approve it and move it to scoping.**

MR. POLAND: Thank you, Chester. There's a motion on the floor. Is there a second?

MR. BREWER: I'm sorry. **I meant to say public hearing.** I'm sorry, I apologize.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Second.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thank you, Jessica. Monica, go ahead.

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: I had a couple of questions. If you could scroll back to the purpose and need, Roger. I think we need to revise this a little bit, and perhaps you could give the IPT, again, a little license to do this, but, for example, in the purpose, it states the purpose of Coral Amendment 10 is to create a Rock Shrimp Fishery Access Area along the eastern edge of the Oculina. That almost sounds like a done deal, and you have done this to create this access area, where, actually, I think better wording is you are considering whether to allow rock shrimping along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the Oculina area, and so that's one comment I had.

Then, in the need for action, if you look at it, the last part of that sentence is -- Well, I will read the first part as well. The need for it is to increase socioeconomic benefits to rock shrimp fishermen, by increasing access to historic rock shrimp fishing grounds, and then my focus is on the last clause here, the "while maintaining protection of the Oculina deepwater coral ecosystems".

There's not much in this decision document, and maybe the larger amendment is going to address this more, but we do have not much in the discussion about the protection of the corals. You've got, in the document, discussion from the Coral AP that they were concerned about sedimentation, due to the plume from the fishing gear, and that sedimentation going over to the coral habitat, and then, right after that sentence, and it's on page 5, but, in subsequent council discussions, members indicated concern over potential interaction of the gear and juvenile deepwater snapper grouper species, which are known to inhabit the base of the coral habitats and mounds found along the eastern boundary.

I think that there should be some discussion, whether the council wants to develop it today or you want to take it to public hearing and then discuss it further in June, but there should be some

discussion of these concerns, especially since your need is to protect the Oculina deepwater coral ecosystems.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thank you, Monica. For the first part of your comment, for the purpose, would it suffice to make remove “create” and replace it with something like “creation of”, or maybe “consideration of creation of a Rock Shrimp Fishery Access Area”?

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: Well, I think you could say, instead of -- You could strike “create” and then insert “consider whether to allow rock shrimping along the eastern edge of the northern extension of the Oculina Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern”. There’s a variety of ways that you could phrase it, like “consider whether to allow the rock shrimp fishery to fish along the eastern edge”. You know what I mean, and I think there’s probably a couple of ways that we could go about it.

MR. POLAND: Basically, just get away from the definite statement.

MS. SMIT-BRUNELLO: Yes.

MR. POLAND: For your second comments, for the need, I would certainly ask the committee to provide some comment on the concern with sedimentation and pluming and impacts to juvenile snapper grouper species. Jessica, go ahead.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Go ahead and go to Andy first. I’m trying to look up something for that second thing that Monica brought up.

MR. POLAND: All right. No problem. Andy, go ahead.

MR. STRELCHECK: Monica has partly addressed my concern, and so, right now, in the regulations, there are shrimp fishery access areas, and so I think we need to move away from specifying the creation, or the establishment, of a rock shrimp fishing access area and focus on the kind of expansion or addition to the existing shrimp fishery access areas, which all pertain to rock shrimp permit holders, but I just wanted to emphasize that, and I think the IPT could certainly rework the alternatives accordingly, to ensure that that kind of matches up with the existing regulations.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thank you, Andy. Is that sufficient direction there, Roger, for the IPT to work on the purpose and the alternatives?

MR. PUGLIESE: Yes, and there are no rock shrimp fishery access areas, and there are shrimp fishery access areas on the other one, and they’re actually for -- They provide access by the royal red shrimp fishery, and so it’s a tool that’s been used for the shrimp fishery, the deepwater shrimp fishery, but in the Oculina Bank there aren’t any, and so this would actually be establishing a new shrimp fishery access area, but I think the guidance on how to clarify the wording -- I did want to make a quick comment to Monica’s about maintaining protection of the deepwater coral ecosystems.

One of the intents of retaining the existing boundaries is that you retain all the other regulations that are in place for the area to protect those habitats from anchoring, et cetera. In addition, it also

retains the character of it also being an essential fish habitat Habitat Area of Particular Concern, and so that boundary is significant, in terms of other activities in the area, and, also, I think it was also to address the fact that, in the adjustments of the area by the industry, the consideration was to try to reduce any of the impact on any of those systems, and so there's just some points.

Yes, there was -- In the original scoping document, there was an extensive description of the deepwater -- The high-relief habitats and the associated species, et cetera, those images that I showed of the high areas, and that actually is in the scoping document, and some of that information will either be included by reference or added directly into the public hearing document, also. Also, the detailed information, some of the detailed information, and then also references to the original habitat information, or species information, in Coral Amendment 8 is being integrated into what would be a public hearing draft.

MR. PUGLIESE: All right. Thank you for that, Roger. Jessica, are you ready?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and I can't lay my hands on some of the historic documents to address Monica's second point, and I had also underlined those portions of the decision document that she brought up about potential interaction with gear and juvenile deepwater shrimp species. I know that -- I can find that this was brought up by the AP, and I can't exactly find where it was brought up by the committee or the council members, but I can be prepared, at the next meeting, to talk about that a little bit more.

Remember that the AP brought up some concerns, like you mentioned, about the plume, but there was no definite area. They just guessed a one-mile area that might be best in thinking of trying to keep the nets away the plume, and I was looking back to some of the information, and these folks use VMS, and that's how we have the tracks, but I can't lay my hands on exactly what we need here, and so I could be ready at the next meeting with that.

MR. POLAND: Thank you, Jessica. I'm not sure if there is any science out there on plumes from shrimp trawls and dredges, and I know there's some, but, as far as the area of influence and that kind of stuff, I'm not sure, and so that might be beneficial to have for June, for our discussion, and also to include in the subsequent amendment. Mel, go ahead.

MR. BELL: I was just going to say that, during the joint AP meeting, there was a lot of discussion from the fishermen, in terms of how they fish the gear and how they utilize the VMS, to know exactly where they are, and there was discussion about, well, you might know where the vessel is, but not necessarily where the gear is, but then there was a lot of discussion about how they were confident about where the gear is, and there was also some speculation on it depended on the currents and how you work the currents and what the currents were doing and what they were running, in terms of where a plume might go, but I think the thing that really stuck with me was the fact that we do require them to utilize this VMS.

VMS is a tool that has multiple benefits, and one of the benefits is that they know -- Again, from previous VMS data that we've utilized, they know where they are, and they know -- They have a good of a sense as they can of exactly where their gear is and how it's fishing, and they have -- They certainly have a desire to stay off of the bottom that they don't want to be on, and so that's what I recall.

The council maybe hasn't discussed that a lot, but I don't know -- Like you said, Steve, I don't know that there was a lot of hard data on anything, and it was -- I suppose the hardest data would be the VMS tracks and the VMS and the fishermen's understanding of how they utilize their gear and how they work it, but certainly conditions vary from day to day or fishing periods over time, and so that's kind of hard to say exactly what might happen, in terms of plume movement and that sort of thing, but that's what I just recall from the -- There was a good bit of discussion at the AP meeting over this topic.

MR. POLAND: Thank you for that, Mel. Yes, that was my recollection, too. They spent a lot of time discussing how the gear is fished, relative to position of the boat and that kind of stuff. To the interaction with the snapper grouper species, juvenile species, Roger, is there any observer data or information on bycatch in this fishery, to really get an idea of what species they might be interacting with?

MR. PUGLIESE: We actually are including some of the historic bycatch information in the documents that we're developing right now, but, really, there's not a lot, and, if I go back to the discussion on the juveniles, it gets to -- I think I will go all the way back to I think when Ben Hartig raised the issue of how they may be closely associated with the bases, some of those areas there, and so I think, if there's information that exists -- When I mentioned that detailed discussion and description of the habitats, of the pinnacles themselves and the areas right on the pinnacles, it does have information.

If you go back into the scoping document, the connection back into those descriptive two northern and southern parts that have been mapped, and ROVs that have been done on it, it does show some of the use by some of the council-managed species in those areas that are closely associated with the pinnacles themselves, and so I think, when it comes down to that information, that is probably the most that we have, especially relative to the area. I think the intent is just to ensure that you stay as far away from any of the high-relief habitats that you possibly can, and I think that's maybe as much information that we have relative to the species use of those different areas.

MR. POLAND: Okay. Thank you, Roger. Jessica, go ahead.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I just forgot to mention, when I raised my hand the last time, that I just wanted to make it clear that the motion that Chester made about taking this out -- To me, it would be taking it out including the modifications that we've made today and some more that might come from the IPT as they look at the purpose and need statements and rewording of -- I believe it was the end of Alternative 2, and so I just wanted to make it clear that it's as modified.

MR. POLAND: Thank you for that, Jessica.

MR. BREWER: I agree with that, Steve.

MR. POLAND: Okay. All right. I think that was my assumption as well, but certainly we need to make it clear. All right. Since we're at the motion, is there any more discussion on the document itself? Roger, do you feel clear in the direction provided to staff and the IPT today?

MR. PUGLIESE: Yes, and I think it's clear what the intent is and the modification that needs to be made by the IPT to track the council's intent, and I just went ahead and included "Coral

Amendment 10”, but that should be good enough. I think the intent is clear, and the direction is clear, and we just need to tighten up some of the language, some of the material, some of the supporting information to move that forward.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thank you, Roger.

MR. PUGLIESE: All I was going to say is, in doing this then, I guess the issue of retaining the preferred alternative as it stands is part of the intent at this time, and just for clarification, and I’m sure that’s what the intent is, but I want to make sure we clarify that on the record.

MR. POLAND: Yes, I believe so. I didn’t hear any comments from the committee otherwise. Jessica?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, that would be my intent, to retain the preferred as-is.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thank you. **We have a motion on the board to approve Coral Amendment 10 for public hearing, as modified, and it’s been seconded.** Is there any more discussion? **Is there any opposition to the motion? Hearing none, the motion stands approved.** Thank you for that, Roger.

Next, and we’ll let Roger get finished up with Coral Amendment 10, we’re going to move on to FEP II Roadmap Update and Discussion, and this was an agenda item that was on our committee meeting agenda for December, but we just ran short of time, and we have bumped this to March. The purpose of this is to review the roadmap.

If you recall, with FEP II, there’s a two-year review of the roadmap and implementation, and it comes back to the council every two years to review the progress and for us to have a discussion and provide guidance on the next two years under the roadmap. Today, we’re looking for just some general discussion and guidance from the committee to Roger to take to the Habitat AP to further develop and flesh out the next two years of the roadmap, and so it looks like you have your presentation up, Roger, and so take it away when you’re ready.

MR. PUGLIESE: Okay. Thank you. I am going to try to focus on the highlights, and there’s a lot of parts and pieces moving in here and additional guidance and action to move forward, and some things that are being finalized right now, which really will affect a lot of some key components of what is intended from the ecosystem plan and the roadmap itself.

The update really draws from advisory panel members’ and other regional partners’ input over the last number of years. We’ve had discussions, through breakout sessions and different components, to try to address the specific areas through 2018 and 2019, and even initiated in 2020, through input from NOAA, as well as state and regional partners, to address actions that were identified within the area.

The FEP Roadmap, what it did is it pulled from the implementation plan and tried to address what looked like low-hanging fruit areas that may be able to be considered within the next couple of years. The intent was that it took the policies and then identified components of those that were actually actions that potentially could be accomplished within the timeframe, and so I what I wanted to do is just walk through the individual chapters and just at least hit some of the highlights.

I think what comes up is that there's some that connect across these different areas, but I would like to at least touch on those, and then we can get back to a broader discussion.

Under Chapter 1, it really got into the council's policy on food webs and connectivity. Some of the key focuses had to do with the actions relative to forage fisheries, and one of the most significant actions is the prey-predator composition information and the comprehensive diet matrix that was developed for the South Atlantic ecosystem EwE model, and it's going to provide the foundation for us to be able to clarify some of the specific -- The entire array of prey, as well as detailed information on the forage and how those interact with the council-managed species, and so it does provide a good moving forward.

With the area of considering food web indicators, one of the things that we still have in the works is the development of the South Atlantic ecosystem status report, and I did get an update on that. The report is essentially complete, and it will be reviewed, and they are planning on reviewing the components at the upcoming Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel meeting, and the actual document may be complete by then, and so that was a heads-up on how far that has come, and the hope is that some of this will actually provide the foundation for some of these recommendations on indicators that can be used by the council in advancing this.

In addition to that, one of the other aspects of indicators that's a crosswalk, and one of the reasons that I'm reaching back to our partners in the LCC and the Southeast Connectivity Adaptation Strategy and the conservation blueprint is that there were actually indicators that were developed for some of the regional components on estuary as well as marine, and maybe there's going to be a crosswalk that we can actually draw from, and so that's something that hopefully we can work on and coordinate as we come up, and maybe it's a springboard from this next coming AP and then into the year.

In addition, the food web and connectivity, and hopefully the climate vulnerability assessment will help provide some information on connections between the different systems. Work that has been done in the past that provided the foundation for some of this was working with the SEAMAP fishery-independent data. When I say SEAMAP data, what it really is is the SEAMAP system data that includes MARMAP and SEAMAP and SEFIS data, and it provided understanding of different species patterns, and we were trying to align those with what we know relative to habitat that's been mapped, relative to the information being collected, and it's starting to create some of the foundational information that would support this.

In addition, our collaboration with partners like SECOORA have been funding the FACT network, the opportunity to link the information on acoustic movement patterns, et cetera, to understand how the different species are moving through our systems.

In addition, the integration of time series of primary productivity, and the last point on the final one, on the food web, had to do with the integration of things such as primary productivity and chlorophyll into the ecosystem model, and it's advancing some of that information and connectivity.

Under the Climate Vulnerability and Fisheries chapter, it addressed things such as beginning to understand the distribution of those species, and, again, hopefully, when we get the information on additional species information, we can apply that to understand, and especially this broader

scope of the coordination between our Atlantic partners, and the climate scenario planning core team has been established. That group will provide focus and discussion on goals, objectives, and process that will be working with all the partners to determine how you apply a lot of it, and a lot of it has the foundation of drawing on what's been provided in the past on climate vulnerability assessment, and so I think it's going to be really critical.

Again, an update on that is we have -- They are going to be able to present, hopefully, the results also at the -- It is completed, and it's supposed to be presented at the April advisory panel meeting also.

One thing that connects into the broader sense of all these different components of the climate is that there will be the climate science, coastwide science, workshop, and it has been rescheduled, finally, to begin to have the discussions on what has been accomplished through NOAA Fisheries, the connection between the different surveys, and the opportunity to make sure that we understand how we'll be able to track moving species within the systems and what is in place right now, and that's been rescheduled for August of this year.

On developing the effects of variability, and hopefully the opportunity to integrate into stock assessments again, we need the baseline information from the climate vulnerability, and hopefully we're going to be able to advance that and be able to go further. I think, also, the movement on the South Atlantic ecosystem model, the Ecopath with Ecosim model, and the opportunity into the future to build the Ecospace model, does provide the opportunity to link the environmental and ecosystem and species information.

That brings us to Marine Aquaculture. The aquaculture -- Without the real focus on aquaculture, we've moved away from a lot of our discussions on aquaculture, because of the uncertain status of what was going on. However, there is activity going on, with the creation of aquaculture locations in other regions.

As part of the effort with the CCC Habitat Workgroup, we're going to be focusing on offshore areas, which is really the broader focus on wind areas, but I think the intent is also to look at where some of these different aquaculture areas -- The locations and some of the guidance and discussions and best practices, and maybe it's things that we can actually draw from in the Southeast, where they're beginning to investigate these in some of the other regions throughout the country, and so that's essentially where we are with any of the discussions on aquaculture.

SAV, working on submerged aquatic vegetation, the -- For all of these different things, the policies have been provided over time, but then there was an additional distribution to all regional partners, as part of our follow-up from the last coordination effort with the CCC Habitat Workgroup and with the CCC coordination on EFH consultation, and so the follow-up on all the different aspects of all of our policies and tools and capabilities was distributed to all of our regional partners, and so it applies to a number of these different chapter areas.

We're ongoing and connecting information on mapping and monitoring within the existing tools online. Any of our designations of essential fish habitat draw on specifically the state -- The most updated information, and it's a little different than some of the areas that's looking at this, and we've tried to get the most finest information, resolution information, to be able to identify that as

the HAPC or EFH designations, and so those have been drawn on and included into the ongoing developing online EFH service.

We still need to coordinate on advancing discussions with monitoring and mapping, the crosswalk between what's going on between the different states, and ASMFC provides some of the connection, and they serve on our Habitat Advisory Panel, and they are providing input as they have been monitoring or coordinating with states on these issues.

That brings us to the Beach Dredge chapter, and, on this, there's actually been a fairly significant amount work, comprehensive environmental document preparation, and the most recent is all the regional partners have been providing links to their policies, as I mentioned before, and so that was distributed to everyone throughout our region, and the council specifically commented on the North Carolina Corps of Engineers dredge windows, which is ongoing, and I have provided some more deliberations and input from other partners and final determinations from the Corps on the activities.

What's also in play is the BOEM, in the background, has been compiling additional information on other aspects of the area, including seafloor classification and sand resources, so that that could fit into the discussion and deliberations on things such as looking at shoals in different areas that are under consideration, and there has been studies that were provided to the Habitat Advisory Panel specifically on some of the losses relative to the beach dredge and beach filling and documenting what some of the considerations are, and those were actually also reviewed at the last advisory panel meeting.

The broadest component that BOEM has been involved in was a regional essential fish habitat geospatial assessment and framework for offshore sand features, and that was also presented to the AP, and all of those parts were presented and provided to set the foundation. The council had directed them to address this policy statement and to address climate, but, at the same time, we have a number of these different activities that all the science is there to be able to provide an update and advancement of a new policy, or a revised policy, or an addendum, and that is underway, and that's what some of the intent of this next coming up advisory panel is. After all of those presentations and all the information that was provided to-date to them, it's to begin setting the stage of how to integrate that into recommendations for the future policy activity.

That brings us to the energy activities, and we've been addressing those. Again, the policies have been distributed in the past, and the council has provided recommendations specifically on the longer-term planning documents that have been provided and prepared by BOEM in the past, and we do have a representative on the AP, and so we have continuous ongoing input on not only the overall status of all the activities from O&G, which is the oil and gas or sand activities, to the renewable energy activities in the Southeast.

The council, in the past, has provided input on the 2019 to 2024 OCS lease proposal, as well as directly with the states on OCRM activities relative to seismic testing and activities that the council provided the policy statements, and we've also worked directly with some of our state partners in providing the spatial information on all of our managed areas and on distributions of habitats, et cetera, to advance these, and so the council has been providing a lot of the information throughout these different processes, and a lot of the different aspects of that information, with our partnership, has been integrated into the marine cadastre that BOEM also serves with federal partners.

Then, as you have been seeing in the last days, the close coordination on wind activities in the Southeast has been really important, and Rick Robbins is the liaison with the fishery components under Avangrid, and he has been providing the council with continuous ongoing activities on where it's going and how they have addressed fishing and habitat concerns over time and advancing this into the future.

That moves us into Chapter 7, with is the Alterations on River and Estuarine Flows, and the policies that the council has, again, adopted have been provided to our partners, and there was some closer coordination with the Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership, because of their connection directly into the instream flow protection policies and individual state discussions on flow regimes, which was one of the intents that some of this was begun to move toward, is trying to identify what those would be for all the regions, and hopefully some of that can pick back up again with the enhanced coordination with the Southeast Connectivity and Adaptation Strategy and the conservation blueprint and with TNC and the Corps, because some of those are very specifically looking at those types of recommendations for major parts of our rivers.

One that had been focused on in North Carolina was the Roanoke River, and so hopefully we can advance that even further as that gets moved into the system. I think one of the intents also is to figure out how that also can impact our managed species, and maybe some of the modeling efforts will actually provide that link.

That moves us into the Non-Native and Invasive Species component of the roadmap, and the council has weighed-in on the production of novel gears, mainly, primarily, enhanced work on lionfish, and the region has been very active in ensuring that, while providing those, that they didn't compromise some of the habitat or other fishery rules that were moving forward. Those were the -- We also do highlight all the individual state activities on the aquatic nuisance species plans, and we have linkages, through different parts I think, under our existing FEP Dashboard. We have not had a chance to do anything on ballast water, to date. there just has not been a focus on that.

That brings us to the Artificial Reefs component, and, under that, the primary focus, over time, has been the opportunity to identify what was either coordinated on mapping with some of the partners, like say the -- When we look at some of the managed areas that the council has put under artificial reefs, such as the Charleston Deepwater Reef or the spawning special management zones, the opportunity that those were mapped, and then hopefully we can see some additional characterization and monitoring of those over time.

There has not been any specific focused resources identified yet for kind of a longer-term monitoring or access, and one thing, I think, that's hoped is that maybe there's a linkage with our partners as we move toward the wind discussion, on advancement on how some of those may serve as artificial reef, or maybe how they can provide resources to expand or enhance the artificial reef components and possibly even establish monitoring within those systems, with remote capabilities for everything from eDNA to acoustics to whatever within the systems.

That is kind of the snapshot of the overall components, and there are a number of different things that we can focus on in the next years, and things that have actually been accomplished in the

broader implementation plan, such as the development of the South Atlantic ecosystem model, et cetera, and I think those are going to be important to draw from.

What we're going to do is begin to have some additional discussion at the AP level on where we are and then some of the other ones that we can accomplish now, and then we can look and draw back on maybe some of the other activities that exist within the overall implementation plan.

I think some of the things that are going to be really important is to understand what is the context of the climate vulnerability analysis, as well as the ecosystem status report, and that may help, plus some of the different partner activities that I have mentioned throughout this. I mean, there's a broad highlight within the bigger review that touched on a lot more of the other partner and state activities. That is essentially what I was going to present on the Fishery Ecosystem Plan two-year roadmap and where we move forward and look at the next stages on how this advances.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thank you for that, Roger. You can just go back to the screen, so I can see if there are any raised hands. Committee, Roger walked through the nine chapters in our FEP II Roadmap, and he provided a good overview of what's captured in those chapters and some of our policy statements.

We, as a council, have tried to use this as a way to influence the conservation of habitat, and specifically our EFH designations throughout the region for the benefit of our managed species, and so, with that, I open it up to the committee for any discussion or guidance to provide Roger for modification of any of those nine chapter policy statements and focuses and anything like that, or just a general discussion on how we've used this document in the past and how we intend to use it in the future, and so, with that, I will go to Mel. Go ahead, Mel.

MR. BELL: Thanks, Steve. You kind of hit on what I was going to ask about, and so it's a plan, and it's a roadmap, and so that indicates that we have something that we want to achieve from this nine-chapter extremely large resource, with a lot of information in it, but the fact that it's a plan and a roadmap means that we're going somewhere with it, and so I'm just trying to -- This is for discussion, and I'm just trying to, in my mind, clearly understand how we intend to operationalize this plan.

Are there specific points where it takes us to needing to move in a particular direction and achieve certain things, certain goals, or is it also, in part, a giant resource that we have, and, when things come up, we consult it, in terms of our established policies on certain things in certain areas, and so I'm just trying to -- In my mind, it's a huge amount of work, Roger, you and all the folks associated with this, and it's a tremendous amount of work.

I am just trying to figure out how we as a council take advantage of that and put it into sort of day-to-day, or meeting-to-meeting -- How do we actually do something with this, or is in part certain things we do and then certain things that we do use it as a resource, and so how has it been used, and how do we intend to actually use it, and so, for discussion purposes, that's just where my head is, in trying to kind of figure all this out.

MR. POLAND: Thank you for that, Mel. I mean, I know, in the last calendar year, we've used one of the policy statements as kind of the basis for comments for some activities in the region, but, as far as actually taking the identified policy statements and positions and addressing those

into actionable items, certainly some of the information collected under, I think, Chapter 1 of those policy directives, and forage fish were considered for the bullet and frigate mackerel discussions, but we've never actually gone back and looked at that as a way to potentially identify additional forage fish issues that we might want to address, but it is there for us to do that. Jessica, go ahead.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Just to add on to what you guys are saying, I feel like, when this was originally developed, that we spent a lot of time working on the wording of the policies that are in there, and, to me, and I don't want to say it's hidden, but there are a number of things, or policies, associated with the council that are stuck inside that roadmap, and I don't necessarily think it's bad, but one example was forage fish, which we debated -- We had a lengthy debate on it, and I think that those policy statements -- They are useful, being in there, and, to me, the roadmap also helps us coordinate with partners and others, but I also wanted to let you know that those statements that are in there are also used in other ways.

If you remember, the CCC Legislative Committee that prepares that giant document about Magnuson reauthorization bills, there are items pulled from this roadmap that are considered policies, and they are worded in that CCC document to be reflective of the policies, and an example is forage fish, and so, I mean, I think that there are a number of things that we've had discussions about in the past, and I think Roger has done a good job of kind of keeping a running checklist on where we are relative to working with partners and other organizations and moving some of these items forward.

I guess I saw this as something that the blueprint, or the workgroup, folks were going to talk about, is do we need to go back and revisit some of those policy statements that are in that document, and how do we want to move some of the items forward in the future, and I just felt like the next steps part of the roadmap was what was going to be discussed by the workgroup that we're going to talk about in the next item.

MR. POLAND: Thank you for that, Jessica, and I certainly agree, and I was going to ask the committee for some input on this too, relative to our upcoming discussion on the roadmap, because I certainly see that as an opportunity to look at this document and see how we've kind of operationalized it, and I do agree that this is a fantastic document for housing a lot of our policy statements, because, I mean, even at the state level, I reference it quite often, when I'm dealing with comments on habitat-related issues or just kind of doing a region-wide policy statement and that kind of stuff. Mel, go ahead.

MR. BELL: I think Jessica kind of nailed it there, and maybe the next step is really the blueprint becoming -- Because I was looking for sort of the feedback loop, and so you have this plan, this roadmap, this resource document, and you document how you're using it and look at how you're using it now and how it's being employed and where the weaknesses are, or needs to change things or update things, but there has to be a sense of where we're going with this and how we're using it and then are we achieving --

Is it achieving what we need it to achieve, and that's, perhaps, part of that blueprint, and the blueprint becomes -- It has an annual component, perhaps, but somehow there needs to sort of be a feedback mechanism to the plan and the roadmap itself, to check where you are, progress-wise, where we want to be, where we are, and what it takes to get where we need to be and what various things might need to be done in a specific year as we plan out the various things we're trying to

do as a council and as a staff, related to accomplishing stuff, and so maybe that blueprint is really the mechanism. Again, this is just discussion, on my part.

MR. POLAND: Thank you for that, Mel. I mean, there's certainly been a lot of work put in from staff and the AP and the council on this, and there's a lot of good information and a lot of good work that went into it, and so certainly, through the blueprint process, if we can come up with some ways to kind of bring this out of the shadows a little bit more and kind of use it in some of our decision-making, I'm all for it. Andy, go ahead.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, Steve. Mel and Jessica have largely made the points that I was going to make. Overall, I certainly commend staff for putting this together, and I think they've done a good job of identifying information gaps and threats and impacts and categorizing those into the various sections of the document.

I do find the document to be fairly ambitious, given that it's just a two-year plan. There's lots and lots of actions, and so, similar to what Mel and Jessica were emphasizing, I think the key to any sort of planning process like this is then linking it to how is the council going to utilize it to make change, change the policies, change how you manage fisheries, change how you protect essential fish habitat, and so that, to me, is -- I think there are certainly pieces of that throughout the document, but I would certainly want to see kind of a broader and more specific connection to kind of what's the next steps, and it sounds like that might be a discussion coming up.

MR. POLAND: Thank you for that, Andy. Certainly, if we can take as much of this as we can and move it on into actionable items, or at least draw that link to how we can take action as a council, I think that would be very, very useful. All right. Roger.

MR. PUGLIESE: Let me make a quick statement about all of this. I think this is exactly what was intended, to get to this point, and now we're going to be talking about moving into the blueprint and the types of information that's been collected or the activities that have happened, and all of it influences those policies and how those may be able to be updated and refined and enhanced, the way they're used, but, also, on actions.

I mean, some of those discussions are specifically talking about compiling understood distributions of species of forage fish, and also of how you're going to be able to integrate some of this into stock assessments or into evaluating what the impacts are on climate, and so I think the natural progression is from where we are with these different capabilities and the opportunity to now, as we go into the blueprint, to look at those policies and to look at how that is done.

There may be new policies that need to address specific items that are kind of embedded through all of these, and so the timing, I think, to accomplish -- I appreciate that linkage, because, yes, that's the toughest part, is you're trying to just see all of these pieces. Now how do they either provide action that the council will take, revision of the policies that will influence the broader actions under EFH consultation, or just under action the council would like to recommend, in making those linkages beyond here, and then, also, making sure the information is compiled into the future, et cetera, and so I think the timing to get a lot of what everybody has talked about is pretty much now.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thank you for that, Roger. Pretty much what I've heard is the committee hasn't provided any specifics on guidance for particular actions or for policies, but it's just more a general discussion on kind of the use and application of this, and so I guess, with that, we don't have anything to provide for the AP in April, specific to modifying or updating any of the policies and actions, but I just might say that we asked for some input from the AP on -- At least their perspective on taking these policies and actions and addressing them through to council action.

With that, if there's no other discussion on the FEP II, we'll move on to our last agenda item, or to the next agenda item. Agenda Item 3 is the Habitat and Ecosystem Program Blueprint. Myra will provide a presentation on the activities of the Program Blueprint Workgroup, and I look forward to comment and discussion from the committee on this, and so whenever you're ready, Myra, take it away.

MS. BROUWER: Thank you, Steve. This will be brief, and this is a short presentation update on discussions that took place beginning at the December meeting, and this is something the council initiated at that time, and it's basically just the progress to-date on this habitat and ecosystem blueprint.

The council identified the need, as you all have stated just now, to describe and evaluate its activities related to habitat and ecosystem, and so what are the mandates, what has been accomplished so far, what are the tools and the partnerships that are available, and what is their intended role, and so how does it all work, and so, to that end, the council established a workgroup, which they called the Habitat and Ecosystem Blueprint Development Team, to sort of map out the scope of the project and develop this evaluation, so the council can better plan its future activities on this topic going forward.

The team's jobs are, basically, to develop this blueprint, and so to identify and prepare and review the materials the council is going to need for discussing how to move forward, and the team will be there to help you all facilitate those discussions. The council will continue to make decisions related to this project at regularly-scheduled meetings, and the plan is to have the job done by the end of this year.

Here is some faces for you, since we can't see each other these days, and so the membership of the team, and Steve is the team lead, as the Habitat and Ecosystem Committee Chair, and Carolyn Belcher is the Vice Chair of this committee, and Mel Bell, our Chairman, and Kerry Marhefka, who is currently the Vice Chair of the Snapper Grouper Committee. In the background are John, myself, and Roger, and so we'll be the ones doing the gathering, the synthesizing, and the planning and facilitating for you all.

In terms of meetings, we have met once thus far in 2021, in January, and we plan to meet in between council meetings and work throughout the year to gather the information and coordinate with advisors, as needed, and review progress and address any information requests from the council, and so, so far, we have an outline of what will be included in the blueprint, and work has already begun on two initial tasks, and so, right now, we're working on documenting the habitat requirements and the council actions to address those requirements. We're also documenting what ecosystem-based management requires and what the council has done thus far to address those.

The next workgroup meeting has already been scheduled for April, but, before we get to that, we had these two questions that we would like some guidance on. In order to better plan the work for this year, we would like to know if you want to include ecosystem-based and climate-related activities in the blueprint or focus it on habitat, and, also, some guidance on how you recommend utilizing the Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel, maybe the SSC, and other APs in this process, and so I will turn it back to you for some discussion, Steve. Thank you.

MR. POLAND: Thank you for that, Myra. To the committee, a little bit of additional background on Question 1. Our Habitat AP, or, specifically, Habitat and Ecosystem-Based Management AP, is really populated with experts from habitat conservation as well as ecosystem management and ecosystem processes and the such, and so, during discussions of the workgroup at our first meeting, and discussions during December, as far as moving forward with our EwE initiatives, looking at taking our Ecopath model and answering some fishery management questions, we wanted to bring this forward to the council for a little bit of input as far as do we feel that we would be better served, potentially, in modifying the makeup of not only the AP, but potentially the committee, and splitting those in two, and so we would appreciate some feedback from the council on this, and I see Jessica is in the queue. Go ahead.

MS. MCCAWLEY: A couple of things. I appreciate you bringing up these questions, and I don't think I have the market cornered on what the answer should be. I guess I'm not knowledgeable enough, since I wasn't in those discussions, to understand maybe the pros and cons of what you're suggesting.

I do agree that these items are overarching and cover many things that the council does, and so, for example, forage fish, that policy affects things like what we did with bullet and frigate mackerel, but it might also affect things in other committees, and so I'm having a hard time picturing what are the various alternatives that you guys are talking about here and what the pros and cons would be of each.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thanks for that, Jessica. I mean, off the top of my head, I can come up with a few pros and cons on either side of that, but what it sounds like to me is that you and the council might benefit from some additional thought on this and lay out some options for the council to consider, and we're not at the point now of making this type of decision or anything like that, and we just wanted to bring it back to the council, just to get some kind of general feedback on is this question worth applying a little bit of effort to, or should we focus on other things, and so what I'm getting from your comments is maybe the workgroup spend a little bit of time looking at the different options and what those benefits might be, one way or another. Am I hearing that correct, Jessica?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, and that's exactly what I would say, kind of what it would look like moving forward, what some of the benefits would be, what some of the considerations are, or challenges, with going in these different directions, because, as I mentioned in the last discussion, the last item discussion, we do have some pretty important council policies that are somewhat -- I don't want to call them hidden, but they are.

They're kind of buried inside that document, and I don't necessarily think that that's bad, but there's some really important council discussions that were had that built that document, and I don't necessarily think that we reference it well, or think about it adequately, as we move forward

with items in other committees, and so I keep bringing up forage fish, and it's a good example, but thinking about how the council feels about climate change and other actions affecting -- Or how climate change would affect other fisheries moving forward, I feel like that's a little bit hidden in there, and we've indicated, in various other committees, that at least the climate actions are really important and need to get figured out, and they're a priority, and we're putting people onto different outside groups to deal with climate change.

I guess, just for my benefit, if this workgroup talks about these things, and then has some of these things to bring back, that would help me in thinking about it or being able to have a more robust discussion with you guys than just trying to add things off-the-cuff here.

MR. PUGLIESE: Real quick, just a quick comment, and I think that's one of the benefits of what's going to be going forward with reviewing a lot of the foundational information and the structures and the information supporting how these policies are built. All those different aspects, I think, we'll provide, and then the workgroup actually having the discussion about what the positives and different things are, because, when it comes down to it, some of the interconnectivity may be even more clear about that as you move through and the workgroup reviews kind of the foundational information that is provided.

For example, the Habitat and Ecosystem Advisory Panel essentially is the one that has been putting together these policy statements from day-one, and then is addressing different things, but I do understand exactly what you mean, Jessica, about there's some really critical ones that need to be -- They're there, and they're available, but how do you operationalize some of the recommendations into other actions, and that, I think, is going to be critical, but I think that opportunity to understand why some of these -- I mean, the structure of the advisory panel was built to draw on and bring expertise for specific reasons, and so there is a lot of that, I think, that can be highlighted as we move forward with the workgroup and reviewing the overall and providing recommendations on how to advance and make it as most effective as possible, and I think that's the reality.

MR. POLAND: Thank you for that, Roger. Jessica, what I'm really hearing too is that this seems like a broader goal of the workgroup and the blueprint initiative, is to figure out how to better integrate this information that we have in all of our fishery management decisions, and so I really see the blueprint as kind of the vehicle to get, like I said during our last discussion, those policy statements and all that great work out of the shadows and into the conversation for all of our actions, and so certainly that is something that we can focus on, or focus the workgroup efforts on, as far as one of our broader, lofty goals, is to bring all this out and make it operational and integrate it. Jessica, go ahead.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, that sounds great, Steve. I agree with everything that you and Roger just spoke about, and, as I mentioned earlier, I'm on that CCC Legislative Committee that spends a lot of time writing those responses for the Magnuson bills, and I go into this document, into the roadmap, to try to look back to these policies that were created and try to think about how the council might use them moving forward, but I just that to help write the sections about what the South Atlantic thinks on different topics, but I agree with what both of you guys are saying, that those policies that we worked so hard on that are inside the roadmap are kind of in the shadows.

You have to know to go there to find them, and they don't really feel integrated across all the work of the council, and I'm hoping that that's something, and it sounds like it is, that that workgroup is going to talk about as you kind of create this blueprint or path forward.

MR. POLAND: Yes, absolutely, and I know we didn't have a really thorough discussion on this at the last meeting, because we were running short on time, but at least my vision of this is to bring our habitat program at the council up to -- I don't want to say up to the level, because I think it functions well in and of itself, but bring it more into our conversations and have it more focused on deliverables to the council, deliverables in the sense of informing us in all of our management decisions and those broader policy decisions that you mentioned. Go ahead, John Walter.

DR. WALTER: Thank you, Steve. Good morning, everyone. I just wanted to bring up, and maybe John Carmichael is going to bring it up, but there is an Executive Order that's requesting climate information from the councils, an Executive Order on tackling the climate crisis at home and abroad, and I don't want to speak for John, if you've got a strategy for it, and I'm happy to defer to you, but it just seems like this committee might -- It might be timely, given that there's a thirty-day window, for this committee to discuss it.

MR. POLAND: I will let John Carmichael speak to it briefly, but we have had conversations, and I think we're going to discuss this during Executive Committee, but the CCC discussed this last week, and it is a short window, but we're trying to figure out a time for the council to maybe have a special meeting to provide that type of input. Go ahead, John.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Thank you, Steve. I will answer this, and I had raised my hand to comment on the bigger picture that we were talking about, but, as far as this issue, yes, there is a thirty-day comment period, and we became aware of that comment period I think yesterday, and we did discuss this at a CCC briefing last week. At that time, most of the councils indicated that they were interested in some type of presentation from NMFS during their upcoming meetings, with an intent to have, within our councils, discussions handled before the CCC meets, and I think that's third week of May.

I would say that I was surprised that we got a notice yesterday that said a thirty-day time period, given all the discussion that happened last week at the CCC and knowledge of when the different councils were planning to meet, but that is what it is, and it sounded like, from the message that sent around to everybody yesterday, to the council members, that you all will see that it's a thirty-day comment, but they also say, but we'll take comments that come after that, and so I'm not too worried about the thirty days.

We are attempting to set up a meeting, and I have followed up with NMFS again today, to try and figure out when they were available to present on this to our council. We had hoped for something at the end of this month, and, by Federal Register notice requirements, we kind of technically can do the last Monday of the month, which was a potential, due to the twenty-eight days, and so I am really pushing NMFS hard today to find out when they're available, and then I will let all the council members know what our candidate dates are.

We will have a webinar meeting to provide our comment and guidance to NMFS and to help inform Mel and Steve, for when they go to the CCC meeting, where we expect this to be further

discussed, and so we are aware of it, and we're doing what we can to coordinate with NMFS to try to set up something to receive a presentation for all you guys and hear about it.

Steve, the other thing I wanted to comment on was it seems like there's been a lot of discussion about the many useful things that are -- The words that have been said are "buried" or "hidden in the shadows" of this FEP that might have a lot of use in other places, and so I'm wondering if it isn't worth having the blueprint group consider this Number 1 here and looking at ecosystem-based fisheries management, and perhaps climate change, being moved out from underneath just the habitat umbrella, so that we can bring a broader council look at that.

Habitat is part of it, but it also involves the species, and it also involves the communities and the social aspects, and that's all very critical to, really, ecosystem-based fisheries management, as it's defined, and it's also becoming, in a lot of ways, a technical issue that is using things like MSEs to try and determine the ecosystem effects and the ecosystem-level impact of actions, as well as species responses and fisheries responses.

It sounds, to me, from what all I've heard about the use of a number of these things that are found to be very helpful to the council, but perhaps being packaged as habitat and the connotations that carries may not be meeting our best interests, and so this idea that ecosystem-based management and climate might separate out a bit and become its own separate topic could be what the council is sort of hinting at here.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thank you for that, John. Kerry, go ahead.

MS. MARHEFKA: I just wanted to support John's suggestion. I think that that's just going to become too unwieldy, if we keep it under habitat, and I think there are a lot of community-based issues and other issues that climate impacts that aren't necessarily habitat related, and so I would support John's suggestion to move ecosystem-based management and climate out from under habitat.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thank you, Kerry. Mel.

MR. BELL: That's logical. I mean, keep in mind, when we kind of started down this path, in terms of how we were going to view things and have things considered together, and it's a bit of a changing -- It's a dynamic environment right now, and, like was mentioned, we've got new Executive Orders to consider and those sorts of things, and so I think there's enough that would be involved in just considering the climate impacts and ecosystem-based management to warrant kind of pulling that out into its own separate area, and so that makes sense, I think.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thank you, Mel. Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I just wanted to say that I agree with what John suggested, and Kerry suggested, about Number 1 there and pulling it out and bringing it in somewhere else.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thank you, Jessica. All right. That was a fantastic conversation relative to Question 1 and the type of input the workgroup was looking for, and so I really appreciate that. Moving on to Question 2, and, Jessica, based off of your comments at the very beginning, this question might be a little premature as well, but we just wanted to float this out

there with the committee and the council, as far as the role of the Habitat AP and other APs and the SSC in the development of this blueprint. Does anyone have any comments relative to Question 2? It's basically what level should the AP and the SSC be involved in this, or do we feel strongly one way or the other? Jessica, go ahead.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I guess I would just reiterate that it might be easier for the APs and the SSC to react to something that the workgroup has come up with, and so maybe the workgroup comes up with two or three paths that include various ways that the SSC and the APs can engage, moving forward throughout this process, and that might be something that the workgroup wants to get feedback on. I don't know that I have any initial actions, other than I would like to see them be able to comment on something that you guys come up with, but it's a little hard, since it's so open-ended at this point.

MR. POLAND: Thank you, Jessica, and I agree. We don't have anything to take to them yet, and certainly we want their input, and I don't want them put out of this, but it sounds like the workgroup needs to spend a little bit more time really fleshing this out and come up with some items and issues and widgets, so to speak, to generate some thoughtful discussion. Go ahead, Mel.

MR. BELL: Same thing. I think you definitely want to take advantage of the input from those groups and the consideration of particular things, but, if you try to form a giant working group, then that would become rather cumbersome and all, but definitely there needs to be a place for them to plug-in, in terms of, like you said, running things by them and getting input and advice based on their expertise and all, but not necessarily creating sort of a mega working group.

MR. POLAND: I agree, Mel. Thanks. Any more comment from the committee or the council on Question 2? If not, I feel like the discussion we've had for the last fifteen or twenty minutes has been very beneficial to the workgroup, and I look forward to our next meeting in April and getting out of the planning stage and actually getting into the hard work of this, and I do appreciate it. Anything else, Myra, before we move on?

MS. BROUWER: No, Steve. Thank you. That's all I had.

MR. POLAND: All right. Thanks, Myra. Our last agenda item, just real quick, is to have a brief discussion on agenda items and topics for the spring 2021 Habitat AP meeting. If you have the committee meeting agenda in front of you, if you scroll down to the bottom, there is a bulleted list of potential topics for the spring meeting.

As we're doing now with all of our APs, the committee chairs are briefing the APs now on committee and council actions, and they will receive an update of status of amendment development, and we've got the climate vulnerability assessment and the ecosystem status report on the list that Roger referenced earlier. I am excited to finally get to see the reports for these two items, and they've been in development for a while, and I'm really looking forward to having the opportunity for the AP to review them and the council to review them, because I think they will help in future discussions for items related to species movements that we're all seeing for a lot of our managed fisheries.

FEP II Roadmap activities, we've already discussed that, and this is just the next step, where the AP takes that input that we provided and reviews those in more detail and provides

recommendations for either modifying or updating those policy statements and actions. I will give them an overview of -- Me or staff will give them an overview on the habitat blueprint initiative.

Then the beach dredge and fill policy statement revision, and that's something that the committee has discussed in the past and the AP is working diligently on. Then some others, more informational and development items, like the webpages and web services for FEP II, BOEM activities, status report on Kitty Hawk Wind, and we received a status report on that yesterday from Rick Robbins and Brian Benito. They will probably give the same, or a very similar, update to the AP.

Then enhancing collaboration with the CCC Habitat Workgroup and the SECAS and regional conservation blueprint update, and so, to me, that seems like a pretty full list, and certainly our discussions today on Coral Amendment 10, and I'm sure the AP will have some comments on that, through amendment development and our discussions today through FEP II and the blueprint.

Is there any other items that we feel like we want to task the Habitat and Ecosystem-Based Management AP with discussing? Are there any habitat issues significant to the council right now that we feel like we need some input on? Andy, go ahead.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, Steve. I agree with you that it looks like a very busy and ambitious agenda. I guess two things, one of which, timing-wise, might not work, but it goes back to what John Walter and John Carmichael were talking about with the Executive Order and input that the council would be providing, and that there might be some input that you might want to gather from this AP as well.

Then the second is, I guess, an acknowledgment that my office, the Regional Office, recently completed an Endangered Species Act biological opinion along the Atlantic seaboard for beach sand placement and dredging, and I think it has implications for the policy statement related to EFH that is being worked on, and so there might be an opportunity to pull in some of the Regional Office staff to also talk about kind of how that intersects with some of our Endangered Species Act issues.

MR. POLAND: Okay. Thank you for that, Andy. Roger, under the beach dredge and fill policy statement, maybe a sub-bullet just referencing the bi-op, to make sure that's captured. As far as the Executive Order on climate change and climate resiliency, unfortunately, it sounds like the council is going to meet either right before, or it might potentially overlap, with the Habitat AP and prior to discussions on that EO, but certainly any input from the AP I think would be beneficial to the council, even if it is a little late, or a little after the fact, and so I think that's a good place for it, Roger.

All right. Anything else? This is a long list of items for the Habitat AP. All right. I am seeing no hands, and we are twenty minutes over, and so, unless there is any other business from the committee, and I will give everyone an opportunity. Mel, go ahead.

MR. BELL: No other business, Steve, but I was just going to say why don't we take a ten-minute break and allow the next chair and staff to set up for Mackerel Cobia, and so we will just see everybody back in ten.

MR. POLAND: All right. Sounds good, Mel. Thank you. Thank you, Habitat Committee.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on March 2, 2021.)

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Amanda Thomas
April 26, 2021

SAFMC March Council Meeting

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