

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL  
JOINT CORAL/HABITAT PROTECTION COMMITTEE

IP Casino and Resort Biloxi, Mississippi

OCTOBER 19, 2016

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- John Greene.....Alabama
- Tom Frazer.....Florida
- Martha Guyas (designee for Nick Wiley).....Florida
- Kelly Lucas (designee for Jamie Miller).....Mississippi
- Campo Matens.....Louisiana

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**STAFF**

- Steven Atran.....Senior Fishery Biologist
- Assane Diagne.....Economist
- Matt Freeman.....Economist
- John Froeschke.....Fishery Biologist - Statistician
- Douglas Gregory.....Executive Director
- Morgan Kilgour.....Fishery Biologist
- Ava Lasseter.....Anthropologist
- Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
- Jessica Matos.....Administrative Assistant

1 Ryan Rindone.....Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison  
2 Claire Roberts.....EFH Specialist  
3 Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager  
4 Charlotte Schiaffo.....Research and Human Resource Librarian  
5 Carrie Simmons.....Deputy Director  
6

7 **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

8 Myron Fischer.....LA  
9 Troy Frady.....Lillian, AL  
10 Sue Gerhart.....NMFS  
11 Joe Jewell.....MS DMR  
12 Bill Kelly.....FKCFA  
13 Ricky McDuffie.....Orange Beach, AL  
14 Joe Nash.....Gulf Shores, AL  
15 Bart Niquet.....Lynn Haven, FL  
16 Corky Perret.....MS  
17 Charlie Phillips.....SAFMC  
18 Bonnie Ponwith.....SEFSC  
19 Joe Powers.....SSC  
20 Lance Robinson.....TX  
21 Majo Sanabria.....CLS America  
22 Tom Steber.....Orange Beach, AL  
23 Albert Stinson.....Orange Beach, AL  
24 Mike Thierry.....Dauphin Island, AL  
25  
26  
27  
28

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[PAGE 17](#): Motion to forward the five-year EFH review to National Marine Fisheries Service by the end of 2016 and give editorial license to staff to modify the document as needed, with approval of the Chair. [The motion carried on page 18](#).

- - -

1 The Joint Coral/Habitat Protection Committee of the Gulf of  
2 Mexico Fishery Management Council convened at the IP Casino and  
3 Hotel, Biloxi, Mississippi, Wednesday morning, October 19, 2016,  
4 and was called to order by Chairman Dale Diaz.  
5

6 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**  
7 **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**  
8

9 **CHAIRMAN DALE DIAZ:** I could like to call the Joint  
10 Coral/Habitat Protection Committee to order. I am going to  
11 start out by reading the new committee membership list. For the  
12 Coral Committee membership, the Chair is John Sanchez. The Vice  
13 Chair is Tom Frazer. Johnny Greene, Camp Matens, Dr. Lucas, and  
14 Ms. Guyas are on the committee.  
15

16 For the Habitat Protection Committee, the Chair is myself. The  
17 Vice Chair is Mr. Greene. Patrick Banks, Glenn Constant, Camp  
18 Matens, John Sanchez, Greg Stunz, and Ms. Guyas are on the  
19 committee.  
20

21 The first order of business is Adoption of the Agenda. Does  
22 anybody have anything that they would like to add to Other  
23 Business at this point? Seeing none, is there any objection to  
24 adopting the agenda? The agenda is adopted.  
25

26 The next order of business is the Approval of the June 2016  
27 Joint Coral/Habitat Protection Committee Minutes. Are there any  
28 comments or edits for the June minutes? Any objection to  
29 adopting the minutes? Hearing none, the minutes are adopted.  
30

31 The first order of business for this committee is there is going  
32 to be Final Five-Year Draft EFH Review, and I think Ms. Roberts  
33 is going to handle that. Ms. Roberts.  
34

35 **FINAL DRAFT OF FIVE-YEAR EFH REVIEW**  
36

37 **MS. CLAIRE ROBERTS:** Good morning, everyone. This is Tab N,  
38 Number 4. I put together a PowerPoint to help me guide you all  
39 through this document, but my recommendation would be that you  
40 all follow along in the draft that is available in the briefing  
41 book, and I will reference particular pages throughout this  
42 presentation.  
43

44 I am going to start by just reorienting you all to what we  
45 talked about last time around. I brought the first draft of  
46 this five-year review to you, and the primary portions of the  
47 document included the species profiles and habitat association  
48 tables, which I talked about in fairly extensive detail at that

1 point, and I also went over our steps moving forward and what  
2 the timeline of completion for this document looked like.

3  
4 I wanted to refresh your memory as to what our objectives were  
5 with this document. I worked to update and improve the habitat  
6 association tables, which, as I mentioned, you all saw last  
7 time, and also to review EFH by FMP and develop EFH maps by  
8 species and life stage. I will be going over those today, along  
9 with the web-based application for this document, and that I  
10 will also be going over today, with one example.

11  
12 Legally, we required to conduct this review approximately every  
13 five years, and the review of information should include what's  
14 listed up there, the published scientific literature and  
15 soliciting information from interested parties and searching for  
16 previously unavailable or inaccessible data.

17  
18 What's new? I am going to be covering each of these in detail,  
19 but just to give you this information in broad strokes, I added  
20 sections on coral within the species profiles and created  
21 composite maps of benthic habitat use by species and life stage  
22 and added web component information, along with developing the  
23 web application, as an example for one species, and included  
24 HAPC recommendations and EFH recommendations.

25  
26 I will start out with the coral. It is in the primary text,  
27 Section 3.1.2, which is on page 17. Dr. Kilgour helped me put  
28 together this portion. It's essentially just a brief  
29 distribution of corals in the Gulf. A further review on this  
30 subject is going to occur in Coral Amendment 7, and so I just  
31 referenced that in this section, but most of the literature  
32 review work will be done in that document for coral,  
33 specifically. If you all have any questions or want to stop me  
34 at any time, please feel free.

35  
36 The big addition to this document really are the maps, and I  
37 wanted to start out with the maps in the appendix, because I  
38 think that will help frame what I mean when I say composite maps  
39 that are available in the primary text. These can be found on  
40 page 2 in Appendix B or page 257 of the PDF itself. I will give  
41 you all a minute to get there, but I'm going to give an example  
42 of red drum, specifically.

43  
44 Within this appendix are the maps of benthic life stage  
45 information for each of the life stages that occur on benthic  
46 habitat, and so this does not include, in most cases, the egg  
47 life stage, because, for most of the species we manage, those  
48 are water-column associated. For red drum, that includes I

1 think five different maps, and this is going to vary by species,  
2 just based on which species used benthic habitat, specifically.

3  
4 I wanted to include a note that there is no seasonality implicit  
5 in these maps, and also, while I was making them, I had thought  
6 it made more sense to not include the specific habitat types  
7 that are being occupied by each of these species and depicted in  
8 the maps. I thought that it would be best to just allow people  
9 to reference that information in the habitat association tables,  
10 because that's where these maps are coming from. Really, they  
11 were created based on the habitat zone, ecoregion, and habitat  
12 type information that is found in the habitat association  
13 tables.

14  
15 Upon further consideration, I can certainly see the benefit of  
16 including that information within the legend for each of the  
17 maps, and so, for the draft that I will be submitting to NOAA,  
18 the specific habitats that are occupied by that life stage of  
19 that species will be available within the maps themselves.

20  
21 Now, if you all would turn to page 21 in the primary text, which  
22 is page 54 of the PDF itself, I am going to explain what the  
23 composite maps mean, and I will be using red drum, again, as an  
24 example.

25  
26 Rather than bog down the primary text, I only included these  
27 composite, quote, unquote, maps within the -- They're following  
28 each of their associated species profiles, and what the  
29 composite map is, it's essentially I overlaid each of the life  
30 stage layers for each species and merged them together, and so  
31 that is what I consider these composite maps that are available  
32 within the primary text.

33  
34 Another new section is the web components, and that's available  
35 within Section 4, page 137, of the primary document. I am going  
36 to have Dr. Froeschke help me with the web application, and so,  
37 rather than describing these within the document, I am just  
38 going to show you an example of what I have created so far.  
39 This is live on our portal website right now.

40  
41 Essentially, I created these species profiles in a somewhat  
42 fragmented way, at least when you see them in the primary  
43 textual document, because I wanted them to be available on the  
44 web in this kind of format, where it shows the species profile,  
45 which is consistent with what's in the primary document, along  
46 with the age and growth plot and a recent landings plot for each  
47 species.

48

1 In that navigation bar, you can switch which species you want  
2 displayed, and so I have red snapper up here as well as an  
3 example, but, essentially, I am going to continue to populate  
4 this with all of the different species that we're currently  
5 managing, with the hope that displaying it in this format is  
6 more user-friendly and hopefully more interesting to people.

7  
8 This is a mirror image of the habitat association table for red  
9 drum, which is also available in Appendix A of this document,  
10 and, again, you will be able to select different habitat  
11 association tables based on the species that you're interested  
12 in from that navigation bar in the panel on the left.

13  
14 This application will also include a queryable bibliography that  
15 will allow you to search by species, by FMP, if you're  
16 interested in specific authors. Basically, it will include all  
17 of the references that were used in the creation of the primary  
18 text. I think that's something like 680 references. They are  
19 not all up there right now, but that will also be something that  
20 I build on going forward.

21  
22 Lastly, these -- I am essentially taking all of the maps  
23 available in Appendix B and digitizing them and putting them on  
24 the web in such a way that you can select the species that you  
25 are specifically interested in, and you can also select the life  
26 stage that you're interested in.

27  
28 Again, this is just an example, and so we have three life stages  
29 available to select from right now, and, if you want to look at  
30 adults, it will repopulate with that information. These are  
31 essentially the web components of this document, as, I  
32 mentioned, I have a one-and-a-half species example available  
33 online right now, and I will continue to fill that in as I go.

34  
35 The only other web component that I describe that wasn't  
36 available in that example is the HAPC viewer. That was  
37 developed by John, and that's been available online for a while  
38 now. It essentially shows the HAPCs we currently have  
39 designated, if they have any fishing restrictions on them, and  
40 then also the proposed HAPCs that are available in the Coral  
41 Amendment 7 scoping document.

42  
43 Moving forward to the HAPC recommendations, those are available  
44 in Section 3.4, which is on page 133 of the primary draft. The  
45 coral HAPC recommendations specifically come directly from the  
46 scoping document for the Coral 7 Amendment, and I included one  
47 other sort of thought on HAPCs in this section, and so,  
48 technically, HAPCs are really just a subset of EFH, and, at this



1 point, we aren't -- We have not designated anything besides  
2 coral as an HAPC, but that doesn't mean that we can't.

3  
4 I proposed another way of designating what I would call EFH  
5 HAPCs. Part of the point of this review was to sort of look at  
6 how we currently designate EFH and propose refinements, if  
7 possible, and I found, as I was going through and making these  
8 species by life stage maps, that, for the Reef Fish FMP, we  
9 manage so many species that I don't really see a way in which  
10 that footprint would get any smaller.

11  
12 However, one possibility would be that we could essentially  
13 overlay all of the different species and life stage maps on top  
14 of each other and generate what I would consider to be a heat  
15 map that would show specific areas where the most number of  
16 species and life stages -- The specific habitats that the most  
17 number of species and life stages occupy, and so that's  
18 essentially what I proposed to be a possibility for designating  
19 what the most essential essential fish habitat really is.

20  
21 This last part is the EFH recommendations, and that's available  
22 in Section 5, page 139. This section is really the culmination  
23 of everything that I got, all of my take-aways from working on  
24 this review. A big portion of this was reviewing, obviously,  
25 the literature as it pertains to EFH and the species we manage,  
26 but also recognizing where some of the weaknesses are in the way  
27 that we currently identify and describe EFH for our species in  
28 the Gulf, and so, the way that I have this laid out is that I  
29 identified a specific problem that I ran into while I was  
30 working on creating these maps or other elements in the  
31 document.

32  
33 I include, where applicable, example species, and so basically a  
34 case study of what species we manage that this problem  
35 specifically applied to, and, in most cases, it's more than just  
36 the species I have listed, but I thought that that species in  
37 particular did a good job of illustrating the problem.

38  
39 Then, again, where applicable, I offered what would be a  
40 potential solution if we wanted to move forward and amend any of  
41 the EFH descriptions within the FMPs, and so the first one here  
42 is you can see a map of the five ecoregions that we currently  
43 have depicted for essential fish habitat purposes.

44  
45 As I mentioned, I used these ecoregions to inform the maps that  
46 I created. As you can see, they do not cover the entirety of  
47 the EEZ. They extend out to 183 meters and stop there. For  
48 most of the species we manage, this really isn't a problem.

1  
2 However, there are some whose distribution extends beyond that  
3 183-meter depth contour, and so, really, we have a chunk of the  
4 Gulf where it's presented as though particular species don't  
5 exist, when in fact we just really don't have a way to identify  
6 that offshore region for them in a mapping capacity, and so the  
7 example species that I use here are queen snapper and royal red  
8 shrimp, which extend beyond that 183-meter depth contour.

9  
10 The potential solution would look like creating a sixth  
11 ecoregion that essentially encompassed that area not described  
12 by the other five and out to the EEZ. Another alternative to  
13 that would just be to extend the five regions in some fashion  
14 out to the EEZ, but that would have to be decided upon.

15  
16 The next problem stems from describing habitat as binned by  
17 habitat zones, and, currently, the estuarine boundary is inside  
18 the barrier islands and into estuaries. The near-shore boundary  
19 extends from the barrier islands out to eighteen meters of  
20 depth, and then offshore is greater than eighteen meters out to  
21 that 183 meters, as I described. This is Figure 71.

22  
23 These regions, at least inshore, are very vague and challenging  
24 to define within the shallower water. Then, as you can see, the  
25 offshore zone really encompasses most of the area, and so that  
26 poses a problem for species. The example that I give here is  
27 for white shrimp, which, as we have in the habitat association  
28 tables, occupy a depth from one to thirty-four meters.

29  
30 This means that they encompass all three of the habitat zones,  
31 and that is how their habitat use distribution is displayed on  
32 the maps of species by life stage. However, it's unlikely that  
33 they actually extend all the way out to 138 meters, and so there  
34 isn't really any good way of dealing with this problem, based on  
35 how the bins are currently constructed.

36  
37 A couple of potential solutions would be to, one, clip all of  
38 the habitat data based on the range that is specific to each  
39 species and life stage. Another possible alternative would be  
40 to convene a group of people to decide upon a smaller subset of  
41 bins like this that would do a better job of describing the  
42 habitat by the species who don't really occupy that entire  
43 distribution.

44  
45 The next problem I discuss is that the habitat types that were  
46 proposed in the 2004 EFH EIS document, some of them are poorly  
47 defined and have convoluted definitions or are largely  
48 unmappable. For example, the, quote, unquote, banks and shoals

1 habitat type is defined as represented in the GIS as actual  
2 substrate or habitat of which they are composed of. If a bank  
3 or shoal is composed of sand, then, in the GIS, it is shown as  
4 sand. We don't really have a good way of mapping that habitat  
5 type, which makes it hard to determine what essential fish  
6 habitat is for a species when you can't map that particular type  
7 of bottom.

8  
9 Also, reef and hard-bottom habitat types are currently being  
10 defined as two separate entities, but, biologically speaking,  
11 they are not really mutually exclusive, and so my example  
12 species here is gray triggerfish spawning adults, which use  
13 reef-type habitat, but they have not been described as using  
14 hard bottom. It's likely that they use both, but, because of  
15 the research that I found describes reef specifically, that is  
16 the distribution that they appear to occupy in the maps.

17  
18 My potential solution to sort of clearing up some of these  
19 unmappable or vaguely-described habitat types would be to get a  
20 group together and talk about which ones could be combined to  
21 make things less complicated and which ones could be better  
22 described, so that they're easier to visualize.

23  
24 Next up is that, similar to the problem with hard-bottom reef  
25 habitats, the GIS data used to describe reef habitat in the Gulf  
26 for this review is relatively poor, and so my question would be  
27 that we have quite a bit of data available for point  
28 observations, and is there some way that we could incorporate  
29 that into how we describe reef habitat in the Gulf of Mexico?

30  
31 Another problem that I ran into is that we don't really have any  
32 criteria to decide if habitat types identified in studies  
33 occurring outside of our jurisdiction should be used to create  
34 map depictions of EFH.

35  
36 The example species I use here is spawning adult blueline  
37 tilefish. I found a study where they were collected on shelf-  
38 edge, sloped habitat type, but the study was conducted outside  
39 of our jurisdiction, and no study referencing that habitat type  
40 has been conducted within our jurisdiction. Should that habitat  
41 type be included in our maps or shouldn't it? That was  
42 something that I had trouble deciding upon, and I'm not sure  
43 that that's really my decision to make, and so I think that it  
44 would be helpful to provide some criteria to decide on how to  
45 answer that question.

46  
47 Next up, and this is a big one from the NOAA consultation  
48 process side of things, is the way that inland boundaries are

1 currently defined is also somewhat vague and challenging to work  
2 with for folks on the ground, and so the potential solution that  
3 I've highlighted here for that would be to work with interested  
4 stakeholders to establish an appropriate inland boundary that is  
5 more explicit for consultation and mapping purposes.

6  
7 Another problem that I found while working through this was that  
8 there is some discrepancies between the habitat association  
9 tables that were identified while I was attempting to make the  
10 maps. The example that I give here are that red drum spawning  
11 adults are identified as using submerged aquatic vegetation as a  
12 habitat type in the habitat association table, but their depth  
13 distribution is described from forty to seventy meters, which  
14 falls well outside where it actually occurs in the Gulf, and so,  
15 throughout this, I think that it would be worthwhile for all the  
16 species to work with species experts to identify further gaps  
17 and discrepancies in habitat information within the habitat  
18 association tables.

19  
20 We ran into some problems with how to identify the best  
21 available GIS data. While we were gathering this data, we had  
22 questions about how to determine what qualifies as best, and so  
23 some habitat types aren't really as much of a concern, for  
24 example hard bottom and reefs. They are relatively static in  
25 nature, and so you don't necessarily need to concern yourself  
26 with when the survey was conducted. That habitat type is likely  
27 still in that location.

28  
29 However, with things like seagrass, which can vary greatly from  
30 year to year and certainly over the course of a decade or less,  
31 how do you draw that line to say it's unlikely that seagrass  
32 still is occurring in this area, because this GIS data was  
33 compiled in 1970, and so I think that it would be helpful,  
34 moving forward, to work with some regional GIS experts to assess  
35 and compile what they consider to be the best available GIS data  
36 describing each habitat type.

37  
38 Another glaring problem that we identified was that essential  
39 fish habitat described for goliath grouper is currently only  
40 identified in Ecoregion 1.

41  
42 However, we have access to data that suggests they also occur in  
43 Ecoregion 2, and part of this problem, I think, stems from the  
44 fact that we don't currently identify artificial reefs as  
45 essential fish habitat, and so it poses the problem if you find  
46 some literature that describes a particular species occurring on  
47 artificial reefs in an ecoregion, but not describe them as  
48 occurring on a habitat type that we do designate as EFH. Does

1 that species occur in that region or does it not?  
2

3 I think that's kind of the problem that was identified in this  
4 specific example, but a potential solution, obviously, is to  
5 revise the description of goliath grouper EFH, and that is  
6 Figure Number 72. You can see the distribution of fishery-  
7 independent sampling of the point locations of goliath grouper,  
8 and you can see they are clearly extending up into the Panhandle  
9 of Florida.

10  
11 The last problem is really just addressing the suggested  
12 revisions, based on the 2010 EFH five-year review, and, if  
13 you're interested in what those suggested revisions were, they  
14 are available in Section 2, which is on page 6 of the primary  
15 document.

16  
17 What's next? I am going to move forward and incorporate any  
18 feedback that you all give me today into this document. Also, I  
19 will be adding all of the references from the habitat  
20 association tables and continuing to add species to the web  
21 application, and my intention is to submit this textual document  
22 to NOAA in December of this year.

23  
24 Really, what I need from you today are any edits, comments, or  
25 feedback that you have on any elements of the document that you  
26 believe should be changed prior to the submission to NOAA, and  
27 that's all I've got.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Okay. Dr. Ponwith.

30  
31 **DR. BONNIE PONWITH:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would say,  
32 scientifically speaking, those map apps rock. Those are very,  
33 very nice, and it takes complex data and it makes them visually  
34 accessible for decision makers, and I just want to applaud you  
35 and your colleagues for the work you put into doing those.

36  
37 The second comment is that I can understand the conundrum of  
38 having studies being conducted outside of our region and  
39 figuring out a way to make decisions about do you incorporate  
40 generic information learned from outside of the region and apply  
41 it to those features in the region or do you not, and that's, I  
42 think, important that you're pausing to answer that question,  
43 rather than leaping forward, because it's a difference between  
44 taking empirical, within-region information and depicting it and  
45 then do you water that down with generic information from our  
46 learnings from outside.

47  
48 What I would say is, first of all, good for you for pausing to

1 ask that question. Second, the Science Center would be pleased  
2 to join in those deliberations, in terms of how to set criteria  
3 to answer that question, if you find that beneficial.

4  
5 **MS. ROBERTS:** Thank you, Dr. Ponwith.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Dr. Stunz.

8  
9 **DR. GREG STUNZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Great presentation.  
10 I feel exactly the same way Bonnie does, and so kudos to you and  
11 John for putting together and visualizing what a lot of us who  
12 have been working in this habitat realm for a long time like to  
13 see. It really sends the message about what's important to  
14 these fish.

15  
16 On your comment about sort of include this jurisdictional thing,  
17 it's along the lines of Dr. Ponwith. I say that, yes, you need  
18 to do it. It's more information that we have. If you're  
19 talking about very remote areas, we're just learning more  
20 information about what habitats fish need, but also, even within  
21 the Gulf. These animals obviously occur outside of our  
22 jurisdictional areas, but you've got a lot of connectivity  
23 issues and fish moving well outside of boundaries that we are  
24 sort of arbitrarily defining for management purposes, many  
25 times, and so, yes, I think that any information included in  
26 this is a good thing.

27  
28 I guess my only other comment would be about artificial reefs.  
29 I would be a strong proponent that, whether they're actually  
30 considered EFH or not, I don't know. That's sort of more of a  
31 political debate, in a way, but the fish actually use these  
32 structures.

33  
34 A lot of research is coming out, and will come out, I'm sure, in  
35 the next few years showing the value of these structures to the  
36 fish populations we manage, and so they need to be folded in, in  
37 one way or another, whether we're technically calling them  
38 essential fish habitat or not, but they need to be addressed in  
39 one way or the other.

40  
41 **MS. ROBERTS:** Thank you.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Any other edits or comments or additions? Dr.  
44 Frazer.

45  
46 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a question,  
47 Claire, about Appendix A. When you look at those, those various  
48 tables, at the bottom, there's a footnote that says that there

1 is bold and italicized information, and it refers to proxy data,  
2 but I don't really know what proxy data might be, in this case,  
3 and where those data might have come from.

4  
5 **MS. ROBERTS:** In most cases, the proxy data is pertaining to  
6 depths, and, essentially, what I did there was presumed  
7 approximately the same depth range was true for adults as it is  
8 for late juveniles and for spawning adults as it is for eggs.  
9 In a lot of cases, we just don't have depth distribution data  
10 for some of those early life stages, and so I -- To the best of  
11 my ability, I took known depth distributions for other life  
12 stages that were likely to be similar for the unknown depth  
13 distributions for the less-well-studied life stages. Does that  
14 make sense?

15  
16 **DR. FRAZER:** Yes, and I think that makes -- That is fine, but I  
17 just think you need to somehow identify or let people know where  
18 that data are coming from, so they can evaluate it. Then just  
19 more of just a general type of question. Once this document is  
20 submitted to NOAA in December, what is the time -- I mean, what  
21 does that process look like, as far as providing comments back  
22 to you and the group? Are there opportunities again to respond  
23 to those comments and then ultimately -- I don't have any idea  
24 of this timeframe and how we might help in moving forward.

25  
26 **MS. ROBERTS:** I am going to punt this to John, because he can  
27 better explain it.

28  
29 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** One of the things that I think I would  
30 encourage the council to consider is what this document does is  
31 it is a -- Essentially, we are to review EFH information to see  
32 if our current identification and description of EFH is based on  
33 the most appropriate scientific data.

34  
35 What this review is, it's not a regulatory document, where it  
36 changes anything about EFH. It really just identifies things  
37 that the council can deliver, if it's a priority, if it's worth  
38 their time to address. For example, the way that EFH is  
39 currently mapped, and it's based on the description, is by  
40 fishery management plan that they're set in, rather than species  
41 by life stage.

42  
43 If the council wanted to, they could amend that process to  
44 incorporate this or whatever we would feel is the current best  
45 information, and so that would be the process, and that's one of  
46 the things to think about, is, based on this review, is there  
47 sufficient new information available that would warrant an  
48 amendment to our current EFH process?

1  
2 **DR. FRAZER:** Thank you.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Mr. Gregory.

5  
6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DOUG GREGORY:** I have a question for John or  
7 Dr. Crabtree. Our requirement is to do this review and give it  
8 to National Marine Fisheries Service. What do they do with it?  
9 I know we can amend the plan, another generic amendment like we  
10 did in 2005, but what does National Marine Fisheries Service do  
11 with the review, like, in 2010, when we produced a review, but  
12 we didn't do another generic amendment?

13  
14 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I will take a stab, and then if Roy wants to  
15 address it, but, the last time, what we did is we provided the  
16 review and we submitted it to National Marine Fisheries Service.  
17 They reviewed our review and essentially sent us a letter that  
18 stated that we had completed the review as required under  
19 Magnuson, and so that's part of it.

20  
21 The council reviewed the document, and, at that time, they  
22 didn't feel that there was sufficient information that  
23 necessitated a change to our current FMP, and so I view that as  
24 two processes. One is NMFS certifying that we completed the  
25 review, based on the requirements, and two is the council  
26 deciding to or not to amend the document.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Ms. Levy.

29  
30 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Whether it be at this meeting or the next  
31 meeting, I would encourage the council to look at the updated  
32 information presented in the review and then decide whether it  
33 warrants further action, some sort of IPT or some type of action  
34 to actually look at whether the EFH designation should be  
35 updated or whether the current designations are consistent with  
36 whatever new information you have and should remain the same.

37  
38 My other comment is I just heard a lot about the species  
39 distribution versus what is designated, potentially, as  
40 essential fish habitat, and I think that the distribution is  
41 supposed to be larger than the EFH designation, and so we're  
42 supposed to be looking at the distribution and then looking at  
43 the particular habitat types and focusing on those that meet the  
44 criteria of essential fish habitat, and so I don't necessarily  
45 think that the fact that the species might be found here and  
46 this area is not designated as essential fish habitat is a  
47 problem.



1 It seems like you do have a lot of new information, and maybe  
2 some updated maps showing where this type of essential fish  
3 habitat is, and it might warrant further review to see whether  
4 you want to update those designations.  
5

6 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Dr. Froeschke.  
7

8 **DR. FROESCHKE:** That problem is partially mitigated in the way  
9 that the EFH is identified. For example, a particular species,  
10 say red drum, seagrass might be identified as EFH for that  
11 species. In order for that to occur, the way it was originally  
12 decided, the species has to be common in there, and so there was  
13 a gradient of abundances, from absent to there, from common to -  
14 - I can't remember, but there was an effort to make it a subset,  
15 such that it wasn't just the entire known geographic  
16 distribution of the species to be described as EFH.  
17

18 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Dr. Simmons.  
19

20 **DR. CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was just going  
21 to ask, but I assume, at some point, we would need a motion from  
22 the committee or the Full Council regarding the review and the  
23 changes that were requested, refining some of that. If that's  
24 acceptable, I think that would be good, if you're happy with the  
25 review, if you could make a motion to that effect, either now or  
26 perhaps at Full Council. Thank you.  
27

28 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. If anybody on the  
29 committee feels that's appropriate at some point, I think we do  
30 need a motion to accept this five-year EFH review and give the  
31 staff editorial license to fine-tune the document. Dr. Stunz.  
32

33 **DR. STUNZ:** I feel that way, and I'm happy to make the motion,  
34 but I probably need a little help crafting that, for what Dr.  
35 Simmons says it needs to say. Carrie, I don't know if you want  
36 to help me out on what you guys really need from a motion like  
37 this. Is it just that we've reviewed the documents and approve  
38 it? I am happy to move that.  
39

40 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY:** We need the council to say that the  
41 review is complete enough to submit to National Marine Fisheries  
42 Service for their review and approval. That's the legal thing  
43 we need to do. We want the council to give us guidance to say,  
44 yes, this is acceptable and we're ready to submit it to National  
45 Marine Fisheries Service by the end of the year.  
46

47 **DR. STUNZ:** Okay. I will move that we feel this report is  
48 acceptable and are ready to forward it to the National Marine

1 **Fisheries Service by the end of 2016.** I feel like we need  
2 something else there.  
3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** We need to give staff editorial license to fine-  
5 tune the document, or something to that effect.  
6  
7 **DR. STUNZ:** **And we give editorial license to staff to modify the**  
8 **document as needed.**  
9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** We have a motion. Is there a second? It's  
11 seconded by Mr. Matens. Mr. Greene, do you have some  
12 discussion?  
13  
14 **MR. JOHNNY GREENE:** I was just going to ask Dr. Stunz if he  
15 would put in there to give editorial license to the staff to  
16 modify the document as needed with approval of the Chair.  
17  
18 **DR. STUNZ:** **Sure. I'm happy with the approval of the Chair.**  
19 That's a good addition.  
20  
21 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Dr. Simmons.  
22  
23 **DR. SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. If you could just maybe  
24 say, in the actual motion, for this five-year EFH review, so we  
25 know it's the actual review on EFH. Thank you.  
26  
27 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Are you satisfied with that, Dr. Stunz?  
28  
29 **DR. STUNZ:** Yes, Mr. Chairman. That's my motion.  
30  
31 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** All right. Any further discussion on the  
32 motion? I am going to read it into the record before we vote.  
33 The motion is to forward the five-year EFH review to National  
34 Marine Fisheries Service by the end of 2016 and give editorial  
35 license to staff to modify the document as needed, with approval  
36 of the Chair. **Seeing no further discussion, is there any**  
37 **opposition to the motion? Seeing no opposition, the motion**  
38 **carries.** I believe that finishes up on the EFH. Mr. Swindell.  
39  
40 **MR. ED SWINDELL:** I found it very interesting in the document,  
41 and this is a lot of data to absorb right now, but I'm looking  
42 at a map here, on page 21, which is the map of the benthic  
43 habitat use by all life stages of red drum, which is very  
44 coinciding with several of the snappers, red snapper and lane  
45 snapper and all, and I am just really surprised by this wide use  
46 of out to 225 miles, in some cases, with red drum going out  
47 there and using this area.  
48

1 I am just amazed. It just really hit me hard, because I always  
2 think of red drum as being more of a coastal resource, and I  
3 never think of going out 225 miles for anything or for red drum.  
4 That was just interesting.

5

6 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Dr. Stunz.

7

8 **DR. STUNZ:** I will make a side comment to that point, Ed. A  
9 group of scientists and I just, sort of as aside, recognized  
10 that, those that study EFH, and we wrote a paper called "We Need  
11 to Identify Essential Essential Fish Habitat", and everybody  
12 came back and said to me, do you realize that you used the word  
13 "essential" twice in the title?

14

15 I was like, obviously you haven't read the paper, but, so far,  
16 nobody has paid a lot of attention to that, but that is a big  
17 problem that I feel with have with this, and it's a problem for  
18 us as a council, is that it gets so big and what do you do?

19

20 Pretty soon, it's the whole shelf, and, unfortunately, we don't  
21 have a good answer to that, but it's something we need to  
22 struggle with, are what are these really, really important areas  
23 that we need to identify, and we're sort of making some progress  
24 with that, with the coral and that sort of thing.

25

26 **MR. SWINDELL:** It just seemed important to me to know that the  
27 red drum is using this habitat for whatever for its life stages.  
28 That is huge for a fish that is so coastal-bound, but yet it's  
29 everywhere out there. I mean, you look at snapper being far  
30 out, yes, but red drum? I was just amazed. Thank you.

31

32 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** I think this wraps us up, Ms. Roberts, on EFH.  
33 I do want to say a few words, though. I think the staff has  
34 worked very hard on this document. This is a huge undertaking.  
35 I think there has been great improvements made. We have these  
36 interactive web portals now that we didn't have before.

37

38 These maps were a big undertaking and going through and updating  
39 the text and the literature reviews, and I would just like to  
40 thank Ms. Roberts and Dr. Froeschke and Dr. Kilgour and Mr.  
41 Schooner for their hard work. If I'm leaving somebody out on  
42 the staff, I apologize, but I have worked directly with those  
43 folks on this, and I know it's very hard work, and so thank you  
44 very much for your efforts.

45

46 If there is nothing else on EFH, next up on the agenda is we're  
47 going to go over the Scoping Draft for the Coral HAPC Amendment.  
48 Dr. Kilgour.

1  
2                   **SCOPING DRAFT FOR CORAL HAPC AMENDMENT**  
3

4 **DR. MORGAN KILGOUR:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have another  
5 PowerPoint that will just kind of lead me through the document,  
6 but it should follow the document pretty well, and I am just  
7 waiting for them to bring it up on the screen.  
8

9 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** That is going to be Tab N, Number 5. Is that  
10 correct, Dr. Kilgour?  
11

12 **DR. KILGOUR:** That's correct. This table is provided to you in  
13 Tab N, Number 5. It's basically the Coral SSC and AP were  
14 tasked with narrowing down the forty-seven areas that were  
15 recommended in the previous year for HAPC status. I gave them  
16 the loose guidance of trying to come up with ten areas, and I  
17 got them down to fifteen, and there are eight additional areas  
18 that they recommended to be considered as HAPCs with no fishing  
19 regulations, and so we currently have a handful of HAPCs that  
20 don't have regulations, and they thought that these areas should  
21 be considered, but they are in very deep water. They are  
22 significant coral areas, but they don't see fishing as being  
23 affected, but they thought that HAPC status was warranted.  
24

25 I am just going to kind of briefly go through the areas,  
26 starting with those off the Florida Shelf and then heading  
27 towards south Texas. The three options that are highlighted in  
28 this document are, one to designate new HAPCs for corals, based  
29 on the most recent information, and I should note that the deep-  
30 sea coral program with NMFS is currently -- In the year 2017,  
31 the Gulf of Mexico is going to be highlighted, especially off  
32 the West Florida Shelf, and so we have ongoing research in these  
33 areas. They are doing a better job of highlighting the  
34 particular coral banks and getting more information on species  
35 and habitat associations of fish with these areas.  
36

37 The other option is to redefine existing HAPCs using new  
38 information, and so there was some discussion during the Flower  
39 Garden Banks presentation of maybe modifying our existing HAPC  
40 boundaries to coincide with the proposed Flower Garden Banks  
41 boundaries, and so that's another option.  
42

43 Then the third option is to reincorporate deep octocorals into  
44 the fishery management unit. Right now, the only species of  
45 corals that are in the Gulf Council's fishery management unit  
46 are stony corals, or reef-building corals, and black corals,  
47 which are common for jewelry, but we don't harvest those in the  
48 Gulf of Mexico for that purpose. However, octocorals can be

1 significant habitat for some species, and they are prevalent  
2 throughout these coral reefs.

3  
4 The current closed areas with fishing regulations, we have the  
5 East and West Flower Garden Banks, the Florida Middle Grounds,  
6 the Tortugas, Stetson Bank, Pulley Ridge, and McGrail Bank.  
7 Generally, all of these prohibit bottom-tending gear, but the  
8 verbiage is slightly different. Some specifically exclude  
9 dredges and others don't. Most all of them prohibit anchoring  
10 by fishing vessels year-round.

11  
12 Again, these are the areas off the West Florida Slope. You will  
13 note that there are five here, and only four of them have been  
14 recommended as priority areas to have fishing regulations, and  
15 that is Pulley Ridge, down at the south, Many Mounds, North  
16 Reed, and Long Mound, up in the northern part of the map.  
17 Pulley Ridge, I am still trying to wrangle a bunch of people to  
18 have a working group to discuss the proposed boundary.

19  
20 That northwestern corner box, whatever you want to call it, is  
21 still very contentious. There is a lot of red grouper fishermen  
22 that use that area and bottom longliners that use that area, and  
23 so it was the hope of the council and the working group to kind  
24 of come together and come up with appropriate boundaries that  
25 would not affect historical fishermen, but also would protect  
26 the expansion of the coral banks. I am still in the process of  
27 trying to get everyone to agree on a time, so we can discuss  
28 those boundaries.

29  
30 That South Reed site, down at the very bottom, that you can kind  
31 of see, that is an area that is recommended to be an HAPC, but  
32 not have fishing regulations. It doesn't appear that there is a  
33 lot of fishing in that area, when you look at the bottom-tending  
34 gear VMS and the shrimp ELB, and so it wasn't very contentious,  
35 but the group felt that it did have significant coral coverage  
36 to warrant an HAPC status.

37  
38 In the northeastern Gulf of Mexico, I didn't include the VMS  
39 data on these maps. It made them very busy. I have been  
40 including them with all the discussions with the APs, but the  
41 shrimp data is included. Those are those gray dots that you can  
42 see.

43  
44 With the meeting of the Shrimp AP and the Coral SSC and the  
45 Coral AP, they came together to identify the areas that they  
46 felt warranted HAPC status, based on species richness and the  
47 amount of information that was available.

48

1 The one area that's still contentious is that Viosca Knoll  
2 862/906. You can see there is heavy shrimp points that go  
3 through that. Those generally are royal red shrimpers. I am  
4 working with the scientists and the royal red shrimpers to try  
5 and come up with acceptable boundaries. Alabama Alps has  
6 significantly decreased in size since the last time you saw it,  
7 to kind of accommodate the historical shrimping but still  
8 protect the coral portion.

9  
10 The central Gulf of Mexico, many of these that you see are those  
11 that are recommended as HAPCs with no fishing regulations.  
12 These are all in very deep water, and that orange line is 109  
13 fathoms, just so that you know that we're talking about really  
14 deep water for these areas.

15  
16 The last two banks are those two identified on the South Texas  
17 Banks. Southern Bank, again, the boundaries were modified to  
18 kind of accommodate where shrimping has occurred and also to  
19 cover the coral hard bottom that is there. I was able to draw  
20 the boundaries pretty tightly around the topographic feature,  
21 but the Harte Bank, they didn't change the boundaries that were  
22 proposed by the working group. I am happy to take any  
23 questions.

24  
25 Again, these areas were identified because of some nonparametric  
26 analyses that Walt Jaap did, and he is our Coral SSC Chair, and  
27 some information that I got from researchers at UT Brownsville  
28 and Texas A&M Corpus Christi, from cruises that they had done in  
29 I think it was 2012 and 2013, and so there is recent information  
30 on these areas and the coral species richness that are on these  
31 areas.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Okay. What we're trying to accomplish here  
34 today, if we can, is we're trying to get to the point where we  
35 can approve this document, the scoping document, to send it out  
36 for public comment and review. Any questions for Dr. Kilgour?  
37 Ms. Guyas.

38  
39 **MS. MARTHA GUYAS:** Not really questions, but just more comments  
40 about the document. I feel like this may be -- You may get more  
41 helpful comments when you go out to scoping if there is more of  
42 the why in this document for each of these areas. Why are we  
43 considering each of these areas specifically? What makes them  
44 unique? What is the habitat and what species are there? It  
45 kind of reminds the fishermen and people that attend these  
46 meetings kind of what's going on. Then what is the goal that  
47 we're really trying to achieve overall, also.

48

1 I will get with you all about the regulations for Florida, for  
2 the octocorals. There is some inaccuracies there that I can  
3 help you with, but I guess I would say the same comment towards  
4 pulling octocorals back into the FMU, or putting it back into  
5 the FMU. What do we actually accomplish by doing that? Are  
6 there some of these areas that only have octocoral coverage and  
7 don't have hard or black coral cover? What are we achieving  
8 there? That's the overall of my comments on this one. I think,  
9 if we're going to get effective comments, I think we need more  
10 information in here.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Thank you, Ms. Guyas. Any other questions or  
13 comments? Dr. Kilgour.

14  
15 **DR. KILGOUR:** I just wanted to address that comment. I did get  
16 that response from the last council meeting, but, when we're  
17 talking about twenty-three areas, if I were to give a detailed  
18 species description for each of those, we would have a scoping  
19 document that goes from ten pages to eighty, easily, and so I  
20 was trying to make it so that I opened up the conversation for  
21 the public to give me input on whether or not they use these  
22 areas.

23  
24 When this develops into an options paper, there will be a lot  
25 more information on the specifics, but I do appreciate that, and  
26 I understand, but I was just trying to balance having people  
27 actually read the document versus not, and so I do appreciate  
28 that, and the information is there, and I should do a better job  
29 in the presentations, when we do these scopings, to kind of  
30 highlight some of these areas, and I will definitely do that.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Ms. Bosarge.

33  
34 **MS. LEANN BOSARGE:** First, thank you, Morgan. I thought it was  
35 a very well-written document and streamlined and easy to  
36 understand, because, having kind of been part of that process  
37 from the beginning, it can be overwhelming when you look at that  
38 many, and so I thought you did a good job of honing in on the  
39 key points.

40  
41 I had a question, and I guess it's mainly for Martha, because I  
42 didn't realize this. The document is looking at protecting or  
43 possibly closing certain areas to protect corals, and mainly  
44 from the fishing side, to protect them from accidental  
45 interactions, because we're not going out there to harvest  
46 coral. We're not targeting coral. When I saw that Florida does  
47 allow some harvest or permitting, it just seemed strange to me  
48 that -- I would like some more info on it.

1  
2 **MS. GUYAS:** Let me explain. Octocorals and what most of you  
3 probably picture as corals are totally different things, and so  
4 these are not reef-building corals. They're not even corals.  
5 Let me just not say that, octocorals, because it's kind of  
6 confusing.

7  
8 This is part of what we call the marine life fishery in Florida,  
9 the aquarium trade. There is a handful of commercial fishermen.  
10 We have a whole permit system for them that will go out and they  
11 are -- They will take octocorals. They are hand-harvested, and  
12 they are choosing very specific specimens that are going to look  
13 good in aquariums and grow well.

14  
15 They kind of operate under a different business model than a lot  
16 of traditional commercial fishermen, in that they're only going  
17 to harvest specific orders, usually. They will get an online  
18 order or whatever. Maybe their dealer will say I need ten of  
19 these, and I've got some customers that are waiting. Like I  
20 said, they're harvesting them by hand. It's not like wholesale,  
21 where they're taking a large area of these, and a lot of these  
22 species grow back pretty quickly.

23  
24 It's a very different fishery. I can give you guys more  
25 information about it if you would like. We do have a quota on  
26 it, and so, back when the councils, both the South Atlantic and  
27 the Gulf, were doing the Comprehensive ACL Amendment and setting  
28 ACLs for all the fisheries, they decided -- Both councils  
29 regulated octocorals, and they were struggling with setting an  
30 appropriate ACL for that fishery, because it's one where pretty  
31 much the only information that we had was just harvest data.

32  
33 Because really the only harvest was occurring off of Florida,  
34 and a lot of it is in state waters, and there are divers taking  
35 them, they were removed from the fishery management unit. For  
36 the Gulf, it was Gulf-wide. For the South Atlantic, it was just  
37 for Florida, and so they're still regulated north of Florida in  
38 the South Atlantic, and I think there is no harvest north of  
39 Florida.

40  
41 That is kind of how we ended up pulling it out of the fishery  
42 management unit, but, again, it's coral, hard corals, and these  
43 octocorals are very, very different organisms, very different  
44 things, but it's an interesting little fishery that we have  
45 there.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Ms. Bosarge.  
48



1 **MS. BOSARGE:** Very interesting. I think that probably leads us  
2 back into the discussion that I think Dr. Frazer brought up at  
3 the last meeting, where, at some point, hopefully in the near  
4 future, we'll be able to get a presentation that gives us a  
5 little bit of education, for those of us that don't have  
6 experience in that realm, about these different corals and their  
7 usefulness, their life history, and all the different aspects  
8 involved, so we can make better informed decisions.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Mr. Swindell.

11  
12 **MR. SWINDELL:** Are any of these corals, octocorals, being taken  
13 in the areas that are being proposed here with these closures?

14  
15 **MS. GUYAS:** Likely not, because they're taken by diving, and so  
16 it's typically diver depths. One, I think, challenge that we  
17 would have, at least off of Florida, because there is this  
18 harvest, is determining what's an allowable octocoral and what  
19 is -- If we incorporated it back into the management plan off of  
20 Florida, a lot of times telling differences between the species  
21 can be difficult. Inverts are kind of crazy like that, I would  
22 say, and I think it could be an enforcement issue. That's just  
23 some food for thought, if we go down that road, but I don't want  
24 to get ahead of ourselves.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Dr. Kilgour.

27  
28 **DR. KILGOUR:** I just wanted to address the octocorals issue.  
29 It's true that some of the shallow-water octocorals grow back  
30 relatively quickly, but the deepwater octocorals, which the  
31 Coral SSC and AP had recommended for incorporation into the FMU,  
32 some of those are very old, slow-growing different species.

33  
34 They look different, and so that was the motivation for  
35 incorporating -- They actually wanted to have a depth limit and  
36 a specific species listed as what would be incorporated into the  
37 fishery management unit, and so that's why it was an option in  
38 this. The council can choose to do anything that they want to  
39 do, but it was something that the Coral SSC and AP felt pretty  
40 strongly about, these octocorals in the deep water.

41  
42 They are used by many species to come up out of the benthic  
43 boundary layer, so that they can get oxygen. These are low-  
44 oxygen environments, and, again, they are very slow growing and  
45 very deep, and so that's why they wanted to incorporate them  
46 into the fishery management unit, but the council can do  
47 whatever they wanted to, but I believe they wanted specific  
48 species mentioned, or at least families that don't occur in

1 shallow water, and so there would be a differentiation between  
2 what's currently harvested off the coast of Florida and what  
3 would be incorporated in the fishery management unit.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Ms. Bosarge.

6  
7 **MS. BOSARGE:** Morgan, will you back up one slide? I would like  
8 to just explain something that I found very interesting. Can  
9 you go to Viosca Knoll 862/906, the one where you see the shrimp  
10 tracks going straight through the middle of it?

11  
12 That is actually a very well-documented coral area. There has  
13 been a lot of research done on it, and that coral is very  
14 pristine, and it's not -- When you see those shrimp tracks, you  
15 would think there's a lot of damage in that area if there is  
16 coral down there, but there is actually not a lot of damage, and  
17 it's a testament to the fishermen that fish there and their  
18 stewardship and their understanding of the ecosystem.

19  
20 They actually know where that coral is too, and the way that  
21 they fish that bottom -- That is a royal red shrimp grounds, and  
22 that's really deep. That's not the type of shrimping we do.  
23 It's a very finite group of individuals that do that type of  
24 shrimping, but they actually know where that coral is, and so  
25 they have set-out and pickup lines, is what they call them.

26  
27 In other words, they have a certain GPS function where they know  
28 when to pick those nets up, in order to lift them up into the  
29 water column while continuing to tow, and the nets essentially  
30 are high enough in the water column that they go right over the  
31 coral, and then they have a set-out line and they let those nets  
32 back down.

33  
34 That way, they can continue to fish without damaging the  
35 environment, and they've done that for years and years, as you  
36 can see, because I think that's ten or eleven years' worth of  
37 shrimp data on that screen right there, and so about a decade or  
38 so, and it's still pristine.

39  
40 Those are the kinds of things that we have to keep in mind when  
41 we try and balance the need for protection versus the need to  
42 not shut out individuals that understand the value of what's  
43 there and have been protecting it in their own way, to find a  
44 way to balance those competing interests as we go forward, and I  
45 just wanted to point that out, so that people didn't see that  
46 and think, oh my gosh, people are shrimping right through the  
47 middle of the coral. That's the way that's working.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Mr. Greene.

2  
3 **MR. GREENE:** Just to make sure that I'm clear, on the current  
4 screen that we're looking at, the Viosca Knoll 862/906 block, is  
5 that the actual size of the HAPC that we're considering?  
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Dr. Kilgour.

8  
9 **DR. KILGOUR:** No, and that boundary is currently undergoing  
10 revision. I have some coordinates from the royal red shrimper  
11 that has been really good to come to all of these meetings and  
12 provide input, and I am working with coral scientists to try and  
13 revise these boundaries to where everyone can be happy.  
14

15 One thing that was recommended in a much earlier meeting is  
16 perhaps there should be some exemption for folks with a royal  
17 red shrimp endorsement. The problem with a lot of these areas  
18 is they are pulling up their nets above the reef, and so it  
19 still looks like they're towing, but they're not, and so we're  
20 trying to accommodate the protection of the coral while the  
21 fishermen who have been using these areas and not damaging the  
22 coral, not hamstringing them.  
23

24 I am currently working on revisions of that boundary with the  
25 scientists and the shrimpers, so that hopefully we can come up  
26 with something that everybody is happy with, but that was the  
27 proposed boundary. It just hasn't changed yet, because I  
28 haven't gotten a consensus from the user groups.  
29

30 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Mr. Greene.

31  
32 **MR. GREENE:** Okay. Thank you. Just a follow-up comment,  
33 because, knowing where this area is, these are areas that I fish  
34 around a lot and go travel through here as I'm going offshore,  
35 and I see these shrimp boats making two knots, 2.4 knots, when  
36 they're towing, and the only shrimp I have ever caught has been  
37 with a fork, but I can imagine that it would take a couple of  
38 hours to pull that net up from the bottom, 1,200 feet, to the  
39 surface.  
40

41 It's not something that happens very quickly, and so I am  
42 certainly very interested in that, because, if you scroll down,  
43 back to the Texas Banks -- When we were first going through the  
44 presentation, I was trying to keep up with it and everything,  
45 and so, at my first glance of that, I thought that was the Texas  
46 coast. Then it dawned on me that those were shrimp tracks.  
47 Then it dawned on me that, well, it's pretty easy to see where I  
48 probably should go fishing and not shrimping.

1  
2 It looks like they've done a very good job of mitigating their  
3 effort around these particular areas, as much as possible, and  
4 so I encourage you to continue to work with those fishermen and  
5 find out, because it's very plain here. You can see the two  
6 areas of concern, and there is very marginal shrimp tracks  
7 through there at all, and so I think you guys are on the right  
8 track, and I hope you will continue to work with them as you  
9 move forward.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Dr. Kilgour.

12  
13 **DR. KILGOUR:** On that note, I should let you know that Corky  
14 Perret is here, and he's our Shrimp AP Chair, and he might have  
15 something to add, if you had questions about how the Shrimp AP  
16 and the Coral AP meeting went. I think Walt is here too, but  
17 I'm not sure. I haven't seen him, but --

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Mr. Gregory.

20  
21 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY:** Just as a side note, we have been  
22 talking about VMS and electronic logbooks, and a number of  
23 people in the industry originally and still are opposed, and you  
24 hear comments like I don't want people to know where I am  
25 fishing, but the interesting thing here is we're using this  
26 information to document the effectiveness of the fishermen in  
27 avoiding essential fish habitat areas, or particular areas, and  
28 in helping to work out solutions to these problems, instead of  
29 just saying, okay, here is some coral and let's just close the  
30 area and not know what the potential impacts are. This is a  
31 very good example of how electronic information can be useful to  
32 help everybody concerned with the process.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Mr. Perret.

35  
36 **MR. CORKY PERRET:** Thank you. I am sorry, but I was outside  
37 discussing fishery issues, but we, the Coral AP, the Coral  
38 Scientific Committee, and the Shrimp Advisory Committee met, and  
39 we have a former senator from Mississippi who wrote a book  
40 *Herding Cats*. When they decided they wanted me to chair that  
41 three-committee meeting, I thought, oh, boy, we've got coral  
42 guys and we've got shrimp guys, and we also had some of the  
43 longliners in there, but there were thirty-five committee  
44 members.

45  
46 We had an excellent turnout, and there were eleven other people,  
47 and so forty-plus people really worked together very well trying  
48 to come up with options and recommendations, number one, to

1 protect that coral habitat and yet minimize, as much as they  
2 could, the impact on some of the fisheries that are involved in  
3 the area.

4  
5 I've got to compliment the council for putting that group  
6 together, because getting those people together, it was amazing  
7 how well they were willing to work together to come up with  
8 hopefully some good solutions for some of these areas and  
9 minimize any damage whatsoever to the coral.

10  
11 The fishermen don't want to damage the coral, but, yet, they  
12 don't want to give up any areas that they don't have to give up,  
13 because, just by drawing, in some cases, straight lines, because  
14 it's a more practical approach. I thought the group did very  
15 well, and I think this is something the council should do early  
16 on, get different groups involved, and it might make your job a  
17 lot easier. Thank you.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** One thing I noticed at the meeting, Corky, was  
20 the royal red shrimper, when he was talking, when you think of  
21 shrimpers shrimping in shallow water, it's very easy for them to  
22 turn and go in a different direction, but, when these royal red  
23 shrimpers are shrimping in these very deep waters, they've got  
24 so much cable out that they're committed to pulling straight.  
25 They really can't do a whole lot of turning.

26  
27 A lot of times, they are trying to stay in the same depth range  
28 too, for the cable, to match everything they have out, and so  
29 they've got some unique challenges out in that deep water, and I  
30 think they have been innovative in trying to avoid this area,  
31 particularly. Thank you, Mr. Perret. Any other comments? Dr.  
32 Simmons.

33  
34 **DR. SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Did you want the Reef  
35 Fish AP recommendations?

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Please.

38  
39 **DR. SIMMONS:** They discussed this as well, and it's on page 2 of  
40 the Reef Fish AP Report, and so it's Tab B, Number 13. Staff  
41 presented the same scoping document you have reviewed here and  
42 provided background information on new research about these  
43 areas and their importance to the fishery resources that the  
44 council manages.

45  
46 I should note that we had two bottom longline fishermen there  
47 present in the audience in addition to our AP members that were  
48 present, and they reviewed these areas one-by-one, and they made

1 several motions regarding these recommended HAPCs.

2  
3 Morgan did a great job. She had the information about the  
4 fishing. She had it using the bottom-tending VMS system data,  
5 but the AP requested that all VMS data and not just the bottom-  
6 tending gear be used for future analysis, and so I think we're  
7 working on that. We're just not quite there yet.

8  
9 Much of the discussion centered on whether these corals truly  
10 need protection, because of what you just discussed. These have  
11 been preserved and they haven't been damaged, from the  
12 scientists' information, and so there was really a lot of  
13 concern expressed by the AP about closing these areas and the  
14 potential fines that could occur when they maintain these areas  
15 as pristine. They made several motions.

16  
17 The first one is on page 3. By a vote of twelve to one with two  
18 abstentions, the AP recommends that the council not expand the  
19 current Pulley Ridge HAPC with regulations. By a vote of  
20 thirteen to one with one abstention, the AP recommends that Long  
21 Mound, North Reed Site, and Many Mounds be HAPCs, but with no  
22 fishing regulations.

23  
24 Then, by a vote of thirteen to one with one abstention, the AP  
25 recommends that Mississippi Canyon 118, Viosca Knoll 862/906,  
26 Alabama Alps Reef, Viosca Knoll 826, the L&W Pinnacles, Scamp  
27 Reef and Rough Tongue Reef be HAPCs with no fishing regulations.

28  
29 Then, off of Texas, by a vote of fourteen to zero with one  
30 abstention, the AP recommends that Southern Bank and Unnamed  
31 Bank, or Harte Bank, be HAPCs with no fishing regulations.

32  
33 Then, by a vote of twelve to one with two abstentions, the AP  
34 recommends that all the proposed HAPCs in the Gulf of Mexico  
35 have no fishing regulations, and so they were in favor of  
36 designating them as HAPCs, but they were not in favor of putting  
37 additional fishing regulations on those areas. I will stop  
38 there to see if there is questions.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Are there questions for Dr. Simmons? Thank you,  
41 Dr. Simmons. What is the pleasure of the committee? I think,  
42 originally, we had talked about sending this out for scoping in  
43 January, but I know we've had some comments from Ms. Guyas that  
44 she would like a little bit more information in the documents  
45 and things, and so what is the pleasure of the committee? Ms.  
46 Bosarge.

47  
48 **MS. BOSARGE:** I am not on your committee, and so thank you, Mr.

1 Chairman. I know that, at one point, and I think I discussed it  
2 with Myron offline, when we were trying to figure out  
3 scheduling, because we had so many different things to take out  
4 to the public, and Myron and I had an idea of possibly taking  
5 this out with the shrimp document when we go, because the coral  
6 and the shrimp have some interaction that they would have some  
7 interest in there, and that may help to get participation as  
8 well at some of the scoping meetings for this.

9  
10 I don't know what the schedule is on the shrimp document, and so  
11 that may be a hiccup there, but that is one option to try and  
12 streamline some of our meetings, if Myron wants to weigh in on  
13 that. I don't know if he still was thinking along that line.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Mr. Gregory, I am going to put you on the spot.  
16 I know, in the past, you have said that you didn't like  
17 combining scoping meetings and things, but what is your thoughts  
18 on what Ms. Bosarge is proposing?

19  
20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY:** You mean my chief boss? There is  
21 always exceptions.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Exactly.

24  
25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY:** No, I think the logic is there to  
26 do this. We do have a lot of hearings to do, and so, if we can  
27 double up on some and make them effective, it's fine.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** What is the timeline for the shrimp document,  
30 just so everybody is aware of it, to send it out? Dr. Kilgour.

31  
32 **DR. KILGOUR:** We will have a public hearing draft to you in  
33 January, and so the hope was to put the scoping document for the  
34 coral and shrimp public hearing draft out after the January  
35 council meeting, if that was the council's pleasure.

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Ms. Guyas.

38  
39 **MS. GUYAS:** I think that makes sense. Then I can get some of  
40 the information to Morgan and maybe we can get a little bit more  
41 of the why in here. I understand what you're saying about not  
42 wanting to blow this document into a monster.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Dr. Kilgour.

45  
46 **DR. KILGOUR:** Perhaps I bring back a revised scoping draft to  
47 you in January, before we go out to public hearings, and we will  
48 modify the purpose and need so that we have more of the why in

1 there. That is something that the IPT has been struggling with,  
2 but we could do that.

3

4 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Thank you. That sounds like a plan. Any  
5 further comments? Seeing none, I believe we are finished with  
6 this particular document. Is there any other business to come  
7 before this committee? Seeing none, this committee is  
8 adjourned.

9

10 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on October 19, 2016.)

11

12

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