

TAB E

Sustainable Fisheries Committee Report August 7, 2017 David Walker – Chair

The agenda was approved with the addition of items under Other Business, and the minutes of the June 5, 2017 Committee meeting were approved as written.

Protocol for Authorizing Sea Turtle Release Gear

Mr. Charlie Bergmann (SEFSC-Pascagoula) gave a presentation describing the protocols and procedures in use to protect sea turtles from interactions with the reef fish fishery. He displayed two new devices that he felt should be approved for sea turtle releases: a collapsible hoop net that could be used in place of the current dip net, and a dehooking device. Staff summarized a discussion paper that could be developed into an amendment to authorize the new devices and modify the framework procedure to allow changes in release gear requirements to be implemented via the framework process.

Without opposition, the Committee recommends, and I so move: **To move forward with the document that approves the new turtle release gear and modifies our framework process to allow the specification of new release gears for turtles and other protected resources.**

Lionfish Research Overview

Dr. Tom Frazer gave a presentation highlighting his research on lionfish off of the Cayman Islands. His studies found that there was a higher abundance of native reef fish in locations where lionfish were removed than in control areas where lionfish were not removed. However, he found no difference between the control and lionfish removal sites in species richness, species diversity, or evenness. He noted that groupers are starting to learn to eat lionfish.

Lionfish Actions by Federal and State Agencies

Representatives from NMFS, USFWS, and each of the state management agencies gave a short presentation/discussion on agency actions to monitor or remediate lionfish. NMFS noted that they have received applications for EFP and LOAs to evaluate various gear types, and will hold a scientific workshop in August to inform study objectives and survey design. USFWS is primarily involved with coordination and funding of projects, and is addressing lionfish through a National Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force. Each of the state agencies has monitoring and outreach programs, and in some cases, programs to promote the removal of lionfish. These programs are described in the state presentations in the briefing book, except for Alabama and Texas, which provided verbal reports.

Other Business

Ms. Bosarge stated that the Council had previously reviewed an options paper on descending devices and venting tools, but provided no guidance to staff. She indicated that she would like to discuss this at full Council.

Ms. Bosarge also noted that a recent newspaper article stated that this year's dead zone off Louisiana is the largest ever. The size of this dead zone is primarily influenced by agricultural runoff into from interior states. She asked if the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service could do anything to address this runoff issue. Glenn Constant responded that they could possibly address the issue through their Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) process. Ms. Bosarge asked that a presentation be given to the Council on this at a future meeting.

Madam chair, this concludes my report.