

Joint Coral and Habitat Protection and Restoration Committee Report
June 5, 2017
Dale Diaz and John Sanchez, Chairs

Review Options Paper for Coral Amendment 9

Staff presented the Committee with the Draft Options Paper for Coral Amendment 9. There are nine actions in the document. The Committee made several recommendations regarding the introduction and purpose and need including: clarifying the quadrants in the table 1.1.1, modifying the purpose and need to state “appropriate protections for corals in the GOM,” and clarifying some language. Action 1 addresses incorporating octocorals in the FMU. The Committee discussed clarifying Alternative 1. Florida currently manages octocoral harvest in the EEZ adjacent to Florida. Staff also presented the Committee with Action 2 and some issues which the IPT asked for clarification. The Committees discussed the current issues with adding octocorals to the FMU and made the following motion.

The Committee recommends and I so move: **To move Action 1 and 2 to “Considered but Rejected.”**

Motion carried with no opposition.

Staff proceeded to review Actions 3-8 which all address creating new HAPCs in the various regions of the Gulf. There were some minor edits to wording that were suggested and will be included in future documents as will clarification on deep-water coral definitions. Staff will include discussion on the differences between the ELB data and the VMS data in the figure legends and will also adjust the color scheme to better reflect effort. It was also requested that information on how many fishermen are permitted with bottom tending gear and VMS in the eastern Gulf to help inform discussion on eastern Gulf areas.

Staff highlighted the two areas that were identified as contentious and how the options for the Alternatives reflected a tiered approach for these areas. The Committee discussed adding an exemption or tiered approach for all areas that have fishing documented, but no motion was made.

Staff presented Action 9 which would address prohibiting dredging in existing HAPCs with fishing regulations.

The Committee requested clarification on the different mechanisms for protecting corals. Staff highlighted that the deep-sea coral provision for the MSA was intended for Councils that do not have formal Coral FMPs and that the deep-sea coral provision will only prohibit fishing. Coral EFH automatically requires a consultation with NMFS for any extractive purpose, and the establishment of coral HAPCs would highlight specific areas of concern within coral EFH.

The Committees discussed that there should be a prohibition on all anchoring in these areas. Staff will investigate how other Councils prohibit anchoring, if the anchoring is fishing vessel specific, and will report back to the Council with the information.

Other Business

Staff provided a brief update on the status of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Expansions. The Council will likely be presented with updates to both expansions in 2018.

Madam chair, this concludes my report.