

TAB E

**Sustainable Fisheries/Ecosystem Committee
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
March 30, 2015
Golden Nugget Casino Hotel
Biloxi Mississippi**

Categorical Exclusion – Charter/Headboat Decals

Some Council members felt that the Council had not provided enough public access to this proposed action. They stated that they had spoken to charterboat operators who were unaware of the action and were opposed to it. The charterboat operators felt that the decals allowed them to differentiate federally permitted vessels from non-federally permitted vessels, and that this would allow them to police themselves. They suggested that, if anything, the decals should be made larger and easier to read. Dr. Crabtree passed around a sample decal. He stated that the decals are not legible unless up close, and that enforcement is based on the vessel's permit, not the decal. Vessels can transfer a federal permit and are supposed to remove the decal, but do not always do so, making the decals unreliable to identify federally permitted vessels. Because the document was intended to be a categorical exclusion, it did not contain any alternatives, only a proposed action to eliminate the decal requirement.

By a voice vote with one opposed, the Committee recommends and I so move, that the Council stop work on the document to eliminate the decals for federally permitted for-hire vessels.

NOAA Climate Change Strategy

Doug Gregory related that the Council received a presentation on the draft Climate Change Strategy in January, but did not have the actual draft document to review at that time. The document is in the current briefing book materials, and Mr. Gregory gave a brief presentation highlighting the major features of the draft strategy. One Council member asked what NMFS could do about climate change. Mr. Gregory responded that the document was primarily about adapting to changes and did not address any mitigation factors. Dr. Will Patterson presented the SSC comments and recommendations. He noted that mitigation actions such as alternative fuels had been discussed by the SSC and could possibly be added to the document. He noted that, in the Gulf, climate change is being addressed by incorporation into integrated ecosystem assessments. Mr. Gregory then reviewed a draft letter to the NMFS Office of Science and Technology commenting on the draft strategy. The recommendations in the letter were based on staff review of the draft strategy and also contained the SSC recommendations.

By a unanimous voice vote, the Committee recommends and I so move, that the Council give staff editorial license and approve the draft letter on Climate Change Strategy for submission to the NMFS Office of Science and Technology.

National Standard 1, 3, and 7 Proposed Revisions

Alan Risenhoover gave a presentation outlining the proposed changes to National Standard 1, including changes to National Standards 3 and 7. Will Patterson reviewed the SSC comments, which focused on the relationship between OY, ACL, and ACT. Steven Atran noted that staff reviewed the redline draft of the proposed changes and had several proposed comments. The public comment period for the proposed revisions runs through June. Staff will prepare a letter to send to the NMFS Office of Sustainable Fisheries based on staff review, SSC comments, and any Council recommendations for review and approval by the Council at the June meeting.

Ecosystem SSC Report

Steven Atran summarized the report of the September 19, 2014 meeting of the Ecosystem Based Fishery Management Working Group. This group was charged with developing suggested goals and objectives, and with identifying and prioritizing information needs for ecosystem based fishery management. The group's recommendations were submitted to the Ecosystem SSC. Dr. Wei Wu presented a summary of the February 25, 2015 meeting of the Ecosystem SSC, which focused on the effect of the Madison-Swanson, Steamboat Lumps, and Edges marine reserves on gag, red grouper, and other species in the reserves. Monitoring by FSU researchers found that gag, red grouper and red snapper were larger inside the reserves than outside the reserves. In addition, commercial CPUE of gag and red snapper declined in a linear rate with increasing distance from the reserves, suggesting a spillover effect that decreased with distance. The Ecosystem SSC had seven recommendations for the Council to consider for actions to proceed with ecosystem based management.

Due to time constraints, the Committee did not discuss the Ecosystem SSC's recommendations. Instead, Acting Chair Leann Bosarge suggested that the Ecosystem SSC report be submitted for review to the new consolidated SSC once that SSC is formed.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my report.