

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

JOINT CORAL/HABITAT PROTECTION & RESTORATION COMMITTEE

Astor Crowne Plaza New Orleans, Louisiana

January 30, 2017

CORAL COMMITTEE VOTING MEMBERS

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

HABITAT PROTECTION & RESTORATION COMMITTEE VOTING MEMBERS

- Dale Diaz.....Mississippi
John Greene.....Alabama
Martha Guyas (designee for Nick Wiley).....Florida
Campo Matens.....Louisiana
John Sanchez.....Florida
Greg Stunz.....Texas

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Leann Bosarge.....Mississippi
Doug Boyd.....Texas
Roy Crabtree.....NMFS, SERO, St. Petersburg, Florida
Pamela Dana.....Florida
LCDR Leo Danaher.....USCG
Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
Lance Robinson (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
Ed Swindell.....Louisiana
David Walker.....Alabama

STAFF

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Matt Freeman.....Economist
Douglas Gregory.....Executive Director
Morgan Kilgour.....Fishery Biologist
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1
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8 Richard Fischer.....LA
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15 Bonnie Ponwith.....SEFSC

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17 - - -
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Amendment 7 out for scoping hearings. The motion carried on
page 18.

- - -

1 The Joint Coral/Habitat Protection & Restoration Committees of
2 the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council convened at the
3 Astor Crowne Plaza, New Orleans, Louisiana, Monday afternoon,
4 January 30, 2017, and was called to order by Chairman Dale Diaz.

5
6 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
7 **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
8 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**
9

10 **CHAIRMAN DALE DIAZ:** First off, I would like to review exactly
11 who is on the committees. On the Coral Committee, it's John
12 Sanchez is the Chair, Tom Frazer is the Vice Chair, Johnny
13 Greene, Camp Matens, Dr. Lucas, and Ms. Guyas. On Habitat
14 Protection, I am the Chair. Johnny Greene is Vice Chair. Mr.
15 Banks or Mr. Fischer from Louisiana, Glenn Constant, Camp
16 Matens, John Sanchez, Greg Stunz, and Ms. Guyas. Prior to
17 meeting today, Mr. Sanchez and I had a discussion, and we agreed
18 that I would be the Chair for this meeting, and so thank you,
19 Mr. Sanchez.

20
21 First up on the agenda is the Adoption of the Agenda. Does
22 anybody have any additions or other business for the agenda?
23 Seeing none, the agenda is adopted.

24
25 Next up is Approval of the June 2016 Joint Coral and Habitat
26 Protection Committee minutes. Does anybody have any additions
27 or corrections to the minutes? Seeing none, the minutes are
28 adopted.

29
30 Next up on the agenda is the Action Guide and Next Steps. Just
31 to give you a quick recap of the Action Guide and Next Steps,
32 what we're going to do, in a little while, is Morgan is going to
33 give us a review on the biology of coral, and then we're going
34 to look at the Draft Coral Amendment 7.

35
36 We're going to review the documents for any changes needed, and
37 our hope today is to approve the document to go out to scoping
38 and to the public, and so that's what we're trying to accomplish
39 today. With that, the first item that we're going to take up is
40 Dr. Kilgour is going to give us a Presentation on the Biology of
41 Corals. Dr. Kilgour.

42
43 **PRESENTATION ON THE BIOLOGY OF CORALS**
44

45 **DR. MORGAN KILGOUR:** At the last council meeting, it was
46 requested that I kind of give a brief overview of some coral
47 biology. In a previous life, I was a deep-sea biologist. I
48 focused on decapod crustaceans, and thus, also corals, because

1 that's where the decapods were. I am going to give a very brief
2 overview of the deepwater corals in the Gulf of Mexico. Please
3 feel free to ask me any questions as they come about.

4
5 Just a little bit of comparison. The difference between shallow
6 and deepwater corals is mainly their light needs. Shallow-water
7 corals need light. They have a symbiotic zooxanthellae, which
8 is a type of algae that live in them and that help them feed
9 themselves. Those algae produce nutrients that the corals feed
10 off of, and, in response, the corals provide protection and also
11 provide nutrients to the algae.

12
13 Shallow-water corals also live in a dynamic environment. They
14 have night and day, and they have temperature fluctuations,
15 because of that, and they will have salinity fluctuations as
16 well from freshwater runoff and things, and they are much more
17 directly affected by human forces, like divers and fishermen and
18 nutrient runoff. Anything that humans can throw at them,
19 shallow-water corals are going to experience.

20
21 Deepwater corals live just below the photic zone, or where there
22 is no light. There is low nutrients in the water, and so they
23 are very slow growing, generally. This is the octocorals, the
24 black corals, and the stony corals, and they live in a pretty
25 static environment. There isn't a night and day shift. It's
26 always dark. There is relatively low oxygen, and it's very
27 cold, between five and twelve degrees Celsius.

28
29 It's been hypothesized, and not proven, but, because they live
30 in this static environment that isn't changing on a daily basis,
31 that they might be more susceptible to things like climate
32 change and lower pH and changing ocean conditions.

33
34 Mesophotic corals are the corals in the middle. They exist just
35 at the edge of the photic zone, where the light exists, and so
36 they're in these very low-light conditions. They are at the
37 upper depth limits of these deepwater corals, because they don't
38 require light, but they can exist in those areas, and so
39 mesophotic corals are prevalent throughout the Gulf of Mexico.
40 This is what you're going to see on the Flower Garden Banks and
41 throughout a lot of these areas, because the Gulf of Mexico is a
42 relatively shallow waterbody, compared to the Pacific and the
43 Atlantic. This is that edge habitat between light corals and
44 deepwater corals.

45
46 A little overview. We have stony corals, which are hard, reef-
47 forming corals, which is what you typically think of when you're
48 thinking of corals. We have about eighty species in the Gulf of

1 Mexico database. Now, not all of these are deepwater corals,
2 and not all of them are true different species. Some of them
3 might not have been identified all the way to the species level
4 taxonomically, and so there is roughly eighty, plus or minus ten
5 or so.

6
7 These are the reef-building corals, but they may be solitary. I
8 have a few pictures down here. The picture on the very right is
9 an example of a solitary coral. Those are really prevalent.
10 They are actually quite large, three to ten centimeters in
11 length or diameter, and so pretty large for a solitary coral.
12 Then I have a lophelia and some zigzag coral also in the
13 pictures on the bottom.

14
15 Here is an example of some stony corals, and there are red crabs
16 all over. Those are a fishery off the New England coast, the
17 red deep-sea crab. We don't have a fishery for it in the Gulf
18 of Mexico. It was thought, in the 1970s, that it wasn't
19 economically viable, but they do exist, and they are all over
20 the place.

21
22 Black corals, we have about fifty species in the Gulf of Mexico
23 database, and, again, this is not just deepwater coral. This is
24 also shallow coral. They are called black corals because, once
25 you strip off all the living tissue, underneath it's a black
26 skeleton. It's very beautiful, and it's commonly what is used
27 for coral jewelry.

28
29 These black corals can be anywhere on hard substrates and soft
30 substrates, and so they are species specific. If you have ever
31 held a sea whip, which can wash up onto the shore, they are
32 yellow and they look like wire. Those are black corals that are
33 on soft substrate, and they are in typically shallow water, but
34 we also have sea whips in the deep sea that are also on
35 substrate.

36
37 These are giant trees. They can be three to five meters tall,
38 and so they are not very small, but they don't always -- They
39 are really susceptible to damage if they were to be torn at or
40 something, but these big, tree-like structures, usually they are
41 going to have some type of small base on a rock or a cobble or
42 some hard substrate. The sea whips are the ones that you
43 typically see on soft substrate.

44
45 Octocorals and sea fans, I thought we should mention these,
46 since it's been proposed that some of these should be
47 incorporated into the fishery management unit. They are the
48 most specious in the Gulf of Mexico, more than 145 different

1 species, and they are on both soft sediment and hard substrate.
2 That tends to be species-specific. These two are an example of
3 corals that are on hard substrate, but there is a paramuricea,
4 which is -- I don't want to say this, but it's almost like a
5 weed, and it's all over the soft substrate in the Gulf of
6 Mexico.

7
8 Why are these corals important, especially when they're not
9 reef-building corals, but they're just these giant sea fans that
10 are off the sea floor? At the interface between the sediment
11 and the ocean currents, there is a very low oxygen, especially
12 in the deep, when you're already in low-oxygen conditions.

13
14 Right at that sediment/water interface, the oxygen is almost
15 depleted completely, and so the organisms in the sediment kind
16 of chew all that up, and so these corals provide some type of
17 vertical structure that organisms -- You can see in this picture
18 really well. Those are some brittle stars, and also crabs and
19 fish, but they can pull themselves up out of that benthic
20 boundary layer, which is just a few centimeters off the
21 sediment, so that they're in more oxygenated water.

22
23 That is what corals really do for a lot of these animals in the
24 deep. It's already a low-oxygen environment, but they pull them
25 up off of that benthic boundary layer and get them into more
26 oxygenated water.

27
28 They also provide -- They also oriented, in a way into the
29 current, so that they're getting the optimum flow for feeding,
30 and so the corals are feeding on nutrients and things in the
31 water, as are the organisms that are using them as kind of a
32 stepladder up off the ocean floor.

33
34 Like I said, these corals provide habitat for other species. We
35 are still finding out more and more about what other species
36 they currently provide habitat for. I have to put a little
37 picture of a squat lobster. That's what I did my dissertation
38 on. That's the top right-hand corner.

39
40 Those are squat lobsters, but, on the bottom corner, you can see
41 there is lots of brittle stars, and there is catshark egg
42 purses, and so this has been recently discovered, that, without
43 these corals, the catsharks would have no place to lay their
44 eggs. Whenever they go to this one particular field, it's
45 usually covered with catshark egg cases, and so they're finding
46 more and more about this.

47
48 Blackbelly rosefish use these corals all the time. Snowy

1 grouper also use these corals as habitat and golden crabs,
2 which, again, we don't have a fishery for in the Gulf of Mexico,
3 but there is one in the South Atlantic. The juvenile golden
4 crabs are always embedded in these corals.

5
6 Here is the picture of the golden crabs, the juveniles, all over
7 some coral heads, and you are seeing these corals, and this is a
8 typical healthy lophelia reef. Some of them are -- You're going
9 to see some dead lophelia with live lophelia growing on top of
10 it. That is very common, to see lophelia just constantly
11 growing up and up and up. Then it will die and still just
12 continue to grow on the top of it.

13
14 Other coral fun facts, coral-reef-associated species, in
15 particular the red sponges in the deep, have been found to have
16 really good pharmaceutical properties for anti-cancer drugs and
17 basically anything that is rapidly forming. They are finding a
18 lot of properties in some of these reef-associated species to
19 help ameliorate those kind of effects.

20
21 The black and stony coral and octocorals have had ages done on
22 them from a variety of researchers, one in the Texas A&M
23 University in College Station, Brendan Rourke, he does a lot of
24 aging of corals. They found that some of these black corals and
25 stony corals can be hundreds to thousands of years old.

26
27 Corals grow like trees almost, where they lay down a daily or
28 yearly ring, and so they can count how old these corals are, and
29 they used carbon dating to check to see if those were correct,
30 and so these are really old animals. Removing one from the
31 seafloor is -- You might be removing something that's been there
32 for a thousand years.

33
34 There has been an increase in the number of cruises scheduled.
35 In the Gulf of Mexico, there is a number of cruises scheduled
36 for the deep sea in particular. There is one cruise scheduled
37 for 2017, to actually look at some of the areas that are in the
38 coral scoping document, but there are big challenges to studying
39 any of these deep-sea areas.

40
41 You don't get the repetitive statistically-rigorous sampling. I
42 was asking a couple of researchers how much it costs per day to
43 one or maybe two ROV dives, and I was told that, depending on
44 the vessel and depending on the equipment that you use, if you
45 are on a government vessel that has already got an ROV, it could
46 be as little as \$25,000 a day.

47
48 If you have to charter your own vessel and get an industrial ROV

1 to go down to these depths, you're talking \$66,000 a day, and so
2 you're looking at, for a ten-day cruise, upwards of a quarter-
3 of-a-million dollars just to get ten days of cruise time in,
4 and, if you're running twenty-four-hour operations, you're
5 probably getting twenty-four to maybe forty-eight dives, if
6 you're lucky, and so it's very expensive to go and do this
7 sampling and to find out information.

8
9 There have been studies that have been looking at the growth of
10 areas. Eric Cordes, who has been at a couple of our SSC and AP
11 meetings to provide us with information, he has done some
12 growth, where he dyed some of the coral and came back the next
13 year to look at the yearly growth rates. We are getting some of
14 that information, but things that you would think would be
15 standard are just very challenging when you have these types of
16 costs associated with going and doing deepwater work.

17
18 I have a couple of links to some of the cruises that the Ocean
19 Explorer Program through NOAA has done in 2014 and 2015, if
20 you're interested. There is lots more, if you are interested,
21 but I just didn't want to throw them all onto this one page,
22 but, even when you look at all that, if you were to plot the
23 tracks that have actually been surveyed in the Gulf of Mexico,
24 you would find that they're not as extensive as you would like
25 them to be, but there is very good coverage in the areas that
26 have been proposed for these coral HAPCs, but that is why those
27 areas were proposed, was because there has been routine sampling
28 done at those areas.

29
30 This is just some more pretty pictures. I wanted to go over the
31 Coral Habitat Suitability Model. This is a model that was
32 developed by some researchers at NOAA. It's been really
33 beautifully ground-truthed and held up whenever there has been a
34 cruise that has gone to look and say, okay, this is supposed to
35 be high coral habitat, and they have gone down with a
36 submersible or an ROV, and, generally speaking, there are
37 abundant corals.

38
39 The link to that is also available here. We have it on our data
40 portal for the Gulf Council, and I have been told that it has
41 been recently updated, and so we will get that updated version
42 on our portal as soon as possible.

43
44 I just wanted to show some pictures. Some of the areas in the
45 Gulf of Mexico are on the Western Florida Slope. These are why
46 some of these pictures are -- All of these pictures are on those
47 sites on the West Florida Slope, and so you see lots of stony
48 and black corals on these hard limestone ridges.

1
2 This is some more pictures from the northern Gulf of Mexico. I
3 would guess that these are generally from the Viosca Knoll area
4 and Alabama Alps. Pulley Ridge is one of the only areas in our
5 HAPC document, and the others are South Texas Banks, that are in
6 that mesophotic area, and so we have lots of grouper and lots of
7 zooxanthellate corals, which are corals that require that
8 zooxanthellae to survive.

9
10 This is some more pictures from Viosca Knoll and the
11 northeastern Gulf. These are all from Viosca Knoll. I have
12 that bathymetry map at the bottom. There are two main regions
13 in that grid that are important.

14
15 Basically, there is a lump at the top of that, in the top right-
16 hand corner, that you can kind of see that has a lot of research
17 done, and then there are two little nodes at the bottom, in the
18 green area, and those also have lots of work done. We have ROV
19 tracks that have pictures and video surveys of these areas, and
20 there is just coral everywhere. It's probably one of the best
21 studied areas in the Gulf of Mexico, and it has a really high
22 abundance of coral.

23
24 Then these are some photos from the South Texas Banks survey
25 that was done in 2012 and 2013, and I could be off by a year,
26 but we have lots of black corals, and you can see all those sea
27 whips in the top right-hand corner, and all types of gorgonians
28 as well.

29
30 This is why there is concern with these areas and why it's been
31 proposed that there should be some type of habitat protections,
32 and it's because of some pictures that, when you're only getting
33 a snapshot of these areas, and you see fishing gear, then it
34 created some concern.

35
36 In the top-right corner, that's evidence of a trawled lophelia
37 mound, and you can see a crab right there, but, in all the other
38 pictures, you can see monofilament wrapped around these corals.
39 Some of them have been there for so long that they're creating
40 their own unique habitats and having all types of little
41 hydroids and other types of organisms, in that middle picture,
42 growing on top of the monofilament, but they are there, and you
43 can see that middle picture with the monofilament, and that
44 coral is, I would say, probably 50 percent or more dead, because
45 of probably the pressure of that line pulling on it over and
46 over and over again, and so it's not able to maintain its
47 optimal position.

48

1 Just another little resource is our council data portal. We are
2 currently improving all of the learning modules, and so those
3 will be pushed out over the next few months on just the biology
4 of corals and how they've been managed.

5
6 We also have some other interesting things that we have included
7 on the portal, but I encourage you to look it up, and, if you
8 have questions or if you have learning modules you would like to
9 see on the portal, please tell us, and we will do our very best
10 to accommodate those types of requests, and so I am happy to
11 take any questions.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Any questions for Morgan?

14
15 **LCDR LEO DANAHER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just one quick
16 question. At the Flower Garden Banks Council, they've been
17 talking about the bleaching event, at the Eastern Banks, I
18 believe, and I just wanted to gain some clarity from the
19 experts. Basically, when the coral is bleaching, it's not dead
20 yet, correct? It's just performing some kind of a reaction to
21 temperature in the water, and is that correct?

22
23 **DR. KILGOUR:** That's correct. What happens when a coral
24 bleaches is the coral is stressed, and so it releases the
25 zooxanthellae, and so that zooxanthellae, or that algae that
26 lives within the coral, is what provides that pigment. When
27 it's stressed, either the zooxanthellae leave voluntarily or the
28 coral kicks them out. We don't know about that type of
29 contract, but we do know that they are released into the water
30 column, which is why the corals bleach.

31
32 That doesn't necessarily mean the corals die. They can recover.
33 There is a big bleaching event on the Great Barrier Reef that
34 happens every year, and the corals seem to recover as well.

35
36 **LCDR DANAHER:** Thank you.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Seeing no other questions, we're going to move
39 on with the agenda. Next up, Dr. Kilgour is going to talk about
40 the scoping draft for Coral Amendment 7. Dr. Kilgour.

41
42 **REVISED SCOPING DRAFT OF CORAL AMENDMENT 7**

43
44 **DR. KILGOUR:** This is not much modified, other than what was
45 requested by the council at the last meeting that this was
46 presented, and so I want to just kind of briefly go through what
47 I added, so that everyone knows what is different.

1 If you look on page 3, I added a description of the coral,
2 mesophotic corals, the deepwater corals, and basically a brief
3 little biology lesson of the corals in the Gulf of Mexico. I
4 also, on the next page, I segmented the description of the
5 recommended areas into the eastern Gulf, the northern Gulf, and
6 the western Gulf, because they are all distinct in their geology
7 and biology, and so I kind of gave a little bit of introduction
8 on what those different areas look like, but it's not extensive.

9
10 Then I also modified the regulations to be what was appropriate
11 for the State of Florida, as requested, and so my question for
12 the committee is, is there anything else that you would like to
13 see for this document or do you approve this document to go out
14 to scoping as it is? We have the scoping guide that reflects
15 these changes as well, and so I am happy to take any comments or
16 questions.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Ms. Bosarge.

19
20 **MS. LEANN BOSARGE:** Thank you. I actually have good things,
21 excellent things, to say, Morgan. I wanted to say thank you,
22 number one, because, when I read this, everything is listed in
23 feet and not in meters, and I was so excited about that. Thank
24 you. The table and even the verbiage in the text is in feet. I
25 said, all right, they're speaking my language, and so I
26 appreciated that.

27
28 I also really liked the description of the coral that you gave.
29 For somebody that coral is maybe not their background and their
30 expertise, I think that that is very helpful, to give you a
31 brief overview of what we're looking at and the biology related
32 to it.

33
34 On the purpose and need, I thought it was spot-on. My only
35 suggestion would be that I was worried if somebody that maybe
36 was less familiar with the current and previous management of
37 corals by the Gulf Council read it, that, when they read that
38 first sentence, if they're less informed of our history, they
39 may think that we currently have no protections for corals in
40 the Gulf of Mexico, just because it says the purpose of this
41 amendment is to consider establishing protection of corals in
42 the Gulf of Mexico.

43
44 We do have some protections out there already, and so, maybe if
45 we give staff some editorial license to just kind of tweak that,
46 so that people maybe come away with the idea that we're actually
47 maybe refining, or something like that, our coral management
48 measures or coral protection in the Gulf, so that they don't

1 think that we haven't done anything with it before. Like I
2 said, for anybody that's familiar with the process, they would
3 completely understand what we were trying to say there. I had
4 one more thing, but I will turn it over to somebody else for a
5 minute while I try and find that note.

6

7 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Mr. Boyd.

8

9 **MR. DOUG BOYD:** Morgan, thank you. On page 8, in the middle of
10 the paragraph on Option 1, it says all corals are sensitive to
11 human-induced habitat degradation by fishing and non-fishing
12 activities. Would non-fishing activities be like anchoring? Is
13 that what you're referring to, or is it diving on the corals or
14 is it taking the corals for sale or what do you mean by non-
15 fishing activities?

16

17 **DR. KILGOUR:** I mean all of those things as well as nutrient
18 runoff caused by pollution, and so pretty much anything we can
19 throw at them generally freaks them out. They need to stay in
20 their happy little universe, and so any human-induced
21 anthropogenic effect could generally harm coral.

22

23 **MR. BOYD:** Thank you.

24

25 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Ms. Bosarge.

26

27 **MS. BOSARGE:** When I was reading that paragraph, I think on that
28 Option 1, which is on page 8, I understand that what we're
29 listing there is the definition. It says, where corals exist in
30 sufficient numbers or diversity, it would qualify an area as an
31 HAPC as long as it meets one of the HAPC requirements. Then we
32 list the HAPC requirements.

33

34 Then, when you read further in that paragraph about those HAPC
35 requirements, it goes on to say that all corals are sensitive to
36 human-induced habitat degradation by fishing and non-fishing,
37 and so that's an HAPC qualifier. It says deepwater coral ages
38 can range from decades to thousands of years old and, thus,
39 these species are unlikely to fully recover from destruction,
40 and so all corals, deep-sea corals, are unlikely to recover, and
41 so, there again, that's your HAPC qualifier.

42

43 Although, yes, that is true, I am not sure how informative it is
44 for us for management purposes. I think we may need to have
45 some more elaboration there. Imagine if we replaced the word
46 "coral" in those sentences with "fish". It really wouldn't tell
47 us where to hone in and focus which species of fish and where do
48 we have our issues.

1
2 All fish are sensitive to human-induced habitat degradation by
3 fishing and non-fishing, and that's kind of very broad, and it
4 really doesn't focus our management efforts, and so maybe if we
5 can get, somehow, a little more fine-tuning in there, so that we
6 can say, okay, all corals, yes, are special, but not to be coral
7 snobs, but all corals probably aren't created equal when it
8 comes to being at risk, right? It's true, right?

9
10 Maybe if we can hone in somehow on the ones that are more at
11 risk, although, yes, they are all sensitive to degradation from
12 fishing and non-fishing activities, but which ones are most
13 susceptible or most at risk? Maybe we can put that somewhere in
14 these options, so that we can really focus as a council and
15 actually have some options there to see what we want to do and
16 evaluate things.

17
18 **DR. KILGOUR:** I have a follow-up question for that. I think
19 that all needs to be addressed. Does it need to be addressed in
20 the scoping document, or does it need to be addressed in the
21 options paper, where I get areas where I can have discussion and
22 -- That's my question. Is this scoping document okay as is, and
23 that will all be addressed in the options paper, or do you need
24 that addressed in this scoping document?

25
26 **MS. BOSARGE:** Yes, you're right. This is supposed to be
27 general, but I was just looking into the future and hoping that
28 we would get into that, rather than the blanket all. It's not
29 very helpful when we go to make decisions, and so, as long as
30 it's noted, I am good to go.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Dr. Frazer.

33
34 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** Thanks, Dale. I just wanted to follow up a
35 little bit. I think trying to get any detailed information on
36 these particular organisms can be really difficult, for the
37 reasons that Morgan pointed out before, and I am not sure that
38 we'll ever have that.

39
40 I think, if you're looking at things that we can do as a
41 management entity to try to conserve those habitats, we have to
42 look at those things that we know stress them generally, whether
43 it's sediments or changes in temperature or things of that
44 nature, and I'm not sure how we're going to get there, to be
45 honest with you.

46
47 I think a lot about that, but I think, when this goes out for
48 public hearing, you're going to have a lot of comments from the

1 conservation community that say, hey, we need to have a little
2 bit more information, and people always say that, but it's not
3 the type of place or habitat that you're going to get a lot of
4 information, and so you have to probably think a little more
5 conservatively about these habitats than maybe we have in the
6 past.

7
8 When we're talking about managing fishes, since you kind of
9 brought that up, we're always dealing with this idea of
10 uncertainty, and I think we're going to have to do the same
11 thing with these habitats, and figure out what's an appropriate
12 buffer, for example, and how much uncertainty are we going to be
13 able to incorporate into our various plans, and so I just wanted
14 to say that on the record.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Ms. Guyas.

17
18 **MS. MARTHA GUYAS:** Thanks. As the discussion about Option 1 was
19 occurring, the wording kind of struck me. In I guess the second
20 sentence, where corals exist in sufficient numbers or diversity
21 would qualify an area as a HAPC, it kind of sounds like the
22 council isn't making an active decision and it's just like an
23 automatic thing, which I don't think is what is happening here.
24 I think we're deciding on these individual areas, and so maybe
25 we just need to say that they would be considered by the council
26 as a HAPC. Just something, I think, needs to be word-smithed
27 there, and I don't mean to micromanage that, but --

28
29 **MS. BOSARGE:** That was exactly -- I think you said it much more
30 eloquently than what I did, Martha, but that was kind of the
31 feeling that I got too, that it was a blanket, but I think maybe
32 what Dr. Frazer was getting at is -- I guess we think in fish
33 mentality, and so I am thinking different species of fish and
34 which ones are overfished and undergoing overfishing, and there
35 are certain protections that you want to put in place there and
36 maybe give a little more focus to those particular species, and
37 so I guess I was thinking coral in that fish mentality, but you
38 came at it from a different perspective, where maybe we need to
39 look at it from more of a holistic environment of that little
40 area and changes in what's going on with the ocean right there,
41 whether it's acidification or this or that.

42
43 I think Martha really summarized what I was getting at, that it
44 seemed like a blanket. However we come at it, whether it's by
45 species or whether it's by environment or whatever, I do think
46 that, if there can be some flexibility there for us to look at,
47 rather than it being a blanket decision.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Mr. Gregory.

2
3 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DOUG GREGORY:** We can easily change "would
4 qualify" to "would be considered to become an area". As it's
5 written now, it might mislead some conservation people to think
6 that we're just going to do all of that automatically.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Mara.

9
10 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Thank you. I have a question. It doesn't
11 really relate to that, but kind of. It says it would qualify as
12 an area, as an HAPC, as long as it meets one of the HAPC
13 requirements. It's fine if you want to change the language, but
14 I think what it's saying is these areas with these sufficient
15 diversities and numbers would qualify as long as you determine
16 that it meets one of these requirements for an HAPC.

17
18 Then I was also wondering, and I thought that this whole
19 document and discussion comes from the fact that you had various
20 groups and APs meet to sort of look at the different areas and
21 they came out with recommendations as to which particular areas
22 they thought met these types of criteria, and maybe I am
23 misremembering.

24
25 To me, it seemed like you had a discussion about what types of
26 areas would meet it, and you had all this input, and now you're
27 kind of trying to put it into a document, but then, when I was
28 hearing the discussion here, there seemed to be some indication
29 that folks think that you don't have that and that you need to
30 somehow start at like the beginning and identify specific
31 criteria, and maybe I am misremembering the history here.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Mr. Gregory.

34
35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY:** Yes, we have done a lot of that,
36 but, because of the sensitivity of closing areas to fishing, we
37 wanted to take the document out as a beginning document, as a
38 scoping document, although all the meetings we've had are
39 scoping, and run this by the public in general, and so I think,
40 purposely, we don't have a lot of detail in this that we could
41 have put in, like we will put in for the options paper, but,
42 because of the sensitivity of this whole subject, we just wanted
43 to go out to the public without any, I guess, leading
44 information and see what feedback we get.

45
46 **MS. LEVY:** Right, and I wasn't suggesting that you had to put
47 more in there, but it's just that you have -- I just want it to
48 be clear that you have gone through a process to have folks try

1 to identify the areas that are the most important or the species
2 in the particular areas that you might want to consider
3 protecting with designating it in the special designation or
4 give it special consideration, and so you've started that
5 process, and you're continuing the process, but it's not like
6 you haven't done anything, and I just wanted to make that clear.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Any other comments from the committee? Mr.
9 Sanchez.

10
11 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Unrelated, but oddly enough, when we have VMS
12 tracks and ELBs and this type of stuff, it helps identify user
13 groups in these proposed HAPCs that will be impacted, and it
14 clearly identifies them and brings them to the table, and so
15 therein is an underlying value of that, above and beyond just
16 counting landings and what have you.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Ms. Bosarge.

19
20 **MS. BOSARGE:** This is a question for Martha. We talked about
21 octocorals a little bit at the last meeting, and that they're
22 not part of our FMP right now. They were taken out because
23 Florida manages those, I think both state and federally,
24 essentially. You all handle the management, and that there is a
25 limited harvest of those corals that's allowed. I may show how
26 naïve I am, but I just want to make sure, on the black corals
27 and stony corals, in state waters, there is still no harvest of
28 that allowed by Florida, right, for those two types of corals.

29
30 **MS. GUYAS:** Yes, that's correct. It's only the octocorals.

31
32 **MS. BOSARGE:** Okay. Just making sure.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Any other comments from the committee? Hearing
35 none, I would entertain a motion to bring this document out for
36 scoping.

37
38 **MR. MATENS:** So moved.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** So moved by Mr. Matens. Seconded by Dr. Frazer.
41 We have a motion by Mr. Matens on the board. Any discussion on
42 the motion? **Any opposition to the motion? The motion carries.**
43 Dr. Kilgour, do you have anything else for this committee?

44
45 **PULLEY RIDGE WORKING GROUP SUMMARY**

46
47 **DR. KILGOUR:** Yes. The last little bit that I have to bring to
48 you is the Pulley Ridge Working Group. They met in early

1 January. It was a few longliners and a few of our Coral SSC and
2 AP members, to discuss modifying that proposed boundary.

3
4 We had pretty good attendance via the webinar, but the ultimate
5 result of the meeting meant that I need to go in person to the
6 different longliners that have been providing us with
7 information to look at their tracks and modify those boundaries
8 and bring them back to the working group again, so that there
9 can be more discussion, and so to be done at a later date, and
10 so I don't have modified boundaries for Pulley Ridge.

11
12 I also wanted to give a brief update. I was to contact some
13 royal red shrimpers and some coral biologists about the Viosca
14 Knoll area. As of yet, they have been unable to come up with a
15 boundary that both groups can live with. If that's the case,
16 then, when I bring an options paper to you guys at the next
17 stage, and I'm not sure if that's going to be April or June, I
18 will have both options available for the council to determine
19 what would be the most appropriate route for that Viosca Knoll
20 area.

21
22 That was a high-priority area identified by the Coral SSC and AP
23 Working Group, but they also needed to work with the royal red
24 shrimp fishermen to find a boundary that everyone could live
25 with, and I don't see that happening. That is a council
26 decision on what we do with that area, and I just wanted to
27 update you on those two things.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Any questions for Dr. Kilgour on that update?
30 Seeing none, at the beginning of the meeting, I asked if there
31 was anybody that had other business. Nobody did at that time.
32 Since then, has anybody come up with any other business for this
33 committee? Seeing none, Madam Chair, that concludes this
34 committee.

35
36 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on January 30, 2017.)

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