GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

JOINT CORAL/HABITAT PROTECTION & RESTORATION COMMITTEE

Astor Crowne Plaza
New Orleans, Louisiana

January 30, 2017

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

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PAGE 18: Motion to bring the Revised Scoping Draft of Coral Amendment 7 out for scoping hearings. The motion carried on page 18.
The Joint Coral/Habitat Protection & Restoration Committees of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council convened at the Astor Crowne Plaza, New Orleans, Louisiana, Monday afternoon, January 30, 2017, and was called to order by Chairman Dale Diaz.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS

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

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

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

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

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

PRESENTATION ON THE BIOLOGY OF CORALS

DR. MORGAN KILGOUR: At the last council meeting, it was requested that I kind of give a brief overview of some coral biology. In a previous life, I was a deep-sea biologist. I focused on decapod crustaceans, and thus, also corals, because
that’s where the decapods were. I am going to give a very brief overview of the deepwater corals in the Gulf of Mexico. Please feel free to ask me any questions as they come about.

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

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

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

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

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

A little overview. We have stony corals, which are hard, reef-forming corals, which is what you typically think of when you’re thinking of corals. We have about eighty species in the Gulf of
Mexico database. Now, not all of these are deepwater corals, and not all of them are true different species. Some of them might not have been identified all the way to the species level taxonomically, and so there is roughly eighty, plus or minus ten or so.

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

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

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

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

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

Octocorals and sea fans, I thought we should mention these, since it’s been proposed that some of these should be incorporated into the fishery management unit. They are the most specious in the Gulf of Mexico, more than 145 different
species, and they are on both soft sediment and hard substrate. That tends to be species-specific. These two are an example of corals that are on hard substrate, but there is a paramuricea, which is -- I don’t want to say this, but it’s almost like a weed, and it’s all over the soft substrate in the Gulf of Mexico.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Blackbelly rosefish use these corals all the time. Snowy
grouper also use these corals as habitat and golden crabs, which, again, we don’t have a fishery for in the Gulf of Mexico, but there is one in the South Atlantic. The juvenile golden crabs are always embedded in these corals.

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

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

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

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

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

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

If you have to charter your own vessel and get an industrial ROV
to go down to these depths, you’re talking $66,000 a day, and so you’re looking at, for a ten-day cruise, upwards of a quarter-of-a-million dollars just to get ten days of cruise time in, and, if you’re running twenty-four-hour operations, you’re probably getting twenty-four to maybe forty-eight dives, if you’re lucky, and so it’s very expensive to go and do this sampling and to find out information.

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

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

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

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

I just wanted to show some pictures. Some of the areas in the Gulf of Mexico are on the Western Florida Slope. These are why some of these pictures are -- All of these pictures are on those sites on the West Florida Slope, and so you see lots of stony and black corals on these hard limestone ridges.
This is some more pictures from the northern Gulf of Mexico. I would guess that these are generally from the Viosca Knoll area and Alabama Alps. Pulley Ridge is one of the only areas in our HAPC document, and the others are South Texas Banks, that are in that mesophotic area, and so we have lots of grouper and lots of zooxanthellate corals, which are corals that require that zooxanthellae to survive.

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

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

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

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

In the top-right corner, that’s evidence of a trawled lophelia mound, and you can see a crab right there, but, in all the other pictures, you can see monofilament wrapped around these corals. Some of them have been there for so long that they’re creating their own unique habitats and having all types of little hydroids and other types of organisms, in that middle picture, growing on top of the monofilament, but they are there, and you can see that middle picture with the monofilament, and that coral is, I would say, probably 50 percent or more dead, because of probably the pressure of that line pulling on it over and over and over again, and so it’s not able to maintain its optimal position.
Just another little resource is our council data portal. We are currently improving all of the learning modules, and so those will be pushed out over the next few months on just the biology of corals and how they’ve been managed.

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

CHAIRMAN DIAZ: Any questions for Morgan?

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

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

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

LCDR DANAHER: Thank you.

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

REVISED SCOPING DRAFT OF CORAL AMENDMENT 7

DR. KILGOUR: This is not much modified, other than what was requested by the council at the last meeting that this was presented, and so I want to just kind of briefly go through what I added, so that everyone knows what is different.
If you look on page 3, I added a description of the coral, mesophotic corals, the deepwater corals, and basically a brief little biology lesson of the corals in the Gulf of Mexico. I also, on the next page, I segmented the description of the recommended areas into the eastern Gulf, the northern Gulf, and the western Gulf, because they are all distinct in their geology and biology, and so I kind of gave a little bit of introduction on what those different areas look like, but it’s not extensive.

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

CHAIRMAN DIAZ: Ms. Bosarge.

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

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

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

We do have some protections out there already, and so, maybe if we give staff some editorial license to just kind of tweak that, so that people maybe come away with the idea that we’re actually maybe refining, or something like that, our coral management measures or coral protection in the Gulf, so that they don’t
think that we haven’t done anything with it before. Like I said, for anybody that’s familiar with the process, they would completely understand what we were trying to say there. I had one more thing, but I will turn it over to somebody else for a minute while I try and find that note.

CHAIRMAN DIAZ: Mr. Boyd.

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

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

MR. BOYD: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DIAZ: Ms. Bosarge.

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

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

Although, yes, that is true, I am not sure how informative it is for us for management purposes. I think we may need to have some more elaboration there. Imagine if we replaced the word “coral” in those sentences with “fish”. It really wouldn’t tell us where to hone in and focus which species of fish and where do we have our issues.
All fish are sensitive to human-induced habitat degradation by fishing and non-fishing, and that’s kind of very broad, and it really doesn’t focus our management efforts, and so maybe if we can get, somehow, a little more fine-tuning in there, so that we can say, okay, all corals, yes, are special, but not to be coral snobs, but all corals probably aren’t created equal when it comes to being at risk, right? It’s true, right?

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

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

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

**CHAIRMAN DIAZ:** Dr. Frazer.

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

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

I think a lot about that, but I think, when this goes out for public hearing, you’re going to have a lot of comments from the
conservation community that say, hey, we need to have a little bit more information, and people always say that, but it’s not the type of place or habitat that you’re going to get a lot of information, and so you have to probably think a little more conservatively about these habitats than maybe we have in the past.

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

CHAIRMAN DIAZ: Ms. Guyas.

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

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

I think Martha really summarized what I was getting at, that it seemed like a blanket. However we come at it, whether it’s by species or whether it’s by environment or whatever, I do think that, if there can be some flexibility there for us to look at, rather than it being a blanket decision.
CHAIRMAN DIAZ: Mr. Gregory.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DOUG GREGORY: We can easily change “would qualify” to “would be considered to become an area”. As it’s written now, it might mislead some conservation people to think that we’re just going to do all of that automatically.

CHAIRMAN DIAZ: Mara.

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

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

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

CHAIRMAN DIAZ: Mr. Gregory.

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

MS. LEVY: Right, and I wasn’t suggesting that you had to put more in there, but it’s just that you have -- I just want it to be clear that you have gone through a process to have folks try
to identify the areas that are the most important or the species in the particular areas that you might want to consider protecting with designating it in the special designation or give it special consideration, and so you’ve started that process, and you’re continuing the process, but it’s not like you haven’t done anything, and I just wanted to make that clear.

CHAIRMAN DIAZ: Any other comments from the committee? Mr. Sanchez.

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

CHAIRMAN DIAZ: Ms. Bosarge.

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

MS. GUYAS: Yes, that’s correct. It’s only the octocorals.


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

MR. MATENS: So moved.

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

PULLEY RIDGE WORKING GROUP SUMMARY

DR. KILGOUR: Yes. The last little bit that I have to bring to you is the Pulley Ridge Working Group. They met in early
January. It was a few longliners and a few of our Coral SSC and AP members, to discuss modifying that proposed boundary.

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

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

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

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

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

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