

## **Migratory Species Committee Report August 14, 2023 Dr. Thomas Frazer, Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda as written (**Tab M, No. 1**) and approved the minutes (**Tab M, No. 2**) of the August 2022 meeting.

### ***Update on Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Management Measures (Tab M, No. 4)***

Ms. Karyl Brewster-Geisz provided an update on three management measures being considered by the HMS office. Amendment 15 is in the proposed action stage and compared options for HMS spatial management and electronic reporting. The two other actions are in the scoping phase. Amendment 16 will establish catch limits for non-prohibited shark species and consider approaches that would increase management flexibility with the goal to optimize harvesting of quotas to the extent practicable. An Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for electronic reporting has been published to solicit comment on transitioning toward a more streamlined logbook reporting which could potentially result in a “one stop reporting” approach for satisfying overlapping data reporting requirements.

For Amendment 15, a Committee member disagreed with the HMS interpretation of the cost share allocation policy. He stated that requiring industry participants to endure most of the implementation costs for an agency-mandated program appeared to violate that policy. Another Committee member asked if there was any possible reimbursement for program participants. Ms. Brewster-Geisz replied there was not, but explained that vessels possessing existing equipment that was compatible with reporting requirements could still be used.

Several Committee members inquired whether the modifications to the De Soto Canyon management area would create overlap between the existing Steamboat Lumps or Middle Ground marine protected areas. Ms. Brewster-Geisz did not believe there was any overlap, but would provide the spatial data to Council staff to review that assessment<sup>1</sup>. A Committee member asked if any economic analysis had been conducted to inform when reopening a closed area would be appropriate and Ms. Brewster-Geisz indicated that relevant economic data had been integrated into the amendment. Ms. Brewster-Geisz was asked how many HMS permitted vessels were currently operating in the Gulf and South Atlantic and she replied she would need to get back to the Committee with that information.

Council staff commented that the proposed catch limits for black tip sharks in the Gulf were similar to red snapper, which seemed to indicate a high level of productivity, especially for a shark species. Ms. Brewster-Geisz replied that the stock assessment indicated blacktip sharks could sustain a higher level of harvest than in the past and attributed that result to decades of successful shark management. A Council member asked how sharks could be commercially marketed when a fin ban eliminated the sale of the most lucrative part of the fish. Ms. Brewster-Geisz responded that the shark fin ban was implemented by congressional action and outside the

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<sup>1</sup> After this discussion, Council staff developed a map that shows that there is overlap with modified De Soto Canyon management area and several Gulf Council marine protected areas, Habitat Areas of Particular Concern and other management areas. See map at the end of this report.

purview of HMS. A Committee member asked when Amendment 16 was scheduled to be implemented. Ms. Brewster-Geisz responded that the amendment would be on hold until the completion of the hammerhead shark stock assessment and could be implemented by early 2025.

Ms. Brewster-Geisz stated that she would document the Committee’s comments on the three HMS measures. If the Council was interested in providing formal comment to HMS, she requested that comments on the scoping measures be submitted before the August 18<sup>th</sup> deadline or shortly after. The comment period for Amendment 15 will be open until September 15<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

