

Coral Committee Report
June 18, 2018
Dr. Tom Frazer, Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda and approved the minutes as amended.

Final Action Amendment 9: Coral Habitat Areas Considered for Management in the Gulf of Mexico

Staff presented the Committee with the public hearing comments and written comments received on Coral Amendment 9, over 16,000 comments were received. Staff reviewed the actions and preferred alternatives and options in the document. A transit provision was discussed in Committee, and it was noted that as long as a vessel is not fishing, it was not in violation. The language in the document is consistent with the existing HAPC fishing regulations in Coral subpart D (e.g., Pulley Ridge, West and East Flower Garden Banks, etc.). A comparison was made with Madison-Swanson in committee, but it was noted that this is a reef fish closed area (and is thus, not comparable). Another committee member discussed the rationale for prohibiting anchoring by fishing vessels and noted that fishermen are starting to fish deeper and that this prohibition may need to be re-evaluated in the future. Lastly, NOAA General Counsel advised the Council that the document should be edited to reflect that fishing with HMS gear is not included in the prohibition on the use of bottom longlines. The Council should request that HMS conduct concurrent rulemaking regarding bottom longlines in these areas.

Madam Chair, this concludes my report.