

**Ecosystem Committee Report
April 4, 2022
Mr. Kevin Anson – Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab Q, No. 1**) and approved the minutes (**Tab Q, No. 2**) of the December 2020 meeting as written.

Review and Discuss Contracted Draft Gulf of Mexico Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) (Tab Q, No. 4)

In 2021, the Council contracted LGL Ecological Research Associates (LGL) to begin work on developing a Fishing Ecosystem Plan (FEP) for the Gulf of Mexico. Dr. Will Heyman presented the work completed as part of their contract, which included an FEP with a proposal to base it around Fishery Ecosystem Issues (FEIs).

A Committee member requested clarification regarding subdividing the Gulf into separate management regions. Dr. Heyman responded that the FEP did not recommend dividing the Gulf into separate management zones, but rather that FEIs could have regional considerations, depending on the specific issue being considered in a FEI. A Committee member asked if there was opportunity to provide feedback to the work presented by LGL. Council staff replied that recommendations will be incorporated into the final FEP by Council staff.

A Committee member mentioned that the FEP/FEIs should encourage pathways to promote partnerships with external agencies as necessary to address issues that affect the Gulf ecosystem. The Committee liked the FEI concept as a way to incrementally address ecosystem issues. The South Atlantic Council liaison asked if including the commercial fleet into data collection and monitoring efforts is something that the Council would be amenable to, as also proposed by LGL as an example to expand the Cooperative Research Program. Dr. Heyman responded that science and management would benefit from increasing direct collaboration with fishermen.

A Committee member proposed developing a FEI around climate change as it relates to changes in weather patterns (e.g., hurricane frequency, rainfall patterns) and that red tide might be one that is too big to undertake as a first step. The Committee also agreed that there needs to be a procedure in place that would help identify and prioritize how to address the FEIs.

Ecosystem Technical Committee Recommendations (Tab Q, No. 5)

Following the work provided by LGL, Council staff presented an example on how to begin work on a red tide FEI given the amount of stakeholder input, ongoing research, and monitoring efforts at the state and federal level. Due to the amount of information presented, the Committee requested to continue the discussion during Full Council and allow time to provide additional ideas and feedback to contribute to the final FEP.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.