

# Committee Reports







ROY COOPER  
*Governor*

MICHAEL S. REGAN  
*Secretary*

STEPHEN W. MURPHEY  
*Director*

Feb. 1, 2018

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Marine Fisheries Commission

**FROM:** Jason Rock, Co-lead Blue Crab Plan Development Team  
Corrin Flora, Co-lead Blue Crab Plan Development Team

**SUBJECT:** Blue Crab Fishery Management Plan Advisory Committee Meeting

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The Blue Crab Fishery Management Plan Advisory Committee met on Jan. 31, 2018 at 6 p.m., at the NCDEQ Washington Regional Office located at 943 Washington Square Mall in Washington, NC. The meeting had been rescheduled from Jan. 17 due to inclement weather. The following attended:

**Advisers:** Perry Beasley, Steven Bradshaw, Janice Corbett, Elizabeth Cox, Thomas Roller, Joseph Romano, Kenneth Seigler

**Staff:** Catherine Blum, Corrin Flora, Kathy Rawls, Jason Rock, Katy West, Amy Flowers, Yan Li, Laura Lee, Odell Williams

**Public:** Mike Blanton, Jamie Rollinson, Vic White, Steven Midgette, Sonya Midgette

**MFC:** Sammy Corbett

Chairman Romano called the meeting to order at 6 p.m.

### **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND MINUTES/PUBLIC COMMENT**

The meeting agenda and minutes from the September 2017 meeting were approved by consensus. No members of the public provided public comment.

### **STOCK ASSESSMENT PROCESS PRESENTATION**

Division staff gave a presentation that introduced the basic stock assessment concepts and terminology, and the division stock assessment process to the committee. The committee discussed what makes blue crab data unique, how environmental factors are accounted for, bait



supply, how predation is accounted for in stock assessments, whether the modelling approach will be predictive, and regardless of gear shortcomings how the long-term survey trends may be informative.

### **DATA INPUTS PRESENTATION**

Division staff gave a presentation that introduced the various data collection programs and types of data used for the blue crab stock assessment to the committee. The committee discussed gear configuration and use of trawl net studies, minimum of ten years of data for a survey to be useful in assessments, impacts of pollution on stocks, navigation to fixed stations, additional available historic data, and additional sampling methods.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Committee briefly reviewed the handout on the number of crab fishery participants, trips, and commercial harvest that was requested at the last meeting. There was interest in finer regional characterizations. Staff noted with the unit stock being the entire state that influenced these initial summaries at a state level.

Staff and committee members discussed the upcoming meeting schedule. The tentative schedule is to hold a blue crab stock assessment peer review workshop in late March, a Blue Crab Fishery Management Plan Advisory Committee stock assessment meeting in April (dependent on the outcome of the stock assessment peer review), and present the stock assessment to the Marine Fisheries Commission in May. Staff will send out information as soon as possible to the committee to set the April meeting date.

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Cc:	Catherine Blum	Dee Lupton	Jason Walker
	Anne Deaton	Nancy Marlette	District Managers
	Nancy Fish	Phillip Reynolds	Committee Staff Members
	Christine Goebel	Jerry Schill	Marine Patrol Captains
	Jess Hawkins	Tricia Smith	Section Chiefs



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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Marine Fisheries Commission  
Southern Flounder FMP Advisory Committee

FROM: Michael Loeffler, Co-lead Southern Flounder Plan Development Team  
Anne Markwith, Co-lead Southern Flounder Plan Development Team

DATE: March 21, 2018

SUBJECT: Southern Flounder FMP Advisory Committee Meeting

The Southern Flounder FMP Advisory Committee met on Wednesday, March 21, 2018 at 6 p.m. at the NCDEQ Washington Regional Office located at 943 Washington Square Mall in Washington, NC. The following attended:

Advisers: Fred Scharf (chairman), Michael Oppegaard, Tom Roller, Keneth Johnson, Robert Lee Cox, Mary Ellon Ballance, John Tyer, Joe Romano, James Williams.

Absent: Kurt Tressler

Staff: Catherine Blum, Michael Loeffler, Anne Markwith, Katy West, Kathy Rawls, Dana Gillikin, Jennifer Lewis, Charlton Godwin, Carter Witten, Forrest Nelson, Jason Walker

Public: Greg Judy

Fred Scharf, serving as chair, called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

**Motion by Mike Oppegaard to approve agenda, seconded by Mary Ellon Ballance – motion carries 9-0.**

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**Motion by Mike Oppegaard to approve meeting minutes from January 23, 2018, seconded by Joe Romano – motion carries 9-0.**



## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

No members of the public provided comment. The chair summarized three emails sent to the committee by the public prior to the meeting, and stated that these had been provided for the committee members to read.

## **PRESENTATION ON SOUTHERN FLOUNDER DATA SOURCES**

Division staff gave a southern flounder data presentation to the committee. Staff presented background information and trends in the data, not the actual data itself. The presentation was broken into two sections, covering the two primary sources of data: fishery dependent and fishery independent. Fishery dependent data comes from fishermen, while fishery independent data are collected by scientists conducting long-term sampling using consistent methods over time. Throughout the presentation committee members asked staff clarifying questions.

The first section of the presentation was about fishery dependent data. The committee asked about the types of gear the observer program covers, which is mostly small and large mesh gill nets. They also asked about the scope of the carcass collection program. The committee discussed the level of confidence in the Marine Recreational Information Program, or MRIP. Proper species identification is an important aspect of this program. Staff presented information on the Coastal Angler Program, which relies on participation by recreational fishermen. For gigs, the numbers fluctuate for harvest, but releases have been consistent. The other three states covered by the stock assessment (Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina) have gig fisheries, but do not have estimates of gigging.

The presentation of fishery dependent sources of data continued and staff clarified information provided about shrimp trawl bycatch was only flounder bycatch, not all species. Regarding commercial landings data, the committee asked if the data for trawls reflects trips targeting flounder. Staff clarified they are shrimp trawls and are a small component of the southern flounder harvest. Also, most summer flounder vessels fish north of North Carolina where southern flounder do not typically occur. Staff explained that although Florida has a dealer trip ticket program and harvest program, the same information is ultimately collected as it is in North Carolina.

The committee asked about the data for various sectors, such as gill nets and pound nets, potentially looking skewed when seen on a coastwide basis. Staff explained North Carolina has much more inside waters than the other states, so data for certain gears needs to be put in context. For example, a large portion of North Carolina harvest comes from pound nets, but North Carolina is the only state with harvest from that gear thus a reduction in the total magnitude is observed when landings are combined from all gears coastwide. Next, staff emphasized that the fish house sampling is not trip ticket data, it is trips sampled by the division. Staff also explained market grade size is determined by the fish house, not the division.



The second section of the presentation was about fishery independent data. The committee primarily asked clarifying questions about the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program or SEAMAP. Staff explained this survey is conducted in state waters of the southeast states in less than 10 meters of water. Fishing in federal waters did not yield any harvest. There was little variability between the seasons. Male flounder caught were rarely over 14 inches in length, so the harvest is almost 100 percent female, based on the size ratio.

There were a few follow-up questions from the committee about how weather events impact harvest and how that is attributed. Staff explained it is difficult with southern flounder because of unknown factors with the stock, but the stock assessment model takes weather events into account.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

Staff and committee discussed the upcoming meeting scheduled for May 9 when staff will give a presentation of the stock assessment. Staff gave an overview of topics that will be covered at meetings scheduled for the rest of the year.

The meeting adjourned at 8:27 p.m.

cc:	Catherine Blum	Dee Lupton	Patricia Smith
	Anne Deaton	Nancy Marlette	Jason Walker
	Nancy Fish	Stephen Murphey	District Managers
	Christine Goebel	Hardy Plyler	Committee Staff Members
	Jess Hawkins	Phillip Reynolds	Marine Patrol Captains
	David Hilton	Jerry Schill	Section Chiefs









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## MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission  
Habitat and Water Quality Advisory Committee

FROM: Anne Deaton  
Katy West  
Division of Marine Fisheries, NCDEQ

DATE: April 11, 2018

SUBJECT: Habitat and Water Quality Advisory Committee Meeting

The Habitat and Water Quality Advisory Committee met at 1 p.m. on Thursday April 12, 2018 at the Washington Regional Office, 943 Washington Square Mall, Washington. The following attended:

Advisors: Mike Street, David Glenn, Brian Boutin, Sam Boyce

Absent: Alison Willis, Mark Gorges, Clay Willis, Joel Fodrie, Dick Bierly, Bob Christian

Staff: Casey Knight, Anne Deaton, Katy West

Other Agency Staff: Jimmy Johnson, Shane Staples, Kevin Hart

Public: None

Anne Deaton called the meeting to order since neither chair was present.

### **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

**Since there was not a quorum, the agenda was approved by committee consensus.**

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**The meeting minutes from December 15, 2015 were approved by committee consensus.**

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

No public comment was offered.



## **REGION 4 STRATEGIC HABITAT AREAS (SHA): THE CAPE FEAR RIVER BASIN**

Casey Knight gave a presentation on Region 4 Strategic Habitat Areas (SHA): The Cape Fear River Basin. Knight described the goal of SHA is an ecosystem-based approach for fisheries management. She defined a SHA as a subset of all coastal habitats and consist of strategically located complexes of fish habitats. These areas provide the “best of the best” ecological function. The ideal landscape scenario is a mosaic of diverse, connected habitats. Strategic Habitat Areas are defined in Marine Fisheries Commission rule.

Region 4 is the southernmost region for these analyses. Knight described the region and explained the two-phase SHA selection process – part one involves MARXAN site-selection software; part two involves review and modifications based on input from an advisory committee. MARXAN was used to pick best location for SHA based on total alteration scores. Expert modification by advisory committee members and Division staff helped decide what areas to keep or dismiss from the initial model output. This resulted in 43 discrete proposed SHA, 21% of total focus area (74,451 acres). Out of the 43 SHAs, approximately 75% have some level of protection (conservation lands, Primary Nursery Area, Anadromous Fish Spawning Areas). Potential conservation actions based on the SHA designations include local land use planning, increased consideration for restoration projects through agricultural grants or other grant funding opportunities, land acquisition or increased used of Best Management Practices adjacent to SHAs. Once Region 4 SHAs are approved by the commission, groundtruthing of fish and habitat condition within nominated SHAs will be done, and SHAs may be modified, if needed. Staff will then determine if and what management actions are needed to protect or enhance individual SHAs.

Following the presentation, there were questions and discussion by the advisory committee members. Questions included what restrictions to SHAs were planned and how the SHA designations would impact the Wilmington Port and future dredging for larger vessels. Knight answered that no regulatory changes were planned as previously explained. Knight continued that there will be no effect on the port because it is already impacted and not selected by the model for that reason. There were comments that conditionally approved shellfish harvest areas should not automatically be dismissed from consideration as SHAs since they are still of value. Advisory committee members discussed potential negative issues with an area receiving a designation as a SHA, but there was consensus that there were none. Deaton explained that staff were waiting to finish all regions and do groundtruthing before implementing protection and restoration efforts, although some agencies have reached out to staff to use the data for prioritizing grants and land acquisition for conservation. Knight added that she hopes this will ensure that future development will consider best management practices as they move forward.

## **VOTE ON RECOMMENDATION TO MFC TO APPROVE SHA REGION 4 NOMINATIONS**

**The committee made a recommendation, by consensus, that the Marine Fisheries Commission approve the draft Strategic Habitat Area nominations. They did not vote due to a lack of quorum.**



## **MINIMIZING HABITAT IMPACTS THROUGH REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT PERMITS**

Shane Staples, Fisheries Resource Specialist with the Division of Coastal Management, gave a presentation on the current permit review process. He reviews projects in the northern portion of the coast through Carteret County, and Curt Weychert reviews projects in the southern portion of the coast through Brunswick County. These positions are funded through a Coastal Recreational Fishing License (CRFL) grant. Staples said that currently the most pressing permit issues were agricultural drainage projects, development in sensitive habitats, and exceptions to dredging moratorium periods. Many agricultural drainage ditches connect into the upper portion of Primary Nursery Areas, and it is often unclear what is a channelized Primary Nursery Area versus an artificial ditch. This has implications on what is allowed, as well as effects on Primary Nursery Area. In some cases, the ditches are draining freshwater that has sat on flooded fields, and may have high levels of nutrients, herbicides, and pesticides. Staples also described the mitigation currently underway for submerged aquatic vegetation impacts associated with the new Bonner Bridge construction. In FY 2016, the fishery resource specialists reviewed 350 applications. Of those, they requested modifications or conditions on 86 applications and objected to 16. These changes were made to avoid and minimize impacts to designated Primary Nursery Areas and Anadromous Fish Spawning Areas, and submerged aquatic vegetation.

## **MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION UPDATE**

Katy West provided updates from the February Marine Fisheries Commission meeting in Wrightsville Beach, provided information on the Fisheries Management Plan schedule, shrimp industry workgroup, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) highlights and upcoming tagging workshops.

## **PLAN AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will tentatively be in July, depending on MFC action items. The group discussed potential relevant discussion topics for inclusion at future meetings. Suggestions included GenX status, effect of ocean acidification, agricultural runoff, and drainage ditches on blue crab, other species, and water quality. They also suggested that periodic updates on environmental permit issues would be helpful.

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.







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## MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission  
Southern Regional Advisory Committee

FROM: Tina Moore  
Chris Stewart  
Division of Marine Fisheries, NCDEQ

DATE: April 11, 2018

SUBJECT: Southern Regional Advisory Committee Meeting

The Southern Regional Advisory Committee met at 6 p.m. on Wed. April 11, 2018 at the Wilmington Regional Office, 127 Cardinal Drive Extension, Wilmington. The following attended:

Advisors: Dr. Fred Scharf, Ron McCoy, Charles Griffin, Randy Proctor, Pam Morris, Ruth King

Absent: Christopher Hunt, Chris Medlin, Phillip Smith, Tom Smith, Adam Tyler

Staff: Chris Stewart, Tina Moore, Casey Knight, Anne Deaton, Ashley Bishop, Carter Witten

Public: Keith Walls (left before meeting started)

Dr. Fred Scharf called the meeting to order.

### APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

**Randy Proctor moved to approve the agenda; Pam Morris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

**Randy Proctor moved to approve the October 25, 2017 minutes from the presentation on management options for cobia; Charles Griffin seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**



## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Scharf asked if any member of the public was in attendance that wanted to provide comments to the committee. One member of the public had signed up to speak but had left the building before the meeting started.

## **REGION 4 STRATEGIC HABITAT AREAS (SHA): THE CAPE FEAR RIVER BASIN**

Casey Knight gave a presentation on Region 4 Strategic Habitat Areas (SHA): The Cape Fear River Basin. Knight reviewed the goals, the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan (CHPP), and the CHPP source document. Ms. Knight described the goal of SHA is an ecosystem-based approach for fisheries management. She defined a SHA as a subset of all coastal habitats and consist of strategically located complexes of fish habitats. They provide the “best of the best” ecological function. The ideal landscape scenario is a mosaic of diverse, connected habitats. SHA is defined in Marine Fisheries Commission rule.

Region 4 is the southernmost region. She described the region and explained the two-phase SHA selection process – part one involves MARXAN selection software, part two involves input from an advisory committee. Ms. Knight explained what makes it strategic vs. non-strategic. Steps involved- identify the priority species, determine the habitats that are a priority to these species, determine how much of each habitat should be included and determine how much alterations occurred.

MARXAN was used to pick best location for SHA based on total alteration scores. Expert modification by advisory committee members and Division staff helped decide what areas to keep or dismiss from the initial model output. This resulted in 43 discrete proposed SHA, 21% of the total focus area (74,451 acres). Out of the 43 SHAs, about 75% have some level of protection (conservation lands, Primary Nursery Areas, anadromous spawning areas). This falls in line with what has been previously nominated in other regions: Region 1 had 20 SHAs – 20% of the focus area, Region 2 had 67 SHAs - 26% of the focus area, Region 3 had 48 SHAs - 19% of the focus area. Potential conservation actions based on the SHA designations include local land use planning, agriculture cost share project, best use management practices, pursue restoration projects etc. Post-approval involves ground truthing fish and habitat condition within nominated SHAs, using the ground truthing results to modify selections, if needed, and to determine if management actions are needed to protect or enhance individual SHAs.

Knight asked for comments or questions from the committee members to work towards a recommendation to provide to the Marine Fisheries Commission. Various advisory committee members asked about restrictions to SHAs, who made the recommendations for regions 2 and 3, the impact on the Wilmington Port, and future dredging for larger vessels. Knight identified there are not restrictions as of now from SHAs, but 75% have some level of protection already, the recommendation for regions 2 and 3 went through the same process. (Anne Deaton added that we often defer to local knowledge. Knight continued that there will be no effect on the port because it is already impacted and not selected by the model for that reason; focusing on least-altered areas. The goal was not to regulate, but to move toward an ecosystem-based management approach. Deaton added that ground truthing the areas will help identify the stressors, and SHA identification is mainly used to focus on land-based impacts.



Advisory committee members asked if there were potential negative effects of an area receiving a designation as a SHA, and whether and whether its recommendation to the Marine Fisheries Commission. is supposed to focus on approval of the specific sites that were nominated as SHAs? Knight explained that is mainly about knowing how they chose the area based on research, sound science and not just selected randomly. Scharf answered yes, that the committee was just voting on the areas selected as SHAs. Scharf also asked if the use of SHAs in other areas have had any impact so far? Deaton answered not yet, we are waiting to finish all regions and do ground truthing. Deaton also noted that other agencies have reached out to staff to use the data for agriculture grants and for land acquirement for conservation. Knight added that she hopes this will ensure that future development will consider best use practices as they move forward.

### **VOTE ON RECOMMENDATION TO MFC TO APPROVE SHA REGION 4 NOMINATIONS**

**Randy Proctor moved to approve recommendations of the report; Pam Morris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**

### **MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION UPDATE**

Tina Moore provided updates from the February Marine Fisheries Commission meeting in Wrightsville Beach, striped mullet, the Fisheries Management Plan schedule, shrimp industry workgroup, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) highlights and upcoming tagging workshops.

A committee member asked about landings data for weakfish. Moore answered they are looking at commercial landings to the trip level at the request of fishermen to determine if more trips are reaching their trip limit. This information was requested from all states and will be provided to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Weakfish Technical Committee for further review and discussion. The committee asked about flounder stock status. Scharf offered that there is a trend in declining harvest rate. A committee member reported seeing a lot of recreational fishermen gigging in Core Sound may be getting more than the limit and concerns the fish are not getting reported.

### **PLAN AGENDA ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be July 11, 2018 at DEQ Wilmington Regional Office to discuss the stock assessment update for striped mullet. The committee is also scheduled to meet again at the DMF Central District Office in Morehead City on October 3, 2018.

**Randy Proctor moved to adjourn; Ron McCoy seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

