

## **Agenda Item VIII. Discussion of Council Committee Assignments**

### **Committee Assignments**

Council appointments by the Secretary of Commerce are typically announced after our June meeting with an official starting date of August 11 for new appointees (usually prior to our August Council meeting). Historically, the Council Chair is elected as the last order of business at the August Council meeting. The new Chair is then tasked with developing draft committee assignments for full Council consideration and approval during the October Council meeting. The result of this approach is that new Council members are not able to vote in a committee until the January Council meeting.

Staff proposes that the Council consider convening the full Council the first day of the October meeting on Monday morning for the sole purpose of making committee assignments and then recess until after the scheduled committees have met. With this approach new Council appointees will be able to fully participate and vote in a committee beginning with the October Council meeting instead of waiting until January.

A possible concern related to this proposed change is that Council members would not be informed of the Chair's proposed Administrative and Management Committee roster until the first briefing book is posted. Consequently, staff will have to work with the previous committee chairs to develop committee agendas and approve the agenda items and times for the October Council meeting. However, once committee rosters are finalized some committees will have a change in leadership.

### **Consolidation of Committees**

Since committee assignments will be made prior to our October meeting, this is a good time to review our committee structure to determine if there are any efficiencies that could be gained through potential consolidation. The Council has a few Administrative and Management Committees that meet either infrequently or have overlapping purposes. Staff is suggesting consideration of combining the following Committees: Artificial Reef, Habitat Protection, Ad Hoc Restoration, Marine Reserves, and the Sustainable Fisheries/Ecosystem Committees as outlined below. If approved this reorganization would result in the following three Committees: Habitat Protection, Sustainable Fisheries, and Ecosystem.

Staff recommends combining the Habitat Protection and Artificial Reef Committees into a single Habitat Protection Committee that can oversee all habitat related issues since our primary interest is in protecting Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). The Habitat Protection Committee was one of the first formed by the Council and was very active throughout the 1980s. In the last 15 years, the Habitat Committee was active in the development of our Generic EFH Amendment and typically met jointly with other committees, particularly the Artificial Reef, Coral and Shrimp Committees. The Artificial Reef Committee was formed in 1981 and last met jointly with the Shrimp Committee in April 2014. The Artificial Reef Committee was convened a very limited number of times between 1983 and 2011, but was most active in 2012-2013.

Staff also suggests separating Sustainable Fisheries and Ecosystem and leaving Sustainable Fisheries as a stand-alone committee. We also suggest merging the Marine Reserves and Ad Hoc Restoration Committees into a single Ecosystem Committee. The Marine Reserves Committee was formed in January 1998 and was last convened in October 2008. The Committee met infrequently after 2000. The agenda items discussed at the final meeting of the Marine Reserve Committee discussed the mechanisms for including HAPCs and other closed areas listed in the NOAA Marine Protected Area Inventory. Although marine reserves can be established for specific purposes, such as to protect a spawning aggregation, they are also used to protect segments of an ecosystem from both a habitat and fisheries perspective. The Ad Hoc Restoration Committee was convened consistently for one year only, from June 2012 to August 2013. Most of the RESTORE funding is focused on Gulf of Mexico ecosystem needs so it seems appropriate to merge it into an Ecosystem Committee due to overlapping management objectives.