

Ecosystem Committee Report June 4, 2025 Kevin Anson – Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab Q, No. 1**) and the minutes (**Tab Q, No. 2**) from the August 2024 meeting were approved as written.

Ecosystem Technical Committee Recommendations on Fishery Ecosystem Plan (Tab Q, Nos. 4a – b)

Staff provided an update on progress toward development of the Gulf Fishery Ecosystem Plan, including support through the Inflation Reduction Act to contract a social scientist to conduct stakeholder engagement efforts for the Fishery Ecosystem Plan. Staff reviewed the Ecosystem Technical Committee’s (ETC) recommendation for the scope of work for the social science consultant to focus on evaluating either social or economic impacts of Fishery Ecosystem Issues on stakeholders. Staff clarified that the ETC suggested that the Council would be unlikely to solicit a consultant with the capacity to effectively conduct both social and economic analyses. A Committee member recommended focusing on gathering economic information, which has been lacking in the past and would provide valuable context for the Council.

Discussion of Red Tide Fishery Ecosystem Issue Pilot (Tab Q, No. 5a)

Staff provided a presentation on efforts by the ETC to begin work on the Red Tide Fishery Ecosystem Issue Pilot. Committee members were supportive of the initiative, and inquired how the Council would communicate with other agencies and stakeholders about a naturally occurring problem like red tide that can be exacerbated by land use issues. Staff reminded the Committee of the proposal in the Red Tide Communications Plan to develop a Red Tide Federal Fisheries Report to illustrate to other agencies the impacts of upstream actions on Gulf fisheries. Dr. Clay Porch (Southeast Fisheries Science Center [SEFSC]) supported the flexible approach for forming a technical working group to work on the Red Tide Fishery Ecosystem Issue given the reductions in SEFSC staff and reiterated that the SEFSC would continue to do its best to support future ecosystem initiatives under reduced capacity.

A committee member suggested that ongoing research projects in support of red tide forecasting could allow the Council to be more responsive to red tide, perhaps allowing for consideration of proactive harvest of biomass ahead of red tide events, and further inquired about biomass loss during red tide events. Dr. Mandy Karnauskas (ETC Chair, SEFSC) contributed that loss of biomass was significant during major red tide events and added that better information about red tide has allowed the SSC to be less risk averse when setting catch limits. The Committee discussed the value of red tide forecasts in allowing industry to plan ahead for potential red tide impacts.

Any Remaining Ecosystem Technical Committee Recommendations (Tab Q, No. 4a)

Staff provided an update on efforts by the SEFSC to automate the production of Ecosystem Status Reports, which will allow for annual updates of Gulf Ecosystem Status Reports in the future.

Other Business

No other business came before the Committee.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.