

Ecosystem Committee Report November 3, 2025 Kevin Anson – Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab Q, No. 1**) and the minutes (**Tab Q, No. 2**) from the June 2025 meeting were approved as written.

Draft Fishery Ecosystem Plan (Tab Q, Nos. 4a – b)

Staff reviewed the draft Gulf Fishery Ecosystem Plan, which is a non-regulatory document to guide the use of ecosystem information in Gulf fisheries management. The Committee discussed the mission statement of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan, and whether it should be revised to state the Council’s goal to be responsive and proactive to ecosystem concerns in addition to the goal of maintaining long-term sustainability of Gulf resources. A Committee member contributed that the mission statement’s goal to provide a structured process for integrating ecosystem science into decision making processes likely encompassed the short-term goals of responsiveness.

Committee members discussed the Fishery Ecosystem Issue processes and procedures. A Committee member inquired whether the Council could recommend a Fishery Ecosystem Issue directly, or whether Ecosystem Technical Committee (ETC) approval of prospective Fishery Ecosystem Issues would be required. Staff responded that ETC approval was intended for stakeholder recommended Fishery Ecosystem Issues, largely to ensure that recommended issues fall within the Council’s purview. A Committee member asked for clarification on when Council selection and initiation of a Fishery Ecosystem Issue occurred within the Fishery Ecosystem Issue Loop process. Staff responded that Council selection and initiation of a Fishery Ecosystem Issue would be required before the first step of the Fishery Ecosystem Issue Loop can begin. A Committee member stressed the need for interagency communication for issues such as water quality that are outside of the Council’s jurisdiction.

Next, the Committee discussed the Fishery Ecosystem Plan communications strategy and a Committee member expressed the need for these efforts to highlight previous Council successes in incorporating ecosystem information into Gulf fisheries management (e.g., red tide episodic mortality in red grouper stock assessments). A Committee member inquired about the ongoing red tide pilot Fishery Ecosystem Issue, and asked whether other measures were possible beyond incorporating red tide into stock assessments. Staff responded that some potential non-regulatory outcomes of the red tide Fishery Ecosystem Issue could be improved communication of the effects of incorporating red tide episodic mortality in stock assessments to impacted stakeholders, and improved understanding of the biological response and resilience of red grouper to red tide to inform Council decision making. A Committee member contributed that improved information on the underlying causes of changes to patterns of fish distribution, such as for king mackerel, could aid the Council in proactive informed decision making.

Other Business

No other business came before the Committee.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.