

**Habitat and Restoration Committee Report**  
**June 1, 2026**  
**Mr. Johnny Marquez – Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab P, No. 1**) and the minutes (**Tab P, No. 2**) from the November 2025 meeting were approved.

*Public Hearing Draft - Essential Fish Habitat Generic Amendment to the Shrimp, Reef fish, Coastal Migratory Pelagics, Spiny Lobster, and Red Drum Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) in the Gulf (Tab P, No. 4)*

Council staff reviewed the Public Hearing Draft for the Generic Amendment to the Shrimp, Reef fish, Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP), Spiny Lobster, and Red Drum Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) in the Gulf to update essential fish habitat (EFH) descriptions and identifications. A Committee member asked about the inclusion of wrecks when describing the habitat associations of some reef fish. Staff responded that artificial reef structures are not a recognized habitat type within the scope of EFH management, the inclusion of wreck (or other artificial) structures in the species-specific habitat descriptions were provided to reflect habitat associations obtained from the updated literature review and describing the general association of many reef fish species with artificial structures. Staff highlighted that additional information to inform the EFH inland boundary was brought forward by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) but was not available in time for this meeting. Previous EFH reviews and agency-recommendations have identified that establishing an EFH inland boundary is a research priority to better describe and identify EFH in the Gulf. Staff will continue work on the delineation of an inland boundary to include in the document prior to going out to public hearings. General Counsel noted that the document will need to be approved by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) prior to public hearings as it is looking to modify the FMPs for CMP and spiny lobster, which are jointly-managed by both the Gulf and South Atlantic Council's.

Public hearings will be two virtual sessions; one during regular business hours to accommodate agency partner participation, and one in the evening consistent with our typical practices. A Committee member supported approval of the document for public hearings and directed staff to include pertinent EFH inland boundary information provided by the SEFSC when it is available. The current workplan is for staff to continue work on development of an EFH inland boundary, present the public hearing draft to the South Atlantic for approval, conduct public hearings in late 2026/early 2027, and schedule final action after completion of the virtual public hearings.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.