

Ecosystem Committee Report August 24, 2026 Kevin Anson – Chair

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

Identification of Stakeholder-Driven Fishery Ecosystem Issues (Tab Q, Nos. 4a – b)

Drs. Kelsi Furman (University of South Alabama), Nate Brugnone (Two Six Technologies), and Steve Kasperski (Kasperski Consulting) presented preliminary results for work contracted by the Council to identify Fishery Ecosystem Issues of concern to Gulf of America stakeholders using social science approaches. The Council funded this work to support the first phase of operationalizing the Gulf Fishery Ecosystem Plan. The project team described their approaches, which included stakeholder workshops held in each Gulf state, a Fisherman Feedback Survey, use of a large language model analysis to capture broader ecosystem perspectives from online sources and outlined prospective Fishery Ecosystem Issues they have identified thus far. The Committee asked clarifying questions about the data sources used for the large language model analysis and provided suggestions for focusing the online data sources on ecosystem issues directly impacting federal fisheries species.

In addition, Committee members discussed the broad scope of the Fishery Ecosystem Issues identified thus far and recommended that future efforts focus on identifying tangible issues that are within the Council's jurisdiction and have potential management solutions. A Committee member suggested that consideration of issues outside of the Council's jurisdiction was still an appropriate use of the processes outlined in the Fishery Ecosystem Plan, and doing so would acknowledge the concerns of stakeholders and communicate fisheries impacts to partner agencies. A Committee member provided an example that mitigation of red tide does not fall within the Council's purview, yet red tide impacts have been successfully integrated into stock assessments for several species. Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) staff suggested that work on Fishery Ecosystem Issues should align with ongoing SEFSC efforts on similar topics when possible. Staff and the project team stated that the next phase of the project would include working with the Ecosystem Technical Committee to narrow the scope of the Fishery Ecosystem Issues and identify issues with management levers that could be prioritized for Council consideration.

The Committee recommends, and I so **move**: **Upon completion of identifying the list of fishery ecosystem issues, send the list to the Ecosystem Technical Committee to begin development of action item next steps for Council review and consideration.**

Motion carried with no opposition.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.