

**Meeting Summary**  
**Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary**  
**Advisory Council Meeting – August 23, 2021**  
**(On-Line Webinar)**

**Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC)**

**Attendees**

Michael Denmark, Chair  
Scott Noakes, Vice-Chair  
Mona Behl, Secretary  
Peter Auster  
Paulita Bennett-Martin  
LT James Bruce  
Mark Carson  
Robert Crimian  
Rick DeVictor  
Joseph Glenn  
Jaime Gormley  
Rachel Guy  
Ben Hughes  
Kathy Knowlton  
Lauren Stefaniak  
Suzanne VanParreren

**Primary SAC Members Absent**

Monique Gordon  
Colby Harris  
Chris Hodge

**Gray's Reef National Marine  
Sanctuary (GRNMS) Support Staff**

Stan Rogers, Superintendent  
Alexi Archer  
Scott Kathey  
Ben Prueitt

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**Council Business**

Chair Michael Denmark called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Advisory Council (AC) meeting to order at 10:00 AM.

Mona Behl (AC Secretary) called roll and confirmed a quorum was present.

AC Chair Michael Denmark and GRNMS Superintendent Stan Rogers thanked Mark Padgett for serving three consecutive terms as a Citizen-At-Large member of the council, and displayed on-line a certificate and framed reef photo that will be presented to him at a later date. Mark's third term as Citizen-At-Large ended in April 2021.

**Motion #1: Approve the meeting minutes for the April 15, 2021 AC meeting.**

The Chair invited a motion to approve the meeting summary from the April 15, 2021 AC meeting. Paulita Bennett-Martin made a motion to approve the meeting summary, which was seconded. Before voting, the Chair asked if any member wished to suggest changes to the draft meeting summary. No one replied. The council approved the April 15 meeting summary by a majority show of hands. No one opposed approval of the

summary. The AC Secretary emailed a final draft April 15 meeting summary to all council members on May 11 for their review and consideration prior to this meeting.

Scott Kathey (GRNMS) made a short enrichment presentation to clarify the differences between an AC subcommittee and an AC working group.

### **GRNMS Advisory Council Charter Review – Subcommittee Report & Recommendations**

The Chair thanked the members of the charter review subcommittee and GRNMS staff who supported the group's discussions and reported that the subcommittee had drafted 6 recommendations for revising the council charter. For each of the subcommittee recommendations, the Chair asked for a second to the given recommendation, opened the floor for discussion, and subsequently proceeded to a council vote. Upon conclusion of each vote, he advanced to the next subcommittee recommendation listed on the agenda and repeated the same three actions.

Motion #2: Change the title of the current "Commercial/Charter Fishing" seat to "Fishing Industry" to include commercial fishing/charter interests, tackle/bait shops, marinas, etc. The above motion was displayed for the council on an electronic slide. The Chair called for a second to the subcommittee's recommended motion. Scott Noakes seconded the motion. The Chair asked for comments/concerns prior to a vote.

Kathy Knowlton said she fully supports the recommendation, but would have preferred to see a detailed mark-up of the current charter to see how the recommended change would appear in context and how it would affect other parts of the charter. She noted the current charter associates "tackle shops" with the *Sport Fishing* seat and that the proposed inclusion of "tackle shops" in the definition of the newly defined *Fishing Industry* seat will require deletion of "tackle shops" from the definition for the *Sport Fishing* seat.

Scott Kathey (GRNMS) explained that NOAA staff will ensure that any SAC recommendations adopted by the ONMS Director are consistent and compatible with other provisions of the document. All related text will be revised as necessary.

The Chair noted that GRNMS has had a "dismal time" trying to fill the *Commercial/Charter Fishing* seat. Multiple recruitment attempts have failed to fill the seat, leaving it vacant for the past several years. By expanding the definition and constituency of the seat, the subcommittee hopes to restore representation of the for-profit fishing industry on the council. The re-structured voting seat will continue to represent commercial and charter fishing interests, but will also include other commercial businesses related to fishing (e.g. bait shops, tackle shops, marinas, wholesalers, etc.).

Rick DeVactor said he preferred that the title of the seat remain unchanged because the title *Fishing Industry* is vaguer than the title *Commercial/Charter Fishing*.

Bob Crimean voiced a preference for expanding recruitment to capture broader commercial fishing interests beyond GRNMS, in lieu of changing the seat title.

Peter Auster commented that marinas do not represent commercial and charter fishing.

The motion passed by a roll call vote of 6 “Yes” votes, 0 “No” votes, and 1 abstention. A minimum quorum of seven voting members was present at the time of the vote.

Motion #3: Create a third Citizen At-Large seat to foster broader inclusion of community interests on the SAC.

The above motion was displayed for the council on an electronic slide. The Chair called for a second to the subcommittee’s recommended motion. Kathy Knowlton seconded the motion. The Chair asked for comments/concerns prior to a vote. There were no questions or comments.

The Chair noted that the subcommittee considered addition of a variety of new interests and perspectives on the council (shipping, Gullah Geechee culture, Youth, etc.), but ultimately decided that by creating a third Citizen-At-Large seat, the council would have the flexibility to seek diverse community voices over time to provide critical perspectives on emergent issues. It would also provide opportunities to explore different community perspectives and interests that might eventually lead to the addition of new constituent seats.

The motion passed by a roll call vote of 7 “Yes” votes, 0 “No” votes, and 0 abstentions. A minimum quorum of seven voting members was present at the time of the vote.

Motion #4: Change term duration of all Citizen-At-Large seats from 2 to 3 years.

The above motion was displayed for the council on an electronic slide. The Chair called for a second to the subcommittee’s recommended motion. Kathy Knowlton seconded the motion. The Chair asked for comments/concerns prior to a vote. There were no questions or comments.

The Chair explained that the subcommittee recommended adjusting the term lengths of the Citizen-At-Large seats to match the 3-year term lengths of all other constituent seats on the council as a matter of equity.

The motion passed by a roll call vote of 7 “Yes” votes, 0 “No” votes, and 0 abstentions. A minimum quorum of seven voting members was present at the time of the vote.

Motion #5: Stagger Citizen At-Large recruitments to facilitate a new Citizen At-Large recruitment each year. This will create an annual opportunity to diversify perspectives on the SAC from various interest groups across the region as the SAC addresses emergent issues.

The above motion was displayed for the council on an electronic slide. The Chair called for a second to the subcommittee’s recommended motion. Kathy Knowlton seconded

the motion. The Chair asked for comments/concerns prior to a vote. There were no questions or comments.

The motion passed by a roll call vote of 7 “Yes” votes, 0 “No” votes, and 0 abstentions. A minimum quorum of seven voting members was present at the time of the vote.

Motion #6: Change the officer term limit for the SAC Secretary to match the existing term limits for the Chair and Vice-Chair officer positions.

The above motion was displayed for the council on an electronic slide. The Chair called for a second to the subcommittee’s recommended motion. Scott Noakes seconded the motion. The Chair asked for comments/concerns prior to a vote.

The Chair noted that the present charter placed no limit on the number of consecutive terms an individual could serve as Secretary. The subcommittee recommended that the Secretary position have the same term limit as that prescribed for the Chair and Vice Chair (i.e. a maximum of 2 consecutive 2-year terms).

Peter Auster noted that due to council seat term limits, anyone serving as Secretary could not continue in that office beyond the term limit of their constituency seat (i.e. 9 years). The Secretary position is critical, and finding someone who is good at it and wants to do it is rare. If such a person were willing to serve for an extended period, that could actually be a benefit to the SAC. By imposing a term limit, the SAC could lose qualified people willing and able to continue serving in the position. Kathy Knowlton agreed.

Scott Kathey noted that SAC records indicate that one past SAC Secretary served in the position for 9 consecutive years.

Mona Behl commented that having term limits provides an opportunity to bring in someone new with fresh perspectives.

The motion passed by a roll call vote of 4 “Yes” votes, 2 “No” votes, and 1 abstention. A minimum quorum of seven voting members was present at the time of the vote.

Motion #7: Change the title of the "Secretary" officer position to "Operations Officer" to better reflect the purpose and duties of the position.

The above motion was displayed for the council on an electronic slide. The Chair called for a second to the subcommittee’s recommended motion. Scott Noakes seconded the motion. The Chair asked for comments/concerns prior to a vote.

The Chair commented that the functions of the Secretary position are more essential to council administration than the title implies. Therefore, the subcommittee felt that a change of title was warranted to accurately reflect the level of responsibility assigned to the position.

Peter Auster asked what other titles were considered, noting that “Operations Officer” is a bit ambiguous and doesn’t clearly connote the responsibilities of the SAC position. Peter commented that Operations Officer implies a role of managing physical operations, such as equipment operations and safety.

Kathy Knowlton voiced support for the title change but questioned why the executive duties of the Secretary have not simply been split between the Chair and Vice-Chair, rather than vested in a third officer position.

In response to Peter Auster’s question, Scott Kathey reported that one alternative title considered by the subcommittee was “Administrative Officer”.

The motion passed by a roll call vote of 7 “Yes” votes, 0 “No” votes, and 0 abstentions. A minimum quorum of seven voting members was present at the time of the vote.

### **Superintendent’s Report**

GRNMS Superintendent Stan Rogers presented a report summarizing recent and pending activities by GRNMS staff:

- GRNMS recently completed the 2021 Summer Research Expedition aboard the NOAA Ship NANCY FOSTER, which required re-mobilization of the GRNMS dive team and small boat team after nearly two years of operational stand-downs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. GRNMS staff and partners conducted a variety of scientific studies. Positive cases of COVID appeared aboard ship and cut the mission short by two to three days. Approximately 80% of the planned mission was completed with marked success.
- In May, GRNMS lead a benthic mapping mission aboard the NOAA Ship NANCY FOSTER and successfully mapped ~40 square miles of live bottom habitat off the coast of Georgia (outside GRNMS). Mapping data will be shared publicly.
- GRNMS is in final negotiations for a visitor center lease in downtown Savannah and anticipates taking occupancy of the space by November 1, 2021. This will be the first visitor center ever for GRNMS. Stan will formally announce the location of the selected visitor center site once the lease is signed. As the center spurs engagement between GRNMS and diverse sectors of the local community, the council may discover opportunities to recruit new voices and perspectives through its Citizen-At-Large seats.
- GRNMS hosted a Live Bottom Ecological Connectivity Workshop in mid-July to assess regional understanding of live bottom habitats within the South Atlantic Bight. GRNMS hosted the workshop of 30 regional resource managers and researchers to assess current knowledge, the threats and pressures facing these reefs, and conservation needs. A Proceedings document will be prepared this winter.

- GRNMS will soon begin developing a [Condition Report](#) to assess the state of the sanctuary in advance of a revision of its management plan. The information gained from the Connectivity Workshop will aid preparation of the report.
- As part of the [Sanctuaries Climate Resilience Plan](#), GRNMS staff may update a climate vulnerability assessment for the site in advance of its management plan review.
- In July, the public comment period ended for a [Regulatory Flexibility Act \(RFA\) review](#) of the economic impacts of the closed [GRNMS Research Area](#). The routine review of past NOAA rulemakings included an assessment of economic impacts of the GRNMS Research Area designation to small businesses over the past 10 years. NOAA will complete a report of findings in the next 2-3 months.
- GRNMS expects to receive a new research vessel in late 2023 or early 2024. Design efforts are currently underway. The vessel will support partner missions.
- Over the next few months, NOAA will require federal employees to attest to vaccination status prior to phased reintegration of the work force to NOAA offices. Employees are not required to get vaccinated, but must report status. A mandatory 100% telework order has been in place since 2020. Reopening of the GRNMS office will be based upon Covid-19 statistics for Chatham County. As a result of this, in-person SAC meetings will not likely resume anytime soon.

Joseph Glenn asked Stan Rogers if the recent benthic mapping mission aboard the NOAA Ship NANCY FOSTER will result in a product available to the public. He also asked if Stan could provide the general location for the new visitor center and asked what Stan thinks about a submitted public comment supporting opening the GRNMS Research Area to diving. Stan explained that the raw mapping data will eventually be rendered into a finished map product available through [NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information \(NCEI\)](#). The new GRNMS visitor center will be located on the west side of the Savannah historical district along Martin Luther King Boulevard in the vicinity of museum row. Regarding the public comment received by NOAA during the RFA review about diver access to the GRNMS Research Area, Stan explained that NOAA will officially respond to the comment in its final report and that it would be premature for him to state an opinion in advance of the report. The Chair suggested that Joseph contact Scott Kathey (GRNMS) to get information about why diving was prohibited in the Research Area at the time of its destination.

Kathy Knowlton commented that Roldan Munoz (NOAA NMFS) presented an excellent report at the GADNR Climate Conference in June on shifting distribution of semi-tropical marine fish in the southeast region and suggested he give the presentation to the SAC in the future. The Chair asked GRNMS staff to circle back with him about placing it on the November SAC meeting agenda.

## **America the Beautiful Initiative (30x30 goals)**

Lauren Wenzel (NOAA ONMS) gave a slide presentation to explain goals and guidance for public submission of ideas and input on the President's [America the Beautiful initiative](#) to conserve 30% of U.S. lands and ocean waters by 2030 (the 30x30 initiative). A question and answer period followed.

The Chair asked council members if they thought the SAC should provide input to NOAA regarding the 30x30 initiative, and if so, whether the council wished to provide input about potential conservation efforts beyond GRNMS boundaries. Responding council members indicated a desire to provide input. There were no objections.

The Chair stated that the SAC Executive Committee will form the core of a subcommittee to explore potential input on the 30x30 initiative and invited interested council members to participate. Bob Crimian, Paulita Bennett-Martin, and Peter Auster volunteered to serve on the 30x30 subcommittee.

## **National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) Assessment of the National Marine Sanctuary Program**

Scott Kathey (GRNMS) provided an overview of the [NAPA report](#) findings.

The Chair asked council members wishing to comment on the NAPA report to submit written comments to the AC Secretary by November 1 (an extension from the previous June deadline) for compilation and referral to NOAA.

## **Call for Council Member Updates**

The Chair asked if any AC members had any updates to present to the council.

Rick DeVictor reported that the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAFMC) plans to hold its first post-Covid, in-person meeting Sep 13-17. The SAFMC has received multiple fishery stock assessments and is working on fishery management plan amendments for several marine species. Status of stocks is varied, depending on species. The SAFMC and NMFS are in the initial stage of developing "scenario planning", a 7-stage process to map out various possible future stock scenarios based upon key elements of uncertainty. This is a new planning initiative on the east coast.

James Bruce reported that the Coast Guard conducted 15 GRNMS patrols in FY21. No violations were reported from Coast Guard boardings. Other than observation of a research vessel, the only activities detected within GRNMS were recreational fishing.

Mark Carson reported that GADNR has not patrolled GRNMS recently, but that the GADNR/NOAA Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) has been signed and starts tomorrow (effective to Aug 23, 2022). The new JEA allots 95 hours for GADNR patrols at GRNMS. Last year, GADNR Enforcement conducted 18 patrols in GRNMS, spent 97

work hours there, encountered 26 vessels and 76 people, and referred 5 violation cases to NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (including illegal anchoring, undersized fish, and charter operation with improper licenses).

### **Next SAC Meeting**

The Chair announced that a poll of SAC members indicates that Monday, November 8, 10:30 AM – 2:00 PM is the best timeframe for the fall meeting.

Kathey Knowlton asked if more breaks could be included in future SAC agendas and a 30-minute break for lunch. She also suggested considering splitting meetings over two days for 2 hours/day.

### **Public Comment**

The Chair asked if any member of the public wished to address the council. Jeff Soss, (a GA charter captain and South Carolina Recreational Fishing Representative on the SAFMC's Habitat & Ecosystem-Based Management Advisory Council, commented that in recommending a new title and expanded scope for the Commercial/Charter Fishing seat, the SAC should consider the various biases and competing interests that for-profit fishing constituents hold. One stakeholder group opinion within the Fishing Industry umbrella does not necessarily represent the opinions or interests of other groups within that category. Recreational and commercial fishers have different interests, and he urged the council to support the voices of recreational fishers, charter boat captains and GRNMS-reliant businesses.

### **Adjournment**

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 4:02 PM for a total meeting duration of 4 hours and 2 minutes.