

**Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary
Sanctuary Advisory Council Meeting
Meeting, March 4, 2002
8:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Hilton Savannah DeSoto
Savannah, GA**

Attendance:

SAC Members Present: Henry Ansley, Doug Rader, Anne Lindsay Frick, George Sedberry, Bing Phillips, Patty McIntosh, and Joe Kimmel. Lt. Mark Gordon is attending for LCDR Dave Cinalli.

SAC Members Absent: Jim Henry, Judy Wright, and Dave Cinalli

NOAA Gray's Reef staff in attendance: Reed Bohne, Marcy Lee, Cathy Sakas, and Becky Shortland.

Others in attendance: Dr. Jon Hare-NCCOS, Rod Ehler-NMSP economist, Dr. Zaphon Wilson-Savannah State University, Toni Iarocci-Florida Keys NMS SAC and member South Atlantic Fishery Management Council

Distributed Materials:

- Agenda
- Approved minutes from October 24-25, 2001 SAC Retreat, December 18, 2001 meeting
- National SAC Chair/coordinators meeting materials
- Draft summary of in-person socio-economic surveys
- SAC roles in sanctuary management processes

Welcome

Chairman Matt Gilligan called the meeting to order and reviewed the agenda. Dr. Gilligan noted for the record that the minutes distributed were approved online.

Public Comment

No members of the public were present.

National SAC Chairs/Coordinators Annual Meeting

Dr. Gilligan discussed the National SAC Chairs/Coordinators Annual Meeting that he and Becky Shortland attended, February 6-7, hosted by Florida Keys NMS in Marathon, FL. He noted that the SAC's are diverse in scope and mission, and that individual SAC's

now could have an impact on national policies with new initiatives supported by NMSP Director Dan Basta. Mr. Basta intends to request input on national issues during future annual SAC meetings. Another initiative suggested by Mr. Basta is an exchange program for SAC chairs to visit other SAC as appropriate. Also, a directory of all SAC members from all sites is in development.

There was also a strong consensus among attendees that individual and national SAC annual reports were important, as well as annual work plans. Dr. Gilligan suggested that we might want to plan annual retreats to coincide with the beginning of the fiscal year for these purposes.

Dr. Gilligan also posed the following questions to help stimulate this thinking and future plans:

1. What are our (SAC member) obligations and responsibilities to the Sanctuary Program (GRNMS and NMSP), to conservation (of fisheries, natural habitats, ecosystems, cultural heritage, marine resources), and to the public that we represent?
2. To what extent should the SAC address issues beyond the boundaries of the Sanctuary? The ocean adjacent to Georgia? The South Atlantic Bight? The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)? Global ocean?
3. How can the SAC, National Marine Sanctuary Program, and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation work together to increase public awareness and understanding of the oceans and of the diversity of our cultural and historical connections to the ocean?
4. To what extent should the SAC consider alternate members or expanding the SAC? (i.e. to expand stature, influence; to include elected governmental officials and others who will seek wider community visibility, input, and investment in the NMSP and NMS Foundation).
5. What are some of the things that you, personally, would like to take a lead in achieving this year as a SAC member?
6. What are some ways that we might measure and report our effectiveness?

Reed Bohne reminded everyone that the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is meeting this week in the hotel, and that a public scoping meeting is scheduled on Tuesday 3/5 regarding the SAFMC's proposed marine protected areas. Tony Iarocci suggested that SAC members might want to keep their constituents involved in the SAFMC process. He suggested that those who may be interested might want to be on the SAFMC mailing list rather than relying on press releases and newspaper notices.

Discussion followed as to whether staff could submit the full Gray's Reef mailing list to SAFMC for their mailing. Doug Rader expressed concern that the recipients be a diverse group of interests, not skewing it towards one type of constituency like the fishing

community. Becky Shortland suggested and the SAC members agreed that she would ask SAFMC to add SAC members to the SAFMC mailing list, along with any other individuals suggested. Any suggested individuals should be forwarded to Becky as soon as possible.

Socio-economic Studies

NMSP Economist Rod Ehler gave a presentation on the recent in-personal surveys he conducted with charter boat captains and dive operators. (Report attached.)

NCCOS Studies

Dr. Jon Hare of NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS), Center for Coastal Fisheries and Habitat Research in Beaufort, NC, gave a presentation on studies conducted at Gray's Reef and surrounding areas.

Jon discussed the work they have been doing to:

- monitor adult fish populations, and validate sampling methods,
- learn about juvenile fish habitat utilization, and
- fish spawning in the area.

Regarding adult fish population monitoring, there seems to be a noticeable change in the fish fauna seasonally at GR (from spring to summer to fall). There also seem to be annual differences, but it is difficult to determine since sampling has not been consistent by time of year. Dr. Hare emphasized that, it is important to continue sampling in the same season(s) each year. More work needs to be done with the data. He also emphasized the need to come to terms with what the sanctuary wants to monitor and whether or not the current monitoring program is achieving those goals. A working group to refine monitoring methodology would be advantageous.

Matt Gilligan stressed the importance of monitoring diversity in fish populations at GR, as well as change and abundance. George Sedberry pointed out the importance of doing both the transect and point count methods especially to determine abundance.

Dr. Hare went on to present the studies done to date on juvenile fish habitat utilization at Gray's Reef NMS and across the continental shelf nearby. Open sand habitat was examined first. Importantly, they do see some reef fish species settling in and using non-reef habitat for early life stages. Future sampling will focus on Gray's Reef (live bottom habitat) and the water column.

Next, Dr. Hare talked about the studies conducted to begin to evaluate fish spawning activity in the vicinity of Gray's Reef. They began with potential larval transport to, and dispersal from, Gray's Reef by deploying several drifters. The results indicate that fish larvae, which might spawn at or near Gray's Reef, may remain on the inner shelf for up to 45 days. This time period would encompass the larval state of many fish species,

indicating that juveniles may then settle on the inner continental shelf nearby. They are conducting similar studies at the Tortugas Ecological Reserve and Oculina Bank.

Dr. Hare noted that a proposal has just been submitted to develop a three-dimensional reference model on circulation for the southeast US continental shelf. If the proposal is not funded, he and other partners, such as the SABSOON project, will still collaborate to incorporate information.

Dr. Hare outlined the future efforts NCCOS may lead as:

- Continued adult fish population monitoring;
- Continued examination of juvenile fish habitat utilization at Gray's Reef and in the water column;
- Evaluating spawning patterns;
- Determining the condition of macroinfauna (Dr. Jeff Hyland), and eventually bringing this information together with juvenile fish habitat utilization studies.

Draft Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement

Becky Shortland noted that release of the plan may now be in early summer, and suggested that the public release could coincide with the next SAC meeting. Extensive discussion followed regarding timing of SAC review of the document before it is released to the general public. The SAC discussed the issue at length and finally asked that they be allowed to review the plan before it is released to the public.

Reed Bohne will consult with General Counsel to determine if that is possible.

SAC and Staff Final Comments

Matt Gilligan commended Reed Bohne and the Gray's Reef staff on R/V Joe Ferguson boat dedication.

The next SAC meeting was tentatively scheduled for early May.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:43 p.m.