

# Meeting Summary

## Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary

### Advisory Council Meeting – February 5, 2021

#### (On-Line Webinar)

#### Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC)

##### Attendees

Scott Noakes, Vice-Chair  
Mona Behl, Secretary  
Peter Auster  
Paulita Bennett-Martin  
LT James Bruce  
Laura Busch  
Robert Crimian  
Joseph Glenn  
Monique Gordon  
Rachel Guy  
CAPT Chris Hodge  
Ben Hughes  
Kathy Knowlton  
Jack McGovern  
Mark Padgett  
Lauren Stefaniak  
Suzanne VanParreren

##### Primary SAC Members Absent

Carolyn Belcher  
Michael Denmark  
Rick DeVictor  
Colby Harris

##### Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Staff

Stan Rogers, Superintendent  
Alexi Archer  
Scott Kathey  
Elliott Lam  
Ben Prueitt  
Michelle Riley  
Kim Roberson

##### GRNMS Foundation (GRNMSF) Staff

Jody Patterson

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## Council Business

Council Vice-Chair Dr. Scott Noakes called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Advisory Council (AC) meeting to order at 1:05 PM, after the new GRNMS AC Liaison (Scott Kathey) introduced himself, reviewed meeting etiquette for the on-line webinar session, and confirmed to the meeting chair that a quorum of voting members was present.

Dr. Noakes explained that he was filling in as meeting chair for AC Chair Michael Denmark who could not attend the meeting due to illness.

Written minutes of the October 22, 2020 GRNMS AC meeting were approved by the council with no changes or objections. The draft minutes had been previously emailed to council members on January 29 for their review.

## **Ecological Connectivity Working Group Final Results - Briefing**

The chair introduced the agenda for this special meeting of the AC to receive a final briefing from Dr. Peter Auster on products developed by the AC's Ecological Connectivity Working Group (ECWG). He then yielded the floor to Dr. Auster, Chair of the ECWG.

Dr. Auster presented a signed letter from the ECWG Chair to AC Chair Michael Denmark (enclosure 1). An image of the letter was displayed on the webinar meeting screen for review by AC members as Dr. Auster proceeded with his presentation. The first line of the letter stated, "Please accept this communication and attachments assembled by the Ecological Connectivity Working Group (ECWG)." The attachments were four reference materials about the state of understanding of connectivity of species across life-histories at GRNMS.

Dr. Auster outlined the history of the working group's efforts and explained that its work had multiple starts and stops after its first meeting in 2015 for various reasons outlined in the letter. He explained that the group was formed as an outcome of the 2014 GRNMS management plan update that called for a review of the state of knowledge about ecological connectivity between Gray's Reef and surrounding live bottom habitat, as well as interactions between natural resource management agencies in the region regarding live bottom conservation. Auster noted that ECWG participants were well-established members of the scientific community, representing a wide range of ecological expertise.

Dr. Auster said the ONMS/GRNMS developed "terms of reference" over a 12-month period to frame the nature and scope of its inquiry. During the tenure of the ECWG, many of its members were also called upon, among other things, to develop parts of a multi-chapter publication reporting on scientific studies within the GRNMS Research Area from 2011 - 2016. Also, during the tenure of the working group, six acting superintendents managed GRNMS over a 2-year transitional leadership period. Dr. Auster stated that due to these and other factors, the working group did not fully complete the terms of reference. However, the ECWG assembled four products that will be useful to continued efforts toward assessing connectivity and conservation issues among live bottom reefs in the region.

Dr. Auster stated that in order to link working group efforts and products to date with a planned upcoming regional workshop addressing connectivity, the ECWG reported on the products it had assembled so they can be transmitted to the sanctuary superintendent in advance of that workshop. He reviewed the four principle products assembled for, and in support of, questions about connectivity and summarized each of the four products identified at the bottom of his transmittal letter to the AC Chair. Web

links for accessing each of the four products were sent to AC members by GRNMS staff in a January 29, 2021 email message.

Dr. Auster then asked for questions from the SAC members. No questions were posed.

The meeting chair again asked for questions regarding Dr. Auster's presentation and commented that this was a huge undertaking and significant compilation of information on ecological connectivity. He opined that the group had gone about as far as it could under the constraints as discussed earlier. No questions were posed by AC members present.

### **Motion #1: Forward the ECWG's products to the GRNMS Superintendent**

Dr. Auster made a motion that the GRNMS AC forward the ECWG's transmittal letter and attachments to the GRNMS superintendent. The motion was seconded by Paulita Bennett-Martin. The Vice-Chair asked for discussion. No one offered comment. The Chair called for a vote on the motion. Individual votes were posted as "Yes" or "No" by eligible voting council members, using the chat box in the GoToWebinar application. Two voting members participating by phone communicated directly with GRNMS meeting support staff to register their votes. Mark Padgett voted verbally since he had temporarily lost access to the GoToWebinar screen. Votes were tallied by Alexi Archer (GRNMS). Scott Kathey announced the motion passed. Final results were 7 Yes votes, 0 No votes, 0 Abstentions.

### **Motion #2: Dissolve the ECWG**

Peter Auster made a second motion that the GRNMS AC dissolve the ECWG. The motion was seconded by Paulita Bennett-Martin. The Vice-Chair asked for discussion. No one offered comment. The Vice-Chair called for a vote on the motion. Individual votes were posted in the chat box, as described for Motion #1 above and tallied by Alexi Archer. One council member participating by phone communicated directly with GRNMS meeting support staff to register their vote. Another member on the phone abstained from voting. Final results were 6 Yes votes, 0 No votes, 1 Abstention. Scott Kathey announced that the motion passed.

### **Motion #3: Approve the Draft Transmittal Letter to the Superintendent, Forwarding the ECWG's Products**

Dr. Noakes then made a motion that the AC approve the text of a draft letter (enclosure 2 - displayed to AC members on the webinar meeting screen) to formally submit the ECWG's four products to the sanctuary superintendent. Scott Kathey stated that the text of the draft letter was almost identical to the text of the transmittal letter from the ECWG Chair to the AC Chair, displayed earlier in the meeting. The motion was seconded by Paulita Bennett-Martin. The Vice-Chair asked for discussion. No one offered comment. The Vice-Chair called for a vote on the motion. Individual votes were

posted in the chat box, as described for Motion #1 above. One council member participating by phone communicated directly with GRNMS meeting support staff to register their vote. Another member on the phone abstained from voting. Final results were 6 Yes votes, 0 No votes, 1 Abstention. Scott Kathey announced that the motion passed.

GRNMS Superintendent Stan Rogers thanked the ECWG for their work and acknowledged the various challenges the group encountered to carry the work forward. He explained that delivery of the group's final products are timely because they will be directly relevant to preparation of the GRNMS Condition Report over the next 2 years. The Condition Report is a pre-requisite for revision of the sanctuary's management plan scheduled for completion in 2024. Wrapping up the ECWG frees its members to participate in the next steps of the connectivity dialogue.

### **Next Steps for Exploring Connectivity & Relevance to Regional Resource Management**

GRNMS Superintendent Stan Rogers presented 4 informational slides (enclosure 3) as part of a briefing on planned next steps by GRNMS regarding ecological connectivity. He noted that the 2014 GRNMS Management Plan included an objective (SR-6) to evaluate potential areas outside GRNMS that may have connectivity with the sanctuary and may benefit from increased protection. He explained that objective SR-6 was the driver for formation and tasking of the ECWG in 2015. Now that foundational information has been compiled by the ECWG, the next step is to convene a broader-based stakeholder workshop in late spring/early summer 2021 to 1) identify significant areas of live bottom within the Carolinian Ecoregion; 2) assess knowledge and gaps regarding live bottom habitat and species status; and 3) assess conservation and protection needs across the ecoregion. Mr. Rogers said the workshop results will inform the upcoming Condition Report and management plan process. He added that workshop participants will include state and federal natural resource agencies/trustees, NGOs, academia, Sea Grant programs, and others.

Mr. Rogers then paused for any questions from the council about the scope or nature of the described proposal for the stakeholder workshop.

Paulita Bennett-Martin asked if the long-term goal is to expand GRNMS boundaries or add new sites along the southeastern area to create a network of protected areas. Rogers replied that there is no pre-determined objective to expand or create new marine protected areas, though such action might potentially be considered by workshop participants. Other management approaches, such as revision or focused application of existing regulatory authorities (e.g. fishery regulations) might also be considered. The purpose of the workshop is to engage principle stakeholders to help identify what next steps are recommended and to capture the results in written workshop proceedings that can inform future decisionmaking. Mr. Rogers noted that

the discussion will extend to the greater region beyond GRNMS boundaries (i.e. the southern portion of the Carolinian Marine Ecoregion).

Jack McGovern recommended inviting state natural resources agencies and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to participate in the workshop. Rogers agreed that they would be major players at the workshop, together with academia, user groups, interest groups, etc.

Joseph Glenn asked if there was an established timeline for the proposed stakeholder workshop. Mr. Rogers replied that GRNMS will begin reaching out to prospective stakeholders from North Carolina to NE Florida to determine interest in participation and aim for a meeting date in late spring/early summer 2021. The intent is to complete the workshop before scheduled initiation of the GRNMS Condition Report in October/November 2021. [Note: The Condition Report is a pre-requisite to the GRNMS management plan review process that will begin in earnest in 2022 for a scheduled 2024 completion date.]

Rogers concluded his remarks by adding that GRNMS will be seeking SAC input on suggested workshop participants.

## **Call for Other Council Business**

The meeting chair asked if any AC members had any other business that needed the council's attention before moving to the public comment period. After a 5-10 second pause and no response, he opened the floor for public comment.

## **Public Comment**

The meeting chair asked if any member of the public wished to address the council. After a pause of 10 seconds and no response, the meeting Organizer (Ben Prueitt) explained for any attendees present how to share a comment or submit a question through the GoToWebinar meeting app. After another 10-second pause and no response, the Organizer stated that he had received no public request. [Note: The scheduled time for public comment was 2:15 PM, but due to quick progression of agenda items, the floor was opened for public comment at 1:41 PM. The publicly posted meeting agenda included a notice in colored text that "All times are subject to possible adjustment."]

## **Adjournment**

The meeting chair again thanked Dr. Auster for his service as Connectivity Working Group chair and provided a brief update on Michael Denmark's recovery before making

a motion to adjourn. Paulita Bennett-Martin seconded the motion. The AC meeting adjourned at 1:43 PM for a total meeting duration of approximately 40 minutes.

### **Next Meeting**

The next regularly scheduled AC meeting is Thursday, April 15, 2021.