

Meeting Summary
Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary
Advisory Council Meeting – March 24, 2022
(On-Line Webinar)

Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC)

Attendees

Peter Auster, Chair
Lauren Stefaniak, Vice-Chair
Mona Behl
LT James Bruce
Robert Crimian
Michael Denmark
Rick DeVictor
Jaime Gormley
Ben Hughes
Kathy Knowlton
Stan Rogers
Chris Sawyer
Jeff Soss
Michelle Taliercio

Primary SAC Members Absent

Paulita Bennett-Martin
Monique Gordon
Rachel Guy
Chris Hodge

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

Vicki Baglin
Scott Kathey
Elliott Lam
Ben Prueitt

Advisory Council Administrative Business

Peter Auster called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Advisory Council (AC) meeting to order at 10:00 AM with the ringing of a cow bell.

AC Vice Chair Lauren Stefaniak called roll, reported 14 members present and confirmed a quorum of 8 voting members present. Mona Behl joined the meeting later.

AC Chair Peter Auster noted that members would be joining and exiting the meeting during the day and that quorum would need to be re-assessed prior to any consensus measure or vote by the AC. He clarified that an abstention does not count as a vote or toward meeting quorum requirements.

Action #1: Approve the meeting minutes for the November 8, 2021 AC meeting.

The Chair asked if any members had any suggested edits or corrections to the draft November 8, 2021 AC meeting summary and, hearing none, asked if anyone objected to approving the meeting summary by consensus. Hearing no objections, the Chair announced that the meeting minutes were approved.

The Chair and GRNMS Superintendent Stan Rogers thanked departing council members Colby Harris and Joseph Glenn. He also thanked departing SAC officers Michael Denmark, Scott Noakes, and Mona Behl for their service. The Chair also welcomed the incoming Citizen-At-Large representative, Christopher Sawyer; Sport Diving representative, Michelle Taliercio; Sport Fishing representative, Jeffrey Soss; and returning Conservation representative (second term), Bob Crimian. He invited each to make a few comments to introduce themselves to the council.

The Chair recognized SAC member LT James Bruce for being awarded USCG Law Enforcement Officer of the Year and also recognized Marcel Reichert upon his retirement for multiple contributions to GRNMS and annual fish trap surveys across the South Atlantic Bight over several decades.

Action #2: Approve CY2022 AC Meeting Schedule.

The Chair asked if any members objected to adopting the proposed advisory council CY2022 quarterly meeting schedule by consensus. After several members noted that the proposed fall and winter dates conflicted with longstanding South Atlantic Fishery Management Council quarterly meetings, Kathy Knowlton suggested the SAC adopt the June 6 date only and attempt to reschedule at least one of the fall and winter straw dates since several SAC members would have to otherwise split their time between the two meetings. The Chair announced that he cannot be present for the proposed June 6 meeting date, but the Vice Chair confirmed that she could lead the meeting on that date. The Chair subsequently asked if there were any objections to adopting June 6 as the spring meeting date for the AC. Hearing none, the Chair announced that the next meeting of the SAC would be held on June 6, 2022, and that the ExCom will re-poll SAC members to identify potential fall and winter meeting dates that do not coincide with SAFMC meetings, holidays, fiscal year end dates, or other major events.

The Chair announced the need to elect an Executive Officer for the AC and invited members to consider making a nomination and/or serving. He reviewed the roles of the office, and Scott Kathey (GRNMS) explained that GRNMS staff provide substantial administrative support for more tedious tasks. No volunteers stepped forward and no nominations were made. Scott Kathey clarified that no vote would be taken without public notice of such a vote prior to a future AC meeting. The Chair invited any interested members to contact him, the Vice Chair, or Scott Kathey.

Scott Kathey reviewed the process by which any SAC member can propose an agenda item for an AC meeting (submission to the Chair or superintendent for approval).

Advisory Council Working Group & Subcommittee Administration

Scott Kathey reviewed the differences between AC Working Groups and Subcommittees (i.e. subcommittees are comprised of AC members only, while AC Working groups include AC members and external members). Working groups are also designed to address specific issues for a time certain and report back to the AC, whereas subcommittees may be standing subunits of the AC.

The Chair noted that AC members were sent a copy of the final report of the Recreational Fishing Working Group (RFWG) for advance review, and asked the working group chair, Bob Crimian, to provide a brief review of the group's activities and end products. The group included anglers, fishery managers, and other stakeholder groups and was formed in 2016. After conducting two in-person learning exchanges with anglers and the sudden onset of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic, the working group pivoted to support development of a [recreational best-fishing-practices website](#) by The Nature Conservancy to meet the goals of the working group's assignment and offer greater longevity and broader audience reach. The final webpages were linked to the GRNMS website for GRNMS maintenance and updates moving forward. Bob referred members to a [1-minute introductory video](#) at the website and provided a narrated visual tour of its layout and contents. The website is designed so people can quickly explore and focus on the fishing topics of particular interest to them.

Rick DeVictor asked if any analytics had been collected on traffic at the website. Bob responded that Ben Prueitt (GRNMS) had recently reported that average time spent on this part of the GRNMS website was 30 minutes compared to an average of 30 seconds on other parts of the website. Stan Rogers said that Ben will respond to Rick's query in more detail. Kathy Knowlton thanked Bob Crimian for leading the website development effort over 3 years of a very evolutionary process.

Action #3: Accept the Final Report of the Recreational Fishing Working Group.

The Chair asked for comments about a straw motion to accept the final report of the RFWG. Chris Sawyer asked if the website would be regularly updated and refreshed. Stan Rogers explained that the product would be revised over time as needed and invited any recommended revisions the AC or individual members might wish to offer.

The Chair then asked if any public attendees had any questions or comments. The Chair asked if any members objected to the following straw motion: *The Advisory Council finds that the Recreational Fishing Working Group has completed the task assigned to it by the council in 2016 and accepts the final working group report (submitted to the council chair by the working group chair on February 16, 2022) as the group's closing action.* Hearing no objection, the Chair announced formal AC acceptance of the aforementioned document as the final report of the RFWG and thanked Bob Crimian for his leadership and those who participated in the working group.

Chris Sawyer suggested to Stan Rogers that he share the product across the entire National Marine Sanctuary System. Stan responded that it has been distributed system-wide, but that the communications team could share a second time. In response to a question from the AC Chair, Stan said the Chair was free to share the link with other AC chairs around the country at his discretion. The Chair asked the superintendent if he could gather and share more specific information about the award earned by the best-fishing-practices website. Stan Rogers replied that he would provide the information to the SAC Chair.

Action #4: Disband the Recreational Fishing Working Group.

The Chair introduced the following straw motion: *The Advisory Council finds that the Recreational Fishing Working Group has successfully completed its assignment and is hereby disbanded.* The motion was put forward by Bob Crimian and seconded by Kathy Knowlton. The Chair called for discussion or comment, first from the council, and second from the public. No one presented comments or questions. The chair then asked if anyone objected to passing the motion by consensus. Hearing none, the Chair announced that the Recreational Fishing Working Group was formally disbanded.

The Chair asked Scott Kathey if AC members could brainstorm outside of an AC meeting about proposing an agenda item(s) regarding use of recreational fishers in a citizen science effort in GRNMS. AC members Soss, Crimian, Knowlton, and DeVictor indicated they would be interested in such an exploratory discussion. Knowlton urged that any exploratory discussions consider significant work by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to design effective and productive citizen science programs in the region. The Chair said he would schedule an informal discussion among the interested AC members in the future.

The Chair asked Scott Kathey to provide a brief review of the objectives of the AC's Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Subcommittee. Scott explained that the subcommittee was formed at the April 2020 AC meeting with a broad mandate to infuse JEDI principles into SAC operations to better represent sanctuary constituencies and perspectives. He explained actions already taken to move toward that goal, such as addition of a third Citizen-At-Large seat on the AC, significantly expanded outreach to underserved and underrepresented communities about SAC meetings and recruitments, and increased opportunity for public input during AC meetings (especially prior to substantive decisions by the AC). The subcommittee gave a presentation in April 2021 regarding what JEDI means within the context of the advisory council. Scott

Kathey stated that the objective of this agenda item is to define what the council wants the subcommittee to accomplish and what deliverables and timeline are expected to meet expectations.

Mona Behl asked how the AC would like to see the subcommittee evolve. Discussion ensued about where to start and what practical action(s) to take to promote JEDI principles within the Advisory Council. Stan Rogers commented that the topic is large and multi-faceted and suggested the AC get started by selecting just one simple

objective and seeing it through to completion. Afterwards, the council could select, one-by-one, other objectives, repeating the process in an iterative manner to enhance JEDI principles in SAC protocols and operations. He cited deliberate action by the AC to increase public attendance and participation at AC meetings as an example of a simple initial step, with an emphasis on engaging groups outside the marine sector.

Mona Behl said that the aspiration, as she understands it, is to think about JEDI principles from the outset of a new conversation and apply that lens in everything the AC does, and not merely as a tag-on at the end of a project. For example: Is any formed AC subunit diverse enough in composition? Are participants sharing their perspectives in a welcoming, respectful, and fully deliberative environment? Is the AC reaching out to diverse audiences for AC attendance, AC membership, and through GRNMS science and education programs.

The Chair asked Mona what she thought an actionable next step of the subcommittee could be. Mona responded that we can advance JEDI for favored projects or topics, but unless they are executed in a coordinated, thoughtful, and careful manner, it will have no lasting impacts. She recommended the JEDI subcommittee be expanded to a working group to bring in external contributors to develop a JEDI strategic plan with recommended actions for GRNMS and the SAC to provide better service to GRNMS constituents. Sea Grant completed a process of this nature to develop a JEDI strategic plan.

Michael Denmark said the original intent for forming the JEDI Subcommittee was to host a council discussion about JEDI principles to help develop an organizational culture of keeping diversity and inclusion “top-of-mind” during the normal course of business. Prior to the JEDI Subcommittee’s presentation last April, the AC had never scheduled a dedicated discussion about JEDI principles and applicability to the council. He encouraged the current council to advance to the next level.

Kathy Knowlton suggested a facilitated in-person JEDI training in the coming months. The AC lacks cohesive unity when meeting only four times per year, and that may hinder progress on advancing JEDI goals due to lack of familiarity and relationship.

Jeff Soss suggested that meeting outside of the M-F, 9-5 workweek would be a means of enhancing inclusion for many workers who cannot get time off to attend SAC meetings during the 8-5 workday. He proposes diversifying AC meeting times to be more inclusive of the majority of the public. He also cited the need to resolve current NOAA policy impediments preventing routine audio/video recordings of meetings, stating that such recordings provide a net public benefit since meeting minutes/summaries provide a limited representation of AC discussion.

Bob Crimian said that we assume we can be significantly more inclusive about a resource (GRNMS) that is inherently exclusive due to its location, access, and distance from people’s everyday lives. The top-of-mind priorities for many underrepresented people are not about issues at Gray’s Reef. Outreach and messaging need to explain

the relevance of GRNMS at a kitchen table in Savannah. What does it mean to them? It won't happen until the SAC and GRNMS staff have a better understanding of JEDI principles and practices. He suggests an engagement session with the public by the SAC in place of a SAC meeting. He said building bridges of mutual understanding will take time, and the AC will need to manage its expectations realistically.

Stan Rogers asked if the AC wants to propose an actionable item today. By this point, the council was 18 minutes past the scheduled break, with a very full agenda. The Chair asked if the AC would like to table further discussion of this topic for the next meeting. Mona Behl supported tabling the topic to allow more thought by AC members. The Chair concurred and called for a ten-minute break.

The council recessed from 11:55 AM – 12:05 PM.

Superintendent's Report

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

- He began by welcoming new and departing AC members and highlighted the purpose for sanctuary designation in 1981 to better understand live bottom habitat in the South Atlantic Bight and promote wise use of sanctuary resources. He also explained how the GRNMS office is organized internally and within NOAA, provided a staffing update, and explained staff roles.
- Stan then provided a virtual visual tour of the new Ocean Discovery Center building – GRNMS' first visitor center, located in a historically black business district of Savannah on museum row. It is a 3,600 square-foot space (ten-year lease) on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, offering opportunities for neighborhood and community engagement and outreach to school children and millions of tourists. A dedication and opening ceremony is planned for fall 2022, and anticipated hours of operation will be Tuesday-Saturday, 10 – 4 PM. The space will be available for AC and community meetings. He invited current and future AC recommendations and suggestions about the center. One member suggested a mural for the north exterior wall of the building. Another asked about portability of exhibits should the center move in the future. One member asked about opportunities to collaborate with Sea Grant and other entities at the center.
- Stan provided an overview of vessel operations supporting GRNMS, including its small boats and NOAA ship support. GRNMS has received funding for a new vessel and displayed images of the class of vessel selected - a 52' – 60' vessel, capable of multi-day operations between Cape Hatteras and Cape Canaveral. Solicitation for bids should occur within the next two months for a projected spring 2023 delivery date. The boat will be a game changer for how GRNMS conducts research, increasing capabilities and the tempo of research in the sanctuary. He invited AC members to propose seabird names for the boat. One

member asked if the vessel will be available for use by others based upon a day rate. The vessel will be available for both collaborative efforts and partner sole-use based upon a day rate. The vessel will also be available for education, outreach, monitoring, and other uses beyond scientific research. Stan said that the vessel can be used to accommodate AC member orientation tours of GRNMS. He said AC members can accompany staff on some operations as space permits.

- There are additional SAC seats that need to be filled – a new additional Citizen-At-Large seat, and seats for Fishing Industry, Non-Living Resources Research, and Conservation.
- GRNMS is drafting proceedings for the three-day July 2021 Live/Hard Bottom Ecological Connectivity Workshop to assess regional understanding of live bottom habitats. Raw materials were distributed to attendees in December 2021. The proceedings will be published and made available to the public. GRNMS staff hope to finalize the proceedings this summer.
- GRNMS has initiated a review of the status and trends of sanctuary resources – a ten-year report card of the state of the sanctuary. In addition to the standard ecological assessment, this new report will assess the status and trends of ecosystem services affecting human use and enjoyment of the sanctuary. GRNMS is currently identifying indicators of sanctuary health.
- A 10-year management plan review will follow publication of the Condition Report. The management plan revision process can take several years to complete, beginning in 2023.
- Stan reviewed in detail the GRNMS AC member comments he forwarded to ONMS Director John Armor regarding an independent report by the National Academy of Public Administration about current administration of national marine sanctuaries and recommendations for the future. The AC's comments were received and forwarded above the ONMS Director's level for consideration.
- Stan stated that GRNMS is not satisfied with the answers it is getting about the ONMS likeness form and concerns by the AC and staff about the form. The form is a modification of a Department of Commerce form for use by sanctuary advisory councils. The intent of a likeness form is to gain individual permission to use a person's likeness, voice, image, and biographical information for outreach to the public about Advisory Council actions and functions. Due to AC concerns about the form requirements, GRNMS has elected not to use personal AC information and image or voice records for public outreach. GRNMS also cannot record AC meetings. This restricts the public-facing posture of the AC, which is a core tenant of its existence. Thus, the current form presents a stumbling block.
- Lastly, Stan shared and described an image of the new Office of National Marine Sanctuaries 50-year anniversary poster for GRNMS, depicting live bottom reef, a host of flora and fauna, and human uses of the sanctuary. A copy of the poster will be presented to all AC members in the future. The GRNMS poster was

commissioned fourth in a series of fifteen sanctuary site posters because it was the fourth sanctuary designated under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act.

The council recessed for lunch from 1:05 – 2:05 PM.

Upon return from the break, Vice Chair Lauren Stefaniak conducted a roll call for voting members, and only six voting members were present – one member short of quorum requirements for decision actions by the council.

Review and Discussion of the ONMS Likeness/Copyright Release Form

Chair Peter Auster reviewed the history of a likeness/copyright release form presented to SAC members in August 2020. He noted that a key provision of the form requires members to indemnify NOAA in the event they present copyrighted information without right of sole ownership or express permission from the author to use the information. He noted that the provision completely ignores the widely applied Fair Use Doctrine, which allows use of copyrighted information and images for educational purposes so long as the source is credited. He said that he and other AC members at GRNMS and two other sanctuary sites refuse to sign the form in its current version based upon this and other issues related to its declarations and requirements. He noted that GRNMS staff have spent considerable time addressing these issues with the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, but have received no responses that remedy AC member concerns. He suggested that the Executive Committee write a letter to ONMS Director John Armor addressing the AC's concerns about the form and its negative impact on AC functions, recordkeeping, and public transparency and outreach. The likeness/copyright form issue has stifled AC interaction with constituents, since the stalemate has hindered audio/video presentation of AC deliberations, presentations, and activities. It has also impeded the AC's ability to attract new members. Auster stated that the current form's copyright provisions would preclude delivery of a research presentation to the AC due to its onerous requirements for obtaining copyright owner permissions for every graph, image, and scholarly reference that permeate such presentations. This complete disregard for the Fair Use Doctrine therefore impedes the free transfer of information essential to AC deliberations and action.

Kathy Knowlton said that legal counsel for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources instructed department employees not to sign the form. The department's legal counsel had several questions and concerns about the form. She supports any efforts to change or eliminate the form. She has not encountered such stringent requirements in years of work with NOAA Fisheries management councils and other entities within NOAA, and does not understand why ONMS is imposing this form on AC members. She is willing to obtain comments from the state's legal counsel about why state employees cannot sign the form, if that would be helpful. The Chair asked that she do so. The Chair has also received personal legal advice that he should not sign the form. The Vice Chair noted that the current version of the form was provided to AC members in the meeting materials for this meeting.

The superintendent noted that AC members in constituent seats are representing those interests as private citizens and not representatives of their employers, while those holding government agency seats do represent their employers. So, the likeness form applies differently between these two groups. He said that gaining permission for use of a private citizen's likeness for public outreach materials is nothing new, but the blending of likeness and copyright issues in the current form has obviously caused problems. The two issues should be uncoupled and addressed separately. This form has created problems at other sanctuary sites beyond GRNMS.

Chris Sawyer, a senior attorney with extensive experience on organizational boards, said he finds the form "remarkably over the top". He asked if the Executive Committee or a subcommittee are bound by the same public notice and participation requirements. Scott Kathey responded that they are not. Chris stressed the importance of posting biographies of AC members and suggested finding tailored solutions to get such key issues resolved, recognizing that NOAA's broader legal concerns may preclude a near-term or comprehensive solution.

Lauren Stefaniak asked if AC meetings were recorded prior to the COVID-19 pandemic shift to 100% virtual meetings. Stan Rogers replied that AC meetings have not been recorded by audio/video since he became superintendent in summer 2019, but audio recordings were previously made to support drafting of meeting summaries, and photos have been taken at AC meetings for outreach purposes. GRNMS is not currently allowed to audio record AC meetings for transcription purposes, even though the recordings themselves are not intended for public release. Absence of audio/video recordings forces a default to rudimentary note-taking – which is more prone to errors and omissions.

Lauren Stefaniak and Peter Auster both stated that they do not own the copyright to their own papers in many cases. Though they have permission to use the material as authors, they do not necessarily own it. Lauren strongly recommends separating the likeness issue from the copyright issue, and the copyright language should acknowledge bona-fide use of copyright materials for educational purposes under the Fair Use Doctrine.

The Chair asked if any member objected to the following action, the text of which was projected on their screens: *The Advisory Council directs that the Executive Committee prepare a draft letter to ONMS Director John Armor regarding council concerns about the current ONMS likeness form and submit the draft letter to the council for corporate review and potential action at its next meeting.*

The Vice Chair reported the lack of a voting quorum. In the absence of a quorum for voting or consensus action on this item, the Chair confirmed with staff that the Executive Committee or a group of council members could alternatively prepare a draft letter without explicit direction from the AC and distribute it to AC members prior to the next council meeting for consideration and potential approval at that meeting. The public

could then be notified that the council will address the issue and potentially take action at its next meeting.

Stan Rogers said another alternative would be for GRNMS staff to explore with ONMS Chris Sawyer's suggestion that the current likeness form be tabled in favor of more narrowly tailored release forms that facilitate immediate public engagement needs of the council. Peter Auster responded that such an alternative could be included in an AC letter, but any action by GRNMS to promote the alternative should only compliment and not replace the proposed AC action.

Chris Sawyer suggested the potential for sending two letters from the AC. One that immediately asks ONMS, as an interim measure, to provide a form(s) that allows GRNMS and the AC to use individual head-shot photos and biographical statements, provided by the members themselves, for outreach purposes, as well as photographs of AC members taken by GRNMS staff at council meetings. The second letter would address the council's concerns about the comprehensive likeness form content and particularly its copyright provisions. He said NOAA's response to the latter would likely take considerable time. This solution could allow the AC to achieve some critical objectives while it continues to work the larger problem.

The Chair asked if the group collectively understands how the council will move forward on this issue. Vice Chair Lauren Stefaniak stated that it is her understanding that interested AC members will prepare a draft letter addressing the likeness/copyright form and post an agenda item for the next council meeting for potential approval of a final letter to ONMS Director John Armor about the issues discussed today. Meanwhile, Stan Rogers and Scott Kathey will investigate with ONMS the feasibility of using more specific permission forms that could allow public posting of AC member images and biographies, while dialogue continues concerning copyright and other problematic issues of the likeness/copyright form. She then asked the council, "Am I summarizing that correctly?" No council members voiced objection.

Disbanding of the Science Advisory Group (SAG)

The Chair explained that the council's Science Advisory Group (SAG) was originally established in 2010 to assist with the design and evaluation of the Research Area formally established within GRNMS in December 2011. The evaluation component of its mandate extended over several years following establishment of the zone, and during that time, the working group experienced some mission creep, advising both the sanctuary and the council on various scientific research issues affecting the sanctuary that were not part of its mandate. Upon completing the final Research Area Report that characterized research efforts in the zone during the first five years after its designation, the SAG effectively completed its assigned task by the Sanctuary Advisory Council. Therefore, the SAG chair, Peter Auster, sent a March 22, 2022 letter to the Vice Chair of the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council reporting that "the SAG had completed its charge by contributing to the Research Area monitoring plan and the 5-year Research Area Report." The brief letter was made available to council members

during the meeting. Peter Auster recommended that the SAG be disbanded, having concluded its mission. But, due to the value of this group of regional experts to sanctuary conservation and management efforts, he reported that it would continue to meet and deliberate in the future as a reconstructed partner forum hosted by GRNMS staff. Stan Rogers confirmed that GRNMS plans to create a forum for bringing together researchers in the region on a regular basis to coordinate science.

Action #5: Confirm that the Science Advisory Group (SAG) Has Completed Its Assigned Task.

Prior to discussion, the Vice Chair verified that a quorum was present for voting or consensus action.

The Chair read to the council the text of a March 22, 2022 letter to the Vice Chair declaring the SAG had completed its assigned tasks. He then asked if any members had questions. Hearing none, he asked if anyone wished to submit the following straw motion that was displayed on AC members' computer screens: *The Advisory Council finds that the Science Advisory Group has completed the task assigned to it by the council in 2010 and accepts the final working group report (submitted to the council vice chair by the working group chair on March 23, 2022) as the group's closing action.*
Note: The letter was dated March 22, 2022.

Lauren Stefaniak proposed the motion. Michelle Taliercio seconded the motion.

The Chair asked for any discussion about the motion by AC members and then invited comments from the public. No one responded. Hearing none, he asked if any member objected to adopting the motion by consensus. Hearing no objections, he announced that the motion passed.

Action #6: Disband the Science Advisory Group (SAG).

The Chair asked if anyone wished to submit the following straw motion that was displayed on AC members' screens: *The Advisory Council finds that the Science Advisory Group has successfully completed its assignment and is hereby disbanded.*

Lauren Stefaniak proposed the motion. Kathy Knowlton seconded the motion.

The Chair asked for any discussion about the motion by AC members and then invited comments from the public. No one responded. Hearing none, he asked if any member objected to adopting the motion by consensus. Hearing no objections, he announced that the motion passed.

Additional SAC Input to NOAA Regarding President Biden’s [Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad](#) (i.e. the 30 X 30 Conservation Initiative)

The Chair noted that the AC approved a letter to ONMS Director John Armor in response to President Biden’s call for community input on the federal initiative to conserve 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030. The letter addressed broad support for the initiative and urged equity and public engagement during the process of identifying preferred actions across marine regions of the United States. However, the council’s previous letter did not endorse or advance any specific existing or new initiative in the local region that could help achieve the 30 X 30 goal.

The Chair presented the following straw motion (displayed on members’ computer screens) to determine if the council desired to make specific recommendations concerning conservation initiatives within the South Atlantic Bight: *The Advisory Council establishes the “30x30 Working Group” (comprised of all former Science Advisory Group members and any additional members the Executive Committee might recommend) to explore existing regional activities or new proposals for the President’s 30 X 30 Initiative that relate directly to natural resources and habitat conservation at GRNMS. The working group shall deliver its findings and final recommendations to the Advisory Council by December 31, 2023. A chair shall be appointed by the advisory council chair, with the concurrence of the other members of the Executive Committee.*

The Chair asked if anyone had questions about the proposal. Stan Rogers elaborated for new AC members that the 30 X 30 initiative was much broader than simply protecting terrestrial and marine habitat, as it also addresses access to the outdoors, recreation, and other socio-economic services of natural areas.

Scott Kathey offered to present five slides for an overview of the initiative. The Chair asked the council if anyone wished to receive the overview. No one responded.

Therefore, the chair asked if anyone wished to place the straw motion on the floor. Rick DeVictor asked if someone could explain the charge to “explore existing regional activities” that relate to GRNMS. The Chair responded that the language is meant to allow for consideration of existing conservation activities or regimes within the biogeographic region that could complement the protections at GRNMS.

Chris Sawyer suggested that conservation projects at Ossabaw and St. Catherine’s Islands could benefit conservation efforts at GRNMS. He urged that any recommendation by the AC be very focused on actions that would benefit GRNMS.

Stan Rogers noted that the AC is here to advise GRNMS and NOAA, and if the council believes that NOAA ONMS should pursue a particular course to enhance stewardship of GRNMS or regional resources, it has the discretion to make recommendations to that effect.

The chair again asked if anyone wished to advance the straw motion to the floor.

Chris Sawyer proposed the motion. Bob Crimian seconded the motion.

The Chair asked for any discussion about the motion by AC members and then invited comments from the public. No one responded. Hearing none, he asked if any member objected to adopting the motion by consensus. Hearing no objections, he announced that the motion passed.

The Chair asked if anyone was interested in serving as chair of the 30 X 30 Working Group. He then asked Rick DeVictor if he would be willing to chair the working group and asked if anyone wished to serve on the group. After some thought, Rick agreed to serve as chair, pending approval by his agency supervisor.

The following expressed interest in serving on the working group:

- Rick DeVictor
- Peter Auster
- Chris Sawyer
- Michelle Taliercio
- Bob Crimian

Stan Rogers advised AC members to submit the names of any suggested non-AC working group members to the Executive Committee for vetting by the superintendent prior to joining the working group.

The Chair acknowledged that any prior Science Advisory Group members interested in serving on the 30 X 30 Working Group would need to be vetted by the superintendent prior to joining the group.

The Chair called for a five-minute break.

The council recessed from 3:23 – 3:28 PM.

Primary Council Member Updates

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

Jeff Soss reiterated his earlier comment about considering alternative meeting days and times for AC meetings.

Chris Sawyer expressed his appreciation for being appointed to the council, and stressed that the sanctuary and council should always consider climate change when making decisions, such as selection of designs and technology for the visitor center and new boat, to set an example of environmentally conscientious actions.

Lauren Stefaniak expressed the need to provide real-world national marine sanctuary data sets to university professors for incorporation into university lesson plans. She recommended that the AC Chair promote such action among SAC chairs across the country. Stan Rogers said he will direct staff member Aleria Jensen to her about this idea. Aleria will assist GRNMS over several months to develop education programming for the sanctuary.

Michelle Taliercio asked if visitor center interpretive displays would be multi-language displays. Stan Rogers replied that the interpretive plan is under development and GRNMS has received input from the local community. Some exhibits will be interpreted in different languages based on input from various advisors. She also asked to be advised of any existing sport diving issues before the council.

Rick DeVictor reported that the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAFMC) met at Jekyll Island within the past 2 weeks. The SAFMC is continuing work on several fishery management plans. Marcel Reichert of South Carolina Department of Natural Resources provided an excellent update to the SAFMC on fishery independent information and abundance. A number of species are declining in abundance per MarMap surveys, especially black seabass, triggering a stock assessment in the near future. Great trigger fish, white grunt, red porgy, gag, and snowy grouper all show reduced abundance. Grouper and other have shown poor recruitment in recent years and managers aren't sure why. Other species, such as mackerel and greater amber jack, show an increase in abundance. The SAFMC received a presentation on the 30 X 30 Initiative. The fishery management councils are conducting a fact-finding exercise to assemble a report on spatial management areas and the square mileage of such areas within their respective regions. They are also discussing how they will define "conservation" for their report on 30 X 30. SAFMC decided it will take some sort of action to reduce discards of by-catch. Three actions discussed were time closures, area closures, and depth-based restrictions. They assigned multiple action items to staff for report out at the June meeting. Peter Auster asked if Marcel Reichert's presentation was available on the SAFMC website. Rick responded that it is – under March 2022 council meeting, full council session 2.

Peter Auster chose not to comment.

Mona Behl had departed the meeting.

James Bruce had departed the meeting.

Bob Crimian welcomed the new members. He asked that GRNMS staff share the posting for the new GRNMS Education Specialist position once the vacancy notice is announced so that AC members can help distribute it to prospective candidates. He also suggested that ACs work together across regions to cross-pollinate on 30 X 30 input to NOAA. He encouraged Peter Auster to contact AC chairs at FKNMS and MNMS.

Michael Denmark had departed the meeting.

Jaime Gormley chose not to comment.

Ben Hughes had departed the meeting.

Kathy Knowlton appreciated the engagement of the new members and the substantive discussion of the meeting.

Stan Rogers assured AC members that GRNMS staff are here to provide any information needs they may have for conducting business. But GRNMS management also wants to ensure the AC operates independently and a circular pattern is not inadvertently established where staff provides input that comes directly back as AC recommendations.

Public Comment

At 3:52 PM, the Chair asked if any member of the public wished to address the council. No members of the public were in attendance.

Closing Remarks

Peter Auster thanked everyone for their participation, making his job as new chair very easy. He appreciated that the AC was able to close the loop on several items and progress to new pathways for expanded public engagement and conservation.

Adjournment

The Chair asked for a motion to adjourn. Kathy Knowlton moved to adjourn, and Lauren Stefaniak seconded the motion. The Chair asked if anyone objected to adjourning the meeting by consensus. Hearing no objection, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 3:55 PM for a total meeting duration of 4 hours and 40 minutes.