



August 25, 2022

Ms. Janet Coit
Assistant Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Re: NOAA's Decision on Amendment 10 to the Fishery Management Plan for Coral, Coral Reefs, and Live Hard Bottom Habitat of the South Atlantic Region

Dear Assistant Administrator Coit:

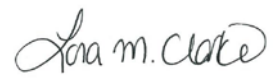
On behalf of The Pew Charitable Trusts, we thank you and NOAA leadership for your commitment to conservation and protection of our nation's fragile and unique deep-sea coral ecosystems. We support NOAA's recent decision to disapprove Amendment 10 to the Fishery Management Plan for Coral, Coral Reefs, and Live Hard Bottom Habitat of the South Atlantic Region and were pleased to see science play a critical role in the decision. NOAA's decision shows a strong commitment to science and underscores the Biden-Harris Administration's conservation efforts, including the *America the Beautiful* Initiative.

The Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC), which Amendment 10 would have weakened, is home to dense thickets of slow-growing ivory tree corals, *Oculina varicose*, that support diverse communities of invertebrates and finfish, including providing essential fish habitat for species in the South Atlantic's struggling snapper grouper complex. Deep-sea corals, along with many ecosystems, are facing multiple stressors from climate change and other human pressures and need to be protected to increase resilience and maintain biodiversity for future generations.

Nationally, NOAA and the fishery management councils have worked to protect deep-sea coral habitats in Alaska, along the Pacific coast, the Mid-Atlantic, and New England. Currently, additional protections are being considered in the Gulf of Mexico where some existing HAPCs are in need to fishing regulations and new fully regulated HAPCs are needed to prevent damage to coral communities from bottom-tending fishing gear.

Thank you again for your commitment to conserving our nation's fragile marine ecosystems, including Oculina Bank. We look forward to continuing to work with NOAA to advance ecosystem-based fisheries management in the Gulf of Mexico and around the Nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lora M. Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

Lora M. Clarke, Ph.D.
Officer, Conserving Marine Life in U.S.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph Gordon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Joseph Gordon
Project Director, Conserving Marine Life in the U.S.