

**FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY
ADVISORY COUNCIL
CHARTER**

ESTABLISHMENT AND AUTHORITY

Section 315 of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA or Act; 16 U.S.C. Sections 1431 – 1445c) authorizes the Secretary of Commerce to establish sanctuary advisory councils to provide advice to the Secretary of Commerce regarding the designation and management of national marine sanctuaries. This authority has been delegated to the Director of the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (director). The director hereby reestablishes the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council (council).

This Charter provides a background on the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) and the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS, or sanctuary), and describes the objectives and roles of the council's activities, procedural requirements regarding the appointment of council members and officers, requirements for the conduct of council members and meetings, and other requirements. All council activities must be conducted pursuant to this Charter.

SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

ONMS regards community involvement and the development of a stewardship ethic as vitally important to successfully protect sanctuary resources. One key way to achieve this involvement is the formation of sanctuary advisory councils.

Sanctuary advisory councils bring diverse community members together to provide advice to the sanctuary superintendent on the management and protection of the sanctuary, or to assist the ONMS in guiding a proposed site through the designation process.

ONMS is committed to the full support, utilization, and enhancement of councils at all sanctuaries. In order for councils to achieve their full potential, the ONMS within the limits of available resources will:

- Provide sufficient support to allow councils to operate efficiently and effectively at each site;
- Provide support and guidance from the national office to help councils operate efficiently and at a basic level of consistency across the system;
- Promote coordination and communication among councils and among sanctuary staff that work closely with councils; and
- Develop training programs appropriate to council officers and members, and NOAA staff.

The resources ONMS manages differ in size, species, depth, color, culture, and countless other ways. This rich diversity is part of natural heritage, a gift to be discovered, appreciated, and protected. Whether a natural ecosystem or a human community, diversity creates strength and resilience. By recruiting for and representing the equally remarkable diversity of advisory council members, ONMS can leverage new creativity, knowledge, and experiences to achieve its mission of a thriving sanctuary system that protects our nation's underwater treasures and inspires momentum for a healthy ocean.

OFFICE OF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES

A national marine sanctuary is an area of the marine or Great Lakes environment of special significance warranting protection and management under the NMSA. As a steward of coastal and ocean resources, NOAA protects and manages the National Marine Sanctuary through ONMS.

The National Marine Sanctuary System is a network of national marine sanctuaries and marine national monuments, currently encompassing more than 620,000 square miles of ocean and Great Lakes waters. ONMS seeks to protect the extraordinary scenic beauty, biodiversity, historical connections, and economic productivity of these areas so they may continue to serve as the basis for thriving recreation, tourism, and commercial activities that drive coastal economies. Through both directed management actions and partnerships, ONMS helps ensure a healthier ocean, now and for future generations.

Vision of the ONMS:

A thriving sanctuary system that protects our nation's underwater treasures and inspires momentum for a healthy ocean.

Mission of the ONMS:

We protect treasured places in the ocean and great lakes.

Strategic goals and objectives of the ONMS:

1. Ensure thriving sanctuaries and other ocean parks.
 - 1.1 Reduce threats to key species and marine habitats.
 - 1.2 Protect significant maritime heritage resources.
 - 1.3 Promote responsible human uses.
2. Safeguard more underwater treasures as national marine sanctuaries.
 - 2.1 Incorporate additional nationally significant resources into existing sanctuaries.
 - 2.2 Implement designation processes for new areas.
 - 2.3 Identify additional resources of national significance.
3. Increase support for sanctuaries.
 - 3.1 Expand recognition of national marine sanctuaries.
 - 3.2 Increase sanctuary engagement.
 - 3.3 Create a vision for the next 50 years of sanctuaries.
4. Deepen our understanding of sanctuaries.
 - 4.1 Learn more about our sanctuaries.
 - 4.2 Track and predict conditions and trends.
 - 4.3 Understand the value of sanctuaries to our nation.
5. Ensure the office of national marine sanctuaries is a great place to work.
 - 5.1 Encourage a culture of collaboration, inclusion and respect.
 - 5.2 Increase staff satisfaction and performance.
 - 5.3 Invest in our people and their professional development.

Objectives:

The Director establishes the council to provide advice on:

- Protecting natural and cultural resources, and identifying and evaluating emergent or critical issues involving sanctuary use or resources;
- Identifying and realizing the sanctuary's research objectives;
- Identifying and realizing educational opportunities to increase the public knowledge and stewardship of the sanctuary environment; and
- Assisting to develop an informed constituency to increase awareness and understanding of the purpose and value of the sanctuary and the ONMS.

FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) encompasses portions of 17 reefs and banks located approximately 80-125 miles off the coasts of Texas and Louisiana. These banks are a combination of small underwater mountains, ridges, troughs, and hard-bottom patches. The habitats associated with these banks range from thriving shallow water coral reefs and algal-sponge communities, to deeper mesophotic reefs alive with black corals, algal nodules, and octocorals. These varied habitats provide havens for tropical reef fish and invertebrates, as well as manta rays, sea turtles, and sharks.

The amazing biodiversity and beauty of the Flower Garden Banks prompted researchers and recreational divers to seek their protection for over 20 years. Finally, on January 17, 1992, FGBNMS was designated. When first designated, the sanctuary consisted of only East and West Flower Garden Banks, home to some of the healthiest coral reefs in the world. In 1996, Stetson Bank also became part of the sanctuary, adding a different type of reef community teeming with marine life. In 2021, the sanctuary was expanded to its present size of 160 square miles to protect important shallow and deep reef habitats across an additional 14 banks. Although each bank is marked with its own separate boundaries, together these banks create a chain of protected habitats for ecologically and economically important species across the northern Gulf of Mexico.

COUNCIL ROLES

The council, in accordance with the NMSA, shall provide advice and recommendations to the sanctuary superintendent regarding the protection and management of Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary.

1. The council shall draw on the expertise of its members and other sources in order to provide advice to the sanctuary superintendent.
2. Council members shall serve as liaisons between their constituents and/or communities and the sanctuary, keeping the sanctuary staff informed of issues and concerns, as well as providing information to their respective communities on the sanctuary's behalf.
3. The council may serve as a forum for consultation and deliberation among its members and as a source of advice to the sanctuary superintendent. Such advice shall fairly represent the collective and individual views of the council members. In formulating such advice, the council members shall recall that the primary objective of the sanctuary and the NMSA is resource protection.
4. The council is established to provide advice and recommendations to the sanctuary

superintendent regarding the management of FGBNMS. Nothing in this charter constitutes authority to perform operational or management functions, or to make decisions on behalf of the sanctuary, NOAA or the Department of Commerce.

5. The council may develop an annual work plan, in consultation with and approved by the sanctuary superintendent, to establish an agenda for specific issues and projects the council intends to address.

COUNCIL VOTING MEMBERS – DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. To work together for the mutual benefit of the Sanctuary, the Sanctuary System, and our community.
2. Attend and participate electronically or physically at SAC meetings.
3. Adhere to the proper rules of order during the meetings.
4. Represent your constituency group - present its views and concerns to the SAC and FGBNMS Superintendent.
5. Represent and present the SAC and sanctuary's views, concerns and activity information to your constituency group.
6. Attend and participate in the SAC's Subcommittee and Working Group process.
7. Respect the views and opinions of other members of the SAC and sanctuary employees.

MEMBERS, ALTERNATES, AND OFFICERS

1. The council shall be appointed by the director. There are two categories of seats, governmental and non-governmental. The council shall consist of no more than 6 governmental ex-officio and 16 non-governmental members. The governmental ex-officio members shall be non-voting and shall be designated by the cooperating government agencies so indicated from persons employed by federal, state, or local agencies with expertise in management of natural resources. The non-governmental members shall be voting and shall be appointed by the director from representatives of local user groups, conservation and other public interest organizations, scientific and educational organizations, or member of the public interested in the protection and multiple use management of sanctuary resources. Membership is to be balanced in terms of points of view represented and advisory functions the council will perform.
2. There are two categories of seats for which non-voting members are appointed or selected.
 - a. The sanctuary superintendent will sit on the council as a non-voting member and shall work with the chair in scheduling each meeting and approving the agenda to ensure each topic of discussion is relevant to the sanctuary. Council meetings may not be conducted in the absence of the sanctuary superintendent or his/her designee.
 - b. Governmental Seats (6) - By virtue of the shared interest of federal, state, and local jurisdictions in the implementation of sanctuary-related management, each of the following government entities shall be requested to designate one individual to serve on the council. The following government agencies shall sit on the council as non-voting members:

Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Department of the Interior
Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, Department of the Interior
United States Coast Guard
NOAA Fisheries, Department of Commerce
Environmental Protection Agency
NOAA Office of Law Enforcement
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Artificial Reef Program

- c. Governmental members are appointed by their agencies and are not subject to term limitations or the competitive application process.
 - i. An alternate (from the same government entity) of a governmental council member may attend a council meeting on occasion if the chair and sanctuary superintendent are notified in advance of any meeting at which an alternate will represent the council member, including the name, address, and position of the individual designated. An alternate may not name another alternate.
 - ii. If a government entity decides to no longer participate as a member of the council, or fails to attend three consecutive council meetings without reasonable justification and is formally removed by the director, the sanctuary superintendent, with the approval of the director, may invite another appropriate government entity to replace that agency on the council.
 - iii. If it is found that a governmental member of the council has violated one or more of the terms of this charter, the sanctuary superintendent may recommend to the director that the appropriate agency be notified and requested to replace the designee. The sanctuary superintendent may consult with the council prior to taking such action.
 - iv. Governmental members are subject to the same grounds for removal as non-governmental members.
3. There is one category of seats for which voting members are appointed. The following procedures shall govern the application, nomination, and appointment of council voting members:
 - a. Non-governmental Seats (16). Two Voting representatives for the following activities, which are integrally affected by the management goals of the sanctuary, shall be selected:
 - Recreational Diving (2)
 - Dive Operations (2)
 - Energy (2)
 - Recreational Fishing (2)
 - Commercial Fishing (2)
 - Research (2)
 - Education (2)
 - Conservation (2)
 - b. Non-governmental member terms:
 - i. Members are appointed by the director for a term of three years, and may compete for reappointment.

- ii. If necessary, subsequent terms of appointment may be changed to provide for balanced (staggered) expiration dates.
 - iii. The exact end date of their term is determined by the next scheduled recruitment period that takes place after a member serves their full term.
 - iv. The council membership recruitment process shall take place on a rolling basis, as seats become vacant or terms are completed. If qualified, the same individual may apply for another seat on the council once they are term-limited on their present seat.
 - v. Members are limited to three consecutive three-year terms on the council in the same seat, unless the director has granted a waiver to this limit. The director will consider waivers to this limit on a case-by-case basis and in a manner provided by the ONMS policy.
 - vi. The council membership recruitment process shall happen on an as-needed basis, with a yearly notice for recruitment placed in the Federal Register.
 - vii. The newly appointed member shall serve for a full term beginning on the date of his/her swearing-in by the sanctuary superintendent.
 - viii. See ONMS complete term limits policy, and waivers to that policy, in the *National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council Implementation Handbook*, Appendix 19 "Policy to Limit Consecutive Term Limits Non-governmental Council Members".
- c. Members serve at the discretion of the director. The sanctuary superintendent may recommend to the director the removal of a non-governmental member of the council on any of the following grounds if that member:
- Is convicted of any felony offense;
 - Is found to have violated any of the following laws or regulations promulgated thereunder: the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Endangered Species Act, Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, or another environmental law for which NOAA or another federal agency has jurisdictional responsibility;
 - Is found to have violated state environmental laws or regulations;
 - Is found to have violated national or state laws or regulations protecting cultural resources;
 - Is determined to have abused his or her position as a member of the council (including but not limited to use of council information for personal gain; use of council position to advance a personal agenda or harm another member of the council or of the community; misrepresentation of, or spreading misinformation about the council or the sanctuary; and refusal to recuse himself or herself if so requested by the sanctuary superintendent and/or chair in a matter in which the member has a conflict of interest);
 - Has a change to the professional affiliation(s) and/or personal circumstances that

comprise a significant portion of that member's qualifications for being a member of the council;

- Misses three consecutive meetings without reasonable justification;
- Disrupts on more than one occasion council meetings in a manner that interferes with the council conducting its business; or
- Violates any term of this charter.

The sanctuary superintendent may consult with the council prior to taking such an action.

- d. As each non-governmental seat becomes vacant and the process for selection of a new member is conducted, the sanctuary superintendent shall recommend to the director the member from among the top three candidates resulting from the review process.
4. Members accept the responsibility of attending council meetings. The sanctuary superintendent/director will not designate alternates to serve in their place or to represent them in meetings or at other council activities.
 5. Council Officer Elections and Terms:
 - (a) The council shall elect one member to serve as chair, and one member to serve as vice-chair. The vice-chair shall act as chair in the absence of the chair. Terms of the chair and vice-chair are two years. The chair and vice-chair may serve a maximum of two consecutive terms if reelected.

A chair or vice-chair may leave his/her term to run for another council officer position if desired. If the chair or vice-chair is elected to a new position, the council shall nominate and elect a new representative for the vacated position. Council members, including non-voting members, may nominate individuals for the council officer positions (except sanctuary superintendents and /or their designees). Any member of the council, including government seats and non-voting seats (with the exception of the sanctuary superintendent) may be nominated and elected as a council officer. Election for all positions is by majority vote of all council members (except sanctuary superintendents and/or their designees), including the non-voting members, and votes shall be made by written ballot. Members who will not be present at the time of the election may submit their vote in writing to the sanctuary superintendent prior to the meeting.

If a council officer resigns, the council should hold an election at the next regularly scheduled council meeting. If the newly elected individual feels comfortable they may begin serving in their position immediately upon being elected, otherwise they may begin serving at the next meeting. If the chair resigns, the vice chair acts on their behalf until the new chair assumes their position. If the vice-chair resigns, the position may remain vacant until the new vice chair assumes their position.

- (b) Roles of Council Officers:

(i) Chair: The chair schedules and sets agendas for all council meetings with the approval of the sanctuary superintendent, presides over all meetings of the full council and ensures that meetings are run according to accepted meeting practices, signs all correspondence and documents authorized by the council, and generally represents the council's interests and concerns to the public. The chair also continues to fulfill the general roles that all council members fill, including representing the interests of their constituents.

(ii) Vice-Chair: The vice-chair serves as chair in the absence of the chair and assists as necessary in performing executive duties of the council. The vice-chair also continues to fulfill the general roles that all council members fill, including representing the interests of their constituents.

APPOINTMENTS

Recruitment and appointment of non-governmental council members shall follow the process outline in the *ONMS Sanctuary Advisory Council Implementation Handbook* (currently Part II, section C.2, Selection of Non-Governmental Members). Public notice shall be provided as to the vacancy of constituent group seat(s) and at-large representatives. Applications for ensuing terms for vacant seats shall be submitted to the sanctuary superintendent directly. Copies of all applications and nominations for each seat will be submitted by the sanctuary superintendent to the preliminary review panel to obtain recommendations on selections. Any council member that has a conflict of interest (financial, personal, self nomination, etc.) shall recuse him/herself from making a selection for the vacant seat. Selection from among those recommended by the council, or from among other applicants or nominees, shall be made by the sanctuary superintendent with the approval of the director. The sanctuary superintendent may choose to re-advertise the vacant seat(s) if adequate candidates are not available after the first recruitment process. In all cases, submission of written statements of particular interest, qualifications, and experience shall be requested. Guidelines for applying shall be supplied at the appropriate time.

ADMINISTRATION

1. Members of the council shall serve without pay except that each member may receive travel expenses including per diem in lieu of subsistence, in accordance with sections 5702 and 5703 of Title 5, U.S.C., for travel to and from official council meetings. Reimbursement is at the discretion of the sanctuary superintendent and dependent upon budgetary considerations and constraints. No members of working groups or subcommittees (defined below) may receive travel expenses for their group activities or meetings, in accordance with the *ONMS Sanctuary Advisory Council Implementation Handbook* (currently Part II, section B.6, Council Subunits). Travel expenses for governmental members of the council may be provided by their own agencies.

2. The ONMS may make available such staff, information, administrative services, or assistance as the sanctuary superintendent determines are reasonably required to enable the council and its subcommittees/working groups to carry out their functions.

OPERATION

1. Meetings

- (a) Meetings are held at the call of the chair and the sanctuary superintendent.
- (b) Decisions (e.g., recommendations) made by the council shall be made by majority vote of those present, provided there is a quorum (more than half of the voting members). A recorded vote may be requested by the chair or the sanctuary superintendent.
- (c) Each meeting shall be open to the public.
- (d) Interested persons shall be permitted to present oral or written statements on items on the agenda, or other pertinent topics.
- (e) Emergency meetings may be held at the call of the chair or presiding officer and the sanctuary superintendent.
- (f) Timely notice of each council meeting, including the time, place, and agenda of each meeting, shall be provided to the local media and additional notice may be given by such other means as will result in appropriate publicity to interested groups. This requirement shall not apply to workshops scheduled by the council to address strategic planning, administration, or specialized technical issues. The council may not vote at any meeting for which the above public notice has not been issued. The council may not vote on any agenda item for which notice was not provided.
- (g) The council shall meet as frequently as necessary, not to exceed once per month (the meetings should be in different months, but do not have to be precisely 30 days apart) for voting meetings, but at least once every six months. The council meeting place may be rotated among various locations adjacent to the sanctuary and meeting sites shall be chosen to accommodate anticipated public attendance and be reasonably accessible to those interested in attending.
- (h) Minutes of each meeting shall be kept by a person specified by the sanctuary superintendent and contain a summary of attendees and matters discussed; such minutes shall be available to the public.

2. Procedures for Providing Advice: The following procedures shall be used to provide advice:

- (a) The council may provide advice on a relevant issue or topic to the sanctuary superintendent. Requests for information, assistance, or advice from the ONMS, other NOAA offices, or other agencies shall be made in writing and be coordinated through the sanctuary superintendent.
- (b) Any matter that a council member wishes to raise to the attention of the sanctuary shall be brought to the attention of either the sanctuary superintendent or the council chair so that it might be placed on the agenda as a discussion topic. The sanctuary superintendent and the council chair shall discuss topics for the agenda. The sanctuary superintendent approves a topic to be placed on the agenda.

- (c) The council shall provide advice directly to the sanctuary superintendent via a written recommendation or a motion passed by the council and reflected in the minutes. Draft recommendations and verbal discussions shall be considered by the sanctuary superintendent as additional background information and shall be included in the minutes.
- (d) Any advice, correspondence, or information the council wishes to offer or express beyond the sanctuary superintendent shall be voted on and approved by the council prior to sending. Because the council was established specifically to provide advice to the Secretary, and operates through the sanctuary superintendent, the sanctuary superintendent must also approve any advice, correspondence or information that goes outside the sanctuary prior to sending.
- (e) The council shall base its advice on a vote of the council with negative votes and abstentions, noted or on consensus reached during discussion with minority opinions noted. A quorum shall be present when the vote is taken or a discussion to reach consensus is conducted.
- (f) Any information or advice resulting from discussions in subcommittees or working groups that is requested by the council shall be presented to and considered by the full council and as appropriate incorporated into the council's recommendation to the sanctuary superintendent. If the council does not incorporate information or advice of a subcommittee or working group, it shall inform the sanctuary superintendent and explain in its advice or information the reasons for not incorporating the subcommittee's or working group's advice or information.

3. Conduct of Individual Members

Council members are expected to be familiar with the processes and regulations governing the sanctuary and to keep themselves informed of sanctuary-related events and issues. Expectations include regular meeting attendance and familiarity with the council charter and the ONMS Council Implementation Handbook.

(a) When speaking to the public or writing about any matter regarding the sanctuary in a document for distribution beyond council membership, the sanctuary superintendent, or sanctuary staff, a member shall clearly distinguish those recommendations, opinions, or positions officially adopted by the council as a body from those he or she may have as an individual. In no case shall a member represent individual opinions as those of the council, the sanctuary superintendent, sanctuary staff, or NOAA.

(b) Any council member that has an interest (financial, personal or business interest) in any matter before the council or a subcommittee or working group shall identify such interest prior to discussion and voting on such matter. No member shall cast a vote on any matter that would provide a direct financial benefit to that member or otherwise give the appearance of a conflict of interest under federal law. An affected member who may not vote on a matter may participate in council deliberations relating to the decision after notifying the council of the voting recusal and identifying the interest that would be affected. These same guidelines apply to members of working groups who are not members of the council.

(c) All council members are expected to conduct themselves in a civil fashion, showing courtesy

and respect to other council members, sanctuary staff and any other individuals present at the meeting.

(d) Any sanctuary advisory council member that has entered into a professional relationship (i.e. contractual, financial, service, business, etc.) with the sanctuary, NOAA, or another council member, shall provide written detail and notice to the sanctuary superintendent within 30 days of the establishment of that relationship. Written notice of said relationship shall be provided to all council members by the sanctuary superintendent within 30 days of either 1) receipt of such written notice from a council member, or 2) establishment of a professional relationship by a council member with the sanctuary. The establishment of such a professional relationship shall be recorded in the public record of the council at the end of the minutes of the next council meeting following said notice. The sanctuary superintendent, also shall forward the written detail and notice to the Director of the ONMS. The Director of the ONMS shall review and determine if the SAC representative should be disqualified from further service.

4. Conduct of the Council as a Body

(a) Any correspondence or other written documents that are intended to speak for the council as a body shall be coordinated with, and approved by, the chair and the sanctuary superintendent prior to sending.

(b) The following disclaimer shall be placed in all documents and communications originating from the council: "The council is an advisory body to the sanctuary superintendent. The opinions and findings of this publication do not necessarily reflect the position of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration."

5. Council Letterhead

The council shall, with the assistance and approval of the sanctuary superintendent, design and use its own letterhead. All correspondence from the chair or other members of the council, or the council as a body, shall be on this letterhead. The council shall not use official NOAA or DOC letterhead for any correspondence or other purpose.

6. Subcommittees and Working Groups

(a) Subcommittees: The chair, in consultation with the council as a whole and with the concurrence of the sanctuary superintendent may establish such subcommittees as necessary to fulfill the council's duties. Subcommittees shall be composed solely of members of the council. The subcommittee must be chaired by a voting member of the council. Subcommittees shall be recognized as official subunits of the council. Subcommittees are subject to all requirements of this charter.

(b) Working Groups: The chair, in consultation with the council as a whole and with the concurrence of the sanctuary superintendent, may establish working groups for specific purposes or topics that need focused attention that cannot be accomplished by a subcommittee. Their work

will be limited to functional areas and discrete issues relating to individual sanctuaries. Working groups may be composed of members of the council and persons outside the council. Working groups shall be chaired by a voting member of the council and shall function under the purview of the council. Working groups established by the council to address specific issues shall disband once the final advice on the particular matter is submitted to the council.

OTHER TERMS OF THIS CHARTER

1. The council shall operate pursuant to the terms of this charter.
2. This charter shall remain in effect for a period of five years from the date of signature.
3. Six months prior to the expiration of this charter, the need for the council will be evaluated by the ONMS, with input from council members, to determine whether to renew the charter.
4. Revisions to the charter may be made as determined necessary by the ONMS with input from the council.



John Armor
Director, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries

1/19/2023
Date