GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

301ST MEETING

FULL COUNCIL SESSION

Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino Biloxi, Mississippi

AUGUST 19-22, 2024

VOTING MEMBERS

Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama
Kesley Banks.....Texas
Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
Troy Frady.....Alabama
Tom Frazer.....Florida
Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
Michael McDermott.....Mississippi
Jason Osborne.....Mississippi
Anthony Overton.....Alabama
John Sanchez.....Florida
Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
C.J. Sweetman.....Florida
Ed Walker.....Florida
Troy Williamson.....Texas

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
LT Jason Morton.....USCG

STAFF

Assane Diagne.....Economist
Matt Freeman.....Economist
John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
Beth Hager.....Administrative Officer
Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
Sarah Gardiner.....Fishery Biologist
Heather Graf.....Accounting and Human Resources Assistant
Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
Jessica Matos.....Administrative Document Editor & IT Coordinator
Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
Kathy Pereira.....Meeting Planner & Travel Coordinator
Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison
Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director

Verena Wang.....Fishery Biologist

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

Ben Allen.....
Deidre Boelke.....RWE
Susan Boggs.....Orange Beach, AL
Gary Borland.....SAFMC
B.J. Burkett.....FL
Lt. Patrick Carron.....MS
Shannon Cass-Calay.....SEFSC
Ronald Chicola.....LA
Karoline DiPerna.....BOEM
Katie Fischer.....Matlacha, FL
Richard Fischer.....LA
Thomas Forehand.....NOAA OLE
Cole Ganey.....MS
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Frank Helies.....NOAA
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Clay Porch.....SEFSC
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Charlie Renier.....FL
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Chance Seymour.....Biloxi, MS
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Mike Sullivan.....
Alexandra St. Pe.....RWE
Mark Tryon.....Gulf Breeze, FL
David Walker.....AL
Johnny Williams.....Galveston, TX
Dale Woodruff.....AL
Bob Zales.....Panama City, FL
Jim Zurbrick.....Steinhatchee, FL

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PAGE 134: Motion to move Action 1.2 to Considered but Rejected. The motion carried on page 135.

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PAGE 172: Motion to move Action 1 to Considered but Rejected. The motion carried on page 172.

PAGE 178: Motion in Action 2 to make an Alternative 4. The motion carried on page 179.

PAGE 179: Motion in Action 3 to move Alternative to Considered but Rejected. The motion carried on page 180.

PAGE 186: Motion to approve and send the comment letter on modifications to the 2024 EBFM road map as amended. The motion carried on page 186.

PAGE 188: Motion to approve the proposed 2024 funded budget. The motion carried on page 188.

PAGE 189: Motion to approve the 2025 to 2028 council budget request, as presented. The motion carried on page 189.

PAGE 196: Motion to move forward with nontechnical solutions for for-hire trip validation. The motion carried on page 196.

PAGE 197: Motion in Action 4 to make an Option e. The motion carried on page 197.

PAGE 197: Motion to remove Option a. The motion carried on page 198.

PAGE 202: Motion to request that NMFS provide an updated presentation on the National Seafood Strategy as well as the pilot program example during the Shrimp Committee at the November 2024 council meeting. The motion carried on page 202.

PAGE 204: Motion that the council send a letter to the SEFSC to proceed with the MSE analysis proposed to assess management impacts of different ABC control rules for Tier 1 stocks. The motion

carried on page 205.

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The Full Council of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council convened at The Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi on Monday morning, August 19, 2024, and was called to order by Chairman Kevin Anson.

INDUCTION OF NEW AND REAPPOINTED COUNCIL MEMBERS

CHAIRMAN KEVIN ANSON: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the Gulf Council. Before we get started, our first item for today's business, which would be induction of the new and reappointed council members, and I just want to take a brief moment to welcome Gary Borland, from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Welcome, and also welcome to Lieutenant Jackson Morton from the United States Coast Guard. Thank you.

That will bring us to our first order of business today, will be the induction of the new and reappointed council members. Mr. Strelcheck. Reappointed and appointed council members, if you could make your way to the front.

(Whereupon, new and reappointed members of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council are sworn-in.)

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Those individuals, for the record, appointed to their first term are Troy Frady, Jason Osborne, and John Sanchez. Second-term appointment is Billy Broussard, and third-term appointment is J.D. Dugas. Congratulations, everyone. All right, and so that will take us to our first committee. I'm sorry. Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. ANDY STRELCHECK: Thanks, Kevin. I just wanted to say a few words with the microphone on, and so, for those that are reappointed, thank you for making that commitment to, obviously, step into the role again, and, for those that are newly appointed, thank you for applying for the council process. We know this is a substantial commitment, and, on behalf of the Fisheries Service, we are grateful for that commitment and participation in the council process, and so we look forward to working with the reappointed members as well as getting to know the new appointed members.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to introduce our new Fishery Biologist, Sarah Gardiner. She replaced Dr. Natasha Mendez-Ferrer. You guys recall that she left and went to the Regional Office in May. She's primarily from North Carolina, and not born-and-raised, but almost. She went to UNC

Wilmington, and completed her master's degree, and then she's been working for the North Pacific Council for about three years now, and so welcome back to the south. We're ready to put her to work. She's going to be working on coral and essential fish habitat, as well as a lot of reef fish stuff, and so welcome.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: General Spraggins.

GENERAL JOE SPRAGGINS: Just, on behalf of Governor Reeves, I would like to thank you all for coming to Mississippi. We're proud to have you here, and we're always proud to have the Gulf Council come here, but we hope that you have a good time. We hope that you enjoy yourself while you're here on the Gulf coast. We would sure like for you to leave a lot of money, and, you know, if you haven't found those machines down there that pay 100 percent of the time, and it's got "ATM" written across them, and so you can definitely go and join in on those, and, you know, we appreciate everything you do. We've got a couple of events set up for while you're here, and we hope that you enjoy yourself, and you should have got a little bag that we gave you, and that's our I Love Mississippi bags, and so, you know, we'll give you a few more things before the week is out and so thank you all for coming.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, General Spraggins. We appreciate it. All right, and so we'll go into our first committee meeting, and that is Administrative/Budget.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on August 19, 2024.)

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August 21, 2024

WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

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The Full Council of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council reconvened at The Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi on Wednesday morning, August 21, 2024, and was called to order by Chairman Kevin Anson.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES CALL TO ORDER, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND INTRODUCTIONS

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Okay, folks. We're going to go ahead and get started. I just want to make one announcement here. Emily Muehlstein will be taking a photo of all the council members before

we break for lunch, or we finish up this part of the session, and she wants us to stay in this room, and we'll have the photograph in the room, and so everybody get your hair ready, and all your clothes ready, so you look good, and we'll do that right before we go to lunch.

All right, and so that will take -- If there are no other announcements, that will take us to our second item for the Full Council Session, and that's the Adoption of the Agenda. Does anyone have any changes to the agenda?

Not seeing any, I have a few that I would like to make, and the first would be to move the NOAA OLE report, Tab R-2(a) and (b), to right after Mississippi Law Enforcement Efforts, which is Tab A, Number 9, and right before lunch, and the second item I would like to have put on the agenda, or change to the agenda, would be a presentation on NOAA Fisheries SEAFish Survey Visualizer from Dr. Porch, and that would occur immediately after lunch, right before we get into public testimony. Then the third item that I would like to change is a request from Dr. Frazer to move the Reef Fish Committee Report to the first report tomorrow morning.

Does anyone have any objections to those changes to the agenda? Is there any objection to accepting the agenda as modified? Seeing none, then we'll go ahead and move forward with that agenda. Thank you.

The next item on the agenda is Approval of the Minutes, Tab A, Numbers 3 and 4. Does anyone have any changes to the minutes? Not seeing any, is there any opposition to accepting the minutes as written? Seeing none, they are passed. I was remiss in providing the statement for public testimony, the chair's statement, and so I will read that now.

Welcome to the 301st meeting of the Gulf Council. My name is Kevin Anson, chair of the council. If you have a cell phone, or a similar device, we ask that you place it on silent or vibrating mode during the meeting. Also, in order for all to be able to hear the proceedings, we ask that you have any private conversations outside. Please be advised that alcoholic beverages are not permitted in the meeting room.

The Gulf Council is one of eight regional councils established in 1976 by the Fishery Conservation and Management Act, known today as the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The council's purpose is to serve as a deliberative body to advise the Secretary of Commerce on fishery management measures in the federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. These measures help to ensure that fishery resources in the Gulf

are sustained, while providing the best overall benefit for the nation.

The council has seventeen voting members, eleven of whom are appointed by the Secretary of Commerce and include individuals from a range of geographical areas in the Gulf of Mexico with experience in various aspects of fisheries. The membership also includes the five state fishery managers from each Gulf state and the Regional Administrator from NOAA's Southeast Fisheries Service, as well as several non-voting members.

Public input is a vital part of the council's deliberative process, and comments, both oral and written, are accepted and considered by the council throughout the process. We will welcome public comment from in-person and virtual attendees.

Anyone joining us virtually that wishes to speak during the public comment should register for comment online. Virtual participants that are registered to comment should ensure that they are registered for the webinar under the same name they used to register to speak.

In-person attendees wishing to speak during the public comment should sign-in at the registration kiosk located at the back of the meeting room. We accept only one registration per person. Public comment may end before the published agenda time if all registered in-person and virtual participants have completed their comment.

A digital recording is used for the public record, and, therefore, for the purpose of voice identification, I would ask that meeting participants seated at the table identify him or herself, starting on my left.

MR. J.D. DUGAS: J.D. Dugas, Louisiana.

MR. BILLY BROUSSARD: Billy Broussard, Louisiana.

MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE: Chris Schieble, Louisiana.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Joe Spraggins, Mississippi.

MR. JASON OSBORNE: Jason Osborne, Mississippi.

MR. MICHAEL MCDERMOTT: Michael McDermott, Mississippi.

MR. DAVE DONALDSON: Dave Donaldson, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

MR. DAKUS GEESLIN: Dakus Geeslin, Texas.

DR. KESLEY BANKS: Kesley Banks, Texas.

MR. TROY WILLIAMSON: Troy Williamson, Texas.

LT. JACKSON MORTON: Lieutenant Jackson Morton, United States Coast Guard.

MR. GARY BORLAND: Gary Borland, South Atlantic Fishery liaison.

MS. MARA LEVY: Mara Levy, NOAA Office of General Counsel.

DR. CLAY PORCH: Clay Porch, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

MR. FRANK HELIES: Frank Helies, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office.

MR. STRELCHECK: Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office.

DR. ANTHONY OVERTON: Anthony Overton, Alabama.

MR. TROY FRADY: Troy Frady, Alabama.

MR. ED WALKER: Ed Walker, Florida.

DR. C.J. SWEETMAN: C.J. Sweetman, Florida.

MR. JOHN SANCHEZ: John Sanchez, Florida.

DR. TOM FRAZER: Tom Frazer, Florida.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Carrie Simmons, council staff.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you. We've adopted the agenda and approved the minutes, and so that will take us to Item Number III on the agenda, the presentations section, and so we have Project Introduction and Review of RWE Fisheries Communication Plan, Tab A, Number 7. Ms. Boelke.

PRESENTATIONS
PROJECT INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF RWE FISHERIES COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

MS. DEIDRE BOELKE: I will get started. Thank you. Good morning,

everyone. My name is Deidre Boelke. I'm a fisheries manager with RWE, which is an energy company globally, but, here in the U.S., is focused on renewables. I'm joined by Alexandra St. Pe, who is a project director with our team, online, and so she'll be presenting these slides with me this morning, and so thank you very much.

I just want to thank everyone for taking time to let us introduce this project more formally to the region, and also introduce ourselves, and take a minute to review the fisheries communications plan that our team has been developing over the last six months or so, and a special shoutout to Emily on the council staff. She's been working with really closely with us, reviewing these, you know, documents, line-by-line, and providing really great feedback, and so I want to thank her for that, and she also shared with us some really useful context.

We're, you know, really just getting started in the region, but already we have been meeting with, you know, dozens of really helpful constituents and regulators in the region, and I start with thanking you for all of that, and, if anyone is interested, and hasn't met with us yet, please find me on one of the breaks. I'll be here today, and into tomorrow morning, or, anyone online, please reach out. My email information is in all the documents.

The next slide is just a brief overview of this presentation. There are three parts, and we have a few slides just to introduce RWE to you as a company, a little bit of project introductions, and the bulk of the presentation will be myself reviewing different sections of our fisheries communications plan.

Again, this is a requirement, a BOEM requirement, of our lease. It is a draft plan, and so we are interested in any feedback that you have to improve the plan, and then, finally, if we have a little time, I have a slide, at the end, to provide some guidance on specific ways that we try to integrate input that we get from different fishery constituents into development of this project. In the next slide, I'll turn it over to Alexandra, and hopefully it will work.

MS. ALEXANDRA ST. PE: Thank you, Deirdre. Good morning, everyone. I'm very happy to be with you today. As Deirdre mentioned, I am the project director for RWE's offshore wind project in the Gulf of Mexico, and I'm actually a Louisiana native, but I spent a good part of my life in Mississippi, and I have family just down the road in Ocean Spring, and so I'm very disappointed that I cannot be with you in-person today, but I'm delighted to even be with you virtually, to introduce RWE and share more about why we're really

excited about the opportunity to work with our partners and build an offshore wind industry in the Gulf.

Just to kick it off, who is RWE? A few words about our history, and we're a well-known brand in Germany. We have been producing electricity in the center of the German industrial heartland for over 125 years. The region where we developed our first project is named Rheinisch-Westfalisches, hence our name, Rheinisch-Westfalisches Energy, RWE.

Since the 1900s, we have evolved a bit as a company, and today we're one of the largest clean power providers in the world, and you see the stats on the slide. I think most relevant to this conversation is that RWE is the second-largest offshore wind developer globally, and we've got more than twenty years of experience delivering these projects.

If you look at our sort of stat sheet a little bit further on offshore wind, we have nineteen projects in operation, and that's more than 1,000 turbines, and they're really concentrated in the North and Baltic Sea in Europe.

We're leveraging the global experience here now in the U.S. We're the fastest growing entrant in the offshore wind market, and so we have acquired a development pipeline over six gigawatts in just two years, and that consists of three projects, and you see them on the screen, listed out really in order of when we acquired them, and so the first is the New York Bight lease, which is one of the largest in that region.

We also have a lease off of the northern coast of California, which it will be one of the world's first floating wind commercial-scale projects, and then, last, but not least, we have the first federal offshore wind lease in the Gulf of Mexico, and so, just zooming-in for a moment on some details about this project, it's about 102,000 acres.

It's around forty miles off the southwest coast of Louisiana, and so really just a straight shot south from Lake Charles. It's relatively shallow waters, and so we are anticipating to used fixed-bottom wind turbines as a solution, and the overall size of capacity is about two gigawatts, and so a pretty big lease, and I will just say, you know, from a development standpoint, we're really at the beginning of the beginning for this emerging Gulf market.

There are a lot of unknowns, and we know that. We knew that when we, you know, bid in the auction to acquire the lease, but we did

so because, despite the unknowns today, we believe in the fundamentals, that the Gulf is well positioned to lead the nation as an offshore wind hub, just given the institutional knowledge that's down here, the ocean energy know-how, the workforce, you know, the supply chain and infrastructure.

We have a relationship with the dominant utility in the region, Entergy, an MOU, and we're working with them to understand their needs for clean power and making sure that we, you know, develop the project in a way that can meet the long-term needs of the region. I will just say that we're committed to working with the public and private partners, including you all, to de-risk and shape this early market opportunity.

Just a quick note on the business model in the offshore wind space, and we're active across the entire value chain, and so we do everything from what we're doing now in the Gulf, which is really the early market development, and then we actually handle the construction in-house, as well as the operation and maintenance, which is, you know, over thirty years, thirty-plus years, of the project timeline, and then we, you know, handle the responsible decommissioning of the asset.

With that in mind, here's a look at our excellent team. There they are, and so myself, and I'm the project director, as I mentioned, and my background is on the technical side and wind resource assessment innovation management, and I'm based out of our Austin, Texas office. Then we have Anthony Bodin, who is based out of New Orleans, and he's had several roles in Louisiana economic development, and he leads, and coordinates, our strategic engagement, and I will hand it over to Deirdre now, who will introduce our outstanding marine affairs team.

MS. BOELKE: Thank you, Alexandra, and I don't want to take too much time, but we do have a growing marine affairs team, that is listed there on the slide, starting with our director of marine affairs, and some of you may recognize Rick Robbins. He was a Mid-Atlantic Council member for nine years, from I believe 2007 through 2016, and that's where I met Rick. He has a long career in seafood processing, and seafood development, as well as, you know, recreational fishing on the side, when he can.

I'm the fisheries manager, as I already said, and, before joining RWE about two years ago, from knowing Rick from before, I was on the New England Council staff, and so I was a staff member for over twenty years, working in the New England region on fisheries throughout the east coast.

We have Ricky Alexander, who is our fisheries liaison for this particular project, and so he really is the main point of contact, moving forward, for the Gulf of Mexico region, and Ricky got his graduate degree here at the University of Texas, tagging fish and working on artificial reef, and so he has a lot of really, you know, local knowledge about the fisheries in this area. He was an observer for many years, and worked in cooperative research.

Gus Seyler-Schmidt has joined our team, more recently, and he's a retired Coast Guard commissioner, and he has been, you know, very active in homeland security, and he will be working on the safety side of our project and stakeholders outside of fisheries.

Kim Gordon you may also recognize, and she's done a lot of work with the councils as a consultant, for many years, and she's located on the west coast, but she's been helping us with stakeholder mapping and some of our early outreach efforts, and so our team is really committed. We understand the council process, and we know that this is a one-stop shop for all things fisheries in the Gulf, and so we are really interested in making this work and have successful outcomes for everyone involved.

There's a few kind of key pillars to our approach that I won't go through now, but definitely RWE is very committed to sustainability and being a responsible partner, and developer, in this region, and all the other things that go with that.

The next slide, just to move us along, and hopefully we can now spend a little time getting through the fisheries communication plan. Alexandra went through a few quick facts, and, just so you have a slide about this, we've already created a map on the right-hand side, with a couple more relevant overlays, in terms of anchoring areas in pink, and different shipping lanes, and our lease area is that gray box, again, which is a little over thirty nautical miles south of Louisiana.

There are some, you know, active oil rigs and wells nearby, a few within the lease area, but hopefully these kinds of overlays are helpful to orient where this lease is in particular.

In the next slide, we'll get into the fisheries communications plan. As I mentioned, this is a required lease condition. It's really not very complicated, and it's intended to guide how the developer will communicate information about the project to relevant fisheries stakeholders. We also develop an agency communications plan, as well as a tribal and Native American communications plan, and so all three of those -- It's an early deliverable for the project, and it's summarizing some of the

different methods and the different ways that we intend to share information about the project, as well as take information in, to make adjustments, and accommodations, for fisheries as we move along.

This is a brief overview of what's in the plan. It's been provided to you in advance, in your binder, and it's about twenty-five pages, and so there's a lot of information in there, some background about the project, and Section 3 gets into a lot of detail about the fisheries within the region, as we understand them to be, and this would be a great section for this audience to review and let us know if you see any gaps, or important fisheries, or stakeholders, that are not identified.

I have a few slides to hit on a few of these key parts moving forward, but, in general, please review this when you have time, if you haven't already, and get back to us whenever, with any kind of input. This is a living document, and it's not going to just sit on a shelf and, you know, you have one chance to look at it.

Briefly, these are the objectives, as I mentioned, for the fisheries communication plan. It's really just laying out how we hope to work with you, as a partner, moving forward. We take this seriously, in making sure that, the more we understand about the fisheries in the region, hopefully the better we can accommodate, and mitigate, any potential impacts of the project on fisheries, and, ideally, through this communication and collaboration, we can hopefully ultimately find ways to work together, through research, or monitoring, to help elevate and bring positive impacts to fisheries as well.

We have some core principles that guide our work, that are described in more detail, but they're listed there on the right, things that you would probably expect, in terms of our team approaching this.

There is a pretty detailed description of our backgrounds, and the different roles that we each play, and I won't go through that now, but just so you can understand the different responsibilities that each of us have, and, again, Ricky Alexander would be the main point of contact for you, for this lease area, where Rick and I work on all of those different projects that Alexandra was describing before, and I just want to take a minute to highlight the box on the right, and so everyone that's been mentioned so far works for RWE exclusively.

This project will also likely contract, and work with, folks on a more part-time basis within the region, and so there is other

roles, such as fisheries representatives or technical advisors, who, for the most part, tend to be active commercial and recreational fishermen, and we hire, and employ, on a part-time basis, through various different contracts, them to advise us about the project, to be kind of on-the-ground places for the wider industry to talk with, to share information and so forth, and so, for example, we have a handful of these individuals for our east coast project, and we're now working on the west coast, to identify folks for that project as well.

In addition, when any kind of on-water activity begins, such as our site assessment process, where we start having surveys, we will also employ, hopefully, local fishermen to be on those vessels, and serve as onboard fisheries liaisons, and so they will be eyes on the water, hoping to, you know, deconflict any issues that might arise offshore, and, again, they would be compensated and work for the project in a contract way, but both of these groups, both for RWE as well as contracts, would be working directly with the public and with the council.

I just want to take a minute, and there are several pages in here, and to highlight a lot of the great work that was done early on to hopefully deconflict many of the overlaps with fishing within the Gulf. The NCCOS process, we have a few of the work that was done by NOAA early on to identify fishing in the region, and these are a few examples.

We have definitely, you know, scoured those reports, and tried to learn from them and identify, you know, the major commercial fisheries in and around the lease area, as well as the recreational fishing activities that occur, and, you know, from our impression, and conversations we've had to-date, you know, this process really did a pretty good job of deconflicting the lease areas outside of primary fishing zones, and so it's offshore of some of those menhaden and shrimp areas, and then it's inshore of some of the longline and bandit pelagic gears.

There is a lot of information in there, and please digest it and let us know if you think there's anything missing. We would love to hear from you. If you want to just keep rolling through the different sections, I will highlight briefly how the next slide, Section 4 of the document, gets into really the various tools that we hope to use, and we are employing these on the east and west coast already, and every region is different.

There is different preferences, and so we would love to hear if there are some that are more advantageous. We've learned a lot already, through the council, of how people prefer to get

information and things like that, but, again, we tried to list out all of the different possible ways, and we are working on developing different apps, and text message services, to try to stay in touch with folks without, you know, doing this in an overloading way.

The next slide summarizes some of the different, you know, strategies, and methods, that we'll use. Again, if it's a wide-ranging -- We want to be very cognizant of taking too much time from people. We know how busy everyone is. They're already involved, tracking the council process and so forth, but this top one, I will say, so far, from our experience on the east and west coast, really is -- These one-on-one conversations that we're able to organize with folks have been very valuable, but as well as attending large meetings, like this one, and we have been invited to different fishery association meetings, to give presentations and things like that, and so we are open to whatever will work best for the various groups that we'll be engaging with.

You have probably seen similar versions of this from BOEM in previous presentations, and I just wanted to highlight the length of these projects, and they really do take a long time to plan and operate, and so we are way on the left side, as Alexandra mentioned, of this very long time horizon, in the initial planning phase, and, if you just hit "next", I think we have an animation to just highlight -- There's a lot of words on the screen now, but, to give you a feel, really, the first thing we're doing is this fisheries communications plan, way on the left-hand side of this timeline, but we did include a very detailed gear loss process.

I would encourage folks on the council, and in the public, to review that, and we can adjust it. This is what we've kind of developed over time, working on the east and west coast, that works with those fisheries, and we do want to have this in place, well before any kind of on-the-water activity, so that it's clear and people understand that, if there are any issues, there are funds set aside for any kind of gear loss claims that may occur, and so that process is outlined in this document.

It's Attachment B, and please look at it carefully, and then, really, over the next five-plus years, we'll be working on all of these other items that are described in the bullets below, in terms of planning for survey activities, and all the communication that goes into that, thinking about the design of the project and so forth.

Sometimes we get questions, early on, about fisheries

compensation, and, you know, very understandably, people are concerned about potential impacts, closures, temporary closures around construction sites and so forth, that would affect fishing activity, and so there will be a detailed compensation mitigation fund, and that has been set aside. There are funds associated with that.

In terms of the exact details and formulas that will be used, those have not been defined yet. We are not going to define those on our own, behind closed doors. We're going to work with the industry, and the council, on those kinds of details. We're doing that on the east coast and west coast now. These are multiyear, you know, processes to figure this all out, and so I just wanted to kind of identify that early, so there's an understanding that we're going to be working on this, you know, for a while, and with others.

Really briefly, and I'm sure I'm getting tight on time here, there is a section about our approaches for coexistence, and hopefully getting to building relationships with folks and collaborating, and we do describe the different ways we hope to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts, and, you know, these kinds of ideas are described in Section 6, for the most part, and I will just keep moving, to stay on time.

This is, again, years off, but I wanted to give you a sense, and this is for survey activities specifically, and these are all the various things that we'll be working on, you know, again, years into the future, but trying to understand fisheries, if there's seasonal patterns, or different ways that we can communicate on a daily basis with folks, if necessary, when any survey activities begin. You know, the more we understand about these things, the more we can hopefully accommodate them, and there are some, you know, concrete ways that we've done this, on the east and west coast, that hopefully we'll learn from here in the Gulf as well, but, again, a lot of information that I'm throwing at you, and hopefully it's described in more detail in the document, and I think I just have one more slide.

At the very end, it's explaining, again, that this is a living document, and we intend to update it as we move forward. I also wanted to let you know that there is a requirement that BOEM has that developers produce progress reports, and so, every six months, starting next year, you'll start to see a summary of the engagements that our team has had with different stakeholders, what we're hearing, what questions people have, and how we're incorporating that into the development of the process, and so these will be posted online.

I encourage, you know, the council, and the public, to review them, and to let us know how we can improve them, and, if you want to get a sense of them, there are ones that exist for the east coast, for all the different projects that are under development there, and so please, you know, reach out, and I'm happy to talk about that, and then, on the right-hand side, this is just summarizing all the different things that we'll be working on as a team over the next few years related to fisheries, and so I think that is all I have.

The next slide might just be for questions, or it's just about the appendices. When you have time, there is hopefully an appendix, in the back, which summarizes a lot of best practices in this kind of world of fisheries and wind, and, again, that detailed claims process is Appendix B, which I didn't take a lot of time to step through today, because this is still, you know, years off, but hopefully it makes sense, and, if you have suggestions on ways to make it better, please let us know. That is all outlined in the back, in Appendix B, and I think that is it.

Do we have time to just end with this slide? Okay. Great. I wanted to share -- You know, Emily mentioned to us, and I'm very familiar, coming from the New England Council staff for years, that it can be frustrating, providing comments to big projects like this, and feeling like it goes on deaf ears, and so I just wanted to share some very specific ways that our team is trying to incorporate the different considerations, and input, that we've been getting from fishermen, again mostly on the east and west coast so far, because those projects are a little further ahead.

The first one, like we're talking about today, would be preferences that people have for communication strategies and how we engage with the public, and fisheries stakeholders in particular, and so we're very responsive to that, and we're happy to vary that by region, but this next bullet I just wanted to share.

For the survey and site assessment activities that the project will begin, you know, down the road, there is definitely opportunities there for, when it's feasible, to adjust different technologies that we may use, different seasons and schedules that the vessel has, and, you know, some of these surveys can be long in length, and so there are ways to approach certain areas first, and then move into a different area, and really coordinate, and so I just wanted to share that the more that we can understand those things, and work together upfront -- You know, there really are ways that this can go off, and, for the surveys that we've had on the east coast, which is multiyear at this point, as well as the

west coast, really, there have been no incidents offshore that caused any issues. We were able to communicate and work through all of those survey campaigns, which was really a great feat.

In terms of the actual points to shore, for example, we've also been able to adjust some of our initial planning for some of those things, once we had a better understanding of where static fixed gear concentrations are, for example, and we really have been able to make these micro-adjustments, in some cases.

The next bullet here, and similar to the photo that's being shared and this is Rick in the background here, with two of our lead engineers, and this is a scallop dredge that's hanging here on the back of this vessel, and really bringing our engineers -- A big part of our job is educating them about fisheries, and how fisheries operate and the different gear types, and already we're seeing them, the engineers, creatively think about adjustments they can make to the design of the project, in terms of maybe the orientation, how the cables are laid out, and so we're seeing some promising things, the more they understand and we're able to translate this information directly to them. Really valuable opportunities can happen that we're seeing.

Finally, research and monitoring, this is something our team is particularly excited about, from our backgrounds in cooperative research, and we really do think these long-term projects are going to have a lot of opportunities for joint research, and we're really pushing to use commercial vessels in as much of this activity as we can, and we are getting through some of the safety hurdles, and learning a lot of that now, from our other projects, that hopefully will be all in place in time for when the Gulf of Mexico gets going into these initiatives, and so we're really excited for that one in particular, and so we're hoping that some of the direct input that we have from folks here could inform a lot of these different steps to make the project as successful as possible and coexist with fisheries in the region.

That's all I had to share today. Thank you very much. I'm here all day, and into tomorrow morning, and please come find me, if you have any more questions.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Thank you. We'll see if there are any questions right now from members. Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: So, Deirdre, thanks for being here. I don't know why you would want to leave the New England Fishery Management Council, but welcome to --

MS. BOELKE: No comment.

MR. STRELCHECK: So my team -- I'm with NOAA Fisheries, and so we've had an opportunity, obviously, to review the communications plan, I believe back in May, and I was trying to get confirmation from my team, and so this is a draft, and it's been beefed up, and improved, considerably since I think we last saw it, and so kind of what stage are you with the communications plan, and what would be kind of the next round to review it?

MS. BOELKE: Thank you, and so, as I was trying to emphasize, it's not super formal. We have sent a version around to folks. BOEM has seen a version, and given us some comments back, and we made changes to that, and we're sharing it with you today. BOEM is reviewing that draft as well, and so, ideally, we could, you know, complete a, quote, more final version, that we post on our website, later this month.

Ideally, that's what we're targeting, but, again, it's a living document, and so, if people have still other ideas that they want to share in their fishery associations, and they don't have a meeting until next month, we can always update it. For example, on the east coast, we're up to, I think, Version 3 of our fisheries communications plan already, and so it's not a deadline, but it would be great, if the council has any feedback that you can share today, or, you know, in the next time here, and then we can incorporate it into the version that we hope to post online, and, as soon as we do post a version, when BOEM gives us the green light, we will let the council know that it's up there, and folks can review it then too. Hopefully that's helpful.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thank you for that, and I will check in with my team and probably work on providing any last feedback on this. I just wanted to give compliments to RWE for the communications plan, and especially the engagement with the fishing industry, and I think that's a critical component to that, and you certainly are showing, with the communications plan, how you're going to work with the industry, and engage on this, and minimize, to the extent practical, conflicts, and so thank you.

MS. BOELKE: Yes, thank you, and I appreciate that. We, obviously, haven't met with everyone yet, only a couple dozen associations and individuals at this point, and we hope to just keep growing those numbers as we move forward, but thank you for that and the commitment that NMFS has had. We do -- Just to share it with everyone else, we have a call every other month, and so we're trying to, with both the Science Center and the Regional Office, to just kind of have check-ins, every other month, to share

information and things like that, and so we're happy to do that with other agencies as well.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We have another question from Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Not so much a question, but a comment. Thank you, Deirdre. I appreciate you, as part of your communication strategy, reaching out to our department already, with our fisheries staff, as well as our outreach staff, to coordinate meeting with our taskforces to present this information, and I think that's critical, and important, and I would also encourage you to try to schedule, with the council staff, to present this to our Shrimp AP at their next scheduled meeting too as well. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Ms. Muehlstein.

MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN: I just wanted to share with the council that we have -- In addition to being in contact with RWE, as they get sort of rolling in the Gulf of Mexico, we have been working with BOEM directly, knowing that this is sort of a new territory, and that there are other leases in the Gulf of Mexico, and we are using you guys as a guinea pig, and so I appreciate your willingness to sort of work with us, and go through our review process, and really take to heart the review, and the comments, that we shared with you, but, you know, just for context, I wanted to make sure that the council is aware that this process that we are engaging in with RWE is sort of the guinea pig to making sure that this process with other lessees in the future is going to incorporate, you know, a lot of opportunity for feedback from the council, and so, you know, I just appreciate the willingness to play that role.

MS. BOELKE: Sure. No problem. We appreciate it, and hopefully we can share learnings from the east and west coast with the Gulf as well.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Dierdre, for being here, again, and for your good communication and meeting with our staff. Just something that we were looking at in the revised, I guess, communications plan that we thought about, as you presented, that we often get calls on from fishermen, is the coordinates of this area, and I apologize if I missed it, but I did not see it in this plan, and so that would be helpful. Then, also, if you could add a scale to that figure. Thanks.

MS. BOELKE: Yes. Thank you for both of those, to make them more

formally here, and we got those comments from you guys, and I guess there is a scale, and it's hard to see, and so we'll make some revised ones, with something more obvious, and definitely having the coordinates as an attachment. They are available on BOEM's page too, but we'll make that much, much easier for folks to get.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Yes, and just one more follow-up. It's my understanding, from BOEM, working with BOEM staff, is NCCOS is going to try to update some of the information that was done, and I think the terminal year was like 2019, or something like that, and so are you going to be actively working with them, to make sure that you guys are also incorporating that, moving forward, any new information regarding fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico?

MS. BOELKE: Definitely. We track that very closely. A lot of the work they're doing, you know, beyond even the Gulf of Mexico now, has been really valuable, and, you know, if we could be more of assistance, and we're only really just watching it, but we will absolutely digest, and update, all of stuff, based on anything that they're able to produce.

I believe that they are kind of sharing some of this information directly to developers, and to get some more developer input on some of the other constraints outside of the fisheries, related to wind and things like that, and so that could be another valuable update to that approach, too.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Thank you, Ms. Boelke, for coming today and providing the information. Thank you.

MS. BOELKE: Thank you for the time. I appreciate it.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Next up, we have an update from Ms. Lyncker from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management on their wind energy development in the Gulf of Mexico, Tab A, Number 8. Ms. Lyncker, hello.

UPDATE FROM BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT (BOEM) ON WIND ENERGY DEVELOPMENT IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

MS. LISSA LYNCKER: Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, members of the council, and good morning, everyone. My name is Lissa Lyncker, and I'm with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. I'm the chief of staff for the Gulf of Mexico Regional Office. Thank you for the opportunity to present an update today and provide details for the unsolicited lease process that we have recently announced.

BOEM also values seeing the ongoing collaboration between RWE and the council, and the council in working with our staff to make sure that these communication plans are what they need to be, and so that's great to see.

I'm actually going to hand off the presentation part to Karoline DiPerna here, and she's going to walk through the details of the project. I also want to mention that I'm fortunate to have a team with me today. Normally it's me, and my online colleagues, but we do have Idrissa today, and Karoline DiPerna from our leasing office, and we have Mariana Steen from the Office of the Environment, and so, as we answer questions, or in conversations after the Q&A, we'll be available for you all, and so I'm going to hand it over to Karoline. Thank you.

MS. KAROLINE DIPERNA: All right. Good morning, everyone. Like Lissa said, my name is Karoline DiPerna, and I'm a project coordinator for the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management Gulf of Mexico Region's Renewable Energy Leasing Office, located in New Orleans. Today, I'm just going to give you a brief overview of our unsolicited lease request process, our noncompetitive leasing process, and then some details about our first unsolicited lease request in the Gulf.

As we know, there is the opportunity for competitive leasing in the Gulf, but we also, in our regulations, can offer noncompetitive leases, if that situation may arise, and our unsolicited lease requests are analyzed on a case-by-case basis. We will not consider an unsolicited request for a lease under any area that is already scheduled for a lease sale under this part.

Our regulations outline all the requirements that are necessary when a company submits an unsolicited lease request. Of course, we need to know the area requested for lease, a description of their objectives and facilities that they will use to achieve those objectives, a schedule of their proposed activities, if available, and any pertinent data and information regarding renewable energy and environmental conditions in that area of interest, and, if we can have it, a statement that the proposed activity conforms with our state and local energy planning requirements.

We also require documentation that shows that the company meets all qualifications to become a lessee for BOEM regulations, and so legal, technical, and financially qualified, and, finally, we require an acquisition fee of twenty-five cents per acre, unless this is set otherwise by the BOEM Director at the time of the application.

There is a lot going on in this slide, and I know we have a relatively small screen to look at, and so we're not going to spend too much time on this one. We're going to dive deeper as we go down through the rest of the presentation, but the purpose of this slide is just to give a visual overview of what could happen for a noncompetitive lease.

The first object, as you see at the top, shows a request for competitive interest, and that is published in the Federal Register, and that is where we are right now with our first unsolicited lease request that we'll discuss in just a minute.

Once this is published to the Federal Register, we have a forty-five-day comment period. After that comment period is when BOEM decides, given the information, given the comments, given any outreach that we have, is there competitive interest in this area or if there is not competitive interest.

Once competitive interest is indicated, the unsolicited lease request is closed, and we would move into the traditional competitive leasing process. On the other hand, noncompetitive leasing requires quite a bit more, and a little bit different, work, and so we're going to go to our next slide, and so, before we jump into this new unsolicited lease request, I wanted to give a brief outline of our WEA option history.

If we go back to June of 2021, BOEM had published a request for interest to determine if commercial interest in the Gulf. Later on in the year, we published the call for information and nominations, to further assess this interest and again to gain public comment.

Heading into 2022, BOEM, with NCCOS developed the first ecosystem-wide spatial suitability model. This model was used to designate fourteen WEA options in the Gulf. We eventually removed WEA Option B, due to Department of Defense concerns, and so, finally, in 2022, we announced two final wind energy areas, which were WEAs I and M. In May of 2023, BOEM published the final environmental assessment and a finding of no significant impact.

We completed our consultations under the Endangered Species Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and so the EA, the FONSI, as we call it, and consultations over the call area allow for the issuance of up to eighteen leases.

Later on in that year, 2023, WEA M was issued to RWE Offshore Wind in our first Gulf of Mexico auction. After that auction, we

continued to look at WEA options, and we announced that more additional final WEAs could be released, and those were J, K, L, and N.

Coming to February of this year, Hecate Gulf Wind LLC submitted their unsolicited lease request for WEA Options C and D, and, on this map, you can see, within the red circled area, those are the two wind energy area options that they are looking at. After we reviewed a request for competitive interest, we published this request for competitive interest in the Federal Register late last month.

Because we did not receive competitive interest for the areas that were to be offered in the Gulf of Mexico Wind 2 auction, that auction was canceled. We are going to move forward and see where we get with this unsolicited lease request.

On this slide, we have two maps, and this is to narrow down exactly where these wind energy area options are. On the left, we've got a map that shows the individual blocks in the Gulf that encompass these WEAs. On the right, we've got a map showing C and D, in green. In yellow, we have our previous final wind energy areas, which were I, J, and K, and then, finally, in blue, we have our first wind lease that was offered to RWE.

Looking at WEA Options C and D, we're looking at a combined acreage of about 142,000 acres. Note that both of these areas are within the BOEM call area. WEA C is about 74,000 acres, with a distance to shore of 37.3 kilometers, with a mean depth across the entire area of 47.6 meters. The max depth is 60.8 meters and a minimum depth of 34.3 meters. WEA D is a bit smaller, at 68,239 acres, with a distance to shore of 39.8 kilometers, a mean depth of 36.1 meters, a max depth of 44.7 meters, and a minimum depth of 28.9 meters.

What does Hecate Energy's project look like? Within their unsolicited lease request, they sent details about their proposed project that they are calling Gulf Wind 2. What would this look like?

Per their proposal, they are looking at up to 133 fixed-bottom wind turbine generators, with each a capacity of fifteen to twenty-three megawatts, resulting in an overall maximum capacity of about 3,000 megawatts. Each of these turbines would be deployed on a fixed monopile or jacket foundation types.

Looking at points of interconnection, Hecate narrowed its selections down to Texas and Louisiana, but they do continue to

examine twelve potential landfall locations, with paths to three designated substations. Their export cables may run separately from the two lease areas, or the lease areas may be joined offshore, with one substation and one central export cable, and, if you would like to see the entire proposed project, the whole unsolicited lease request, we do have that on BOEM's website, and so, if you would like a link to that, please reach out, and we can send that your way.

At this point, as I mentioned, at the end of July, we published a request for competitive interest for this unsolicited lease request to the Federal Register, and so what does that entail? What does an RFCI look like? We require that the RFCI contains a description of the areas that they're interested in, a map and blocks list, and any application and project background, which we do have available on our website.

At this point, a main point that we want to make sure that we hit today is that we are within our forty-five-day comment period, and so we ask that any comments that you have regarding the project, or the areas -- Please go to regulations.gov, and we've got the project number right there, and if's 2024-0039. Once you find that, you can submit your comment on the RFCI there.

After this forty-five-day public comment period, that is when we'll look at these comments, the proposed project, any impacts that we may need to consider, and, at that point, we'll determine competitive interest or noncompetitive interest.

As we mentioned before, one possible outcome of the RFCI would be competitive interest, and so this is the auction process that we are most familiar with, with a proposed sale notice, a sixty-day comment period, a final sale notice, and, finally, an auction.

Now, looking at the situation where there may be no competitive interest, and so another public notice would be published to the Federal Register, and this is called a Determination of No Competitive Interest, or DNCI, and so what happens next?

Last month, our modernization rule went into effect, at the middle of July, and this will now include BOEM providing a written estimate of our proposed fee, to pay for any processing costs, and so this would include environment review that we may require lease issuance. Now, while the EA, that final EA, that was published in 2023 does cover WEA Options C and D, any activities or impact-producing factors not covered in the final EA will require additional NEPA analysis.

After the DNCI, BOEM will also conduct environmental reviews, required by federal law, consult with federal agencies, federally recognized indigenous tribes, and state and local governments. Now, the company will be responsible for submitting any consistency certification and data and information for state CZMA agencies as well as to us at BOEM.

Now, after -- If BOEM does decide to move forward for issuance of a noncompetitive lease, this looks similar, if not equal to, what we're looking at with the offering of a competitive lease, and so, after we publish the DNCI, if we do decide to offer a noncompetitive lease, the lessee must accept all terms and conditions. If they do not accept these terms and conditions, we will not issue a lease, of course, and we will also not refund the acquisition fee, and the lessee must comply with all terms and conditions of the lease.

After ten days of receiving the lease, the company must execute and return the lease and file financial assurance, and so, with our modernization rule, that financial assurance is twelve months rent. Within forty-five calendar days after receiving a copy of the executed lease, the company must pay the first twelve months rent, which is three-dollars per acre per year. Once this process has been wrapped up, we will publish another final notice to the Federal Register announcing the issuance of the lease.

This graphic here shows our renewable energy leasing process from start to finish, and just to highlight here, in the leasing section, in blue, you can see there is a star that says "lease granted". At this point, for both competitive and noncompetitive leasing, the steps are the same after this, and so, between leasing and construction and operations, this process is the same.

Moving on to site assessment, and I know, just a little while ago, we discussed some of the communication plans, and we do require Native American tribes communications plans, agency communications plans, fisheries communications plans, and progress reports. Survey plans need to be reviewed by BOEM prior to any survey operations, and then we also require a preliminary period, with multiple survey mobilizations and purpose-specific activities.

This graphic shows an overview of our environmental review and approval process for a COP. Starting with COP submittal, BOEM will assess the submittal for completeness and sufficiency and start developing a schedule with the cooperating agencies. Over the next twenty-four months, we move into public scoping, drafting an EIS, and a final EIS. Then, finally, a record of decision and COP approval will be published, and so BOEM may decide to approve

the COP, approve with modifications, or disapprove the COP.

Just to wrap things up, just a reminder that we are accepting public comment at this time, and we certainly value your input, and so we ask that, if you do have comments that you would like to make on this RFCI, please do so in regulations.gov. We will need to receive those comments before September 12. Any late submissions may not be considered, and so please get your comments in as soon as you can, and that is all I have. I appreciate you guys listening. If you have any questions, feel free to email me, and you can also email renewableenergygomr@boem.gov, and anybody on our renewables leasing team can help you as well. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you. Any questions? Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Thank you, Ms. DiPerna. Good presentation, and I appreciate you coming through with the timeline for us, to at least explain how that works. Can you describe what actually a substation is, and is that an underwater structure where the cables go to, is or is it visibly above the surface of the water and located other than where the --

MS. DIPERNA: Within their proposal, they don't go too deep into what that will look like, but there are some details online, if you want to take a look, to take a look at that.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Williamson.

MR. WILLIAMSON: Thank you for your presentation. I'm curious about your previous sale, your auction, and I believe that RWE was the winner on that, and is that correct? If I recall correctly, it was something like $2 million that they bid for the lease, and does that equate to the acquisition cost? Is that the proper term for that?

MS. DIPERNA: So we do have to consider fair return, and so it can vary -- Lissa, did you want to chat about that? We don't have a final decision from our leadership yet, but --

MS. LYNCKER: Good morning. That's a great question, and so, for the last sale, I think it was about $5.6 million that RWE bid, and so the question is is that the acquisition fee for the potential unsolicited lease request? We do not have a final decision on what the acquisition fee will be, and so, right now, we have twenty-five cents an acre, and we are in further discussion with our leadership on what OCSLA requires, the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act. Just like for oil and gas, we require a fair return, and so we're in the process of figuring that out, and we don't

have those decisions yet, but that's a great -- That's an astute observation.

MR. WILLIAMSON: How does that twenty-five cents per acre equate to the $2 million that RWE paid?

MS. LYNCKER: I'm sorry?

MR. WILLIAMSON: The twenty-five cents per acre, what is the total for acquisition fee for the Hecate --

MS. LYNCKER: So it's about $35,000 for that twenty-five cents an acre, and so that's a big difference, between $5 million and $35,000.

MR. WILLIAMSON: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: I have Dave Donaldson, followed by Dr. Porch.

MR. DONALDSON: Thanks for the presentation. You mentioned that the comment period is open, and I was just curious. Can you tell us -- Have you received any comments, and how many you have, or can you not say that until the comment period is over? I was just curious.

MS. DIPERNA: At this time, we have three official comments. We do have one from Southern Shrimp Alliance, we which appreciate, that we're reviewing right now.

MR. DONALDSON: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Porch.

DR. PORCH: Thank you for the presentation. With respect to that unsolicited lease request, we spent a lot of effort, BOEM and NOAA, on marine spatial planning, and in those spatial suitability analyses, and, when I look at the grids that the unsolicited requests -- The C and D, I see a lot of them grade pretty high on the suitability analyses, and some of them not so high, and some of them include a considerable amount of shrimping effort, and so I'm wondering if there's much back and forth, if you would go back to the lease requester and say, well, some of these areas, yes, we would consider, and maybe others exclude, or is it kind of all or nothing?

MS. DIPERNA: We will be considering all the comments that we receive, and we have had comments from Southern Shrimp Alliance, and we've had other stakeholder comments, and so we absolutely

were starting with what we had when we were considering this proposal, but, yes, there will be opportunity for us to review and minimize impacts, and deconflict, and we're working out what the subsequent steps are on the process of working with -- We have to determine first if there is competitive interest and if there would be one company or if we need to move forward to doing a competitive process, but, if we determine there is no competitive interest, the next steps would be walking through the deconflicting part.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any other questions? Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks for being here, and it was great to talk to you last week. A more recent issue, at least for me, is concerns have been raised about a National Academies of Sciences study and the interference of wind turbines and energy with radar, marine radar, and can you speak to that a little bit more? I guess, you know, there's a lot of concerns that seem to be emerging, from our fishing industry, about those potential conflicts with marine radar.

MS. LYNCKER: I am not -- I was going to ask if any of my colleagues here have any information on that, and I'm not specifically -- I know we coordinate with DOD, for their radar efforts and their national security exercises, but, as far as fisheries -- Idrissa, do you know more?

MR. IDRISSA BOUBE: Just exactly what Lissa was saying. When we did the first NCCOS modeling effort with BOEM, we did consider the radar as a layer into our model, and so, as much data we've gotten with the radar, we use it with the models, and so, if we have any more data, we are willing to add it into the modeling, when we're doing the WEA C and D, or any other activity in the Gulf of Mexico.

MR. STRELCHECK: So I guess what I'm more asking is not so much the modeling and the efforts for deconfliction as much as is there a potential, you know, like safety-at-sea issue here, if, you know, wind energy development disrupts the use of marine radar for commercial and recreational fishing vessels, or any other vessels, and I just am not familiar with the science, and this is something that's being brought to the Fisheries Service's attention.

MS. LYNCKER: Well, we definitely appreciate hearing that today, and it's something that we've noted, and we will make sure to talk to NCCOS and see if they have additional data on that, or if there's an opportunity to meet with -- To obtain more information, and we're certainly open to do that.

MR. BOUBE: Also, like during the lease also, we will have a lot

of consultations that we can be doing, and so we probably are going to be taking a look at the COP stage.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any other questions? Not seeing any, thank you all for coming and being here and providing additional information. We appreciate it.

MS. LYNCKER: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Next on the agenda is a presentation from Mississippi Law Enforcement Efforts, Tab A, Number 9, and Sergeant Carron. Good morning, sir.

MISSISSIPPI LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS

LT. PATRICK CARRON: Good morning. Patrick Carron, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. I have a brief presentation to go over our federal enforcement efforts thus far this year. Our joint enforcement agreement covers several priorities and general enforcement.

For turtle excluder devices, our primary priority, we conducted 432 at-sea patrol hours and sixty-five hours of dockside patrols. Our next priority is recreational reef fish, and we conducted 192 at-sea patrol hours and sixty hours of dockside patrols. For the individual fishing quota priority, we are going to be conducting 124 hours of dockside patrols, and, for Lacey Act and IUU fishing, we're going to be conducting 118 hours of dockside patrols, and, general enforcement, we're going to be conducting 492 hours of at-sea patrols and 120 hours of dockside patrols. Do you have any questions or concerns?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any questions for Sergeant Carron? General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Well, first off, I would like to thank you and every one of our Department of Marine Resources for the State of Mississippi. You all are doing an outstanding job. I want you all to know that they finished the 4th of July weekend, which is huge for us and everything, with zero fatalities, and that's the first time I've seen that in a long time, that we've had anything like that, with the numbers of boats we have, with the beautiful water and everything else, and it's because of your diligence out there, and the Coast Guard working hand-in-hand with us, and we thank you all very much.

LT. CARRON: Thank you very much, sir. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Sergeant Carron. We appreciate it. All right, and so we added to the agenda, earlier, the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement Report, Tab R, 2(a) and (b), and we have Officer Forehand here. Good morning, sir.

NOAA OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT REPORT

MR. THOMAS FOREHAND: Good morning. How are you all? My name is Thomas Forehand, and I am the enforcement officer for NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, based out of Louisiana. I'm going to give you our quarter enforcement update.

Within the last quarter, NOAA OLE has opened up 150 incidents. We opened up 150 opened incidents within the Gulf of Mexico, and there were 262 that encompassed the Southeast Division, and that encompasses some of the Atlantic side of well. Five cases within the Gulf were referred to General Counsel and U.S. DOJ, including illegal charters and sanctuary-related violations.

Thirty summary settlements have been processed, ranging from a $100 penalty to a $2,000 penalty, ranging from retention during closure and IFQ program violations. 277 patrols have been conducted by NOAA OLE, and this encompasses air, sea, and land-based patrols. 33 percent of these incidents have been closed as no violation or compliance assistance.

Some of the enforcement highlights from this last quarter that OLE has focused on are seafood imports, and this ranges from port inspections, the Port of Mobile, Port of New Orleans, places like that, to along the southern border. One of the case highlights involved a Chinese national smuggling sea cucumbers across the southern border, and this was brought to NOAA OLE's attention through joint with CBP and HIS.

Outreach and awareness, continued outreach surrounding the Flower Gardens National Marine Sanctuary and the regs surrounding that expansion from several years ago. Of national attention, we processed a reward involving an illegal take with dolphin in western Louisiana.

OLE also participated in a joint fishing trip for military families out of Houston, Texas. That was put on by Texas Parks and the Flower Gardens Marine Sanctuary. It helped take military families, children, on a fishing trip, explaining species, baiting hooks, things like that.

Training and patrols, OLE has been active in providing training, and training assistance, through our partners at GRFTC in New

Orleans, along with some of the state partners, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Florida, and this has included international work with our partners in the Bahamas and the Caribbean, ensuring that relationship is good and working, with the vessels that transit back and forth.

Patrols, we are continuously patrolling with our partners, along with our own agents. This includes joint patrols with Texas, LDWF, Mississippi Marine, Alabama Marine, and FWC.

Enforcement partnership and referrals, partnership with the states and the Coast Guard, all along the Gulf and the Atlantic, and, in this last quarter, we have had ninety-one enforcement referrals, and this encompasses the entire SED within -- This includes seventy-seven from FWC, two from the U.S. Coast Guard, four cases from LDWF, and one from Texas Parks. The diagram there shows the locations of those referrals.

Some of the OLE targeted operations over the last quarter were a TED operation in the Florida Keys, and that was the work of OLE, our gear management team, FWC, and the U.S. Coast Guard. The gear management team provided training for our partners down there, and we conducted a multi-vessel patrol in the Gulf, targeting the shrimp fleet and TED enforcement, and this resulted in numerous violations.

An illegal charter operation out of the Florida Panhandle focused on the area from the Madison-Swanson, and it involved multiple vessels between OLE and FWC.

The current spotlight, we're just finishing up -- OLE had a large presence in the Florida Keys, in the national marine sanctuary, surrounding the mini lobster season down there. We had six boat crews, working jointly with FWC, Coast Guard, and the Refuge Service, enforcing the rules, and we focused on the sanctuary and the protected areas within the sanctuary down there, no-take zones and no-access zones. Rough seas were tough, for the first couple of days, but it resulted in numerous contacts, lots of education provided, and several violations. This also includes groundings, and we dealt with a couple of those in the sanctuary down there.

As always, our enforcement hotline is available twenty-four-seven, and we just ask for complete information with those complaints. Any questions for me?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any questions? Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Can we go back to the map that was shown earlier

in the presentation? You may not know the answer to this, but I was just struck by the number of referrals for the South Atlantic Florida east coast, compared to the entire Gulf of Mexico, and do you have any insights on that?

MR. FOREHAND: I don't have any insights on that, and that might be a question for somebody else within my agency, but we can get back to you on that.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: A similar, I guess, topic, or question, related to do you all have any information on like the percentage of referrals per contact, or anything like, or, you know, number of referrals per trip, patrol?

MR. FOREHAND: When it comes from percentage of contacts through our JEA partners that result in referrals?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Yes, and, again, just to kind of keep an idea as to how many folks are in violation over time, so you can kind of monitor that.

MR. FOREHAND: I don't have those numbers when it comes from contacts that come from JEA patrols that result in referrals. That can be something we can pass up, and we can get that information to the council, if it's there.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: I appreciate it. Any other questions? Not seeing any. Go ahead.

UNIDENTIFIED: On behalf of Alabama and Mississippi, I would just like to say you're welcome. We had the least amount of events.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: I noticed that too, but I didn't want to say anything. Anyway, we appreciate it. We appreciate all the efforts that you do, and all of your fellow officers did. We appreciate it.

MR. FOREHAND: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Okay, and so that concludes all we had written for Full Council before lunch, but we did add the presentation to be given by Dr. Porch on the SEAFish Survey, and, Dr. Porch, do you think you would be able to do that now?

DR. PORCH: Yes, I think I can pull that up, if I can share my screen.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: If you need, we do have some time, and we've got

forty minutes until our scheduled lunch, if you want a few minutes to get ready.

DR. PORCH: Sure.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Okay. Let's take a short break then, five or so minutes, and then we'll come back.

(Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Okay. We're going to reconvene Full Council. Those that are having discussions, if you can finish them up or take them outside the room, please. All right, and so, Dr. Porch, you're going to show us the SEAFish survey visualizer.

SOUTHEAST ABUNDANCE OF FISH AND SHRIMP DATA VISUALIZER

DR. PORCH: Yes, and thank you very much, Chair. As many of you are aware, a priority of NOAA, and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, is to make our data more available to our stakeholders and easier for them to obtain, easier for them to look at, and some of our most influential, and important, data comes from our resource surveys, and so those are the things that we do in partnership with Gulf States' SEAMAP program, and some of it is collected from the great big white ships, and some of it is collected from smaller vessels, some of it from our commercial fishing partners, et cetera, and we wanted to make this all available.

We talked about how we generate relative indices of abundance from these surveys that are used in our stock assessments and interim analyses, to interpolate ABC advice in between stock assessments, and all sorts of uses, and so, in that regard, I'm super excited that we've taken a first big step to make that data available, and that's the Southeast Abundance of Fish and Shrimp data visualizer, the SEAFish visualizer.

I have it pulled up here on the big screen, and we'll see if this will move in real time, and it doesn't seem to respond as quick as my screen, but I have an example here for brown shrimp in the Gulf of Mexico, and you can easily see the trends from our SEAMAP survey. I will scroll up here and see if it will show the SEAMAP fall groundfish survey that we run, and here you can see the trends in that data, the abundance trends from 1987 to 2003, and the solid lines with dots are the actual index of relative abundance, and then the dashed lines are the 95 percent confidence interval, and here you can see those confidence intervals are rather narrow, because it's a survey that targets shrimp, and we get a lot of shrimp.

This just tells you basically how many shrimp there have been out there, in the relative sense, from 1987 to 2003, and you can see it's actually been fairly stable, with some ups and downs, but you can look at virtually all the species that we have good indices of abundance for, and it's very easy to click on that, and you just go -- For instance, let's say I want to look at groupers, and I click on "groupers", and I can look at black sea bass trends. This is from our South Atlantic trap-video survey, and you can see, in this case, we're getting very sharp declines in late juveniles and adults.

I can switch and say, okay, maybe I want to look at gag grouper, and maybe I want to look in the Gulf of Mexico here, and you can see, from our SEAMAP reef fish video survey, the trends in adults, where they were very high before 2005, and you have the big drop, and then it's kind of been bouncing along here, and it's pretty low in 2016, and then has been increasing a little bit.

This one, because it's the video survey, we haven't been able to fully update it yet for this display, but that will be coming fairly quickly, but the point is that you can look at virtually all the species that we have, and get an idea of what their stock trends are, and so a lot of this information would be the very information that we would give to the SSC if they wanted to do an interim analysis and update the catch advice.

I can look at a few other species for you, and click on let's say -- Let's go with red snapper, and so here we can see the SEAMAP fall groundfish survey, and so these are very young juveniles caught in our groundfish survey, the same one that gets the shrimp, and then we can look at the plankton survey, and somebody mentioned the plankton surveys earlier, and, yes, we do have one that gives the abundance of eggs and larvae of red snapper, and you can see that has generally been increasing through time.

The SEAMAP reef fish video survey, again, you can see pretty remarkable increases since the 1990s, and then we have the SEAMAP summer groundfish survey, and, again, those are very young juveniles, age-zeros and ones, and then you have the bottom longline survey, which is one of the more influential surveys in our stock assessments, and so you can do that for virtually all the species, get an idea of pretty close to real-time trends. It will be updated, obviously, much more frequently than stock assessments, and, you know, it's just at your fingertips at any time.

The only other thing that I would point out here is -- Well, one,

I want to give thanks to our team that put this together, both with the Office of Science and Technology and our staff at the Southeast Fisheries Science Center. There is nothing like this in the rest of the country yet, and so we're pioneers here.

We did also add, for your convenience, a little tab here with species profiles for each of these species, and so, if you want to learn a little bit more about the biology, you can click on that, and it's, for whatever reason, not going to the site now, but I tested it this morning and -- There it goes. You can see that it will tell you more about the species in question, and so that's all I have for you, but, again, we're super excited, and that's our first installment in making data more available to the council, and all stakeholders, and we hope to do that with many other data streams in the future. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Dr. Porch. Very nice work that your staff has done to put this together. It kind of brings -- It brings the discussions more alive, and it makes that data very accessible, and it's very good. I do have one question for you, or consideration, and that is another aspect of data that is important when you look at it, particularly over a time series, is the number of samples, and is there any way to attach, either through the interactive portion of each of the individual points or through a separate chart that shows the number of samples that are collected, that represent the points?

DR. PORCH: Yes, and, as a matter of fact -- We didn't show it graphically, but what we did do was put a link to the SEDAR working paper, and so those who are more interested in all those details, how the sampling is done, how many sample sizes, they can click on that link, and so you'll see here, for fall groundfish survey juveniles, there's a SEDAR working paper.

I can click on that, and it will pull up red snapper abundance indices, and, from there, you can look at -- I won't go through all the details, but exactly how it's generated and then the -- I am probably making you dizzy, scrolling through that fact, but here is, for instance, Table 1, and number of stations sampled, by Shrimp Statistical Zone, during that survey.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Very good. Thank you. Do we have any other questions or comments? I am not seeing any. Thanks again. That was very nice to see. Next, we have a few minutes before our scheduled lunchbreak, and so I went ahead and took the liberty to ask our South Atlantic liaison, Gary, to provide a summary, or an update, of what's going on over in the South Atlantic. Gary.

SOUTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL LIAISON REPORT

MR. BORLAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. For those of you that don't know me, Gary Borland. I sit on the South Atlantic Fisheries Council, representing the great state of South Carolina. I appreciate the welcoming I've had here. I appreciate you all welcoming me to this meeting.

I want to give you a quick update of what we did at the June South Atlantic Fisheries meeting in Daytona Beach. It happened on June 10 through 14, and one of the first agenda items was the SEFHIER, Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting, and the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program has been undertaking a for-hire methodology technical review, with goals that include more fully utilizing for-hire logbooks, MRIP catch statistics, and setting specifications that allow Atlantic coast logbook programs to be used and certified for design requirements.

The council received an overview, and council staff then reviewed information requested from the March meeting, as well as options to potentially obtain higher compliance with SEFHIER. The council directed staff to initiate a SEFHIER improvement amendment, considering the ACCSP project and actions and alternatives that the council is considering.

The council also approved a charge for an ad hoc for-hire reporting AP and gave staff additional guidance to advertise seats for this AP. The council intends to make AP appointments at the September meeting.

The next was a for-hire limited entry amendment, and the council received a summary of comments on requested control dates of December 5, 2023 and December 8, 2023, as well as an overview of possible options for a moratorium on for-hire permits and elements of a limited-access program. The council decided to postpone further development of the amendment pending resolution of an issue with the NMFS Southeast Regional Office permits system that is preventing data from being obtained and used in developing the amendment. In the meantime, the council will work on a purpose and need statement for the amendment, developing a discussion of OY in the context of limiting access in for-hire fisheries, and obtaining additional input from appropriate APs.

The next agenda item was a snapper grouper amendment for wreckfish, Amendment 48. The council completed work on this amendment, which was initiated to respond to a review of the IFQ program. The review found that the program has been relatively successful, although there is still room for improvement, particularly moving

away from a coupon-based program and into an electronic program, cost recovery, wreckfish permit allocation issues, and monitoring and enforcement. The council approved Amendment 48 for formal review.

The next item was private recreational permitting. The council reviewed input from the Snapper Grouper Permitting and Reporting Technical AP, Private Angler AP, and Outreach and Communications AP. The council decided to postpone development of the amendment until December 2024, pending discussion of the planned MRIP revisioning and improvements to the program at the September 2024 meeting.

Additionally, the council intends to obtain more information from NMFS on potential measures that can be taken to improve recreational data, available tools to improve such data, and sources for dedicated funds to support education and outreach. The council will also consider preliminary information on red snapper exempted fishing permits and requests feedback from FWC on how the State Reef Fish Survey could be modified to accommodate a federal permit requirement.

The next agenda was black sea bass management, Amendment 56, and Amendment 56 responds to the SEDAR 76 stock of black sea bass, which indicates the stock is depleted. NMFS sent a letter on May 30, 2024, indicating that black sea bass will continue to be listed as not overfished and not overfishing, pending the adoption of new status determination criteria that have been recommended by the assessment panel and endorsed by the SSC.

Council staff presented the information requested at a previous meeting and updated the committee on additional assessment model projections being developed by the SEFSC, which will be reviewed by the SSC at their August 2024 webinar meeting. These projections could affect the SSC's acceptable biological catch recommendation for black sea bass, affecting catch level options that could be considered in the amendment.

The council requested additional projections from the SEFSC that incorporate a phase-in approach and projections that would allocate total yield and subtract sector discards from the allocated yields. The council also directed staff on initial regulations beyond catch level changes that should be considered during scoping, approved the amendment for scoping, and directed scoping meetings to be conducted following the September 2024 meeting.

The last item, headboat and black grouper regulations, the council

considered recommendations from the Snapper Grouper AP, as well as public comment, regarding different regulations for headboats. To inform future discussions, the council directed staff to develop a report exploring current recreational regulations for snapper grouper species and potential ways in which headboat-specific regulations could be feasible.

Additionally, the council will explore potential different regulations for black grouper in south Florida. The council intends to engage in discussion regarding headboats in December and address any changes to black grouper regulations in March of 2025. That concludes my report from the South Atlantic Council.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Mr. Borland. Any questions? Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Thank you, Mr. Borland. I'm just curious about the private recreational permitting concept. I see that you guys postponed development of your Amendment 46, pending discussion of the planned MRIP revisioning, and so does that mean that, if they fix MRIP, you don't feel like you need a recreational permit program, or are those not as related as I'm reading it, and any other information you could give us on the discussions on private recreational permitting.

MR. BORLAND: I would answer that as saying that the council is trying to -- You know, we all want to try to understand the universe of recreational fishermen that's fishing off the Atlantic coast, and, you know, obviously, exploring ways to try to understand that universe, and, obviously, the amount of effort that we don't know, right, and there's a lot of different ideas there, and I think the private recreational reporting permit was a way to which -- A vehicle to which to try to determine some of that. Connection with MRIP, I'm not sure it was connected directly, and I think that got tabled because of that.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any other questions? I am not seeing any. Thank you again. We have just a few minutes left, and, in order to try to maximize our time here, I have asked Lieutenant Morton, from the Coast Guard, to give his presentation, and so Lieutenant Morton.

U.S. COAST GUARD REPORT

LT. MORTON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I understand that I'm standing between everyone and lunch, and so I will try to keep it brief. This being my first council meeting, I'm also new to the area, and new to the position, and I would like to express my appreciation

for the opportunity to represent the Coast Guard here at the Gulf Council.

The Coast Guard's District 8 area of responsibility is fairly large, as we see from the map here. We cover most of the Mississippi and western rivers. When it comes to Gulf fisheries, D8's responsibility is the majority of the Gulf, but it is important to know that on the eastern edge there of the west coast of the Florida Peninsula, that's actually D7's area of responsibility. If you have any questions regarding that area, you can contact me, and I will get you in touch with the right people over there at D7.

For the Gulf fisheries for the Coast Guard, one of our most resource-intensive operations is our Exclusive Economic Zone enforcement, particularly combatting IUU fishing from foreign-flagged fishing vessels, poaching mainly red snapper here in the Gulf, and this is occurring mainly off the State of Texas, the western edge. As you can see from the breakdown of yearly interdictions, we're currently sitting at about fifty, and that's almost 12,000 pounds of snapper seized thus far.

The Coast Guard is experiencing some personnel shortages, and so those numbers have been on sort of a downward trend there, but it's not necessarily meaning that there is fewer lanchas coming into our EEZ, but it's just that we don't have as many resources that we're able to dedicate to the mission.

We would also like to stress that assessing how much red snapper is being caught is very difficult. We don't interdict every single vessel that we detect, and we don't detect every single vessel that's fishing in here. We try our best, but it's difficult, and, also, when we interdict a vessel that doesn't have any fishing gear onboard, usually that would mean that the fishing gear is still out there somewhere, unfortunately, and we have seen that our Coast Guard cutters have routinely recovered longlines, which is the main gear used, and that can be very, very long.

We're currently -- We're always engaging with our partners in Mexico, to help deter this illegal fishing, and we're currently working on more targeted enforcement operations, to hopefully become more efficient at this.

For domestic fisheries this year, we're sitting right at about the same number of boardings that we've done in previous years, and some of the most common violations that we've seen revolve around bar spacing on our turtle excluder devices, as well as improper use of bycatch reduction devices. Through this year, we've seen

a higher increase in 75/25 violations, regarding the citizenship requirements for unlicensed seamen on commercial vessels, particularly in our Houston-Galveston AOR, and, as always, we're looking to continue building our partnerships with NOAA OLE and our state law enforcement agencies.

One of our other operations that we do here in the Gulf is marine protected resources, particularly a lot of entangled turtles, and also whale sightings. We're sitting at four requests for assistance this year, up from previous years, and we're always, on the water, looking to educate the public, do community outreach, and we're willing and able to respond to additional requests for marine protected resources sightings and responses. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. We have a question from Dr. Banks.

DR. BANKS: Thank you so much for that information. You say, with the IUU fishing, that you had some personnel shortages, and so we're seeing a lower interdiction rate, and are you also seeing a lower detection rate? Has that changed? I have a follow-up after that.

LT. MORTON: Thank you for the question. The detection rate remains about the same, but, like you said, we actually lost a Coast Guard cutter due to fire, a couple of years back, and so that shrinks our capabilities a little bit, but we are trying to increase cooperation with both Texas state agencies as well as hopefully, again, with Mexico, more cooperation with them, to help deter this.

DR. BANKS: My follow-up question is are you starting to see activity shift further offshore, as they're able to -- I have a little insider information, due to the fact that I'm on the border, and lanchas can see when you have certain assets, and they may decide that's not the day to run, versus another day, and so are you starting to see that they shift offshore, where that access may not be as effective?

LT. MORTON: Thank you for that question. Without going into too many specifics, it's always a cat-and-mouse game, right? We update our tactics, and then the illegal fishing will update their tactics, and so we always try to adapt as best as we can.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any other questions? General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: First off, Lieutenant, thank you all so much. We really enjoy working with the Coast Guard in Mississippi, and you all have been very instrumental in a lot of things with us in

the last few years, and we thank you for that. I know that, not just with the fisheries side, but safety, and you all have been instrumental to help us a lot with the safety and what's going on out there and being able to respond when we have someone in disaster or whatever. You've got helicopters in the air, and you've got boats in the water, headed with us, and thank you very much. We appreciate what you do.

LT. MORTON: Thank you. Being in the Coast Guard, one of our top priorities is safety and search and rescue, and we're always on Channel 16, and so, if you're in trouble, let us know.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Thank you, Lieutenant Morton. Thanks again. We appreciate it. All right, and so that will take us, I think, to our break. As I mentioned earlier, we do have a photo that we need to take with the council members, and so we're going to meet in the back of the room, right near the entrance to the room, or right there in the corner, and we'll be back and ready to start with public comment at 1:30.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on August 21, 2024.)

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August 21, 2024

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

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The Full Council of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council reconvened at The Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi on Wednesday afternoon, August 21, 2024, and was called to order by Chairman Kevin Anson.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Okay, everyone. We're going to get started with public testimony. Good afternoon. Public input is a vital part of the council's deliberative process, and comments, both oral and written, are accepted and considered by the council throughout the process.

The Sustainable Fisheries Act requires that all statements include a brief description of the background and interests of the person, or persons, in the subject of the statement. All written information shall include a statement of the source and date of such information.

Oral or written communications provided to the council, its

members, or its staff that relate to matters within the council's purview are public in nature. Please give any written comments to the staff, as all written comments will be posted on the council's website for viewing by council members and the public and will be maintained by the council as part of the permanent record.

Knowingly and willfully submitting false information to the council is a violation of federal law. We will welcome public comment from in-person and virtual attendees. Anyone joining us virtually that wishes to speak during public comment should have already registered online. Virtual participants that are registered to comment should ensure that they are registered for the webinar under the same name they used to register to speak. In-person attendees wishing to speak during public comment should sign-in at the registration kiosk located in the back of the meeting room. We accept only one registration per person.

Each speaker is allowed three minutes for their public testimony. Please note the timer lights on the podium or on the webinar. They will be green for the first two minutes and will blink yellow for the final minute of testimony. At three minutes, the red light will appear, and a buzzer may be enacted. Time allowed to dignitaries providing testimony is extended at the discretion of the Chair.

If you have a cellphone or similar device, we ask that you keep them on silent or vibrating mode during the meeting. Also, for all to be able to hear the proceedings, we ask that you have any private conversations outside the meeting room. Please note that public comment may end before the published agenda time if all registered in-person and virtual participants have completed their comment. While we are waiting for the list to come up, I would like to recognize two previous council members in the audience, and that would be David Walker, there in the back. Stand up, David. We appreciate it. It's nice to see you. Thanks for coming. Then our second prior council member, also from Alabama, is Johnny Greene. Since you're standing up, Johnny, could you come -- I understand that you have some comments, and so could you come and provide your comments now?

PUBLIC COMMENT

MR. JOHNNY GREENE: Well, it sure is nice being on this side of the podium. I've said it for six years, but I sat up there for nine years, and welcome to the new council members. It's nice to see some old friends and some smiling faces around, and so I don't really have a lot to lose, and so I'm just going to kind of you what I'm seeing on the water.

I've been in the business since 1987, and I run anywhere from 150 to 200 days a year offshore, primarily bottom fishing, but I do a lot of offshore fishing for tuna and blue marlin and different things, and so the first thing I can tell you that I saw, back in the spring, is the groupers didn't run. Normally, they will make a move in March. Around the 15th, they will make a move, and it didn't happen this year. I don't know why, but it didn't happen.

The second thing I'm going to tell you is that snapper fishing is down across-the-board. I cover -- I'm a big boat, and I cover a lot of ground, and it doesn't matter if you're in close, and it doesn't matter how far west you go, or how far east you go, and it doesn't matter if you've got super-secret spots, or super-secret areas. It is what it is.

Earlier this year, in June, I took a picture of my bottom machine, because I just really didn't think it was correct, because it showed water temperature on the surface at ninety-three degrees, and so I went back through my logbooks that I keep, all the way back to 1988, which is nothing more than a notebook, where I just keep my basic notes in it, with what I caught, and who I have, and I didn't have anything that showed water temperature -- Not even close to that, ever, for me, which is a big deal.

So I do a lot of offshore fishing, and that affects the tunas and blue marlins, but the bottom fish as well, and you think, well, that's on the surface. Well, it is, but it also relates down, and I don't know what the actual water temperature is on the bottom, but there's some correction here, and I don't know exactly what it is.

There's some areas that me and Captain Walker, who you mentioned earlier, like to fish, and I see his boats in there from time to time, and they're pretty good areas to fish, to fish around, and so, being part of some studies in the past, and taking a camera and running it down on a spot, and I realized that there was nothing on the spot. Nothing. Nothing but the spot.

I moved a couple of miles, and there's fish everywhere, and I have no idea why. I think it may be some type of low oxygen and high water temperature, but think of fishery issues that we're dealing with as further down the road than effort. I think it may be water temperature. There's some other phenomenon that we're battling here, and I don't know what it is, but I just want to relay these things to you, but I don't know -- Normally I don't like to give a statement if I don't have a plausible solution or an idea, and that's why I say that I've just come here with some comments, and

some observations, because I really don't know what to tell you, and so that's really all I've got for you. Good luck.

New council members, you have a heck of a staff over there, that will help you do anything that you ask them, and there's a lot of good people at the table. Don't take it personal if they disagree with you. It is what it is. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Captain Greene, and, just to provide some information, the Dauphin Island Seal Lab, the University of South Alabama, in our neck of the woods, you know, goes out, and they sample, and they've been collecting water quality this year, and they have documented several areas, pockets if you will, off of Alabama that have had lower than normal dissolved oxygen concentrations at the bottom, and, you know, there is a correlation between water temperature and the ability for water to hold oxygen, and, as the water gets warmer, it has less of an ability to do so, and so there might be some synergies going on there, but, anyways, the researchers there at Dauphin Island Sea Lab have been documenting that, and so there might be -- As you hit upon it, there might be a reason why you see some fish in one area and not in another, but thank you for coming, and thank you for your comments. Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Thanks, Johnny. I think I kind of know the answer to this, but so you're pretty well convinced that a large part of the missing fish is environmental and not from being fished down, and, like you said, you've got some areas that you go that probably don't get fished as much, and they're not there either, and so you think, in your experience, it's not just fishing pressure that is contributing to this?

MR. GREENE: I believe so. I mean, you've been a fisherman for a long time, Ed, and you've got a pile of world records, and all the accolades, and you know the deal. You know how it is. There's areas that you just know, and you can feel it, and there's not a lot of pressure, and, when those fish disappear, they didn't just get caught. I mean, you know what I'm talking about, and I know you're speaking to the bigger group of people at the table, and the people listening online, but it's a gut feeling.

It's one of those things that I think fishermen have, and I normally don't generalize comments much, but it's one of those things, that there is something else at play, and I don't know what it is, and it keeps me awake at night, because normally I'm a -- I'm a little bit of smart guy, and I can kind of figure things out, but this is one that I lay in bed thinking about, and I don't know what the answer is, Ed, but it's that feeling that you get

when you know.

MR. WALKER: Thank you, sir.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Captain Greene. Again, nice to see you. Okay, and so we're going to go first to the list of those that are in the audience, and we have Mr. Larry Marino, and then we'll go to our virtual attendees next.

MR. LAWRENCE MARINO: Good afternoon. My name is Larry Marino, and I'm here on behalf of Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrell. Amendment 59 is trying to reduce sharecropping, by imposing requirements for shareholders to obtain, or retain, shares. Action 2 would require active participation, and such a requirement is essential to get at the sharecropping problem, but the current approach to the participation requirement treats it as a binary thing. Fishermen either or aren't active, depending on whether they do or don't fish a threshold percentage of their shares.

In order to truly get at sharecropping, instead of a threshold to determine activity, the requirement should focus on the shares and whether they are sharecropped or used by the shareholder. Active participation should be a proportional analysis, where shareholders lose all shares they don't fish, except allowing a relatively small grace amount to account for problems in individual circumstances. Instead of a threshold of 25 percent to keep all shares, the 25 percent should be the grace amount that they can keep, even if they don't fish those shares.

It's reasonable to allow leeway in other ways, too, like average participation over two or three years. Have a hardship waiver provision. Hardship could be determined by NMFS, or an objective body, using an objective standard, and it could be defined as physical inability to land the fish during that year, due to circumstances beyond the reasonable control of a shareholder, such as medical conditions, mechanical problems, natural disasters, or failure of the entire commercial fishery for the relative share category to land its full quota. That last one was the scaling principle that was discussed a fair bit yesterday. No more than a certain number of waivers should be allowed within say a five-year program, one or two, or maybe three.

The active fishing participation requirement should be about type of share, and not by entire account, because fishing one species doesn't justify sharecropping another.

Now, in order to get around any activity requirement, shareholders may try to sell or trade shares back and forth amongst themselves,

including to affiliated shareholders. To prevent that kind of share trading, shareholders who sell their shares should be prohibited from repurchasing shares in that same category until expiration of the inactivity period, whatever you all choose it to be, and, to implement that, there should be mandatory reporting of sales and prices and full transparency on the website.

In-season adjustments have to be excluded from the calculation, and the same thing would go for shares purchased during the season, and it's okay to give NMFS time to review the data and make decisions without rushing it, with a decision becoming effective say the first of the next calendar year, or the next fishing year, because the goal is to get things right and not to get them done instantly.

Pending an appeal, and there would have to be appeals, a shareholder should be prohibited from selling the shares that were deemed inactive. In the meantime, they ought to be able to fish the shares, or to transfer them, but for either no compensation or with the compensation dedicated to a charity or placed in escrow until the matter is resolved.

Finally, Action 5, regarding divestment measures, which was in the prior version of this presentation, seemed to be missing this time around, and it needs to be restored, in order to provide a timeframe for this amendment to go into effect. It should also, of course, be expanded to include inactive shares, under the revised Action 2 that we just discussed, as well as the permit requirement under Action 1. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you. Any questions? I am not seeing any. Thank you, Larry. All right. Next, we'll have, on virtual, Zack Istre.

MR. ZACK ISTRE: I was just going to say that it's a good thing that -- We need to let the people have quota, like we're working for, for the fishermen, and, to actual maintain it, you need to be fishing some of your quota. Then maybe possibly figuring out some way of mandatory reporting on the price, like the guy just said before, and possibly doing like a cap of a percentage of the market value of what the fish is. That might help bring the cost down for all the guys that are actually fishing, and to be able to stay in this, and there's a lot of us that are struggling right now, and just kind of staying in the fishery, because we can't afford to get quota and pay for everything else. Thank you, guys.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Zack, are you still there? Zack, I think we lost you, if you can hear us.

MR. ISTRE: I can hear you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Okay. We can hear you again. Are you finished?

MR. ISTRE: Yes, sir. I don't know what all you guys were able to hear, and maybe I broke up, but that was it.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Okay. We have at least one question for you. Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Thanks, Zack. Just to clarify, you're a commercial reef fisherman, and you support the permit requirement for commercial fishermen?

MR. ISTRE: Yes, sir, I do. I'm a commercial reef fish fisherman that spearfishes and sees the fish under the water, every trip we go.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Thank you, Zack. Next, we have Ken Haddad. I'm sorry. Ron Chicola. I'm still trying to master reading. Sorry about that, Ron.

MS. LAURA CHICOLA: I am not Ronald Chicola. Good afternoon. Many of you already know me. My name is Laura Chicola, and I own J&B Fisheries, LLC, and, this morning, one of the staff members asked me how to get more input from the fishermen. My answer was, the last year, they were only about the EEJ strategy, and that nothing was returned but more trouble. Another year has passed with no real results.

Mr. Tom said yesterday that they cannot take shares from the shareholders that they bought, because they would lose money, but he didn't say anything about me, and many other fishermen, that pay the sea lords the privilege to work. I personally have paid over $5 million in the last six years, and where is our sympathy? The sad part is that they have NOAA to enforce it and truthfully working for them.

One more time, I have been naïve, thinking that real changes were coming, and I see that is not happening. Time, for you, doesn't mean anything, but, for us, it means everything, and we can lose everything that we have worked so hard for. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you. All right. That will take us to virtual. Steve Rash.

MR. STEVE RASH: Hello. My name is Steve Rash, and I own Water

Street Seafood in Apalachicola, Florida. I've been in the fishing business for over forty years. First, I would like to disagree with the politician from Louisiana. The quota system is pretty effective, and it's working pretty well. Some people have them, and some people don't, and that's life.

I buy quota, or rent quota. I lease quota to distribute to the fishermen that fish for us, because they don't have quota, and they don't have the means, or the financial resources, to obtain quota, and so I'm not doing it for profit. I'm doing it to provide the fishermen quota that they can catch.

The next point is red snapper is in decline. Everybody knows it, and I heard that the council might be recommending raising the quota. You raised the quota on red grouper, when the fish were disappearing, and you raised the quota in the snapper, two years ago, when the fishermen begged you not to raise the quota. You cut the quota 80 percent on gag grouper, when the gag grouper populations were exploding and rebounding tremendously, and I don't know where these decisions come from, but they seem the opposite of what should happen. The process is broken. Management is not effective. Management is actually destroying the fishery.

A two-fish bag limit in red snapper is creating horrendous amounts of discards, and probably three fish are killed for every one fish that's brought to the dock by a recreational fisherman. At least three fish are killed, and you refuse to do anything about it. A descender device, and, oh, that's the response? It's a joke. You need to change the bag limit to an amount of fish, so that fishermen are not enticed to throw fish back.

They're not incentivized to throw fish back. Once they catch a certain amount of fish, they're done. There is no reason to throw twenty pounds of fish back to catch another twenty pounds of fish, and, in actuality, if you do that, fishermen are going to be able to keep more fish, instead of throwing them back and feeding them to the dolphins and sharks and the crabs.

Please listen. I've been doing this forty years. I've been coming to council meetings for forty years and making public comment. I've watched commercial fishermen make public comment, and generally they're ignored, and the management process goes on with whatever cockamamie path they choose to follow. It's a political process now, and science has very little to do with it. Everybody knows what's going on.

The politician from Louisiana is a CCA spokesman. I'm not against recreational fishermen at all. Recreational fishermen should be

able to keep more fish, because there's more fish available, if management was on target and did what they should do. Please, please do something about discards. We're turning our entire fishery, grouper and snapper, into discard fisheries, and we're killing way more fish, and throwing them back, than what we're bringing to the dock. Please do something about it.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Mr. Rash. Next, we have Ken Haddad.

MR. KEN HADDAD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and council members. First, I want to welcome the new council members, and thank you for picking up the mantle, and I will remind you that you must be out of your minds.

I am with the American Sportfishing Association, the trade organization for the sportfishing industry. I'm going to talk around Reef Fish Amendment 58, but focus on highlighting some of the bigger issues that have been of concern to us for quite a while.

Several meetings ago, you passed a motion stating you would not make new allocations until the FES study on survey biases was completed. At the time, we felt this motion created an apples-and-oranges situation, but accepting the use of FES conversions is stock assessments, but ignoring that allocation must go through the same conversion. Based on feedback on our concerns, we understood the motion to be largely irrelevant, other than delaying some schedules in the allocation review process.

While Amendment 58 may seem insignificant, the allocation actions you take on shallow and deepwater grouper will have implications for the rec sector, and, at a minimum reinforce the confusion, and the belief, that the FES conversion should not include concurrent allocation conversions, and so, once again, we ask that you consider passing a motion to rescind that allocation motion, and we're simply asking that you legitimately discuss allocation during conversions and make your decisions based on both FES-converted stock assessments and allocations and not leave allocations in the now irrelevant MRFSS-CHTS data.

We would like to see the decisions made on a case-by-case basis and have a defensible rationale behind those decisions, and so it's a pretty simple request.

Looking at Amendment 58, it's not a huge deal to us in the rec sector, but it's important. It not only highlights what is wrong with the motion we want rescinded, but it also highlights how flawed MRIP remains for rare, and I think what Dr. Sweetman

characterized as super-rare events, and we know the SSC has tried to provide the best scientific information, but, at some point, you just can't dress up a pig, and there has got to be a better way, and we're just hoping that you can kind of think about it and find a way out of the rare and super-rare event conundrum. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Ken. Next, we'll have Katie Fischer.

MS. KATIE FISCHER: Hello. My name is Katie Fischer, Matlacha, Florida, a fish house owner and also vessel owner, and I want to start out by giving you an update on the status of my area, which is southwest Florida, the Fort Myers area. We are approaching the two-year anniversary of Hurricane Ian, which was a Category 4. We were left high-and-dry by NOAA, as we were denied fisheries disaster assistance, which still blows my mind, to this day, when you look at some of the other disaster requests that were approved.

With that said, the timeframes discussed yesterday for qualifying catches would be very harmful to many in our area, including us, and so what happened to the catch shares option for this program?

Yesterday, I emailed all of you, again, a program called Continuing Qualification. I wrote this program before the IFQ focus group met in 2022, and, rather than reinventing the wheel, which it seems like you guys are trying to do right now, it uses the same process that was originally used for the IFQ, but it changes the one-time distribution of shares, and it makes it so participants regularly have to requalify their fish, like every five to seven years, or a set period of years.

This program meets many of the goals that you all are trying to achieve, and it places an emphasis on participation, and it gives the fish back to fishermen. It allows for participants to enter and exit the program, and it remedies graying of the fleet, which our fleet is definitely suffering. This program will also stand the test of time, and it makes the program more fluid, which it desperately needs, and so I hope that you guys take the time -- I did email it to all of you yesterday, and, if you have any questions, I would love to answer any questions on that.

Then, lastly, I want to talk about wind energy. Look. This is a disaster. This wind energy, it's a disaster. We do not want this in the Gulf. You know, all of this, this whole program, is being driven by bought-and-paid-for science that's ignoring the negative effects that it will have on our environment and also marine life. Just look at what's going on in the Northeast right now, and we really do not want that in the Gulf, and that's all I've got for

you guys today. Thank you for the time to speak.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you for your comments, Katie. Next, we have -- Katie, we do have a question for you from Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Not a question, and so, Katie, thanks for your comments, and I appreciate you listening to the council meeting virtually. To clarify, you stated, obviously, that NOAA left you high-and-dry with regard to disaster assistance.

MS. FISCHER: Yes.

MR. STRELCHECK: We are working on that disaster determination. That analysis, and work, has been provided to us by the Fish and Wildlife Commission, and it is under review, and it will next go to the Secretary for a decision. I recognize it's not happening in a timely fashion, and that it takes way too long, but I just wanted to update you on where we're at in that process.

MS. FISCHER: Okay, because, the last I heard, only the shrimp fleet was going to qualify, and not what we do, what we fish, and so that's the last I've heard on that. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Katie, we have one more from Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: I was going to say the same thing as Andy, more of that for you, Katie, and, yes, that has not been decided yet. As Andy said, we filed our report a couple months back, and they're reviewing that right now. It's more than just shrimp that potentially would qualify, but we're actively working through that process, and, actually, me, and some of my leadership here, have a meeting with NOAA Fisheries, and the federal fishery disaster process, in St. Pete next week, to try and clarify some of this stuff, and I do also want to emphasize that there is some laws making their way, potentially, through Congress that would -- Well, they actually have already been passed that would provide more timely responses for some of these issues here that we've been talking about, because, yes, I completely agree with you that this process is way too long, and, two years past Hurricane Ian, I agree that something is broken here, and we're going to try and help work with the feds to try and fix it.

MS. FISCHER: Yes, and a big shoutout to Byron Donalds that is in our area. He drove the FISHES Act, and so we were definitely a part of helping him shape that, and he's awesome, and so, thanks to him, that stuff is getting pushed through, and so thank you, guys.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you for your comments, Katie. Next, we have Bob Zales.

MR. BOB ZALES, II: Bob Zales, II, Executive Director of Southeastern Fisheries Association. On red snapper, I'm going to take you all back in time a little bit. Two years ago this month, in Texas, this council met to consider increasing the quota on red snapper, and you can look at the minutes, and the public comments in those minutes, to verify what I'm fixing to say.

Every commercial fisherman, every for-hire fisherman, and a few private rec fishermen that commented asked the council not to increase the quota, because they felt that the fishery had issues, and not that it was in trouble, but clearly there was a problem. Two fishermen, rec fishermen, from Texas spoke and talked about how great and wonderful the fishery was, and they wanted to see the increase.

Well, the council, in their infinite wisdom, completely ignored the stakeholders and increased the quota. Today, you're hearing the result of that decision.

The study that the Destin association did is really good, and it mirrors pretty much everything that I'm hearing, everywhere I go over the past year or two, the shark problem, the red snapper issues, the fact that the commercial guys have got to go further and further offshore to catch fish. The fish that the charter guys and the private rec guys are catching have to be measured, and you don't see big fish anymore, and there's areas where fish are not there.

You're working on a stock assessment for red snapper, and, in all reality, that stock assessment probably won't be completed for another three years. If you all don't do anything about the red snapper fishery until that period of time comes, you may not have a fishery to worry about. The fishery has big issues.

The primary issue is too much effort. You cannot -- This stock of fish cannot be sustained with the amount of effort that's out there. You've heard me, over the years, talk about a key component to your data system that you all completely ignored, and that's the people in this room, the fishermen who are on the water on a daily basis that tell you all, at just about every meeting, and in other situations, what they see on the water, the status of the stock, the status of habitat, the environment, and they know what it is.

Nobody listens to them, and you worry about computer modeling and

all the different things that you collect, but you completely ignore this source of information, and, until you include this source of information in what you're doing, we're going to continue to have these problems down the road. I would suggest to you to use this resource, and actively use it, and listen to them, so that you can really see what is happening every day on the water. Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Captain Zales. We appreciate it. All right. Next, we have David Krebs.

DR. DAVID KREBS: Good afternoon, council. David Krebs here. I will start out with thank you, Troy Frady, for stepping up to the plate, and he's going to give you guys a perspective that you don't want to hear, but I'm thankful that he's there, and welcome back to Mr. Sanchez and other council members.

It's good to follow Bob and my good friend, Steve Rash. I will be honest that my feelings were hurt when you took me off the IFQ AP, as a founding member with forty-three years in wholesaling seafood and fishing seafood in the Gulf of Mexico, and, because you don't like the truth, you remove people from these APs. An AP was suggested, by Magnuson, to have people with knowledge to inform you, the council, who, in most cases, don't have every day, every week, every month knowledge. I get it that you don't like me, and I get it that I speak my mind, and I have a passion, and I get upset. I understand all of that, but my passion is for the resource. It's not for you guys, and it's not for politics. It's for fishery management. It has been, and it always will be.

One of the questions you can ask yourselves, or every participant that comes up here complaining about the IFQ system, is how much fish would you like to catch a year, and then I want you to do some simple math and say, well, we're under a seven-million ACL, give or take, and 100 percent of that fishery allows 70,000 pounds of fish per participant, if there was only a hundred of them, and so are we going to go to 200 participants and give them 35,000, or are we going to go to 400 and give them 15,000, and are we going to expect this fish houses and infrastructure to stay viable, as you jockey all this fish around?

No disrespect to anybody new coming into this industry, but everybody new that comes in is taking away from somebody that has been there, and that's the problem. There is only 100 percent in 100 percent. That's it, and you can't make it any better than it is, and you can't run a business, a directed commercial business, that's been around since -- Even go back to Captain Bob Zales' days, in the 1960s and 1970s, and you can't make it on just that.

It’s expensive to have a crew and fish and now chasing these fish all over the Gulf.

To this point about fishery management, when we went to regional management, what the managers failed to acknowledge was the environmental factors. Number one, the recreational fleet, and no offense to them, and they’re doing just what they’re supposed to do, but you, as managers, are supposed to anticipate the consequences, which were you now had a fishery that went from Key West to Brownsville, open to recreational fishing into the EEZ, which means deeper-water fishing, which means more discard mortality, and, like everybody says, yes, you’ve got a white paper on the descending devices, and who is using it?

Not if you’re out there with four of your buddies, and you all catch four undersized fish, or you want a bigger fish, and these are realities that you should have anticipated and said, wow, in four years, what is the damage to the fishery going to look like with discard mortality, and then you pile on top of that the idle iron and the rig removal in the western Gulf, which, when it was finally counted in the Great American Snapper Count, as part of your successful stock -- Those rigs were removed, and there’s no telling how much fish were killed as they were being removed, when they blowed the legs off of them, to this situation that we’re in today.

You guys have got to listen to the people that care. The commercial industry does not fish on opportunity. We fish on harvest, and trying to dismantle the IFQ is -- All you’re doing is harming every business that -- I lease fish from other people, and not a single person complains, that has been in this industry.

When this fishery -- When this IFQ was developed, all these questions that you’re rehashing today was talked about, and we had these discussions about what if, what when, and -- I’m about to wrap this up. The knowledge of the people that were there, that people have about what it took to get the fishermen to vote in a double referendum to approve this IFQ, which changed the landscape of the entire fishery in 2007.

There was concessions made, and there was a lot of agreeing with a lot of the sympathy that’s out there, but, in order to get the people to say, hey, I’m going to take my Class 1 license and surrender it for this unknown, and I want to have some promises, and the promises then was that this fishery would go on to something that they could retire, because there was no retirement for fishermen.

These are just facts, and, if we could ever get back -- I will let you all go, and thank you, Troy, for being there, and God bless you all, and I hope you figure out how to take care of these fish.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, David. All right. Next, we have Chris Niquet.

MR. CHRIS NIQUET: Yes. Chris Niquet from Panama City, Florida. I would like to talk to you about the allocation and quota for red snapper. The method you're using for determining this supposed reallocation, you won't use the Great American Snapper Count, and you're using the FES, which you admit is 40 percent flawed, and do you want to use 40 percent flawed data to determine your paycheck? I don't think so. I don't want you to use 40 percent flawed data to determine reallocation, if you're even going to have a reallocation.

Now, the next thing we want to know, with this reallocation push, is I want to know the problem that you're addressing with this supposed reallocation push. No one has given me the problem that this supposed reallocation is looking to solve. Somebody says, well, I've heard that we're trying to make more allocation available to the new entries. There is only so much allocation to go around, seven-million pounds, and we're catching 99 percent of it every year with the existing shareholders.

You're trying to reallocate into a declining fishery. It's going to decline. Look at the numbers. If it declines, where are the new entries going to get their fish? They're not going to be able to get another fish to support the boat and the reef fish permit that they get. They're going to go broke. Do you want them to go broke? There you go.

Next is this FES -- Has anyone come up with a better plan, to get better information, to figure out the numbers that you're going to use in the future? If it is, bring it forth before the group. Anybody here got a better plan? I will wait. All of you are learned businessmen and women. Raise your hand, spin around, do something. That's what I thought. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Niquet, to answer your question, there is some work that's going to be taking place. Currently, there is an effort for a pilot survey in both Mississippi and Alabama to look at private recreational effort estimates, and the problem, or the main problem, with FES is the overestimation, potentially, of angler effort, and so the states, working with NOAA, are looking at implementing the private recreational effort survey that is currently being used in Louisiana to develop their private angler

effort estimates, and so we are -- The two states, Mississippi and Alabama, are currently, this year, running that same survey, using its database of licensed anglers to try to estimate effort.

Then we're also looking at trying to implement a dockside survey program in those two states as well, and so we're looking at trying to move away from the APAIS survey, the MRIP survey methodology, at least in Mississippi and Alabama, and so that's -- We are doing something. We are trying to move forward in that direction, to try to look at it.

Of course, NOAA is looking at a survey currently with some different survey questionnaire order, if you will, because that was the perceived problem to cause potentially higher estimates to be made in the telephone survey that they used to estimate effort for Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida anglers, and so they are implementing that this year, to look to see what impacts that question order has over the entire range of the survey in the Gulf, and so we are working towards trying to do something to create a better pathway towards better data.

MR. NIQUET: Okay, and let me ask you this. Are these surveys going to include the amount of discards in the recreational sector?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: So the current survey, for the NOAA survey, does account for discards, and the surveys, going forward, it's my understanding, will also ask the question to get at the number of discards that are occurring.

MR. NIQUET: Okay. Well, if you're catching three-million, and you're throwing away nine-times that many, that's unsustainable. You can't do it.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Yes, and so just, you know, the effort side of the component, because you've got catch on one side, multiplied by the number of trips, the effort, right, and so they are interrelated, but certainly, if you just have an impact on the number of trips being estimated, and you multiply that by the catch, or the discards, and you have an increase in the number of trips being reported, then you're going to have an increase in the number of discards, and so they might -- There will probably be a reduction in both, if there in fact is a reduction in the number of estimated trips, even with the same survey information that you have, because you have less trips, and you will have less discards, and less --

MR. NIQUET: Okay. I understand.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: But I had a question over here from Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Not a question, but more just responses to some of the comments that you said there, and so, yes, I agree with you that there are some issues, clearly, with how we estimate effort. I just want to kind of point out, even beyond what our chair was talking about, relative to the individual states, there is an MRIP transition group here, that is working across the broader Gulf to incorporate state data survey collection programs into the overall estimation effort of that.

Even beyond that, there is funds that have been received more recently from the Inflation Reduction Act, and there has been several workshops that have been conducted to look at, number one, better ways to estimate effort, and these can be things from the use of satellite cameras at inlets, things along those lines, but also ways to better estimate and get ahold of discard mortality there, and so these are things that are actively -- That we're working on. We share your concerns, and all of the respective states, and the federal government, are working on these things right now.

MR. NIQUET: Okay, and so we're going to move away from the FES 40 percent -- I guess you would call it 40 percent flawed data, and we're moving away from it, and is that correct?

DR. SWEETMAN: That is not a decision for me to make myself.

MR. NIQUET: Does anybody here know?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: It's species dependent, and so we have moved away from using FES to monitor red snapper landings, and it's being considered for red grouper in the assessment, and it's already being use for gag for monitoring, and so it is a work in progress, but it's definitely being applied to a number of different species.

While I have the mic, I want to ask you a couple of questions, because I feel like you were mixing some of your testimony with a variety of issues, and so, first, you are a reef fish shareholder, correct?

MR. NIQUET: Yes.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Do you have a reef fish permit?

MR. NIQUET: Yes.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: You do have a reef fish permit, and do you still fish?

MR. NIQUET: No. I lease my permit out.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: So, just for clarity, in terms of your public comments, because you were concerned -- You said reallocation, and you talked about reallocation maybe between the sectors, but you're also concerned about shares being reallocated from you to someone else, based on lack of active participation, and is that correct?

MR. NIQUET: No. It depends on what is your definition of "active participation".

MR. STRELCHECK: Do you fish some proportion of your shares?

MR. NIQUET: No. If you say "active participation", and you say how active are you in the fishery, and I say I'm 100 percent active, because I lease 100 percent of my shares to people who don't have any, you can't be more active than 100 percent, and that's the maximum activity you can have. If I were to take all those shares and fish them myself, how active would I be? I would be zero percent active, because I would be fishing them all myself.

If I were to say, okay, I'm going to get a boat and fish 50 percent of those shares myself, on my own boat, I would only have 50 percent to least to other fishermen that don't have any. Therefore, they're what? They're 50 percent out, and they don't have the shares to catch. Some of those people, especially the little fellas that I lease to, they're going broke. They can't make it. You can't make it if you're -- You know, like one fella I know, he got 18,000 last year, and he can't make it on 9,000. I will just be truthful with you.

MR. STRELCHECK: So last question then. So, based on what I just heard, what you're saying is that, by leasing all of your shares, that provides a greater benefit to non-shareholders than if you're required to land some of your catch and lease the remainder, and is that --

MR. NIQUET: It's a better benefit to non-shareholders who lease allocation. If they have no shares, they have no allocation, and so I'm going to say --

MR. STRELCHECK: Because there's more availability.

MR. NIQUET: There is more availability. Without availability,

they're out. They can't fish.

MR. STRELCHECK: Just to be clear, I'm not agreeing or disagreeing with you, but I just wanted to understand your perspective.

MR. NIQUET: They have an ability to lease allocation, which, before -- Without that allocation, they're going broke.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thank you.

MR. NIQUET: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Niquet, we have one more question from Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: I would like you, if you could, to elaborate a little bit on the universe of people that you lease your shares to, and, more specifically, how reliant that group of people that you lease to has become on you leasing them the shares to be, you know, sustainable in their business models.

MR. NIQUET: Okay. Well, let's see. I started buying -- I bought all my shares, and I didn't get any issued to me because of effort. I wanted an investment in the IFQ fishery, when it first came out, and I started buying immediately. The allocation that was issued to me, I started leasing immediately. I have had people leasing from me since day-one, and they're still leasing from me. If I don't lease to them, they either have to find somebody else or find another fishery to participate in.

Some of them are central and south Florida, and some of them are in Texas, and some of them are in Louisiana. I don't have any in Mississippi, I don't think. No, I don't have any in Mississippi, but -- Let me put it this way. You can have your staff check on the records, and I've got a pretty good number of pounds, and I've never failed to lease one pound of fish. Every year, I'm leased out. Therefore, I'm not charging too much for the leases. The people that are leasing them must be making money, or else they wouldn't lease them, and that's simple economics, and I leased to people ten or twelve or fifteen or eighteen years in a row, and so, you know, I don't know how much better it can get. Any more elaboration you need to --

MR. SANCHEZ: Thank you for taking the time to answer this. No, and I'm just getting the impression, and you've helped explain that, that there is a vast group of people that rely on what you do for them, and that's part of keeping their businesses running, and that some of the changes that are being suggested might be

highly disruptive to that, and I just wanted to get that clear. Thank you.

MR. NIQUET: Well, if you based your business on getting X number of pounds per year, and you've been getting this number of pounds for a few years, let's just say, and, all of a sudden, it's cut in half, 50 percent, all of a sudden, the house payment don't get made, and the car payment don't get made, and the boat payment don't get made, and you're -- You're out of business, basically.

If you can keep getting these fish, you know, and getting a fair market price, you're going to be able to make these payments, and life goes on. I know several people like that that, you know, they -- Let me put it this way. I don't have anybody that leases from me, presently, that says this, that, oh boy, Mr. Niquet, I don't want as many fish as I got last year. Almost everyone says can you get me a few more fish, and so that's a pretty good indicator of the business model that I run. They want more fish. They don't want less, and so that's --

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Mr. Niquet. We appreciate it.

MR. NIQUET: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Next, we'll go online to Mark Kelley.

MS. BERNADINE ROY: Mr. Kelley, you will have to unmute your line. Mark Kelley, it's your turn. You can go ahead and unmute your line to speak.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We'll come back to Mark in a little bit, and we'll go to Jim Zurbrick.

MR. JIM ZURBRICK: Thank you, council, for allowing me to speak. I'm Jim Zurbrick from Steinhatchee, Florida. I've been a long time, about twenty-some-odd years, in the charter business, and I'm a dealer, and I'm also an active fisherman. I just got home last week from a trip, and I want to welcome the new council members.

I've been doing this a long time, as a lot of you know. I'm going to bounce around a little bit, and what I usually do is always show you that I am part of the Mote Laboratory, and so I have cameras on my boat, and so, when I talk about my discards, I can prove it, okay, or as much as a camera can prove it. I'm just waiting for the AI to come out so we can size all my fish without me having to measure something, and it will just have a digital scale up there and tell me that, hey, it's a keeper, right, but

the discards is a huge -- This particular report had me catching 1,954 fish, and I had twenty-eight red snapper discards.

If you extrapolate what the number was four or five years ago, when they came out with the study that says the recreational sector discards eight to nine fish to retain one, it's a 15,000 discard number, instead of twenty-eight, and that's what the ugly side of it is, and I know that, back four or five years ago, there was a lot more bigger fish, and so people were discarding the sixteen-inch fish, but, now that we're beating this fishery up somewhat, and we're seeing signs, and it's showing its ugly head, and Jason Delacruz the other day, I heard in a comment, summed it up, that the commercial sector is the canary in the coalmine.

That's exactly what I'm seeing, and do you think that I want to ask for a quota cut, because you see it's going to affect me, and, I mean, that's my wife's and my livelihood, right, plus other fishermen that I lease some of my quota to, and, actually, I lease quota from the fishermen I buy from, but we're concerned. We're seeing enough of a downward trend, just like that red grouper episode that was very sad, that we didn't get listened to, but I think we're pulling ourselves out of the red grouper.

Listen, and I've got some comments about Amendment 28. If we had a 400,000-pound shallow-water quota, and 20 percent of it are scamp landings, and I personally own 1 percent of the shallow-water, then, if you took 1 percent of 80,000 pounds, which is 20 percent of the 400,000, I would get 800 pounds. I would be happy with that, because I'm not catching a lot of scamps, and so let's just try to keep that simple.

What was talked about the other day, and I know I'm not the only one in the room that went, holy cow, lord have mercy, and this is one of the most involved documents going forward, and so I don't know, and it's just a thought. I just think there's a simpler way, unless we're looking to disrupt the IFQ, when we put this back out there, but let's just give everybody their percentage of the shallow-water that they retain now, but in three different segments, you know, something like the carbo and then the scamp and then the yellowfin.

Quickly, the permit renewal, NOAA has done a tremendous job, National Marine Fisheries, in getting these permits out. I get online, and it's there. As long as I've done my trip report, you know, my no-fishing reports, and I've sent in my logbooks, it's a no-brainer, and so the people that might complain about it -- I'm not sure, you know, what's going on now, but it's a smooth operation. It really is, and I thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Jim. Jim, we have a comment, or a question, from Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: First, Jim, thanks for the compliments about the permit system. I'm curious what you're seeing with gag up in your area.

MR. ZURBRICK: I had some comments here, but there's only so much time, right? Listen.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, I read ahead.

MR. ZURBRICK: My wife Patty does the offloads, right, and I've got five boats that are fishing for me, and we're in the shallow water. None of us are fishing 200 feet plus. I know guys are catching gags in 200 feet plus, or 180, but we try to concentrate between 100 feet and 150 feet.

Our last trip, I had three. The trip before that, I had one. Two of my boats came in and had none. There was a time, four or five years ago, and I know people are talking about the gag is coming back, but it's coming back in areas, but we used to have a couple or two or three-hundred pounds of bycatch, just trying to catch red grouper, not even fishing for gag, with no live bait, and so -- I hear the reports about in thirty or forty feet of water, fifty feet of water, there's more, but I don't fish that, but, in my 100 to 150 span, from Steinhatchee, Florida down to almost to Crystal River and towards Carrabelle, that's what I'm seeing.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thanks again, Jim. Thank you. All right. Next, we'll go to Mike Sullivan.

MR. MIKE SULLIVAN: Thank you again for allowing us to do this virtual. As I'm also in the commercial and charter industry, this is still our red snapper season. I do have one thing. It's very -- It's easy to get on the webinar, but it's very hard to register on the webinar. That was just one comment that I have about this, if there was a little easier way to actually register, to where I could publicly speak a little easier, that would be great.

I wanted to talk about the charter-for-hire red snapper season. I am in favor of moving it back to the Friday before Memorial Weekend and then just letting it go continuous there. I know there's talks of lowering the buffer from 9 percent, to 5 percent or to no buffer, and I'm against that.

The fishery is not in the best shape right now, and, leaving it at

the 9 percent, I'm fine with that, or even if you wanted to go to the 5, and okay, but definitely I do not want to get rid of the buffer. I don't want to have endure what we went through years ago, with reduced seasons, and, you know, going back to that timeframe.

I also wanted to comment on the shark predation problem. Yes, I would love to see the commercial sector opened up a little bit more, to where they could help work on some of these sharks. You know, they are becoming overabundant, and they really are working on a lot of our bycatch, our fish we're catching, and, yes, we're getting lopsided in that state.

Then last one thing I want to comment on is the IFQ program. With the IFQ shares, I'm one who owns shares, and I'm one who is dual-permitted, commercial and charter, and, if you're trying to make things -- Make everybody have a reef fish permit. I mean, that's not a big ordeal. As for you want to punish somebody if they don't catch a certain percentage of species they own, I mean, that's ridiculous.

Somebody like myself, who had to buy everything I have, where I'm in both industries because, as we've seen in years past, and I've been in the business for twenty-nine years, and, when the charter business isn't great, we have to commercial fish more, and vice versa. You know, we have to be diversified to be able to survive in this industry, and, if you're going to punish me because it's great charter season, and I don't commercial fish as much, or vice versa, and if I commercial fish more, because the charter fishing is slow, and then you want to talk about taking my charter permit, because I didn't go, and, I mean, that kind of stuff is ridiculous.

Then, when you do talk about taking this, who is going to pay me the money back that I borrowed, that I owe the banks for the quota? You know, those are the kinds of real questions that come up that I want to make public, and that's pretty much it.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you.

MR. SULLIVAN: Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Have a good day. Thank you. Next, we have Mark Tryon.

MR. MARK TRYON: Mark Tryon, commercial fisherman, Gulf Breeze, Florida, rod-and-reel fishing, for the most part day trips. I've got a twenty-seven-foot MayCraft, and so it's not a big boat. We go out on twelve to fourteen-hour trips.

I think, the last time I spoke, I was asked about -- I mentioned recreational overfishing, and I didn't have my numbers handy on that, but I've gone through this a number of times before, and I don't mean to be redundant, but, if we have a seven-and-a-half-million, approximately, pound recreational quota for the Gulf, and we had one-million anglers, just to throw out a nice round number, that would come out to seven-and-a-half pounds per angler per season, which certainly doesn't justify the length of the seasons that we have right now.

Looking at Florida, and that's my state, I believe it's 2.3 million pounds, and let's just say we have 500,000 anglers, you would have a measly 4.6 pounds per angler for a 103-day season, which just seems totally preposterous.

The denominator in this is not static, the number of fish, okay, and it's constantly growing. The number of anglers is growing, and their efficiency of their modern vessels, and their equipment, and you have iPilot, side scanning sonar, and guys can go out and buy surveys, and they don't even have to find their own spots anymore, and it's -- You know, it's incredible, the advances that have been made, and so it's a lot easier to catch fish now, or at least, you know, have the means of catching them, if you're a recreational angler.

My fishing data, and observations, back in 2019, I had my best year, and it seems like, coincidentally, with this shift over to state management, every year, my landings have gone down, once state management was implemented, okay, and, this here, it has continued on a downward trend, but at an accelerated rate, which is very disturbing.

I caught -- I was out for thirteen hours the other day, and I only caught seventy-four pounds of snapper, and I can't justify fishing at that rate, and so it's very disturbing. What am I supposed to do? Buy a bigger boat, a bigger, faster boat, and stay out longer? You know, at sixty-six years old, I don't see myself doing that, and so this business about catching 50 percent, or 25 percent, or whatever, to me, is very alarming.

Right now, if let's say that was instituted, I will tell you right now that I wouldn't even be able to catch my 25 percent, okay, and so it's -- You know, I'm totally against that 25 and 50 percent on the landings requirement, and, finally, just to say that my catch rate has been, to reiterate, inversely proportional to the recreational effort, okay, and the thing I have a problem with this council is they foisted these rules -- You know, they've taken

all the responsibility and given it to the states, but there's no oversight from the National Marine Fisheries to audit what the states are doing and, if necessary, shut down their seasons, if there is overfishing.

I guess, finally, and I guess I'm getting over time here, but just bear with me for one more thing, and there needs to be better data, and I think everybody would agree. Like, in Florida, we're extrapolating random samples, which are requested a month after the actual angling activity has taken place, and that's not good enough, and so, anyway, thank you for letting me speak.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Mark. Next, we have B.J. Burkett. We've got Mark Kelley on the phone.

MR. MARK KELLEY: I'm Mark Kelley, from Panama City. I have two charter boats, which are dually-permitted, and I'm also fully invested in the IFQ program. The first thing that I want to speak on is the red snapper, the changing the start date to the Friday before Memorial Day. I'm all for that, and I think that would help us greatly.

I am not really for a buffer reduction, and I think we need to leave it at 9 percent, and I could live with 5, but I think 9 percent -- Until we get this red snapper fishery back under control and see the fishery rebounding, I don't think we need to increase the days any.

I want to speak a moment on the IFQ, and I think, with the IFQ system, you should be required to have a permit. I think that's where the problem all began, is when we did away with the permits and you could buy the shares without a permit. I don't really feel that you should have to catch a percentage of your quota, because I totally lease all my fish out, because my crew, that runs my charter boats, chooses not to fish in the winter, and so, when you start making us catch a percentage of our fish, those -- That is going to decrease 20 or 30 percent to whoever we are leasing our allocation to, and so I think that puts even more of a hardship on the smaller guy already, and that's who we're trying to help.

Just a little history on the IFQ program is I was grandfathered 800 pounds, and I have bought, and I have borrowed, and I've done everything that I can do to get enough fish, and it's possible, over time, to do that, if your money is managed right, and so the shark and dolphin -- The shark problem is passing the dolphin problem, and it's 100 percent discards that are dead, because, if he don't get ate on the way up, he's getting ate on the way down,

and all the descender device is doing is it just slows that fish down, so he can be ate.

Also, we are -- The king mackerel fishery is just about nonexistent off of Panama City, and I can't speak for nowhere else, but something that also is nonexistent is the Spanish sardine/herring. The last five to seven years, we have caught very few herring for bait, and, for some reason, that fishery has disappeared, and I wouldn't mind seeing a little information on that.

The recreational fishing is a problem. In just Bay County alone, the state guideboats have tripled in numbers, and it's non-enforceable. They go across that state line every day, and there's no one ever there to check them, and that is booming, which is catching the recreational limit, plus we have this fast, sixty-mile-an-hour center consoles, that are leaving at three or four in the afternoon, but come back at nine or ten at night, that are not being counted, and they brag on Facebook about how fast they can catch their limit and bring it to the dock, and so effort is real high in the recreational fishery, but that's pretty much all I've got to say.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Mark. Next, we have Dale Woodruff.

MR. DALE WOODRUFF: Good afternoon. Dale Woodruff, and I have two charter boats, one a multi-passenger and one a six-pack boat, and I'm also the president of the Alabama Charter Fishing Association. We definitely want to get this reporting up and going, the SEFHIER reporting going, as soon as possible.

Now, I don't know if I'm any smarter, watching the presentation on triggerfish yesterday, than I was twenty years ago, but I can say that, looking at the growth rate of the fish, and whatever was presented yesterday, and I'll try to make a little bit light of this, but, in the first three years, three-and-a-half years, triggerfish get up to thirteen inches, and they gradually slow down after that, and it could take up to seven years for a triggerfish to reach a legal size limit, which is fifteen inches.

It could take four to five years for that trigger to reach fourteen to fifteen inches, and so we're looking at five to seven years for triggerfish to become sexually mature, around twelve inches, I believe, and that's what we said, and, years ago, we had a fourteen-inch triggerfish, and now we're at fifteen inches, and I would like for the council, and the SSC, to maybe start looking back at a fourteen-inch triggerfish.

When we went from fourteen to fifteen-inch fish, we said the

triggerfish's discard mortality wasn't as high, and now we realize it's a lot higher than what we saw, and, yes, we're trying to catch and keep a fifteen-inch triggerfish, but now we're throwing fourteen-inch fish back, and I understand the concept behind that, that we can catch fourteen, and keep fourteen, and maybe not catch as many fourteen-inch fish, but it's taking a long time for those fish to grow, but they're already spawning at twelve inches.

I would just like for maybe you all to look at that, maybe going back to a fourteen-inch fish, and see what it looks like, see what our seasons would look like.

The red snapper opening, I would like to keep that at June 1, just for the fact that we don't have a reporting program, and, if you open it up -- To me, if you open it up the Memorial Day Weekend, it would almost be equal to fishing a July 4th week for the charter-for-hire, and so, you know, I don't want to blow everything out of the water, because, you know, yes, the fishing has slowed down, as far as effort right now, but you're talking about a big, major effort shift if we get that early, without any type of reporting. Then just let us fish it all the way through, through whatever the date is, June 1 through whatever.

Then I know this sounds crazy, but we have porpoises, and we have problems with dolphins, and maybe looking at possibly, as charter-for-hire boats, taking these undersized red snapper and throwing them in our live well, while we're offshore fishing, if we have a dolphin problem, and then, as we leave from one spot to another, we can release those fish safely, without the harm of being eaten by a dolphin. You know, as long as we don't bring that back to the dock.

Right now, if we throw a fish that's undersized in the live well, you can get a ticket, but maybe look at possibly keeping mama dolphin from training the baby dolphin, and so, if I can take a viable thirteen or fourteen-inch snapper, that is incidentally caught on my boat, because we don't target them, and do everything that we need to do, and put it in the live well, and we go from one stock to another, and, if dolphin is not there, we release that fish.

Now, if we get back to the dock, and we mess up and we have one in the live well, and we get checked, that's on us, but that's something that I would like for you all to look at, you know, instead of it being considered that we're retaining that fish. We're just trying to save the value of that fish, so that it can grow, and that's all I've got to say.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Thank you, Captain Woodruff. I have a couple of questions for you. Could you elaborate a little more on why you would like red snapper season to open June 1, rather than getting Memorial Day Weekend, because, I don't know about where you are, but our guys, here at the end of the season, the kids are going back to school, and it's slow, and they're not booking as many trips. It seems to me that days are more useful to a charter guy on Memorial Day Weekend than they are on the 20th of August, and so I would appreciate your thoughts on that.

MR. WOODRUFF: I can agree with you on what you just said. The problem, what I fear, is a major effort shift in our effort. Right now, we don't have a great effort in August, and I understand. Would we benefit, Alabama and Mississippi and Florida? Yes, but will we -- Will we mess our fishery up by too much effort, and I see a Memorial Day Weekend, from Memorial Day to June 1, would look just like a July 4th week.

We're going to fish, and we're going to fish hard, and we're going to catch those fish. Without some good reporting -- You know, with what we've got now, everything is still an uncertainty in our fishery, and we know that. We're hoping that people get it right and that we get our seasons. If they start looking back at that Memorial Day to June 1, there's going to be a lot of effort, and do we have any reporting in the SEFHIER program, and I would be all for it, once we've got the program going, and I'm just worried about a major effort shift in the timeline, in the targeting of red snapper, and I just don't want to overfish.

MR. WALKER: All right, and, while I have you here, I hear what you're saying about legally being able to take a fish that you have to discard, when you have two dolphins with their head out of the water behind the boat, and not being able to move to your next spot, or let it go while you're underway, when it has a much better chance of getting away, and so I hear you there, and I don't know what the solution is there, but I hear what you're saying.

MR. WOODRUFF: I think it would be -- I think it would be a good idea. I mean, like I said, as long as we don't bring that fish to the dock, you know, and it's the same thing as being in the icebox, the fish box. Give us the opportunity to keep the fish alive, because, when we flip that thing back over, we know what's going to happen.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Frady.

MR. FRADY: Captain Woodruff, thank you so much for being here, and I appreciate your comments. I kind of like what you're saying about the effort shift and opening on Memorial Day Weekend, and how it would be a lot of effort, and it would be hard to, you know, actually measure that, and would you be in support of possibly considering the idea of having -- To cut the red snapper season, say, if it opens on June 1, and would you be in support of leaving it open to say mid-August, and having a hard closure, and a chance to have say a fixed opening for red snapper, for however many days it is, in October, beginning on October 1, and is that something that would be feasible? Would you benefit from it?

MR. WOODRUFF: I would be open to everything, once we get some good, hard data coming from the charter-for-hire.

MR. FRADY: Okay.

MR. WOODRUFF: I'm open for a lot of ideas, especially that. You know, monetarily, yes, we would benefit if we opened up early, and you know that, as a fisherman, being where we've been years ago, to where we're at now, god, we don't want to mess this up. Right now, we're relying on somebody in a back room, with all their data underneath their seat, and they decide to pull it out whenever they want to, and no offense to you all, and, the next thing you know, we're two weeks before snapper season starts that we know our season. We need to get some good data before we do anything else, and that's kind of how we've discussed it at the association, and we just don't want to mess up what we have now.

MR. FRADY: Thank you for so much for your comments. We appreciate it, and we agree with you, in a lot of ways, or I do, that the data has got to come first. We've got to have the data.

MR. WOODRUFF: I agree that the data has got to come first.

MR. FRADY: But I wouldn't want to rush this, myself, and this would be something that I would try to get done by 2026, to make sure that we have the correct data coming in, but I feel your passion for the resource, and making sure we don't overfish, and to make sure that we protect those fish and try to stop the trend of feeding the dolphins and have them retrained, and even the sharks out there that are being retrained, but thank you so much for your caring about the resource.

MR. WOODRUFF: I agree.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Captain Woodruff. Next, we'll go back online to B.J. Burkett.

MR. B.J. BURKETT: My name is B.J. Burkett, and I own and operate three charter boats and a commercial boat. The charter boat is in Panama City, and the commercial boat is out of Apalachicola, Florida. A couple of the charter boats are also dual-permitted, and I'm an IFQ holder. A very small amount of red snapper is included in that.

The first thing I want to talk about today is recreational red snapper. Before I heard everybody's public comment, I was kind of leaning towards liking the Memorial Day start date, but kind of, from what I'm hearing, that I hope you all listening to a lot of these comments, red snapper has got an issue right now, and so the worst thing we can do is add days, change days, anything like that.

After listening to everybody, I really think that we need to stay with the June 1 start date, and we need to keep the same buffer, and not change the buffer, because you all probably don't remember, and some of you all are new, but I told you all this two years ago, that, hey, the same time as everybody else, and the whole public comment was about don't increase our amount of snapper, and you all did anyway, but at what point are you all going to start listening to us, where we're trying to conserve this resource?

We need these fish. We need these fish to make a living, ten, twenty, thirty years from now, and we're trying to help you all manage this, and we get no response out of the council from what we're seeing day-to-day. I mean, leave the season alone.

If anything, I kind of agree with Troy about the fall season, but then I got to thinking to close it August 15, and maybe we need to deduct a couple of days, because there's definitely an issue out there, and maybe it works itself out, but we can't wait five years from now, or two years from now, and you all shut us down and give us three days a year, like the Atlantic. I mean, we're in a bind, and we're telling you all now, and react to it now, and start doing something about it.

The other issues are sharks and dolphins. I've stood up here and I've said the dolphins have been the main problem, and the sharks are definitely a problem, but now I'm going to have to switch. The sharks have got so bad that the dolphins don't have a chance. The dolphins are still eating our fish, but the sharks are getting out of control, and I've heard some of the members of the council say that's not our department, and you all need to make it your department, because it's highly affecting a species that you all are supposed to be managing, and, at the rate it's going, there's not going to be any snapper, or any reef fish, to manage, in a few

more years, and you all just kind of keep your blinders on, and you're not looking at the main problem.

The recreational industry is a problem, yes, and there's getting to be a lot more boats. Somehow, there needs to be some checks-and-balances on letting these states keep extending their seasons, when we're seeing a fishery that is barely trying to hold on, if not declining.

The IFQ side of it, if you all don't let me lease fish from who I have been leasing them from, I can't find any more red snapper to lease that I can afford. I lease 90 percent of my red snapper to catch for the year, and, if you all make him catch 30, 40, 50 percent of it, that's 30, 40, 50 percent that my crews, on my boats, don't get to make, and so, with gag, the same issue, just like Steve Rash said. There's more gags out there than there's been in a while, and the regulation is even tighter, and we just really don't want to see this all get -- I'm out of time. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you. Next, we have Charlie Renier.

MR. CHARLIE RENIER: Hello. My name is Charlie Renier, and a lot of you have heard my story before, but I'm going to tell it for all the new people here. I was born and raised in the Keys, and my dad started fishing in 1956, and so my family has been in the fishing industry for almost seventy years. When I could walk, I was fishing. That's all I've done my whole life, is fish.

I own a fish house in Key West, and I have mackerel fished, lobster fished, stone crabbed, longlined, bandit fished. You name it, I've done it. I have been in the industry my whole entire life.

I started a fish house in 1990, and we currently have about ninety boats fishing for us out of Key West. I moved to Madeira Beach, and bought a fish house in Madeira Beach, in the early 2000s, and the reason was you all -- Later in life, you all were started to close the Atlantic down, and I wanted to be able to catch snapper and grouper, and so the only way to do it was to have a fish house on the west coast to catch snapper and grouper. I saw the Atlantic completely getting shut down, and everybody I grew up with was getting put out of business, and they're all gone now. There's none of them left in the Atlantic fishing.

The best thing that I saw that has ever happened is you all put a quota system on these fish, because we wouldn't have anything on this Gulf side, the way it was going. We need regulations, and you all did that.

I bought boats, and I bought quota. I currently own about a dozen longline boats, and I still own four or five boats in Key West, and I own all kinds of boats fishing. I own a lot of quota, and I lease a lot of quota. I probably lease a couple million pounds of quota a year to catch, and I couldn't do it without leasing fish.

Now, when I started buying quota, it was about seven years ago, and that was the first year you all come in and took -- I think you took 40 percent of our red grouper, that I just bought, and, whack, it was gone, and I'm like, wow, this is terrible, and I thought I could buy fish and stay in it, and we were going and going, and then, a couple of years later, whack, twenty more percent of our red grouper, and I'm like this is getting crazy.

I mean, I'm spending money, and borrowing money, and I'm mortgaging my property. I've got fishermen, and I've got fish houses, and I've got everything going, and I'm trying to do everything I'm supposed to do, and I want to be in the industry. My daughter is working in the fish house, and she's twenty-two years old, and she wants to run it, and I want her to be in there for the next forty or fifty years.

Fishing is a hard, rough life. We pay our dues out there on that water, and a few problems I see that you all have -- You all are doing the best you can do, and I can understand, but I have a huge issue with what you all call the best available science. Last year, you all took 80 percent of our gag grouper from us, 80 percent. 80 percent is about, what, 700,000 pounds that you all took, that we can no longer catch, and I'm going to tell you why we lost them gag grouper. It was because you all told us that there was no big males left, and all we had was females.

Now, just to give everybody a short lesson, and this came from your scientist, that told me that most of the male gag grouper are thirty pounds or bigger. I've got your people at my fish house, weighing fish, on a daily basis. They come in, and they weigh the fish, and they measure the fish, and they check the fish.

They're all cute little girls about this tall, every one of them. They can't pick up a fifteen-pound fish, and I asked them, would you like us to pick up some big fish? No, sir, and we don't want to pick up big fish. We're just going to go ahead and measure all these little fish, which every single one of them is a female, and so you all took our fish, last year, the year before, and then you all sent some scientists to my fish house, which we put out on boats, and, I mean, they measured all the fish when they come in,

and they come up with totally different numbers, because they measured all the big fish.

Please look at your science on your gag grouper, because it's totally wrong. The gags have made a stronger comeback than I've ever seen, and, hey, if -- I will be the first one. If we're hurting them, I don't want to catch them. I want to save this industry, guys. I'm heavily invested in it, and my family is invested in it, and their futures are invested in it, and I don't want to catch them. I want to keep it going.

Yesterday, you all blew me away. I just built two brand-new deepwater boats to go deepwater fishing, and let me tell you how hard it is to catch a deepwater grouper. There used to be a hundred boats in this Gulf to catch deepwater grouper, and there might be ten now, and there might be two or three out of Texas, two or three out of Louisiana, a couple out of north Florida, and five or six scattered along through the rest of us.

I would say ten to twelve boats, and you all are going to snatch 40 percent of our deepwater grouper, because we haven't caught it, and let me tell you what has happened. All the old fishermen have died off, through the years, that used to know how to catch it. I've been training some young fishermen to get out there and catch it, so they've got a future, because there's plenty of deepwater quota around, and now you all are taking 40 percent of our deepwater quota because we haven't caught it. That's not right. You all need to look at the science. If the fish aren't getting caught, that's because we're not out there catching it. We need to do something about that.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Renier, you're going to have to wrap up your comments.

MR. RENIER: You got me offline with my thoughts.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. We have some questions. Mr. Sanchez, followed by Captain Walker.

MR. SANCHEZ: Thank you. I wanted to see if you could elaborate, as I asked Mr. Niquet earlier, a little bit about your business model and how reliant you are on shares that you lease, and then, being a fish house owner, in your case as well, multiple fish houses, how you lease them to people that are also reliant on them.

MR. RENIER: So I probably own, me and my partner, half-a-million pounds of quota. I probably lease, like I said, a couple million pounds more. I lay out millions of dollars, in January, to get

quota for all my boats to fish. I've got four or five fishermen that own boats, and permits, that don't own one pound of quota. They don't have the money to lease the quota, and so I'm constantly out there leasing quota, all over the place, just to keep the boats fishing, and it's tough, and it's very expensive.

I don't make a penny off of the quota that I lease. If it costs me -- For instance, if it costs me $4.65 a pound, which is what I pay right now for American red snapper, and, mind you, a fish, we're paying $6.75 for it, and we pay $4.65 a pound for it. If I've got to borrow the money from the bank, whatever the interest is is what I put on it, and that's what the boats pay. I don't make a penny on the quota, but it keeps the boats fishing, and it keeps the fish house going, and it keeps fish going to everybody's plate, and it's a lot, and it's a struggle, but we've got no choice. If we want to stay in it, we've got to do it.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Thank you, Mr. Renier. First off, since you seem to have experience with the deeper-water groupers, what are your thoughts on this shallow-water grouper split that we're --

MR. RENIER: I don't like it at all. I would like you to leave it just the way it is. Number one, we catch about 300,000 pounds of the scamps a year, and why go ahead and split it off? If you've got something that's working there, why are we going to mess with that? It's working good, and we haven't had an issue. Nobody has had an issue with it. That's one of the few things there has not been an issue with anywhere.

MR. WALKER: All right, and so let me ask you this. How would you address what some people see as a problem with investors, speculators, and retirees in the IFQ program?

MR. RENIER: That's a hard question. That's a question that you guys are going to have to figure out, and I'm not putting my foot in that water.

MR. WALKER: Thanks a lot, Charlie.

MR. RENIER: Like I said, I lease millions of pounds of fish, and it would put me out of business if I could not lease fish. The problem is there's not enough fish to go around, and, while you're on that, one thing I do want to bring up, because some of you all asked me this last night, and I thought about it, and you all asked me how the red grouper industry is going, and you said all the fish weren't caught last year.

I am going to tell you that, last year, for five months, I had my boats on 5,000 to 6,000-pound limits, because we couldn't get enough quota, and we come down to the end of the year, in December, and hundreds of thousands of pounds of quota -- We charge our boats $1.75 a pound for quota, and red grouper quota was leasing for $3.00 at the beginning of the year. I'm not paying $3.00.

Our fishermen -- $1.75, to me, is the max they could pay, and, at the end of the year, people were calling me with 20,000, 30,000, 40,000 pounds, at a quarter a pound, because they sat on it the whole year and thought, at the end of the year, they were going to get $4.00 for it, and so that's another thing when it comes to the science and you all say we've got a problem, because they're not getting caught.

Let me tell you that my boats could have caught them, and, if you guys want to do a study on any kind of fish that we catch in the eastern Gulf, gags, scamps, deepwater grouper, snappers, and I own twelve boats. I will put you on, and I want you all there. I want you all to see what I see, because, like I said, if we're hurting the fish, we ain't catching them, but then, when the stocks are good, let us catch them.

Another thing, talking about snappers, is we don't target red snapper at all. Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, north Florida, they all have a snapper fishery, and we never had a snapper fishery down there, never. We didn't catch none of them. We didn't have any.

I grew up in Key West, and, if we saw one or two snappers a year off of the Tortugas, that was a lot. I can go to the Tortugas right now and catch 3,000 pounds a day. That's how far south the snappers are, and we don't catch the small snappers, the ones-to-twos and two-to-fours. That's not what we catch. Our longline boats, we all fish offshore in deeper water, and our average fish is fifteen pounds. It's totally different.

The stacks of little fish, I can take you to spots, in eighty to ninety feet, that are fifty feet tall of one to four-pound snapper, and nobody wants them. I don't want to deal with them, and none of us do. We have a very good stock in the eastern Gulf, and, when you all do this recount, I would hope that somebody looks at us never getting fish down there and says, wow, these are your fish down here, and can we do something for the fishermen that catch them every day, and don't have -- I don't care if we've got to buy the quota. That doesn't bother me, but we just need a shot at it, because there never was fish there before, and I can

guarantee you that there is a whole lot of fish down south.

Anytime you all want to talk to me, you give me a call. I want to help. I want to be in front of this, and not behind it, and I want to be in business for a hundred years, arguing with you guys back and forth, to make it a better industry, and I want everybody that wants to eat a snapper and grouper in this country to be able to eat one, and not an imported one, but a local one.

I live on Madeira Beach, and there is hundreds of restaurants on that beach, and there's four that serve domestic seafood. Everybody else serves imported garbage, because it's cheap, and so let us keep some good stuff around.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right, Mr. Renier. Thank you very much for your comments. We have one more question from Mr. Dugas.

MR. DUGAS: Thank you, Charlie. I just want to say that I chatted a little bit with Charlie last night, and it was pretty informative, and I think that council members should take the time to do the same thing. Thank you.

MR. RENIER: I appreciate it. I'm always available. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you. Next, we have Captain Johnny Williams. Hello, Mr. Williams.

MR. JOHNNY WILLIAMS: Good afternoon. Johnny Williams, Williams Partyboats, Incorporated, a third-generation partyboat operator out of Galveston, Texas. As some of you new council members may not be aware of, I don't really have a script when I come up here, and I just kind of speak from the heart, and so let me go over a few things that I would like to mention.

A couple of years ago, I want to a program over here in Mississippi, and I think it was SEDAR, and they were showing us the harvest that we were going to have, and it was probably as higher, or higher, than the historical landings have been for red snapper, and I posed the question to the people on the panel, and I said, if we collapsed the fishery, fishing at that level before, what makes you think we're not going to do it now, and everyone just kind of looked at each other, but no one had an answer.

I think my question is probably validated by the fact that, off of Texas anyway, this year, the fishing wasn't as good as it was last year, and last year it wasn't as good as it was the year before, and it's just been going downhill. We've been running farther out, and we've been catching smaller fish.

I've heard people say that, well, you know, people voted not to raise the quota, and everyone in the for-hire sector, like Bob Zales mentioned, that I heard, said don't raise the quota. The commercial fishermen too came up and said don't raise the quota, and the quota still got raised anyway. I think we're in dire straits here, if we continue going like we're going, and we're not going to be able to have the stock recover by 2032, and quite the antithesis. We're going in the wrong direction, and we need to do something about it.

Now, as far as the allocation of the quota, I think probably the commercial fishermen are going to catch the quota this year that they're allocated, and the recreational fishermen are going to catch the quota that the states allocate to them, but, since school is starting earlier and earlier every year, the partyboat and charter boat business, the for-hire sector, is going downhill in August.

I heard people talk about conflict out there, because there are so many user groups out there at one time, and I've got a perfect solution for all of it. Amendment 42. We had a pilot program, and it worked extremely well. You get to choose when you want to fish, and not when the government tells you to fish.

This summer, we tried something where, instead of fishing twelve-hour trips the entire duration of the red snapper season, we started doing some thirty-six-hour trips, and we took fewer than half the people that we catch on twelve-hour trips, and we made almost the same amount of revenue on the two-day trips as we would on two twelve-hour trips. We burned a little more fuel, but we only basically caught less than half the fish that we would have caught if we had been fishing on twelve-hour trips, and so I can do more with less, if you just give me that opportunity.

Give me, and give the rest of the for-hire sector, the opportunity to fish the way they want to, instead of the way we're required to in this structure, because everyone has different needs, all up and down the coast. Thank you very much for your time, and I appreciate it.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Captain Williams. We have a question. Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: First, compliments on the hat. I like it. Johnny, I appreciate you being here, and I know you expressed concerns about the decline of the fishery, and you also talked about Amendment 42, but we do have an amendment before us that would

consider moving the start date of the red snapper season from June 1 to either the Friday day before Memorial Day, or potentially even earlier into May, and what are your thoughts on that for Texas?

MR. WILLIAMS: I would certainly agree that that would be a better solution. I mean, even May 1, or something like that, because, once school starts, most of our clientele are either people that are tourists, are people that have children in school, and can't afford their own vessels, and, in order to enjoy the fishery, they have to come out with us.

Now, when school starts, which many of the people that can't afford the boats have children, which are very expensive to raise, and they have to save their money to buy school clothes, school supplies, this, that, and the other, and so, generally, with school starting earlier and earlier every year, and, this year, we had some schools that were starting as early as the first week in August, which is unheard of. Back when I was a child, we started, you know, around -- It was after Labor Day, and we got out in May, but now that's no longer the situation, and the solution is, yes, I would certainly be amenable to starting earlier, on May 1, or something like that, and just let it go.

I mean, this year, I suspect the for-hire sector is not going to catch their quota, but we won't know about it. It takes so long to collect the data, and then, if they tell us, okay, you know, the first part of October, okay, we're going to open it up for ten days, October 1 through October 10, we don't have time to get the word out to our clientele, or anything like that, and so I think that probably the for-hire sector is the only sector that is probably not going to catch their quota this year.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We have another question from Captain Frady.

MR. FRADY: Mr. Johnny, thank you so much for being here. Would you support a hard closure for the red snapper, in say August, for a possibility to have something in October, to have something you can count on, a hard start on October 1?

MR. WILLIAMS: Troy, my hearing is getting bad, and I didn't quite understand the question. I'm getting some hearing aids, and I'm coming to the next council meeting, thanks to my girlfriend. I want to be able to hear everything that everyone says.

MR. FRADY: All right. For the charter-for-hire red snapper, you acknowledged that you would support opening up in May. Now, the time before, I heard many people in Texas complain about May and

June being real windy, and I'm thinking about -- I mean, I know you've got big boats, but I'm thinking about the greater everybody, and would everybody in Texas benefit, do you think, from opening up before Memorial Day?

MR. WILLIAMS: It's true, Troy, that we have some bad weather off of Texas, usually in May and the first part of June, and we had a storm that came through this year, but, once school starts, our weekday business just really goes into a tailspin, and there was number of days this year, just recently, where we didn't have enough people to go out on a trip, and, you know, that's pretty much unheard of when school is not in session, and so, yes, we would rather -- I think I would rather have the opportunity to go out in May than I would sit around and watch the boat sitting there at the dock after school starts in August.

MR. FRADY: So you would support a hard stop after say the second week, or the tenth or whatever, of August, for the possibility of having a hard restart for red snapper, no matter how many days it is, on October 1, trying to get a fall season, if we had the days to get --

MR. WILLIAMS: I would rather us -- Yes, I would be for that, too. I mean, if we shut things off earlier in August, and said, okay, you all are going to have so many days in October, and, when we get to November and December off of Texas, the weather is terrible, but, in October, we can usually make some trips, and, yes, if you all shut it off earlier in August, and say, hey, we're going to open it up for, you know, so many days in October, I would be up for that.

More so than that, Amendment 42 would be the ideal thing for me, because I want to choose the days that I want to fish, and not the days that you all choose for me, because I can run my business better than you all can run my business.

MR. FRADY: There is no doubt, and we've had this talk for many, many years, and I always appreciate your candor about it, and thank you for your willingness to make sure that the resource is -- To acknowledge that it's declining and acknowledging that we want to do something about it and try something different and do what's right for the resource. Thank you so much for your time.

MR. WILLIAMS: Thank you so much for your time, and I hope you all have a wonderful evening.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thanks, Johnny. Before we get to Dylan, I just want to recognize another council member, former council member,

in the audience, and that's Susan Boggs. Susan, it's good to see you. Dylan Hubbard.

MR. DYLAN HUBBARD: Thank you for your time today. I want to first start by saying that I got involved in federal fisheries management, and started attending these meetings, because of how disastrous Amendment 42 would be for our fishery, and so I just want to lead off with that.

Gag grouper, we need updated science as soon as possible. Based on the SEDAR Committee presentation, the gag assessment has not been finalized for the schedule, and I really would love to see that as soon as possible, and maybe at Full Council. It's a huge issue that we're being so constrained, based on an assessment with a terminal year of 2019.

Red snapper, leave the buffer in place, and it would have been nice to have that back the last three years or so, and we've been under our ACL for quite a while, but, at this point, we're seeing Gulf-wide discussions over this depletion, and this downturn in the biomass, and it would not be a good idea, I think, at this point, to start being less conservative with that management.

As far as SEFHIER is concerned, we need to move forward with this as soon as possible. In my mind, that solves so many other problems that are discussed around this table, for multiple facets of the fishery, the resource, and especially our industry.

I would support moving forward with SEFHIER with whatever we need to do to make sure that data is usable in an assessment. What I would hate to see happen is, in order to try to water down the program, in order to try to make it easy to swallow, we make the data unusable. We have to have a program where that data can be then input into an assessment and used for management. If we can't do that, we are wasting our time. We don't want to be mandated to report data that can't be used.

For red grouper, I look forward to seeing the Wave 3 numbers, hopefully soon, and hopefully, maybe, potentially, a little bit of added access. However, it would really benefit the recreational sector to have the removal of the twenty-fathom closure. It's going to be talked about at the next meeting, and I look forward to working with you guys to get that accomplished. It's an outdated rule, and it doesn't do what it was intended to do, and I applaud this council for considering its removal at the next meeting.

As far as enforcement and spatial area closure issues, enforcement

issues, enforcement is extremely underfunded. We have a large fleet of vessels out of our area, and I personally own and operate quite a few vessels, and we haven't been boarded in a great number of years. Ironically, we were boarded today, and we were checked for turtle gear. Luckily, we had it, but that's it. We have a huge enforcement problem, and the spatial area closures are hard, if not impossible, to enforce.

Yellowtail snapper and lane snapper, these are two very robust fisheries. Another reason that we're really looking forward to seeing that Wave 3 data is I'm hoping and praying that don't have a forecasted closure in lane snapper for this year. This fishery is very healthy, and it's expanding spatially, and it's getting a larger average size, and we're seeing the same thing with yellowtail snapper, and we're going to begin to have problems with both of those, and so I would love to see the council take some precautionary measures to prevent this moving forward, and take a hard look at that, whatever we can do to prevent it. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Dylan. All right. It was brought to my attention that there are some connectivity issues here at the hotel, and so there might be some folks that may have registered, or, if you know of folks that are registered, or maybe slipped out of the room, and, if you don't see their name on the board, they're not registered, and so Emily is walking back to the back there, to help make sure that you do get on the list, and so I just wanted to let everybody know. Next up, we have Buddy Guindon.

MR. BUDDY GUINDON: I know you look forward to this every so often. Buddy Guindon, Galveston, Texas, commercial fisherman. I'm interested in talking about deepwater grouper and shallow-water grouper and the immense amount of work you put the staff through to develop a document that they don't even understand.

First of all, I don't think that deepwater grouper has a problem. I think that, as we came into the deepwater grouper, or the grouper IFQ, people had time to pad the books a little bit, and so, if you look at the catch history, from the year of implementation on, we've had a pretty constant catch in the deepwater grouper fishery, and so we won't elaborate on that, but I think we should look at those numbers and see if there's something we can do there.

We're looking at some type of reallocation. I should be in favor of it, because I don't own any shallow-water grouper, and I catch them, and so, in some of these schemes, you will want to give me fish, and I don't think that's fair to the people that spent their life, or their money, earning them, and I think we should focus on ending overfishing and allow the people that own the shares now to

figure out where they are after this change, so that they can go back and redefine their business plan and make sure they have enough fish that they don't discards, that they cover all of their discards, like I do.

I think that would be a much more beneficial way to use the staff's time, and a much more beneficial way to continue to build value in the IFQ system, because, every time you say we're going to do this, or we're going to do that, it's going to change things to benefit folks that don't want to participate under the current system, by buying in or -- To hear that, you know, they can't make a living -- If they couldn't make a living, they wouldn't be here.

They wouldn't be fishing if they couldn't make a living, and so, when you get rid of the Chris Niquet's of the world, and, of course, there are small-boat fishermen that will suffer immensely, but there are also people like myself, who leases a lot of fish, and has built a business plan, and has built harvesting vessels, that need to have these fish, and, of course, over time, some of these deepwater grouper that I leased, I wasn't able to catch, but neither was anyone else, because I have offered them to everyone, and several times a year I sent out letters.

The system is working very good for the people that are participating and building business plans and working, and I would like to see us continue towards making the IFQ system successful, rather than trying to manipulate who is a winner and loser in the fishery. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We have a question from Captain Walker.

MR. GUINDON: Thank goodness for you.

MR. WALKER: I know you're a wealth of information, and I appreciate the opportunity to prod you a little bit. I think I heard this, but I would like to know if you agree with the requirement, one, to have a permit to own shares and a requirement to actually fish to own shares, at some small level.

MR. GUINDON: I like the way the IFQ system is today. If you want to put in some hurdles for people to jump over, I think you need to examine the unintended consequences of that. If Chris Niquet is forced to get a permit, and a boat, and put his shares into a corporation, where he can operate a fishing business under a new type of rule, then he will do that, and then those people that he was helping with leasing fish are going to be disenfranchised, and I think that will --

It will send shockwaves through the fishery, and it will do what should have already happened, in that it will consolidate the fishery, and that should have already happened, if we would have fully implemented an IFQ system, where we had full retention, because people would be forced to go out and get the quota they need, instead of throwing the fish back, and that's where the biggest problem is in our fisheries management.

Our scientists will tell you that, when you're discarding fish dead, it has no value to anybody, and we have one sector of the fishery that claims ninety-plus percent of those dead discards, when they only harvest 25 percent of the fish in that sector.

MR. WALKER: On those same lines, are you okay with investors, and speculators, who don't fish owning shares and making a living by leasing them out to people who do fish?

MR. GUINDON: In the beginning, I was against it 100 percent, but I can't be against someone who took his hard-earned money and invested it in a management system that's working very well for him. I think it's unfair to say to someone, who has taken their life's earnings and invested into something for their retirement, for you to now say, well, we changed our minds, and you need to go away, because, to be real honest with you, shares used to be worth $50.00 or $60.00 a pound for red snapper, and, today, I can buy them for $35.00.

If we keep going with this rhetoric of redistribution and getting some fish for the poor guy that is just getting started -- What you should think about is maybe fixing the fishery, so that there's some fish available.

In a fishery where you take 80 percent of this fishery, and 80 percent of that fishery, and we're headed for about, what, 50 percent of the red snapper are going to be taken off the table real soon, because of the fact that we have fumbled the management, and that's not your fault, if the science comes in and it's three years old, and you have to manage by that, but we have to fix the ability to maintain our stocks, in order to maintain our fishermen.

MR. WALKER: Great points. Thank you, sir.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: I always appreciate your comments, Buddy, and you kind of touched on what I was going to get at there, but I'm just curious what you're seeing in your neck of the woods as it relates to the red snapper stock this year.

MR. GUINDON: I'm sorry, but I can't hear a danged thing.

DR. SWEETMAN: Okay. I'm curious what you're seeing in your neck of the woods relative to red snapper this year.

MR. GUINDON: What I'm seeing?

DR. SWEETMAN: Yes, and we were hearing a lot of concerns around the council, and I'm wondering if you're seeing --

MR. GUINDON: I've been fishing out of Galveston, Texas, for forty-six years. I now take these catch share trips, where I go out and try to catch 500 pounds of fish, and I've always come in with some really beautiful fish, and I never have to throw a fish back. This year, we're throwing fish back like crazy, and I had to run ninety-one miles offshore to finish my trip.

It is, I would say, worse than I've ever seen it, even during the worst times of the derby, right now, and that's disheartening, because we've cut our quota to two-and-a-half million, and I'm afraid we're headed there, and it's no fault of yours, except that maybe listening to lifelong fishermen might be a good idea in the future.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Buddy.

MR. GUINDON: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Next up, we have Ashford Rosenberg. I'm sorry. Mike Jennings. Remember I told you that I was having trouble reading.

MR. MIKE JENNINGS: You were just going to skip over me, huh? No, but I appreciate you all letting me speak today, and, real quick, I want to welcome back John, and it's good to see you back on the council, and Troy there, with his tie on, and he's just as handsome as he can be. It's good to see you, Troy. I like seeing you around the table.

Real quick, I'm going to bring, I think, a little bit of a different perspective, that you haven't heard today, on the commercial fishery. I own a couple of charter boats, dual-permitted, and I own a dedicated reef fish and king mackerel boat out of Freeport, Texas.

I lease 100 percent of my allocation, 100 percent, and I do not own a dime, or a pound, and we stay busy, and I'm on a record pace

on each year, and I've caught more and more fish, and I've leased more and more, and we're just growing this, and building it, and it's something that we've based on a management plan that this council put in place, and, you know, addressing a couple of things that I heard around this table the other day, or yesterday mainly, was, you know, these guys were gifted all these fish, and now they're leasing them and not going fishing.

I would challenge this council to find someone, a single person, who was gifted all of the fish that he's got and is leasing all of the fish that he's got. I don't think you can find him. I lease my fish from two different individuals, and neither one of them received a single pound in the initial allocation. They invested hundreds of thousands, and one millions, to get into this fishery, and I found a way to lease those fish at the market price, get the best price I can for them, and make a living and to have a crew make a living, two young guys with kids that are making a living on that boat, as well as myself, and it's a big portion of my living.

I will give you this one perspective. If you push the individuals who have invested in these fish to buy a permit -- What's a permit to a guy who's spent a million dollars on the fish? Nothing, but he'll buy a boat, and he'll put a crew on it. The only person you're going to harm, and mark my words on this, because I will come up, like Bob Zales did, in two years and tell you, and remind you that I told you so, that the only person that you're going to harm is the individuals who are relying on those fish, who have built those working relationships, and don't have access to those fish any other way.

They're going to lose those fish. The guy that's done that investment, you think that little move of making him go fishing for 25 percent is going to make him sit back and just let you divest him of those fish? Come on. You've got to know better than that.

I was asked one question by a council member yesterday, and I was asked two, but I haven't come up with a good answer for the second one, but, one, I was asked, last night, and not directed at anyone, was why haven't you taken the time to buy allocation, to buy shares, and I do have a good answer. I was in the middle of the conversation last night, but my best answer for that is this, right here that I'm looking at, is watching what you all are fixing to do to men who had zero initial allocation, and saw an investment opportunity, and did it, and now you're just going to go kick him in the shins, because you don't like him, and, I mean, when did an investment in a profit, and a retirement, become a bad thing?

I don’t understand it, and it makes no sense to me, but you’re going to harm the people like me, who are requiring 100 percent access to those fish, and business arrangements, and handshakes we’ve made, and checks we’ve written, and that’s the guy you’re going to harm. You’re not going to harm that guy with those fish. You’re not going to do it. Anyway, thank you very much. I see my time is up.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We have a question for you. Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Mike, walk me through this. You bought a boat, and was a charter fisherman. You got into commercial fishing, again, because you need to have a multispecies, or a multi approach, to what Mother Nature, or life, throws at you, and you’ve got to have options.

MR. JENNINGS: Right.

MR. SANCHEZ: If, right now, you’re unable to access shares that you’re 100 percent reliant on to lease, what happens to Mike? What happens to your boat that you --

MR. JENNINGS: I lose that -- Those two guys are out of a job, and I lose that quarter-of-a-million-dollar investment. It wasn’t a five-dollar investment. With zero allocation, by the time that boat was done, and in the water, and moving, it’s a quarter-of-a-million dollars, and that was just getting my feet in the door. There’s been a lot spent since then, and it’s just gone. I will lose that. It’s not going to be a charter boat at seven knots. That’s it, and I won’t be the only one. There’s a lot of people relying on those fish, young guys, small boats.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any other questions? General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Yes, sir, and just a question. You’re leasing from a guy, or whoever, that bought their shares.

MR. JENNINGS: Yes, sir.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: And invested their money, and how much -- If you don’t mind the question, how much do you give a share to them, and then what do you get when you catch the fish?

MR. JENNINGS: I mean, the going rate right now on red snapper is $4.60 or $4.65 a pound, and then depending on what you do, and everybody is making anywhere from -- It depends on who you sell them to, and it depends on what happens, but anybody is making

anywhere from six-and-a-quarter to a little over $7.00, before cost recovery, and so you can do the math on that. A 5,000-pound trip would, you know, cost you, what -- I'm doing the math quick in my head, but $31,000, or $32,000, to get the -- Just to get allocation, for $50,000 worth of fish, and so $18,000, or $18,500, by the time you get back to the dock, gross.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I mean, I understand your points, but somebody that -- If I had put my money into it, and put my skin in the game, I totally understand that.

MR. JENNINGS: I have no dog in that hunt. I haven't made those investments.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I understand that, and what I do understand too is, in the future, if there's any more additional allocation, or any way of doing it, how could somebody like you not be able to buy into that yourself, and not have to buy it from someone else, and that's what I -- You know, if a fisherman was able to buy-in, and not have to lease, that would be a whole lot better, to me.

MR. JENNINGS: I'm able to buy-in right now. It's not that I'm not able to buy-in. I have an unwillingness to buy-in until I can see some stability in my investment. I don't have a million dollars to lose, and, the way this council is going, I think there's -- There's an element involved that wants to manage by chaos and devalue this fishery, and it just doesn't make sense. Some guys have gambled on it, and it has paid real well for them, but, with this council in control of this issue, it doesn't -- There is no incentive, on my part, to take that chance, not with -- You know, I've got a daughter in Texas A&M, in college, and I've got things that I see a future on my investments, and red snapper shares may be one, at some point in some time, but, at this point in time, I just don't -- I don't trust this council enough to make those kinds of monetary commitments, and that's my best answer.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Thank you.

MR. JENNINGS: Yes, sir. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Dugas.

MR. DUGAS: Would you support the red snapper charter season opening on Memorial Day Weekend?

MR. JENNINGS: You know, I'm glad you asked that. I actually spoke with I think seven in my port, and, for me personally, I want to

see it later. I mean, we're unique in Texas. We do get some beautiful weather in the fall, going into August, and we still will book enough trips, even when school goes back, when kids go back to school, and we have a built-in customer base, with Houston forty-five minutes up the road, and it's the fifth-largest city in the world, or the fourth largest now, in the United States, and I'm not real sure, but our customers are basically Houston-based.

They drive in in the morning, and they fish, and they go home. We're not -- We're completely different than Orange Beach, or Destin, and we're even different than Venice, where it's a destination-type fishery, and you've got to have lodging for them and everything, but, for us, the later start would probably be good, but talking to -- I've specifically asked that question, and about half were I'm fine with the way it is, or I would sure like to see it open later, and run later in the season, and then the other half were like, well, what's a week, and let's try it. I'm kind of in that same category.

If it opens a week earlier, I'm not going to throw a tantrum, and we'll try it and see what happens, if it's stays the same, and I know it's not going to get pushed back, and so, if it stays the same, I'm good with that. if we want to see what Memorial Day Weekend does, it's seven days, and, I mean, it's not really a lot of skin off of my back one way or the other, and I don't know if I see a lot of advantage to it, but, if there's some ports that do, then let them try it.

MR. DUGAS: Thank you.

MR. JENNINGS: Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Next, we have Ashford Rosenberg.

MS. ASHFORD ROSENBERG: Good afternoon, council. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I know you all don't usually see me up here, but just imagine me with a big red, bushy beard, and we'll get through this together. My name is Ashford Rosenberg, and I'm the Policy Director for the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance.

First, J.D., and Billy, congratulations on your reappointment. Welcome back. John, Troy, and Jason, congratulations as well, and welcome, or welcome back, in John's case. We look forward to working with all of you on the important tasks ahead of us to conserve our marine resources.

I will start with Amendment 53. You can read more detailed

comments in our letter, but we continue to urge the agency to put any revised analysis on Amendment 53 and red grouper in front of the Gulf Council, in front of the public, for transparent deliberations and input.

Moving on to IFQ programs, the Shareholders Alliance are in support of the thoughtful and deliberative process that has happened to-date, but we remain concerned that there's not a common vision for the future of our fishery. I understand that the Gulf Council doesn't usually spend time thinking about vision statements, but, considering that any changes you make at this point, or any modifications you make at this point, to the IFQ programs will impact literally every participant in those programs, a vision statement is well worth the time, and I would urge you to reconsider your vision statement in Full Council.

From a thirty-thousand-foot view, we provide the following questions for consideration as we continue down this path. First, how should fishery trusts, and quota banks, present or future, operate in a post-Amendment 59 fishery? How should retired fishermen be treated in a post-Amendment 59 fishery? These men and women have given years on the water, and they have chosen to sell their boat and permit, as they were permitted to do, and wind down operations. Should their life and dedication on the water now be punished?

Does the council want to cap the potential for fishermen, or fishing businesses, to grow with these permit and landings requirements? What should the next generation of our fishery look like, and what pathways should be available to them to enter and grow in the fishery? What are the remaining objectives for Goals 3, 4, and 5 that the council developed last year?

These goals do not exist in a silo. They all interact with one another, and we need to make sure that, as we go down this path with Amendment 59, that we are not making changes that are actually counterintuitive, or counterproductive, to the goals that you put in place. For example, changes in 59 may, and likely will, go against Goal 3, which is to maintain flexible fishing options and economic stability within the IFQ programs, and against Goal 4, which is to increase market transparency.

Now to the specifics. We support the removal of Action 4, Alternative 3, for all the justifications given in committee yesterday. We request that, in Action 1, an alternative be added that sets a landings threshold of 10 percent for analysis. As some committee members noted yesterday, flexibility, and an achievable bar, is important, to ensure that we don't inadvertently

harm fishermen and fishing businesses.

We also request adding a two-year requirement for maintaining active participation status, without a limited use. Our environment is getting more unpredictable, and storms are getting more severe, and increasing in frequency, and, again, we don't want to cause inadvertent harm.

On to Amendment 58. We support dividing the document into two. This was an incredibly complex document. You know, basically it's a Rube Goldberg machine, and it's overly complicated, and not necessarily so. We also would be glad if the council would use this allocation review policy to actually consider new information that may be coming out about recreational and commercial allocations, instead of just marrying this idea of calibration and reallocation.

Electronic monitoring, we want to note that we are optimistic about the future of electronic monitoring and our work in that realm. We hear a lot about data improvement, and data modernization, and EM could be an important tool in that toolbox.

Lastly, on red snapper, we have heard lots of discussion today about the status of the fishery and what fishermen are seeing on the water. I urge you to please listen to these fishermen. They spent their life on the water, and they spend untold hours, and they see things first, before anyone else does, and please listen to them.

I understand that, on paper, it looks like our landings are on track with previous years, but what that picture doesn't show you is effort and how far they're going and how long they're out, and so there's ways that we can get that information in more real time, and the Shareholders Alliance stands ready to work with you on that, so that we can give you data that gives you an accurate picture of what's going on on the water and provides the data that they're seeing, and their anecdotal life experience, into data that you can use for management, and, with that, I will take any questions. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We have a question from Mr. Sanchez.

MS. ROSENBERG: Yes, sir.

MR. SANCHEZ: Just one question. In 58, if there was a percentage requirement to be landed, and there are some options in there, and is there some suggestion that you might have for a percentage, if one had to be chosen, that might not be in the document right now?

MS. ROSENBERG: So we definitely want to see 10 percent added for analysis. As far as actually selecting that as like a preferred, we're not there, and we would need to see some more analysis on that, and that also goes back to what the council wants to see fishery trusts, or quota banks, look like.

On paper, the quota bank, we don't have a permit, and we don't have a vessel, and so that precludes us from a landing requirement, and we feel like we've spent a lot of time building a really successful program, that really helps a lot of young fishermen, and so, whatever path the council goes down, we would love to continue having conversations of how the quota bank can continue to operate in that role.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you.

MS. ROSENBERG: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Bobby Kelly.

MR. KELLY: Good afternoon, council. My name is Bobby Kelly. I'm out of Orange Beach, Alabama. I own and operate two multi-passenger boats. This is my first council meeting since August of 2022. I came here really today just to make sure that I had a good before picture of Captain Troy, so I can later have an after picture, when he's all said and done with this, and so, with that being said, Troy, congratulations, and thanks for being here and representing the charter fishermen. Also, just thanks, Ed, for being here and doing what you guys do too, and John is back, and I just want to touch on a few things, while I've got my three minutes.

The long-devoted council members, you need to pay attention to things that are not being said at testimony, and one thing I would like to point out is this is probably the first meeting that I've ever been to at public testimony that I haven't heard the one phrase, and has anybody got an idea? There's more red snapper in the Gulf now than there's ever been. You have not had one person come up here and say that, and do you know why? The fish are not there, guys. We have caught them.

People asked me the other day, and I told them I was a boat captain, and how's the fishing, and I told him, and he goes, what's wrong? I said, we're what's wrong, the fishermen, the recreational, the charter, the commercial. We're catching them, because you said we can, all right?

The data is there that says the fishing is bad, and you guys aren't looking at it. The average size is down, and the CPUE is down, and the bottom longline survey is down, and it's coming, guys. If we don't do anything, it's coming on, and so I have heard some talk about moving the opening of red snapper back to the Friday before Memorial Day, and you're kidding yourselves.

Next year, that's May 23, and do you know what day you all announced the federal for-hire red snapper season this year? Anybody? May 21, and so, if you do intend to do something like that, there's going to be a lot of policy coming on the backside.

I did commercial fish at one time, and I leased 100 percent of my fish from guys that, if you were to make them get on the boats, that would take fish away, and it would have kept me out of there. I divested and moved on to a more passive income, because I like getting paid by the hour, instead of by the pound, and so thanks, guys, for letting me come here.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Bobby. Next up, we have Ben Allen.

MR. BEN ALLEN: Hi, everybody. Thanks for having me here to speak to everyone. I want to thank you very much for all your effort in making sure we maintain a healthy fishery. I'm Captain Ben Allen, and I recently, as of last year -- I'm the new owner and operator of High Times Charters. I'm not federally permitted. However, I have charter fished here of Biloxi, in some capacity, since 2008, and very many of those years on federally-permitted vessels.

I want to touch lightly on a couple of things that have been hot topics first. As far as the opening for Memorial Day Weekend, leading up, I would say, business-wise, and for the American public, that's a good thing, because that's going to, you know, give access to that fishery, at a time when people are traveling, whereas they're not going to be down here in August.

Business-wise, it's obviously better, but my only concern would be that effort shift, because there will be many more fish taken out of the water in that time, as opposed to what would be happening the third week of August, and so that needs to be taken into consideration when doing anything there.

The other thing is electronic logbooks, and I know that that's been a hot topic for many years, and I hope that there is some way that we can get some sort of electronic reporting in place, to give us the better data available to determine the health of this fishery, and I want to spend the majority of my time talking about what I see, and have seen, I guess, at this point, in some way a

career in charter fishing, the decline of the red snapper population.

We have been here before. When I first got involved with a fisheries management capacity, I did -- We were kind of in that crisis mode, where everyone was scared, and we managed to get this fishery back healthy, where everyone got more quota, more time, and we're on the backside of that now.

I mean, I will tell you, having fished on multi-passenger headboats here in our local waters, having fished on smaller boats, federally-permitted in our waters, and now on a boat that does not have a permit, but I plan to be vested soon, that the average size, and the average number of fish, is less.

I don't seen eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one-inch fish. They're small, or they're very large, and whereas, in the past, it's unheard of for guys out of Biloxi to run fifty, sixty, seventy miles to catch limits of snapper for their guests, and people are doing it now, and they're doing it consistently, and that is because the apples have been picked from the tree.

There is less there than ever, and so it is not just on us, but also on you to hold us accountable. We put our trust in this council, to make sure that we have regulations in place to protect this fishery, and not just for me, and not just for everyone's best business interests, but for the people that will be here after us, for my children and my grandchildren that I hope to meet, and so please. I implore you to do what you can to ensure that is there, because, no matter how much money is available to anyone, that is what matters in the end. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Ben. We have a question from General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Ben, I know you've been fishing for a long time, and I know you've been on both sides of the fence. Do you think the discards -- Are you all discarding a large amount, whenever you're catching, and especially like when you were doing the federal? Were you discarding a large amount of the fish? Do you think that's probably some of the issues that we're having?

MR. ALLEN: So I would say that discards are at a higher level than normal. You know, when I say normal, I'm talking about five or six years ago, right, and I think, progressively, there have been more discards, and I do think it's an issue.

As far as -- We don't have as big of a problem with barotrauma as

let's say people fishing the deep water. We're catching our snapper in sixty to ninety foot, for the most part, when we're fishing close, but we still have the problem with the dolphins. The sharks aren't as big of a deal over here, as compared to other areas, but we do have a lot of discards.

I will tell you, sitting out there, which, like I said, I'm not federally-permitted, and so I'm fishing in state waters, and I'm, the majority of my time, sitting right there on that -- There are a lot of recreational boats out there as well, and they are going through a ton of discards.

There is nothing implemented to say that anyone can go out there with two people on a twenty-foot bay boat and throw back thirty-five fish between fourteen and twenty inches, if they can catch some of those nice, you know, twenty-inch fish, because they want to kill four fish that are fifteen or twenty pounds.

Now, I know, with the Tails 'n Scales data, and with the data you get with the state, you guys figure in some amount of discards, and I don't know those metrics, and you would know much better on the numbers that we have here for the state than I would, but I would tell you, from what I see, there are a lot of discards going on, and not just in the charter fleet, but in total, in our state waters fishing.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Also, as far as the early Memorial Day Weekend type, I've heard a lot of the charter boat fishermen, and that's what I'm getting it from, and especially they're saying that, you know, our regular charter boats, state for-hire, can do this, but our federal for-hire cannot do this, and yet we're missing out on some trips that we could get, that people --

Because, you know, the allocation in Mississippi is not very large either way, but the point I'm getting at is they're looking at it, and one of the things that they're telling me is that we're getting jeopardized, and, instead of being able to take our people out, and being able to go out and fish at the same time that the recreational and the state for-hire are doing, and we're not getting the capability of doing it. That's one of the reasons that I would love to see it happen, and I would like an equal playing field. I would love to have everyone on the equal.

MR. ALLEN: Well, so, for me, as I sit right now, the god's honest truth is that's an advantage for me, because I have guys that have been in this business for a lot longer than I have, and they have people chomping at the bit to snapper fish with them, and I get a week head-start, a week head-start on them, and, with that said,

I still think it is the right decision, though I don't benefit from it yet.

That's not just because it's going to bring more business to the Gulf coast, and I do believe there will be trips that will be ran that would otherwise be money left on the floor, so to speak, but I also think it's important to realize that that is a time that some people travel down here, and those people aren't going to be here the next week, or the next week, or the next week, and they may come down and want to snapper fish, and this is about access for everyone, and not everyone who has a boat.

The majority of our business here on the Gulf coast are people from the Midwest, people that are coming from Missouri, or people who are coming from Oklahoma, or Arkansas, who have never caught a saltwater fish. Our most popular fish to catch is a shark, right, but there are some people that dream of catching a red snapper, and they're only here on Memorial Day Weekend. Well, they can't do it. Sorry. Come back next year in June.

With that said though, right now, it would give me a disadvantage. I do think it is the right decision for the American public, but, again, I would like to reiterate that is important to take into account the amount of pressure that it would put on that fishery, that would not be there otherwise, because I will promise you that there ain't nobody fishing seven days a week down here right now in August. We've got our weekends, and that's about it.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Ben. Jim Green.

MR. JIM GREEN: Hello. Captain Jim Green, President of the Destin Charter Boat Association and the Charter Fishermen's, and I'm speaking on behalf of both today. Welcome, and congratulations, to council members newly appointed and reappointed. We appreciate your time and effort that you put into our fishery.

On for-hire data collection, both organizations support getting our data collection program back up and running. We support do-not fish reports, and we would support them on a weekly basis. In the headboat survey, they are called inactive reports, and it's very easy. With a few clicks, you can produce a month's worth of them. If you run a trip, or get a trip, in that time, it cancels it out, and so it's very user-friendly.

Our industry is committed to creating a robust data collection system. While the did-not-fish, or the inactive, report provides

a layer of validation, it is the minimum, and we would like to use them as a way of getting the ball rolling, but, in our minds, we have to continue to work to flesh out some means of an electronic monitoring that brings the program to a lower level of uncertainty in that data.

In the document, in Action 1 and 2, we support Alternative 2, trip-level reporting. In Action 3, Alternative 2, a and b, fishing and any kind of for-hire activity. In Action 4, d, up to 20 percent. In that 10 to 20 percent range would be good.

On the draft options for the for-hire buffer and the fishing season, right now, we support -- We appreciate the idea of going in there and helping lower our buffer, and making accommodations for some people's desire for a change in fishing season dates, but, right now, both organizations support Alternative 1 for both actions, no action.

As you have seen, and discussed briefly, in the Reef Fish Committee, the DCBA released the report expressing concerns of our fleet. During that discussion, I heard some misrepresentations of the numbers from our website, which I appreciate it. I rebuilt that website last week, and I'm glad that you visited it, but you can look at a six-pack maybe as saying that it's full capacity, but, when it comes to multi-passengers and headboats, that's a skew of the numbers, to say that that's the amount of effort that is coming out of Destin. Passenger capacity is dictated off the Coast Guard, and arrangement and other types of things, and most boats that are multi-passenger are not running at full capacity every trip.

What you have found in this report is -- I didn't pay all these guys. All these guys are coming up and speaking the truth, and it's being replayed in that report, exactly what was in that report, because guys are reiterating that, you know, and one of the biggest problems that we see, that is decimating this fishery, is a metric that you don't really have, or, at this time, don't have the ability to capture, and that's depredation.

If you took your release mortality and bumped it up to 80 or 90 percent, you know, that's going to severely change your catch advice, and, if you think that this fishery can withstand that amount of effort and depredation being applied, then you're mistaken. We need all of you to start working on depredation. It undermines -- It not only undermines the angler satisfaction that they're having out there, but it's undermining any kind of effort to rebuild, maintain, or work on any kind of fisheries management plan, when it comes to stocks, and so, with that, I appreciate the

time to get to speak today, and, if you have any questions, I will be available. I appreciate it.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Green, we have at least one question from Dr. Banks.

DR. BANKS: Thanks for coming up and speaking to us. I have two questions, if that's okay, and the first being we're hearing a lot, including from your report, about smaller fish, less fish. If the solution to that, whether it's localized depletion or just growth overfishing -- If the solution was to reduce your season, reduce some of the access, what are, I would guess, your thoughts, and not your organizations', since you will not have had a chance to talk to them?

MR. GREEN: I think it's reducing everybody's season, and I don't think it's just us. We're a very small portion of the fishery, and we are -- We are basically a quarter of the fishery, and it's -- You know, reducing the season is one thing, but it's really you've got to go a little bit further than that, and that's depredation.

The fish that are getting ate by sharks and mammals right now are fish that are harvestable on the way up, or they're fish that are being discarded, and it doesn't matter how well you handle the fish, and your practices, and you return them right, and you descend them, but, if the fish are not making it back down into the school of fish, then they're being removed from the biomass, and so it's not -- To me, it's not so much a season problem as we've got to figure out a way to handle depredation, and, to me, I would think that a reduction in season is a band-aid, but it's not the root cause of why we're seeing smaller fish and less abundance.

DR. BANKS: Okay, and so I'm not suggesting necessarily a reduction in season, but, if that's what it comes to to get what you're saying you want, bigger fish, a higher CPUE, that may be one of those band-aids that has to happen, and we will also have people standing up here telling us, you know, that's unacceptable, and this council has heard that before I got on this council as well, and so you kind of led into my second question with depredation. What are your thoughts on solutions to depredation?

MR. GREEN: Well, with mammals, I think nonlethal deterrents is something to look at, and I know that's a very -- I am not going to go running around with a shotgun and beanbags, and you can imagine the footage that would be put on social media of that, but nonlethal deterrents is a good way, and then, you know, we're

protecting the apex predators of the Gulf.

The sharks in the Gulf have no natural predation that happens to them, and, you know, it's kind of like -- Sorry, Mara, but it's like protecting lawyers and politicians. Like they're running rampant, and I like you, and don't take that the wrong way, please, but that's what I'm saying. You know, like we're protecting something that has no threat, and they're running rampant, and it has a serious problem with it, and so I think, if we look at a commercial solution for sharks, because, you know, they don't surface, and we don't have access to them, and we look at some nonlethal deterrent for dolphins, and then we're heading in the direction that at least fishermen can understand, and that they can wrap their head around.

You know, I don't think the solution -- It's not the fish, and I don't think that, you know, a full-retention fishery is going to help you, because it's happening on the way up too, and so I think that we need to look at solutions like nonlethal deterrents and different fishery suggestions.

DR. BANKS: Okay. Last one, I swear. So there are deterrents that are on the market now, for particularly sharks, and does your vessel use any of those deterrents currently?

MR. GREEN: I primarily fish in shallower waters, and we have more of a dolphin problem than a shark problem. It seems like charter boats, and people that fish further offshore, really engage in more shark issues than they do dolphin, and so we primarily deal with mammal issues. I have seen some of those, like the magnets and stuff like that, and I personally haven't dealt with that, but mine is primarily mammal interactions, on my boat.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Frady.

MR. FRADY: Captain Green, thank you so much for your comments and the study that you did. I was just sitting here thinking, and do you think that -- I mean, I know the dolphins are a problem everywhere for us, and they've gotten worse in correlation to the fishery declining, as far as the average size of the fish, and do you think, if we had a healthier fish stock, a larger average weight per fish, do you think it would stop the training the dolphins, because we're throwing back a lot of fish. I'm throwing back seventeen to nineteen fish before I catch a keeper, within thirty miles. Would that solve the problem, if we managed the fishery to be a healthier size, and would the dolphins -- You would keep them, and you would stop releasing so many fish, or the anglers would stop releasing so many fish, and would that be a

possible solution, to build the fishery back up, to where the average weight was bigger, and so we're keeping more fish, and the dolphins are just slapping their tails, pissed off at everybody, because we won't feed them, and would that be a possible solution, in your mind?

MR. GREEN: I mean, I think it does, in theory, but, in the end of it, you know, it seems like the dolphins learn really quick when red snapper season starts, and usually, in the spring, we're catching fish, and they're allowing us to discard them, because they know that they're coming back in the water.

As soon as they start seeing a reduction in the amount of red snapper that are being released, you start having attacks on the way up. I mean, we're talking about a very intelligent mammal, and, you know, I think that that's well and good, and I would love to see that, and, you know, if they did start eating them, it would fill them up quicker, I guess, but that's -- You know, I think we're a long way from that, you know. I think moving the date, and reducing the buffer, that's kind of -- To me, that's rearranging the chairs on the Titanic at this point, and like we need to get a grip on the root issue. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Captain Green. All right. Clarence Seymour.

MR. CLARENCE SEYMOUR: Thank you, council. I would like to say welcome to the new guy, Mr. Osborne. I'm Captain Clarence Seymour, from Biloxi, Mississippi. I own the Charter Boat SYL, and I'm federally managed, with twenty-seven years in business, and to John for coming back, and, also, Captain Troy Frady. I appreciate you.

Okay. Today, I come up with a -- It's on the federal fishing season, and so I've come up with a petition that you guys should have been emailed today, and so it's all in paper copy also, and so, basically, the fleet kind of instructed me to come to the council with some type of item.

Number one, the reason that we did it like this, the Mississippi for-hire industry does not have a -- We don't have a charter boat association anymore, and we have one, but none of us guys are in it, because they basically just use it as a drug program, and so I just wanted to make that clarified how that works.

This is our way to say -- We ended up getting seventeen signatures, by e-signature, and so I just wanted you all to know that I've got, I don't know, probably four or five in the crowd, that may

not speak, because this is their first council meeting, and so this is going to let me kind of let you guys understand how we do -- We do have a small fleet, and so seventeen have signed, and it's actually around ten that actually -- Ten to twelve, if I can't put the pencil to it, that actually participated in the federal red snapper season in Mississippi, okay, and so just put that number to our fleet here.

The reason that it is important for us to have Memorial Weekend is because COVID changed the school district totally, and I've got it wrote down here in my notes, and so, as of now, today, I've run thirty-seven red snapper trips, and I have collected 377 by Mississippi Tails 'n Scales, and I pulled it off my thing.

I know you all have seen the Margaritaville parking lot. It's empty, and that is the indicator for how many tourists is in town. It's very important to understand that the only reason that my son and I went out today, which we were the only two federally-permitted charter boats that logged out today on hail-out, was because it was a rainout from another day, which was put over to this Wednesday, and it just happened to be on the same day as the council, and so I want everybody to understand that we may have a small fleet, but it's going to work really good for our guys, and so we put eight days on the end, and we took eight days on the front.

We'll take what we get, but this is the first time that I've actually got to come to this podium and beg for this, because Mr. Mike Foto, and he owns the Charter Boat Fish Finder, and he asked me, five or six years ago, when we started Tails 'n Scales, and he said, Sebo, why can't we ever get started off on the Friday of Memorial Weekend, and I said, Mike, it's never come across this table. I said, it made it to the table in the AP to explore moving the season a hair up, and I know that, when I seen that, I said we have to be the push, because these people is going to be in our town in August, and I need these guys to show up.

They're here, and they may not speak, and I want you all to recognize them, and there are some young guys here today, and they're really adamant, and they're going to be great fishermen, but stuff like this is their future, not mine, because, eventually, I will be to a point where I will be out. Am I out of time? Not yet? Okay. Anyway, as far as that goes --

CHAIRMAN ANSON: To answer your question, Clarence, you are, but, if you have a couple of points, brief points, you can go ahead and --

MR. SEYMOUR: Okay. Brief points. Amendment 59, I have a lot of guys that I know very well, and they're hard-working guys, and please keep them in mind on knocking their feet out from under them. The buffer, 9 percent, we'll take the buffer, and we'll take the day before, and don't forget that weather is a big factor in the Memorial Weekend start, but we'll take that, and just to say that we're always going to have weather, and, yes, dolphins do take red snapper, when you throw them overboard. Any questions?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We have at least one. Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I see General Spraggins is -- Sebo, you're on the AP, right, and were you there?

MR. SEYMOUR: No, and I just got appointed to the AP for reef fish this year. I've been on it before.

MR. WALKER: So what I'm hearing here, at this meeting, is it seems to be the rationale for not moving the season forward is to reduce the harvest, is the best thing I've heard, and maybe stability, because that's the way it is, but I'm hearing that guys are saying, you know, we don't want to bring the buffer back, and the charter guys are kind of voluntarily saying we don't want to go out there and book every charter boat in the marina, because we're going to put too much pressure on them, but, I mean, at the end of the day, a charter boat guy wants to book as many days as he can, in my book, and it's hard to argue that it's easier to book Memorial Weekend than it is August 28th, in my book, and so I really understand what you're saying, and, if you're weighing -- To me, in my mind, if you're weighing the pros and cons here, you guys have a pretty good argument for moving the season forward.

Saying we're going to book too many trips, and put too much pressure on the resource, is counter to the goals of being a charter fisherman, in my book.

MR. SEYMOUR: I heard the comment yesterday about -- It is on my thing right here about sustainability. That was on the notes, and so sustainability would be correct. Orange Beach, and Destin, and Panama City, are giant ports, and I understand that, yes, when they blast off, there's probably going to be a pretty good blast off.

Out of the say six federally-permitted that goes out in Mississippi, and we only have -- We're actually down to one multi-passenger left in this town, and so everybody else is six-packs, and so we're only collecting -- On opening day -- I don't think you could have made it out this Friday, an opening day, and so you

would have made it Saturday, and so that would have been one, and so that would have knocked you down to six days, and so, basically, there would have been no reporting for that day, and so that's why I think sustainability -- If that's the case, the 9 percent buffer -- That's going to stay there, but, if we continue to keep adding days on all the way to September, as Andy said yesterday, we're going to go into the next wave, and it's going to really -- But number one is sustainability, and I get that.

That is the number-one thing. I don't know, and for my dollar of whatever or what have you, and so I don't know. I would give up six days to get six in the beginning, if that's the case. I would let the council take that off of me, because that one graph that you all had yesterday, that came on the new sheet for seasons, it was running into September, I mean, and it put us a hundred days out, and, honestly, I think the fleet that is fixing to come up that's from Mississippi, the young guys, they could probably get by with sixty-five or seventy days a year.

We do not probably need eighty-eight or ninety, and especially here, and we're not going to use them all up anyway. My numbers that I just told you all is going to show that, because, last year, I ran forty-nine red snapper trips, and I captured over 525 red snapper, and so has the economy got me off this year? Was it the weather, or what have you, but thank you, Ed. That was a good point, and thank you, Ed.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Clarence, thank you very much for your participation today and what you do in Mississippi for the fisheries. Realizing that Mississippi for sure -- Starting on Memorial Day Weekend would help everybody, in a sense. That would help you, and it would help others, and there's a lot of people that don't realize, when they're coming down, and that's where I've heard quite a few people, and they will say, well, you know, I chartered a boat, but I didn't realize that he couldn't go out and go snapper fishing, but they could, you know, if the situation was changed, and that could happen.

I know that -- I think Alabama maybe, and Mississippi, are the ones that start on that weekend, as far as recreational and all, and I think that maybe Texas is doing their recreational prior to that, and Louisiana, and I think Florida starts with 1 June or something, but the biggest problem that I see is this has got to be a federal issue that is solved, because, from what I understand, Andy, and tell me if I'm wrong or right, but federal -- If we do it, it's going federal to all five states, and not just one, and

is that correct?

If we change the date of this federal start, it starts in all five states, and, as much as I want Mississippi to be involved in that, and I think that we should be able to do it, and I think it would help, and I don't know, and we've got a long, hard push for that, and we're going to have to convince some other states to follow in with us, if that's the way we want to be.

As far as Mississippi, for the people looking at it, our CPUE has gone up over the last few years, and, you know, our weight has gone down minor, but our CPUE has gone up, and so maybe everybody else ought to have a thirty-day season, like Mississippi, and then we'll catch up with it, but I do appreciate what you're doing, and I'm just joking with that last one, but the thing I'm telling you is I appreciate it, and I do think that it would be a great thing, to be able to see everybody on equal ground of being able to fish at the same time, and so I hope it works for you.

MR. SEYMOUR: Yes, General, and that was the main thing, was we rushed down here, and I got in at two o'clock, and it was so important that you guys let us have that kind of support, and I know I don't have complete, you know, everybody wants to do it, and I understand why, but, like you said, let's -- I think we can do this, and, heck, if nothing else, let Mississippi have an EFP, and let us try it out and see how it works, because it's not going to beat the quota up too bad, because we've only got seven federally-permitted charter boats on the coast that's working, and the rest of them is in Venice and wherever else, and so we don't have a big fleet, and it's going to work great here, and I understand that, at the larger docks, it's not, but it is very important, but thank you, General.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We have one more question from Mr. Dugas.

MR. DUGAS: Thank you, Clarence. We hear different opinions across the Gulf from charter captains wanting different seasons back and forth, at different times of the year, different weather patterns, and my question to you is, in the event that the State of Mississippi could put in some sort of state management for you guys, would you support that?

MR. SEYMOUR: Was that data management?

MR. DUGAS: State management.

MR. SEYMOUR: State management?

MR. DUGAS: Yes, and you would --

MR. SEYMOUR: No, no state management. No. No.

MR. DUGAS: So you're not in favor of working with the State of Mississippi to set the season?

MR. SEYMOUR: No.

MR. DUGAS: Okay.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Wait a minute. I take it that you don't like me anymore?

MR. SEYMOUR: No, sir. I love you like a brother, but state management has been a tough situation. It went down, and I think it's worked out fine the way it is, and I understand, but the problem I have with state management is, if you took 3.5 percent of the for-hire allocation, which is 3.3 million pounds right now, we -- Seven charter boats can fish year-round, and I don't think that fellow over there is going to give me 365 days of red snapper fishing. That is the pencil that I'm talking about. That number, with that small of a fleet, and if you're regionally managed -- We're okay being with our season, because it's mostly with the tourism anyway. You're going to see the -- When it comes down to when you're going to have the fall anyway, but that's my thing on that.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: We will give you 365 days, but you can only catch four fish.

MR. SEYMOUR: Correct. A year. Right. Thank you, all.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Thank you. Scott Hickman.

MR. SCOTT HICKMAN: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen of the council. Captain Scott Hickman, from Galveston, Texas. It's good to see everybody here. Welcome to old members and new members and Troy. It's good to see Troy Frady around the table. He's been coming here for a long time.

I'm one of the founding members of the Charter Fishermen's Association. I'm a dual-permitted operator out of Galveston, and I'm a red snapper IFQ shareholder, and I've been doing that for about eight years, and we've got less snapper in Galveston, I would say.

I heard Buddy having to run ninety miles the other day, and he didn't tell you the whole story, which was we were fishing a two-boat deal, and I was doing a lot better than him, and so he had to run about another twenty miles, so he could catch a lot bigger fish than me and show me up at the dock, and so that was the rest of that story that he didn't tell you.

It was good to see the council taking on the ecosystem-based fishery management roadmap. That's important, and I think a lot of these issues with king mackerel, cobia, et cetera, are because of water quality issues. We've got record sea-surface temperatures, definitely climate-related issues, and I think working on that product would really help frame some of these other issues that we're having, and it's not what we're seeing in front of us, and it's water quality, ecosystem-based, red tides, et cetera.

Definitely we want to see SEFHIER get back on the water, as soon as possible, and we support the nontechnical validation way to do that, and that gives us time to test new technical systems, such as the new Starlink systems, twelve-volt, and the new Starlink phone system that will be up this late winter or spring of this next year, and wind energy -- I heard somebody talk bad about wind energy earlier, and CFA supports, and wrote a letter of support, offshore wind in the western Gulf. We would like to get some of our platforms back. I think that BOEM has done a good job with their spatial planning.

The Galveston fleet wants a charter-for-hire snapper season Memorial Day opener, which aligns with our Star Tournament, and we've got customers that like to fish in the Star Tournament, and run it all the way into as late as we can in August. Any additional days, we would like those days to come in the fall, October or November or something like that, and I had a good bottlenose dolphin joke, but I don't think I've got enough time to tell it, and so I appreciate you all. Safe travels home.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: The light is still yellow, Scott.

MR. HICKMAN: I'm good.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Come on.

MR. HICKMAN: You want me to tell you my joke? Okay, and so, prior to the world being flooded, you know, God came to Noah and said you've got to get all the animals, two-by-two, and load them up on there, and all the animals came together, like Sebo did with his

petition, and said -- At that point, bottlenose dolphins were a land animal. They had legs, and all the animals got together and said the dolphins are such jerks, and we don't want them on the ark, and we can't deal with those animals for ten years on this ark, and so they let the land-based bottlenose dolphins off the ark, and so the bottlenose dolphins were like, you know, this is bad, and we're going to drown.

The devil showed up, and the devil said, I've got powers too, and what I'm going to do is I'm going to take away your legs, and I'm going to give you flipper, but the deal is that you've got to continue to be total jerks and harass all the other creatures, below the surface of the water and above, for eternity, and that's how we got bottlenose dolphin.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I want you to know that Mississippi does not agree with that.

MR. HICKMAN: Thank you, all.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Susan Boggs. Hello, Susan.

MS. SUSAN BOGGS: Good afternoon. Welcome to the new and returning council members. My name is Susan Boggs. My husband Randy and I own Reel Surprise Charters and Marina in Orange Beach, Alabama. We hold two federal for-hire reef fish permits and two federal coastal migratory pelagic permits. We own, and Randy operates, our sixty-five-foot headboat, Reel Surprise, and our nineteen-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, who holds a hundred-ton captain license, operates our thirty-six-foot six-passenger vessel.

I am going to provide a couple of comments on the modifications to the Gulf of Mexico for-hire data collection program and, if time allows, red snapper. During committee, in Action 4, Option a, Alternative 3, up to 50 percent of trips, was removed, as it relates to economic data reporting, and a new alternative of up to 10 percent of trips was added. I do firmly believe in the reporting of economic data, and I hope that this council leans more middle-of-the-road and selects Option b, up to 33 percent of trips, as its preferred.

I am concerned that the committee passed a motion to move forward with nontechnical solutions for for-hire trip validation. I will be the first person to say that this document needs to be moved forward as quickly as possible, but, if the output is of no use for management decisions, then what have we gained?

Some of the charter fishermen in the room may remember a pilot study, several years ago, that was funded by appropriations made possible by Senator Shelby. As I recall, the entire Alabama charter fleet participated in this program. Once the pilot study ended, the fishermen were disappointed, and discouraged, to find out that, because the data had not been validated, it could not be used for management decisions.

If you read the letter dated May 30, 2024 to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, that should be enough to make this council take pause. Without some type of validation, what is the purpose of moving forward with this document? I was glad to hear that the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is making new efforts to validate the SEFHIER program.

The Southeast Regional Headboat Survey has validated data. This allowed -- Excuse me. That allowed for fifteen -- Excuse me. For nineteen fishermen to participate in the Headboat Collaborative exempted fishing permit in 2014 and 2015, fishing for red snapper and gag grouper year-round, not to mention the 46 percent decrease in discards.

This EFP was so successful that it won the 2016 NOAA Bronze Award for implementation and piloting the program. Amendment 42 provides for this same opportunity and inclusion of more species. The current pilot program in the South Atlantic for red snapper looks a lot like that of the Headboat Collaborative.

I find it interesting that there is so much pushback for the use of a VMS. If you take a picture with your cellphone, it provides you with your GPS location. All of the charter boats have a radar, and the captains do not mind using that to target another fisherman's fishing spot. This whole argument is frustrating to me. I thought the discussion this morning during the SEDAR Committee was encouraging, but that process also needs good data.

In an aside, if a member of an AP, ad hoc AP, SSC, or working group is at a council meeting as a representative of any of those groups, they should not be allowed to provide their personal view. That is what this public comment period is for. I'm out of time, and I appreciate your time today. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Susan. We have a question or two.

DR. SWEETMAN: It's good to see you again, Susan.

MS. BOGGS: Thank you, C.J.

DR. SWEETMAN: I'm curious what you're seeing about red snapper.

MS. BOGGS: So the red snapper fishery, off the coast of Alabama, at least out of the Orange Beach port, is very poor this year. It's poor in a couple of ways. It's poor in the fact that the customer base is not there for the fishermen to get out fishing, and it's poor in the fact that, right now, I know, on our boat, forty or forty-five miles is where you have to run to catch legal-sized fish, without releasing half -- Say thirty to forty fish to catch a legal fish.

I know that, in shallower waters, where our daughter is fishing, it's really tough to catch legal fish, and what you see come to the dock, on any trip, is barely legal fish, sixteen to eighteen-inch fish, and I have seen four fish that may weigh twelve to fifteen pounds all year this year, and I know the charter fleet, in our marina, are not fishing on a daily basis. I've heard a lot of people say that, this year, your charter fleet is not going to catch their limit, and you're absolutely right. We're not. They're not fishing.

When they are fishing, they're not catching their limits, because the fish are smaller, or they're just not there, and so it is -- I hate to see reducing any kind of a buffer until we know what's going on with this fishery, but I see it every day at the dock I've been fishing, and, as a matter of a fact, this is how bad it is. A Tuesday in July, I went with my husband out on the boat, so we could go scout for fish, because he didn't have a trip, and the first stop we made was forty-five miles.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Great to see you, Ms. Boggs. I just thought I would ask just a clarification. You favor VMS for charter boats, and you prefer a technical validation option, versus a nontechnical, like a did-not-fish? Do I have that right?

MS. BOGGS: I guess that I didn't understand, and I was half listening and half working, and not hearing everything, and so, if you're talking about a no-fish effort, I'm fine with that. I mean, we do that with the headboat survey right now. It's very easy, and it's did you fish, no, and you move on.

MR. WALKER: And VMS? Do you support that in for-hire?

MS. BOGGS: I do. I don't have an issue with VMS. I know that my husband doesn't have an issue with VMS. We used them during the

Headboat Collaborative. I mean, to me, you put it on the boat, and you never know it's there, unless you get a phone call saying, hey, it's not working. I mean, if there's a way that you could ask part of the fleet to use the VMS, and I don't know if you can do it like with the economic data that we're asking for 33 percent, and can 33 percent of the fleet use some kind of a GPS/VMS component on their vessel, for tracking, for validity, because, without validation, you might as well not go any further with this document.

MR. WALKER: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Susan. Rachel Histler.

MS. RACHEL HISTLER: Good afternoon. Rachel Histler, and I'm here representing multiple generations of my family over in Double Bayou, Texas. Concerning Amendment 53, I find it unacceptable that the counsel provided to this body is to simply defer their duty to NMFS, instead of allowing the Gulf Council to do their due diligence in correcting the shortcomings of the previous actions. This will reduce trust and transparency in the council process. It is a disservice to you, the body, and the rest of the stakeholders.

During several presentations at this meeting, we heard about equity, and how can we be confident in NMFS equitably distributing anything, when they aren't being transparent in the process for Amendment 53? Trust must be built and maintained through ongoing behaviors. We demand that these revisions not be made behind closed doors. I'm sorry. I just deleted all of my notes, apparently. No, there is it. Okay.

We demand that these revisions not be made behind closed doors and stakeholders denied the ability to participate. Regarding Amendments 59 and 60, I have many reservations. Who and what are driving these changes to the fishery? This body is charged with the delivery of the most productive and beneficial fishery for both humans and animals. It is not responsible for making decisions based on politicians' fundraising needs or campaign promises. We are here to support the healthy management practices.

Some of the actions, and alternatives, proposed during yesterday's presentations would have consequences that could prove devastating to families like mine and others. We have been building our lives, and businesses, around the frameworks that have been put in place over the past seventeen years of the IFQ program. We have rolled with the punches and adapted to accommodate the challenges that we face as part of this complex ecosystem that we inhabit. We operate

in a way that benefits our specific interests, but still manages to abide by the plethora of laws and regulations that govern this fishery.

When asked what my decision would be, if I were the one sitting at the table, I can confidently say that I would choose the action that is least harmful to families like mine.

Many times, we hear about unintended consequences of the actions taken by the council, and I would posit that, once you are made aware of the consequence, it is no longer unintended. These decisions can be complicated and difficult to make. I urge you to consider what some of these options will do to the real people who are in this room and future generations of fishermen who will inherit what we leave behind. I don't want there to be sides in this fishery, and I don't want to feel like I am fighting this council. I want there to be an open and honest dialogue about what we are working towards and how we achieve our shared goals.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We have some questions. Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: In the spirit of open dialogue, your thoughts on the requirement to have a permit to hold shares, a requirement to be a participant, and, on those same lines, thoughts on investors and speculators holding shares. I would like to hear your opinion on that.

MS. HISTLER: Sure, and so, if you require a permit, I would answer your question with a question. When this IFQ system was first implemented, you were required to have a permit, and then, after some time, this council voted to remove that requirement. What was the impetus of removing that requirement, and then why would you now change back to requiring the permit? Did you achieve what you set out to achieve by removing the requirement for the permit?

If you require it, shareholders will go and get a permit. I mean, that's minimal. That's the least harmful option, in my opinion, for people like me. If you start to require people to participate in the fishery, as far as actually owning a vessel, or going out on a boat and catching the fish themselves, you're taking fish off of my plate, and now I have less fish to catch, because I lease all of my fish, and so that 10 percent, 25 percent, whatever percentage you come up with, that's going to take those fish away from me and my family and the other people who work on our boat to come and harvest those fish.

You're taking them away from them as well, and so you're taking away an opportunity for new entrants, and, a lot of times, here at

the council, we hear a lot of talk about new entrants, and providing them that opportunity, and, well, I am the next generation of fishermen, and I need those fish.

For the investors and speculators, that just goes back to that permit question of why did you remove the requirement for the permit, because I think we knew that, once that requirement was removed, then those investors were going to come into the market, and that was, in my opinion, the reason for removing the permit, right?

MR. WALKER: Well, I will tell you what I think. I'm a little bit surprised to see people come up here and say they're okay with the non-fishermen making $4.75 a pound on red snapper, while you make a dollar-fifty, and I've heard that from a couple of people, and I'm surprised by that, but I've heard it a couple of times, and so it's taken to heart, but you know the other side of it, where people are complaining at the dock.

MS. HISTLER: I do.

MR. WALKER: The guy that doesn't fish makes twice the money on the share of red snapper than he does, but apparently some people are okay with making a dollar-fifty, and will defend it.

MS. HISTLER: Well, here's the thing. There's nothing keeping me from purchasing shares, except for my personal choices for my personal business. Right now, at my stage in life, I choose to send my profits to my pocket, because I have interests in my community, where I want to spend my money. I want to give more tithe to my church, and I want to have the time to be involved there. I want to be politically involved in my local community and government, and so I choose to spend my profit to my pocket, but, if I wanted to, I could put that stuff on the backburner, and wait until some day when I'm retired, and I could be investing in shares, but I just simply don't choose to do that.

I want to be active in those areas right now, while I'm young and able and fit for service, and I want to do that, and so it's just a personal choice, and a business choice. There is nothing keeping us from buying shares.

MR. WALKER: Fair enough. I appreciate that.

MS. HISTLER: Yes, sir. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you. Next, we have Richard Fischer.

MR. RICHARD FISCHER: Right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the council. Thank you all for letting me speak here this afternoon. I want to thank Captain Walker for your recommendation yesterday to create a 10 percent alternative. I do understand what the economists are saying, that, for some species, you maybe need to go above 10 percent, and so I would potentially offer a solution of maybe a compromise of up to 15 percent, where it's not quite 20, but also not as low as 10, and I do want to thank staff, as well as the council, for presenting options are considerably less than 100 percent, because, as of a couple of months ago, it didn't seem like we were going to go down that road, and so I do appreciate you all for that.

I think some great points were brought up by Dr. Banks yesterday, as it pertains to the potential double reporting, with some HMS reporting coming down the pike, and I think it's very important that we don't overburden fishermen, and, if we're going to have some sort of reporting on both situations, whether it's HMS and then reef fish and HMS, we've got to go ahead and do them together, coordinated and in line, so that we're not overburdening fishermen.

Moving on to red snapper, I want to thank Mike, J.D., and the General for your comments yesterday on red snapper. As I said at the last meeting, and I will say it again, and, now, of course, this is not this council's fault, but the state season in Louisiana opened on April 15, and it was four fish, instead of the two that opens on June 1 for the federally-permitted guys, that was a big, big issue for our federally-permitted guys, because I heard from several captains who were struggling, for the first time ever really, to book trips in the month of June, and that continued through the summer, because, if you're --

Like say it's the middle of April, and you want to go red snapper fishing, and it's like, okay, well, I can wait until June, or I can go this weekend, and I can pay less, and I can catch more, and so it just -- It kind of created a booking inequity there, but, of course, in my opinion, that's more of an argument for state management, and not less of an argument for state management. As for potentially opening up the season earlier, I'm all for that, because that would allow that to get closer to that state opening as well.

I do want to touch on the fundamental issue that we kind of keep touching on, and that's that we've got different pressures, and different biomasses, in different parts of the Gulf, and that seems to be getting worse, and not better, and, until we address that, we're never really going to hit the crux of the issue, and I want to say that I respect all the opinions that have been brought up

here at this podium earlier today from other parts of the Gulf, but the fact remains that their problems are not our problems, and the one-size-fits-all system that we're locked into -- That really causes us to kind of have to -- You know, you're only as strong as the weakest link on your chain, and so it's really not fair to Louisiana that we kind of keep getting lumped into these one-size-fits-all situations.

We are very in favor of any kind of situation, whether it's state or regional management, and look. Would blind state or regional management have problems? Of course it would. Doing anything blindly would have problems, but, to this point, I have never heard an issue that can't be hashed out, have a conversation about it, and people can come to a situation that makes sense, and so I would really appreciate this council potentially looking at having some of those conversations, and I would love to be right there ironing some of those things out, and so I want to thank you all for the time. I see that my light is red, and so I'm happy to answer any questions, and thank you, all.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any questions? We have Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Thank you, Richard. As always, the voice of reason. You represent the Louisiana Charter Boat Association, right, and so it's not just the federal for-hire fleet, but it's also the state charter boats, right?

MR. FISCHER: Yes, sir.

MR. SCHIEBLE: You mentioned there was some consternation by the federal fleet about our early season start with the recreational season, as well as the state charter boats were allowed to fish earlier in April, and did you get positive feedback from the state charter boats about having the early start to the season and the four-fish bag limit?

MR. FISCHER: Yes, tons and tons of positive feedback, and, of course, that kind of puts me in a situation where you're serving two masters, where you've got state charter boats and federal charter boats, and potentially their incentives don't always align, and so this was a huge economic plus, booking trips, being able to make more money for our state charter boats on what our federally-permitted charter boats would consider to be a federal species, that they've spent tens of thousands of dollars on a permit for, and they spend way more in fuel, and their vessels are way more expensive, and the profit margins are lower, and so they see it as a deeply unfair situation, but, you know, if a state charter boat is catching fish in state waters, and they're going

with what the state is allowing them to do, I am not going to advocate on behalf of our federally-permitted guys, against our state guys, and say let's make their lives worse.

Like, to me, the answer is to come here, to the Gulf Council, and look for alternatives to make the federally-permitted guys lives better here, and, on that point, I would like to say that I am -- There is a huge issue, in Louisiana, of state charter boats fishing in federal waters, and, for the enforcement agencies that are here and listening, we could really use some more stringent enforcement stopping these. Of course, you have your state charter boats that are operating legally, harvesting in state waters, and of course that's happening, but there are a ton harvesting in federal waters, and bringing it back to the dock with no accountability, and I just wanted to mention that.

MR. SCHIEBLE: To that point, you mentioned that earlier to me in the season, and also I heard it from other charter captains from outside of Louisiana, that that potentially could be going on with the state fleet, not staying within their nine-mile boundary of state waters, and we notified our enforcement, and asked them to, you know, sort of tighten up and pay particular attention to that as they go, and still, to this point, we have yet to have any cases made, that I know about, and so I would like to know more about, you know, where this is ostensibly taking place, because we made a concerted effort to, you know, try to look for this as well, but they're not, obviously, identifying it, to this point.

LT. MORTON: Thank you for the question. We can also work it on our end too, in federal waters, and so any information that you all have, that you would like to pass along, and I would echo what has already been said, and like please let us know, and we can help you work on some kind of action to help correct that situation.

MR. FISCHER: Yes, sir. I appreciate that. We will, and we will continue to.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Your statement about them fishing in the federal waters, maybe, in order to make a bigger statement of why isn't Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama the same as Texas and Florida, and not having the nine miles to be able to go out.

MR. FISCHER: That's a good point, and, if the Gulf -- If the U.S. Congress were to address that, we may have some thoughts on that.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. I am not seeing any more questions. Thank you, Richard. We appreciate it.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you. You all have a wonderful evening.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. We have Colt Patronas.

MR. COLT PATRONAS: Hello, council. I appreciate the opportunity to speak. I'm sure you all have heard a lot this evening, and I've only been here for about an hour-and-a-half, and I've heard several different opinions as well. I hope you all haven't taken an ear beating and you all are willing to listen to a few things. I don't have a whole lot of education, as far as what all of you all do, and I know -- I was under the impression that you all are the fed guys, and not so much the state guys, and all I have is my testimony.

I've been fishing on the amberjack, which is a federally-permitted boat, for the past fourteen years, and I've only been running it for two, and so I have twelve years the cockpit, and all I really wanted to say is that we fish primarily on that -- I think the Mississippi state itself does a wonderful job at enhancing the management of that fish haven, and it is great, in my opinion, until the water hits about eighty-eight degrees.

Some years, that's the 4th of July weekend, and, this year, it seems like it just happened. We had a record cool July, with a lot of rain, and the fishing was great until about two weeks ago. Anything we can do to kind of move that up -- I was told to come here, because our local fleet, like Sebo said, was all in favor of moving the date up, and we get several people that come in May that want to snapper fish, and, like he said, you can take anything you want off of July.

Last year, I thought it was the most days we've ever had, and then this year, in my opinion, and this is the most days we've ever had, and I have one more snapper trip, and I am not looking forward to it. It is tough fishing out there. It's been said, and I don't primarily deal with the sharks where we fish, but the mammals is unbelievable, and it's disheartening to throw a fourteen-inch fish back, thinking this is our fish for next year, and to watch him get eaten by a porpoise.

We do it all day long, and we tell people -- Oh, that's a beautiful fish, and why can't we keep it, and we say, well, you've got to come back next year and catch that fish, and they watch him get eaten right behind the boat, and I don't know what is sustainable, but the shape we're in right now is not.

We leave out of the Palace Casino, there from the Ocean Springs Bridge, all the way to blue water, and I have never eaten one, but, the past couple of years, I think, if you bought a state fishing license, you ought to be able to eat one. I mean, we've got to do something, and, I mean, I don't know. I'm all in favor of however much information you all need, and I think Tails 'n Scales is a great app.

We used to do VESL, and I was able to detail more of my trip, and I can give you all water temp, current direction, and I can give you all as much information as you all need. Running the boat, it's pretty easy to, at the end of the day, say this is what was going on, and I can give you all as much as you all need, and I really don't have much other to say than that, but I appreciate you all's time.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you. We appreciate it. Next up, we have Cole Ganey.

MR. COLE GANEY: My name is Cole Ganey. I work on the Silver Dollar, and we're a federally-permitted boat. I've been fishing with them for the last ten years, running the boat the last three, and we would benefit greatly with a Memorial Day Weekend opening. There's just a lot more business down here, and it's easier to book. We're going to be in competition with the state boats.

Another thing is I would like to see the 9 percent stay the same, and I wouldn't like to see it at 5 percent. We could just use that buffer to manage it better.

The only other thing I have to say is the king mackerel fishing around here, and I've heard a lot of other people say that, it's nonexistent. We'll fish, I don't know, almost a hundred days a year, and trolling a lot, and we've caught maybe two king mackerel this year, and that's crazy. They're just nonexistent.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Cole. Next, we have Chance Seymour.

MR. CHANCE SEYMOUR: How's it going? I'm Chance Seymour. I run a federal boat, a federally-permitted boat, out of Biloxi. I want to start off with saying that I would like to see a federal season open Memorial Day Weekend, and I think it would help our business out tremendously. Even if we cut it off at like July 31, and explored the option to do a late season, because I think ninety days straight is too much of a season straight, because that's a lot of pressure on the fish.

Our king mackerel, like Cole said, is nonexistent here, and I've caught probably ten this year, and it was in a two-day span, out of all my trips, and I would like to see if we could explore to get the triggerfish size reduced. I have fished for them ever since the season was open, on every snapper trip, and I have not caught a keeper yet.

The electronic logbooks, I wouldn't mind seeing them come back, but I think there was too much data being collected on VESL. It was too much of a burden, and I didn't really care for the trackers, but if you all come up with something to make it a little bit easier for the user, I would support it, and the live wells, using them to put the discarded snapper in the live well, I do like that idea. Other than that, that's about all I have.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: That's an interesting idea, but the dolphin are pretty smart, and it's probably not going to take them long to pick up on the fact that I need to follow this guy for the first mile, because he's going to drop his fish overboard along the way, when we get underway, unless you have a really fast boat.

In my experience, in a fast boat, without an illegal fish onboard, but it takes me three miles, at high speed, just to get away from a dolphin, you know, but it's an interesting idea, and you hate to just hand it to a dolphin and watch him eat it. That doesn't seem like it's helping anything either, and so I appreciate your input.

MR. C. SEYMOUR: No problem. Thank you all for this time.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We have one more question from Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Thanks, Chance, for being here. You are, obviously, aware that we're making changes, proposed changes, for the logbook program right now, and you mentioned too much data was being collected, and, you know, one of the things we are looking at is just subsampling for economic data, but do you have other suggestions, in terms of what you would like to see, in terms of modifications to the logbook?

MR. C. SEYMOUR: I would just -- Like we had to report every fish that was caught, and I feel like if you was just to report fish that were really managed, that really needed to be managed, the reporting we would be managed on, if that makes sense. The exact time hail-outs, and the exact time hail-ins, which that's fine, but it doesn't have to -- When you get back to the dock, it doesn't need to be immediately done. The price, which I get is for economic

disasters, but it's still a little bit too much information.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. We have another question from Mr. McDermott.

MR. MCDERMOTT: Chance, I talked to a couple of guys out of Mississippi that, you know, obviously, are already using Tails 'n Scales. If that data could be used for the federal for-hire data collection system, would you be in favor of continuing to do that?

MR. C. SEYMOUR: Yes, 100 percent, and even if there was some data that had to be added on for a separate section of Tails 'n Scales that needed to be reported, just a little bit extra, and that would be an epic program. That would be the ultimate goal.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. I'm not seeing any questions. Thanks, Chance, for being here.

MR. C. SEYMOUR: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Next up, we have David Walker.

MR. DAVID WALKER: Thank you, Kevin. David Walker, commercial fishing, Walker Fishing Fleet, Fishing Vessel June Sue and Fishing Vessel LaBella, and it's dual-permitted charter and commercial. I would like to welcome all the new council members and reappointments. I would also like to say that it's good to see Susan today and Johnny Greene.

Just a little history. I began participating in the Gulf Council process in my twenties. I was involved in my thirties, my forties, my fifties, and now in my sixties. I've been here a while, and I do have -- I would like to echo a lot of these concerns you're hearing about the snapper. The stock is in trouble, and three years, two or three years ago, it was mentioned, you know, that we don't need this increase, and the fishermen were looking out, and the fishermen depend on fish to make a living.

I'm going to speak about the IFQ program. Since I've been around, it's been the most successful fishery management plan ever developed by this council, and just my concerns is remember that, every action you take, there is reaction, and the testimony before me has laid that out well, and I'm just always grateful for the opportunity to speak, and thank you, and it's good to have the new council members.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Captain. All right. Next, and potentially last, we have Sean Heverin.

MR. SEAN HEVERIN: I signed up earlier, but I guess I realized that I wasn't in the list until I got to the bottom there, but, anyway, I have three longline boats in Madeira Beach that I own myself. I operate a few fish houses there in Madeira Beach, and I buy and sell fish from across the Gulf.

There is twelve longline boats that we buy from in Madeira Beach, forty-one rod-and-reel and dive boats. Some are part-time, and some are full-time boats there, and there are nine boats in Louisiana, and three boats in Texas, and so I see fish from all over the Gulf, and I kind of have a good feel for what's going on, and what I've noticed for snapper is the sizes overall are down. Like I'm seeing a lot more one to twos than I've ever seen in the time that I've been buying and selling fish and fishing myself here, and that goes from Louisiana and Texas and also Madeira Beach.

I know that the other fellow was saying that he sees all fifteen-pound-plus snappers, but, you know, I offload a lot of fish. Probably 9 to 10 percent of the snapper in the Gulf comes through Wild Seafood, and our fish sizes at Madeira Beach are smaller now than they have been when I first came in in January of 2021. They're still catching fish, but they're just having to work a little bit harder, run a little bit further, and, you know, it's just an indication, I think, that the snapper fishery is getting a lot tougher.

Texas boats, their fish are way small. They're like, you know, the boat comes with 5,000 pounds, and they might have, you know, maybe 1,100, to 1,400 pounds of four-and-ups, and then the rest are a one-to-two and two-to-four mixture.

The next thing I want to touch on is the deepwater grouper, and so, before I came to Madeira Beach, I was a deepwater grouper and tilefish longliner out of Louisiana. I was catching between 6 to 8 percent in deepwater in the Gulf, and probably 10 to 11 percent in tilefish in the Gulf, and I came to Madeira Beach, and I've noticed that the deepwater had a been a lot harder to catch. We have guys in Madeira Beach that try to catch them, whether it's the spring or the summertime. In the summertime, they get pushed out to thirty-five fathoms, and a lot of those guys fall flat on their face when they go into the deep water and try to make a trip.

Just so you know, the deepwater allocation used to lease for between a dollar to a dollar-fifty. This year, the deepwater allocation is leasing for fifty-cents, and it's hard to even give that away. I'm paying the boats $8.15 on three-pound-and-up

yellowedge, and, with only fifty-cent quota, that's a wide margin for them to make a lot of money, but, if the fish aren't there, they're not catching it, and they're not making any money if there's no fish in the boat.

I think the deepwater in the eastern Gulf is in worse shape than in the northern Gulf. I think the northern Gulf I think is okay, but, overall, I think deepwater is down. I would like to keep the scamp, if we could, and shallow-water grouper complex, and maybe just reduce it overall, if you're going to do some kind of reduction there, and I think it just gets really confusing when you start trying to create a separate category for scamp.

We have to lease just a pile of shallow-water grouper, in the beginning of the year, to get access to red grouper, red snapper, and gag quota that we need for our boats, and, every year, we always have shallow-water grouper left over. There's an excess of shallow-water grouper allocation out there, and nobody is catching it.

Let's see. I think there is a lot of shark problems that people have mentioned here, and we encounter the same issues with our boats. You know, if they're catching, you know, say 5,000 to 6,000 pounds on a longline trip, of various different species, they have probably landed 8,000 or 9,000 pounds, but only 5,000 got to the boat, and the biggest problem is with the sharks, and I think that finding a solution for the sharks -- I would love to buy and sell them, but, honestly, I don't know anything about buying and selling sharks, or where to go with them, or where to sell them, but I do know that sharks are great bait, and so, if we were able to create some kind of program where we could land sharks, and harvest them, maybe we could think the population out, and then we can reuse them for bait on the longline boats, because they would be a tremendous bait that we could use, for a cheap cost, and it would also thin the population, where no shark is getting wasted.

We don't want anything to be wasted, but we want to have a solution for, you know, thinning out the sharks, where they're not eating all the recreational and charter fishermen's fish, and the commercial fishermen's fish, and I think we could definitely utilize that resource, since they seem to be pretty plentiful.

As far as the permit requirements and making share owners catch some of their fish, or land some of their fish, some way, I mean, I think that would be fine. It seems very broad, and there's a lot of loopholes for people to overcome those. We lease -- I mean, the majority of everything that we land is leased fish, and so, if we weren't able to lease those fish from different people, then it

would make it difficult for us to keep in business, and my business model is basically I find allocation for fishermen to go fishing, mainly independent fishermen, and I try to offer them better prices for their fish than the options that they have.

There is a reason why we're buying and selling off of, you know, almost seventy or eighty different boats. I only own three, and that's because we get allocation for them, and we find places for them to offload at, and we get them better prices, and so taking the allocation off the market could impact a lot of independents that rely on us to get them quota and get them better prices.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you. All right. There is no one else who has their name up on the screen. Is there anyone out in the audience that did not get a chance to speak that would like to speak now? I am not seeing anybody stand, and so we will go ahead and conclude the public testimony, and conclude Full Council for today. One other thing that I did not mention -- General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I just want to mention about an event tonight. It starts at six o'clock, and it is across -- You were going to talk about it?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: I was, but you can do it if you want, General, but --

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Go ahead.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Okay, and so everyone is invited to the Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum, which is on 115 East First Street, essentially a block or two that way, I think, but, anyways, it starts at six o'clock, and it will be seafood, and this is local Mississippi seafood, as well as cocktails. It's a good venue. I've been there once before, and there is lots of neat items in there to look at and learn about the history of the local Mississippi Gulf coast, and so that's at six o'clock.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Yes, and, real quick too, if you all would help Mr. Williamson cross the street, because he had concerns, the other day, that he might get hit if he tried to cross Highway 90, and so if you all could help him get across. You can walk. For the ones staying here, if you will just walk straight down the main route there, as you come into the hotel, and you go straight across, and you can turn by Saltgrass, and go to the right, and then go to it, or, if you're driving, you can go straight across the street and take your first right, and it will take you to it, but it's a great event tonight, and it's casual, and so don't come

in tuxedos.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Will do. Otherwise, we'll start back up with Reef Fish Committee, is our first committee report tomorrow, at 8:30 in the morning.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed on August 21, 2024.)

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August 22, 2024

THURSDAY MORNING SESSION

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The Full Council of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council reconvened at The Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi on Thursday morning, August 22, 2024, and was called to order by Chairman Kevin Anson.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Good morning, everyone. We're going to get started here and continue with the Full Council agenda. As was mentioned yesterday, when we approved the agenda, we'll go ahead and do the Reef Fish Committee first, but, before we do that, I just want to extend a big thank you to General Spraggins, and his staff, for hosting and putting on the social that we had last night. It was a great social, a great event, and great food, and so we do appreciate it. General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Well, thank you very much, and this is for Mississippi. How do you like us now? We thank you all very much, and the Governor wished that he could have come down to be here with you all some of the time, but he was tied up, but I can tell you that we very much appreciate you coming to Mississippi, and thank you for what you do, and we hope you had a good time.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thanks again, General. I think we all did. Again, we appreciate it, and to you, and to your staff, for helping out. All right, and so that will take us to Reef Fish Committee. Dr. Frazer.

DR. FRAZER: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Ready to go.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Go ahead.

COMMITTEE REPORTS
REEF FISH COMMITTEE REPORT

DR. FRAZER: All right. The committee adopted the agenda, Tab B, Number 1, after adding updates from states on their private recreational red snapper seasons and a discussion on the status of the red snapper fishery under Other Business. The minutes, Tab B, Number 2, from the June 2024 meeting, were approved as written.

Draft Options: Reef Fish Amendment 58: Modifications to Shallow-Water Grouper and Deepwater Grouper Management Measures, Tab B, Numbers 4(a) and (b), a committee member noted the extensive amount of material and complexity of the draft options document and inquired if deepwater grouper could be addressed separately from shallow-water grouper. Council staff responded that such an approach should be feasible and then presented on modifications to management measures for shallow-water grouper and deepwater grouper.

A committee member noted that an increase in landings of scamp and yellowmouth grouper by account holders without shares may be due to low allocation prices. Another committee member stated that information on unused pounds sorted by active and inactive accounts is relevant to the possible distribution of shares within new share categories to active accounts.

Council staff inquired if an account would be considered active if it transferred shares into another account and then back to the original account. Dr. Stephen, from the Southeast Regional Office, responded that it would be considered active. Another committee member noted that characterization of active accounts should include individuals that may only land a small percentage of their available poundage.

In the discussion of Alternative 2 for Action 1.2 and use of landings history, a committee member stated that natural disasters could affect shallow-water grouper landings and pointed to Hurricane Ian in 2023 as an example.

A committee member inquired if there has ever been a case in the Gulf where a stock complex had been decoupled. Council staff noted that this would be the first time, but, when the individual fishing quota program was established in Reef Fish Amendment 29, this scenario was included, such that needed adjustments would be made based on IFQ share owners on record at time of the adjustment.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Frazer, we have a comment, or a question, from a council member. Hold on. Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Good morning, Tom.

DR. FRAZER: Good morning.

MR. SANCHEZ: Earlier on, we were getting to the complexity of the comments, that this is a super-complex amendment, and I wanted to pitch an idea, and I'm not sure where would be the appropriate time, and so, before we get too deeply into it, I think I would like to throw it out there, and then you can take up a discussion, or not, at the appropriate time, but, if it needs to be made into a motion, I guess I'll just start with something.

The motion would be something along the lines of to ask staff to develop options to use scamp as an indicator species for the shallow-water grouper complex and yellowedge as an indicator species for the deepwater grouper complex, and the reason for that, I guess, if I get a second, and I will offer some rationale, but I'm just trying to keep this document focused on the things we can do and get away from a lot of the complexity. This literally kept me up last night.

DR. FRAZER: Okay. Well, I would defer to the chair at this point, but I would suggest that we could certainly have that discussion, John, but I think, probably at the end of this section would be best, because that's when we're deciding whether or not we will split this document into two documents.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Frazer, I agree with you on that. I think there is a motion that kind of encapsulates some of the shallow-water and deepwater grouper aspects, separating them into two documents, and so I think maybe, Mr. Sanchez, at that time -- If you wouldn't mind waiting to offer your motion at that time. All right. Thank you. All right. Dr. Frazer, if you can continue.

DR. FRAZER: All right. I will do that. NOAA General Counsel added that distribution of shares after splitting a share category should not necessarily rely on an amendment that had been developed more than a decade ago. Staff noted that recent council discussions regarding distribution of shares have occurred and that an objective of the IFQ program is to put shares into the hands of the fishermen landing the species.

A committee member was concerned with having this action, i.e. Action 1.2, in this document, as it would preempt having a more robust discussion of the issue during the development of either Reef Fish Amendment 59 or 60. Another committee member stated that landings history does not follow a permit that has been sold, which places new shareholders at a disadvantage.

Council staff noted that a council member had stated, at a recent council meeting, that the intention was not to take shares away from anyone, when starting work on Reef Fish Amendments 59 and 60. General Counsel noted that an IFQ is a permit to fish, does not create any right, and that the agency can change the requirements for retaining that permit.

Council staff commented that the interdisciplinary planning team, or the IPT, had discussed the potential for unintended consequences when relying on the use of landings history for the new share categories, including negative impacts to any account holders who had recently taken out a loan to purchase shares, but may lose those shares during distribution.

Related to Action 4 in the draft amendment, concerns were expressed related to modifying allocations and noted a previous council motion that cautioned against modifying allocations until issues affecting the use of the Marine Recreational Information Program-Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES) have been resolved.

A committee member noted that annual scamp and yellowmouth grouper landings have averaged about 400,000 pounds in recent years. He inquired how a species that had sustained such high levels of landings would require such a substantial reduction to an acceptable biological catch, i.e., 203,000 pounds. Council staff responded that, as part of the stock assessment process, many factors were considered, including the declining trend in spawning stock biomass and the recent period of low recruitment, and both would likely affect stock productivity.

The committee member also inquired, if scamp and yellowmouth grouper are not overfished, what was driving the need to move from a 30 percent spawning potential ratio to a 40 percent spawning potential ratio.

Another committee member responded that the Scientific and Scientific Committee made that decision based on the life history characteristics of scamp and recent scientific literature that suggests that higher SPR based proxies for MSY are appropriate for species such as scamp. Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff stated that the SSC is not adopting a risk-adverse position and indicated that, if the SSC had retained the F 30 percent SPR, it would be more risk-prone.

A committee member noted a concern related to the timing of an allocation decision. Since the proposed sub-complexes do not yet exist, the agency would not have a way to hold back quota at the beginning of the year, in anticipation of a reduction in the

commercial quota, as has been the case with reallocation decisions for existing share categories. He inquired if there might be a short-term management measure that might be taken to circumvent this issue.

A committee member noted and emphasized the high variability of deepwater grouper landings. With respect to accountability measures, another committee member stated that a post-season adjustment may be preferred by the agency for recreational landings, given the high variability. General Counsel noted that other options could be considered and stated that the same level of monitoring is needed for post-season and in-season accountability measures. She added that the committee would need to document how overfishing for yellowedge grouper will be addressed.

Another committee member stated that another alternative could be added, which would set the duration of the deepwater grouper season for the following year. A committee member inquired about the use of a multi-year annual catch limit to accommodate pronounced variability in landings of deepwater grouper species.

Council staff inquired if there was any interest in a payback by the recreational sector. A committee member said there may be interest in that management measure, although this type of management measure has been discussed previously, but not been successfully used in the Gulf.

A committee member inquired if flexibility measures would be needed in the future. Given the shallow-water grouper catch limits under consideration, he noted there would not likely be excess quota available in the future, which would certainly limit the potential use of multi-use allocation for landing deepwater grouper species.

Another committee member inquired about the history of the multi-use category. Southeast Regional Office staff responded that some species are cooccurring, such as speckled hind and scamp. Another committee member stated that public testimony would be useful, but an action to eliminate multi-use could be considered. The committee member commented that this action would need to be kept with shallow-water grouper, should shallow-water grouper and deepwater grouper be considered in separate documents.

The committee recommends, and I so move, to request council staff to separate out the shallow-water grouper and the deepwater grouper complex into separate documents. That motion carried with two abstentions. Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. We have a committee motion. Any discussion on the motion? We're just pausing here for clicker use. We just have to get that set up. If you use the clicker, and it hasn't shown up in about five or six seconds, if you can just go ahead and hit it again, your response.

1) B.1 To request Council staff to separate out the SWG and the DWG complex into separate documents				
First Name	**Last Name**			
Kesley	Banks	Yes		
Dakus	Geeslin	Yes		
JD	Dugas	Yes		
Anthony	Overton	Yes		
Tom	Frazer	Yes		
Kevin	Anson	Yes		
Billy	Broussard	Yes		
Troy	Williamson	Yes		
Troy	Frady	Yes		
John	Sanchez	Yes		
Joe	Spraggins	Yes		
Michael	McDermott	Yes		
Jason	Osborne	Yes		
Chris	Schieble	Yes		
Andy	Strelcheck	Yes		
Ed	Walker	Yes		
CJ	Sweetman	Yes		
Results - Passed	**Subtotals**	**Yes (17)**	**No (0)**	**Abs (0)**

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Okay. **The motion carries unanimous.** Is there any other discussion? Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Yes, and I was just trying to see -- Maybe have some discussion, rather than a motion, but what is the possibility, or obstacles, from using scamp as an indicator species in the shallow-water and using yellowedge for the deepwater? That way, we can get going, and do some things, being that they've both had recent assessments, and they're both in the same FES, and is that possible? Is that feasible, just as a path forward to accomplishing something in this very complex document?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Froeschke.

DR. JOHN FROESCHKE: Well, I will start, and others can fill-in. We've talked about this, in some theory or other, several times. Some of the initial obstacles -- The scamp, I guess we would have to think about it, whether it was two complexes, sub-complexes, or one, and the primary challenge that we had is, if you use an indicator, you still have to figure out how many shares to distribute in the IFQ, and, if you only use scamp, then you ignore all the landings, and everything else, from all the other stocks, and so that would be something you would have to figure out how to

do.

For the whole shallow-water grouper, there is two different currencies. There is black grouper and all that, and so there would be that, and then the other part that we weren't sure of, at least on scamp, and I think it would apply to yellowedge is, since you have a species-specific catch limit, is how do you ensure -- How do you increase the quota enough to distribute the shares to account for the other landings, but how do you ensure that you're not overfishing the one species that you have a catch limit for, and so those are some of the things that I recall.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right, and so we have Ryan.

MR. RYAN RINDONE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. (The rest of Mr. Rindone's comment is not audible on the recording.)

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Thank you. Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: I guess, to me, it gets back to the complexity of it, and what I was trying, I guess, to accomplish is using an indicator species, and I know it's all kind of interrelated, and wrapped up, with how you did the shares in this and that, and I feel that we should have those activities in a separate document, and handled separately, and then just use these as an indicator species, and it's more, I guess, in my mind, in line with ecosystem management, where we're managing a complex of species that are targeted similarly, in similar areas, as a complex, rather than separating them out, by virtue of having an indicator species.

Again, I -- This is very complex. It's a hell of a thing to show up at your first meeting to an Amendment 58, and it has kept me up, trying to find -- I hate just griping about something without trying to offer a path forward, and I guess this was a suggestion, and you're not going to hurt my feelings if there's no support, but I'm really trying to find a meaningful way forward, and I'm struggling.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: John, first, thanks for, you know, your efforts to think outside the box here. You know, we've spent some time, as a staff, as well thinking through Amendment 58, and I think, for deepwater grouper, we're not too far apart with what you're suggesting, because we think we can still maintain that deepwater grouper complex, because yellowedge dominates so much of the catch, right, and, with scamp and black grouper, the challenge is that they are often are caught separately, from a geographic standpoint,

and, if you use scamp, it's going to be essentially more constraining and impact, obviously, kind of your overall harvest opportunities for all those species, inclusive of black grouper.

We think a viable path here -- We're obviously in agreement, in terms of separating out shallow-water grouper and deepwater grouper. For the deepwater grouper complex, to still have ways to maintain that as a whole, and manage it as a whole, with a reduction that comes based on the yellowedge assessment.

For shallow-water grouper, we still see the most viable path as separating into two share categories for the commercial sector and having the black grouper and yellowfin as one share category and scamp and yellowmouth for the second share category, and I want to get into some more details of 58, but maybe, you know, John, or others, if you have further thoughts on this indicator species, and I would be interested.

MR. SANCHEZ: Again, this was a struggle, and I didn't arrive at that lightly. I was conscious of black grouper, and the geographic differences, but I'm also aware that, you know, we've been harvesting black grouper, some sectors, at twenty-four inches, when they mature at a higher -- More like thirty-two, and so I don't know if they're going to be in great shape, and I'm also cognizant that we're about to have a stock assessment, but we don't have that yet, and so I was capitulating and saying, well, what can you come up with as an indicator species, and probably more conservative, based on my comments earlier this week, and I fell into just using scamp as that, but I'm trying to be conservative, and I guess manage these stocks with some conservation, but, again, everywhere you turn, it seems like there's nowhere to go, and so it's a struggle, but I'm glad to hear that we're starting to think along the same lines, and there are many paths to the same location, and hopefully we just end up at the same spot.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Rindone.

MR. RINDONE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Bernie, could you pull up Figure 2.7.4 from the document? It's the one with all the little blue boxes. I think this will help visually illustrate why it doesn't work for scamp, but why it's possible, maybe for deepwater grouper, to look at yellowedge in this context.

MR. SANCHEZ: Is that Ryan's picture on the cover?

MR. RINDONE: I'm not on the cover of this one. I'm on the cover of some of them, but not this one. John, when we're looking at this, and I think Matt walked you guys through this a couple of

days ago, if we're looking, on the X-axis, at scamp, and then, as we move up the Y-axis, we see the percent cooccurrence of the other species landed when scamp is the -- When it's the primary species that's caught, and, really, it's 13.4 percent for black grouper, 15.5 percent for snowy grouper, and that kind of tells us a little bit about what we already know, and, you know, why these flexibility measures -- You know, why they exist, because we have a little bit of deepwater, or a little bit of shallow-water, that tend to get landed with scamp, and that's why they're able to be used in both right now, but, really, I mean, you know, not -- There's no other species that is predominantly also caught with scamp.

In the case of black grouper, and I think somebody had mentioned, you know, black grouper is a southwest Florida species, primarily, and scamp occurs Gulf-wide, and so, if we just focused on scamp, we might miss something critical happening with black grouper, and, like you alluded to with the length at which 50 percent of the females are sexually mature being about thirty-two or thirty-three inches -- You know, in scamp, that's fifteen-and-a-half, and so they're maturing at very different ages and sizes too, and so scamp just doesn't really work as an indicator for the shallow-water grouper complex, but, if we look at yellowedge for the deepwater -- You know, this might be something to talk about here.

If you look at, you know -- As we move from the X-axis, up along the Y-axis, we see 74 percent of yellowedge landings also have snowy landings, and 24 percent have speckled hind. Warsaw is not really caught so often with -- You know, with much, except for scamp, and snowy, but, if we're talking about yellowedge possibly being good for snowy, and perhaps speckled hind, then perhaps it could also work for warsaw too, and so there's just better cooccurrence among the deepwater grouper species, with yellowedge specifically, that might suggest that, you know, perhaps we could look at yellowedge as an indicator for the deepwater complex.

If we're going to split this document, like you guys have motioned to do, then it's reasonable for us to consider looking at yellowedge as an indicator and then doing something entirely different with shallow-water. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you. All right. Any other comments on this particular comment? Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: It's kind of loosely related, and I don't think it's necessarily related to John's, and so, if we're still talking about John's, I can wait.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: I mean, we just have a little bit left in the shallow-water and deepwater grouper section, and so, I mean, we just have a few more -- Maybe let's finish this section, with Dr. Frazer, and then we'll come back to anything else with shallow-water and deepwater grouper. Dr. Frazer, if you want to continue reading the last paragraph in this section.

DR. FRAZER: I'm happy to do that. A committee member summarized the discussion of DWG accountability measures, which included using recreational landings for a post-season accountability measure and adjusting the recreational season in the following year if recreational landings had exceeded the total ACL.

The committee also planned to circle back and discuss staff's questions regarding the allocation action for the deepwater grouper complex at Full Council, so they could provide staff direction. I think we'll pause here, and I think you're exactly right, Mr. Chairman, and I think we'll have some discussion about, again, some of the allocation issues and things of that nature.

DR. SWEETMAN: Agreed, and I'm glad we're separating this into two separate documents, and I want to try and take this a little bit further, to try and further simplify this, and so, Bernie, if you can bring up the motion that I sent you. **My motion here is to move Action 1.2 in Amendment 58 to Considered but Rejected.** If I get a second, I will provide some rationale.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. We have a motion. It's been seconded by Captain Walker. Is there any discussion on the motion? Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Just to provide some rationale here. I mean, from my perspective, really, the concept of moving the shares, and everything like that, needs to really be considered in its own amendment, and it needs to be applicable to all IFQ species and not just these four shallow-water grouper and deepwater that we're talking about here, and, just to give you my personal perspective, I just don't think it's reasonable, or appropriate, to take away shares from someone who purchased it, and so I think, after we start working on 59 and 60, that's probably the appropriate place to discuss this kind of -- Or to have this discussion there, and so that's just my overall rationale for why I'm asking to have this action considered but rejected.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: I agree, and this falls right in line with, I guess, my earlier train of thought, which kept me up at night, in finding

a way to simplify this, and I think separating them accomplishes that, and I think we're slowly moving in the right direction, and I guess the litmus test will be if not everybody gets everything they want and we all walk away like we did something.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any other discussion? Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and my staff and I talked about, you know, modifications, and this is consistent, and in line, with our discussions. I would say that Alternative 1, as worded, is not truly no action, because we don't have two sub-complexes right now, right, and so we have the single sub-complex, and so I think we will have to address the proportional distribution between multiple sub-complexes somewhere else in the amendment, whether it's a separate action or part of the splitting of the share categories, but that will need to be identified and discussed.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any other discussion on the motion? Not seeing any, we'll go ahead and vote. Use the clickers, please.

2) B.2 To move action 1.2 in Amendment 58 to considered but rejected.				
First Name	**Last Name**			
Kesley	Banks	Yes		
Dakus	Geeslin	Yes		
JD	Dugas	Yes		
Anthony	Overton	Yes		
Tom	Frazer	Yes		
Kevin	Anson	Yes		
Billy	Broussard	Yes		
Troy	Williamson	Yes		
Troy	Frady	Yes		
John	Sanchez	Yes		
Joe	Spraggins	Yes		
Michael	McDermott	Yes		
Jason	Osborne	Yes		
Chris	Schieble	Yes		
Andy	Strelcheck	Yes		
Ed	Walker	Yes		
CJ	Sweetman	Yes		
Results - Passed	**Subtotals**	**Yes (17)**	**No (0)**	**Abs (0)**

CHAIRMAN ANSON: **The motion carries seventeen to zero.** Any -- Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: I don't know if staff will want motions here or not, and so, in kind of walking through the current amendment, and then thinking about how it could be restructured, we just, obviously, took care of the Action 1.2. We believe that Action 1 is still needed, modifying the complex, so that we have to separate out the two share categories into commercial, and we believe the biological reference points action is still required.

The modification of catch limits, we think we could also include the sector catch limits as a component of that, and a couple of thoughts that we wanted to run by the council, for maybe IPT consideration, is, for black grouper and yellowfin, the allocation was kind of a subcomponent of the overall shallow-water grouper ACL that was established back in I think 2012, or 2013, with the Comprehensive ACL Amendment.

We would just propose that that be carried forward and used as at least an alternative for consideration. The scamp and yellowmouth is more complicated, and the council certainly weighed-in with regard to this issue of not wanting to reallocate based on the MRIP-FES data at this time, and so one of the ideas, at least for an alternative, for kind of fairness and equity in the short-term, would be look at kind of more recent landings history for both sectors and reduce catch levels to the newly proposed scamp and yellowmouth catch limit equally across sectors, based on kind of recent average landings.

It's still an allocation, but it's really trying to establish this equitable reduction that would occur for both sectors, with kind of a commitment from the council that, once the MRIP-FES pilot is completed, we could come back and revisit it, and do a more robust allocation decision of scamp and yellowmouth, as well as other species.

Then the last comment that I will make is, given the commercial sector catch limit, and catches, would be substantially reduced for scamp, right, they're going to naturally be affected, in terms of the amount of shares and allocation they receive, but I think it would be worth it on the recreational side, because their catch levels would also be coming down substantially, to look at at least a fixed season for scamp, rather than doing what we're doing now, which is, you know, kind of open like we do red grouper, and project the closure, and close when the season would be met, and so I would suggest adding a new action for recreational management measures, and so I will look at staff. I can try to make a motion, and there was a lot there, and some of it is direction, but thoughts.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: So most of that is exactly what I had come up with as well, and buried in all that public testimony we had yesterday was that casual suggestion that somebody made that, you know, what if you guys just take your shallow-water complex and trim the whole thing by 10 percent, and get it to -- Whatever the number may be,

and get it back down to where you think you won't exceed your ACL, and then you don't have to divide anything. You just bring it down, and I think this is what Andy is suggesting, and it will have to apply to both sides, but then you will not have to split anything, or go through all this complex math.

The second part of what Andy just said is almost exactly what I was going to suggest as well. The last part there, setting up a hard season for the rec side, that will need some discussion, I think, mostly like how big of a trim are we talking about, and what would satisfy the need here, and that is pretty much what I was going to float out there and see if it had any legs.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Frazer.

DR. FRAZER: I like what Ed, and Andy, have proposed as well, and I just wanted to say that, you know, I think that you can incorporate these ideas into the revised documents, and so I guess what he's asking for is, you know, are we willing to give staff the latitude to develop these ideas, and so I'm all for that.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think I can get onboard with that concept here. Obviously, the devil is going to be in the detail here, but I certainly am not opposed to seeing it in a further document here, to see how this plays out. I think what Andy is thinking about there, and what Ed kind of talked about too, kind of lines up with some of the council discussion that we've had.

I think this does simplify things, but, again, the devil is going to be in the detail there. I think the rec season for deepwater is -- That's going to be particularly interesting there, or, I mean, shallow-water. Sorry. My apologies, but certainly, when you look at the landings, and what it has looked like over the last few years, you can see declining trends on all sectors, and so I kind of am in agreement that there needs to be some measure, to kind of reduce the harvest along those lines, to get that stuff under control, but that's just my perspective right now.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: I wanted to comment on what Ed was suggesting, and so, you know, from what I was understanding you to say, Ed, you were, you know, thinking of a way that we could kind of keep the shallow-water grouper complex together, and not have to split out share categories.

The challenges we ran into, kind of thinking through that, is, one, on the recreational side, we have two different units of measure, with scamp being in MRIP-FES and then black grouper being in an old unit. The other issue is, if you reduce shallow-water grouper, you have to reduce it to an amount where you would avoid exceeding the scamp portion of the catch limit, right, and so that could then really substantially bring down your catch limit overall, since scamp is a good portion of that overall shallow-water grouper.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: To that point, Captain Walker?

MR. WALKER: Right, and I thought about that, but, as far as the black grouper goes anyways, they're not going to be close to catching that anyway, and so, if you did trim it 10 percent, or 15 percent, it wouldn't really impact anybody anyway, and so that was my thinking there, but I hear what you're saying, for sure.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think we are going to have to maybe put something down in front of everybody, because I'm a little bit confused. We keep going back to the share category discussion and then whether or not we're going to have sector-specific ACLs. Right now, we do not have sector-specific ACLs, for the complex as a whole or for the sub-components, and so I think maybe we should talk about that in a little bit more detail, and what are we reducing? What is staff basing the proportional reduction on, the current allocation, the current allocation for black grouper, or the current allocation for scamp?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Froeschke.

DR. FROESCHKE: I was taking a look at the presentation, Slides 19 and 28, and so Slide 19 has the scamp and yellowmouth landings, and so I've kind of just taken some -- I've eyeballed the recent landings, and you can bring it up, Bernie, if you want, and it's Slide 19, but, if you were to say average landings for both sectors combined, it's 400,000 pounds is the recent years, and the ACL, the total ACL, for that stock is 203,000, based on the new information, and so you're talking 50 percent, just to kind of put that -- You know, make sure that the framing of that is what -- You know, you have that understanding, and so that -- You could eyeball that different ways, but I just said 400,000 pounds.

Then, if you go to Slide 28, that second or, I guess, third column,

the ABC/ACL column of 203,000, and so I do see -- Like the 50 percent reduction, that part would work, but we would have to figure out how to -- Like Mr. Strelcheck said, about how to prevent overfishing on the scamp component, because, with that much of a cut, it's likely that you're to exceed it on the recreational side. You won't on the commercial, because you just distribute the shares, but, on the other side, we wouldn't currently have a way to address that.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right, and so council staff is requesting a motion to kind of summarize some of the discussion here, or maybe, Andy, if you've got -- If you can reproduce that or --

MR. STRELCHECK: Well so, in the South Atlantic, and I don't know if we're making a motion or just staff direction, but I'm thinking we can maybe just say staff direction, and put some bullets on the board, and would that be good? So rather than a formal motion.

I'm trying to think of the best way to approach this, because some of the things are already in, obviously, Amendment 58, and so we want to modify the complex, or don't we, right, and that was, I think, the first issue, because we're suggesting, the Fisheries Service, to split the share categories into two, from shallow-water grouper to two share categories. You are, it sounds like, Ed and others, wanting to explore maintaining a single share category.

I feel like the first two bullets -- Maintaining a single share category is the status quo, but it's just how do you calculate that, in terms of catch limit then, right? We want to consider a recreational season for scamp and yellowmouth.

MR. WALKER: So the second bullet should say "explore maintaining a single share category".

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Froeschke.

DR. FROESCHKE: Thank you. I guess I'm confused, because "explore maintaining a single share" and then the third bullet is "consider a recreational season for scamp and yellowmouth", which, in my mind, presupposes that you no longer have a single share category.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: So, to John's comment, you know, there is -- We kind of bounced this around, but there's the potential where you could combine black grouper quota and scamp quota, in the commercial program, into a single shallow-water grouper category,

while still maintaining separate recreational ACLs, but here's where it gets complicated, and we were trying to avoid complication, right, and so I see it as problematic that we're not going to be able to control, and limit, scamp harvest to the levels we need to get them to if we keep them in a complex, right, and that's where I keep continuing to struggle with the complex idea. I think Ed is asking to explore, and so we're not saying that this is a definitive direction, and so, if you come back and say you found a way to do this, that's great. If we come back and say there's just not a feasible way, then that, to me, is just reiterating what we're discussing now.

I think the other components of this would be maintaining the allocation for black grouper and yellowfin, based on the Comp ACL Amendment, and is that correct? I mean the Generic ACL Amendment. I guess, to be clear, there wasn't an allocation specific for black grouper and yellowfin, but there was a proportional allocation that was a subcomponent of the shallow-water grouper ACL. Then maybe the last bullet -- Well, two more bullets. Explore equitably reducing -- Explore specifying the scamp and yellowmouth catch limit based on an equitable reduction in recent landings, or from recent landings.

MR. WALKER: I was going to add that to the second bullet, but you laid it out there, that still the second bullet is just -- As it's written, it says status quo right now, but explore maintaining a single share category by potentially lowering the entire ACL to some level, but you just laid that out with that one there, I think, and so it's covered.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. I've got several hands, and so I've got Ms. Levy, then Mr. Rindone, Dr. Frazer, and Dr. Froeschke.

MS. LEVY: Well, I think staff might have something else, but I feel like we're like going back to the beginning, because, when we first started talking about this, we started with let's keep the share category together, and then we found all these problems with keeping the share category together, and so we're like we really need to split them, because we have this assessment for scamp, and we need to have the catch limits low, and we don't want to limit black grouper, and so now we're going back to exploring that, but we're also talking about the need to get this through, because the assessment is getting old. That's just my opinion, like that we're just going back to the beginning, but I'm sure that staff can weigh-in.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Mr. Rindone.

MR. RINDONE: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I was going to echo what Ms. Levy was saying. I mean, we really did try and think about this from, sarcastically, eleven different directions, about how to try to keep it together, and, because of the considerable reduction in catch that the SSC has put forward for scamp and yellowmouth, there just isn't a way to do that without risking knowingly allowing overfishing of scamp and yellowmouth, and so that's why we had proposed splitting things.

I don't know if it was Tom, or Andy, or John Froeschke, but one of them -- About how far you would have to reduce the shallow-water grouper catch limit altogether, and I think it was Andy, but how far you would have to reduce it in order to avoid overfishing of scamp and yellowmouth, and it would really be considerable, and part of the reason why we get the proposed black grouper and yellowfin grouper catch limits that we do, on Slide 21 of the presentation, is due to the high variability in the black grouper and yellowfin grouper landings back in history, and also echoing that these are in MRFSS units, and, like Captain Walker said, we haven't really been getting close to that.

On top of that, where we hear from some of the southwest Florida people about where they really go for black grouper, it's not anywhere nearshore. I mean, they're going thirty, forty, fifty, sixty miles offshore, and so that gets us back into the class of vessels that are not going to be sampled by APAIS, and so we're missing that catch.

I just -- Bernie, if you could bounce back to Andy's list for the motion, so I could see that. Thank you. I mean, I think we have to modify the complex. Based on the IPT's discussion for the last nearly a year, I would say maintaining a single share category is, barring something revolutionary, not possible, in order to avoid knowingly allowing overfishing of scamp and yellowmouth.

Consideration of a recreational season for scamp and yellowmouth was a near certainly anyway, because there was no way, based on recreational landings, that, however we sliced this, any amount of recreational ACL was going to be able to last that sector the entire year. There was going to be a closure.

Maintaining the allocation from black grouper and yellowfin from the generic amendment, I think that's totally doable. I think that's sensible, especially since there's a lot that happened in that amendment that also relied on input from the South Atlantic Council, and so it just helps stabilize anything that we might be doing with black grouper.

Then explore specifying scamp and yellowmouth catch limit based on the equitable reduction from recent landings, and recent landings have been increasing, compared to the historical time series. I mean, that was one of the things that contributed to the current spawning stock biomass level for scamp.

Yellowmouth landings are a small bit of it, but they had to be rolled in together, because it's difficult to tell the two species apart when they're right about that minimum size limit. When they get bigger, it's much easier, but, when they're smaller, it can be difficult, but, like I said, the landings have been going up, and those removals have been increasing, and so that has driven down the spawning stock biomass some.

When you couple that with going to 40 percent SPR for the FMSY proxy, and that's -- Those are contributing factors, along with just poor recruitment in the last decade, about, you know, where the stock currently is. It's not overfished, or undergoing overfishing, but it's flirting with it, and so thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Frazer.

DR. FRAZER: I guess I appreciate the comments that Ryan just made, and I would agree with most of them. You know, what I was going to say, earlier on, is that Bullet Point 2 is going to be incredibly difficult to do, and so I won't just belabor that fact, but I also wanted to say, you know, perhaps before we leave this kind of section of the report, there was some discussion as well about what we're going to do with a multiuse, and so I just didn't want to forget about that.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Froeschke and then Andy.

DR. FROESCHKE: I will be brief. I mean, the thing I was just going to say about the other thing that we -- About the single share category is the two stocks are in different currencies, and so you have the MRFSS and then the FES, and so that's going to cause all kinds of problems, and the only way you can rectify that is to convert the black grouper stock into FES, which would require a joint amendment with the South Atlantic, and redoing that whole thing, and that would be about five actions, off the top of my head, and so I don't think we want to do that.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: All right, and right so --

DR. FROESCHKE: So a five-action document to simplify this, no.

MR. STRELCHECK: So, to clarify my fifth bullet, just we want to say, I guess, recent sector landings, right, because the idea here is that we would be setting sector-level ACLs for scamp and yellowmouth. Going back to, I guess, Bullet Point 2, based on the discussion, Ed, are you still wanting staff to explore this? It sounds like they've run this to ground pretty good.

MR. WALKER: Yes, it does. It sounds like they looked at exactly this for a year, and so asking them to look at this doesn't make a whole lot of sense, and so we can remove that, if it's been looked at.

MR. STRELCHECK: So we would take out Bullet 2, and then, to be clear, we still want to include the action for reference points, and, as Tom mentioned, I think it's worth including flexibility measures, right, and the idea there is do we want to eliminate them, but, at minimum, if we're creating a new share category, we potentially have to modify them, because, right now, there's flexibility measures that allow scamp to be landed as deepwater grouper, or speckled hind and warsaw to be landed as shallow-water grouper, and they're going to be able to -- We would have to specify which shallow-water grouper category that they can be landed under, and so we would have to maintain both of those. I think the suggestion, from the Fisheries Service, is consider an action that would potentially eliminate the flexibility measure for landing scamp as deepwater grouper.

MR. WALKER: I agree. That would solve a lot of problems, and I don't think it would be a huge impact on the commercial fishery, nowadays, with the somewhat lower prices on both of the deepwater and shallow-water allocation, and so I think that's a good suggestion, myself.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Ms. Levy.

MS. LEVY: Just a couple of questions. I think it would be helpful to know more what is meant by "consider a recreational season for scamp and yellowmouth". I don't know, and maybe staff knows, whether we're talking about setting a particular season date, just managing to a rec ACL, and I think a lot of that, to me, is still ambiguous, related to this direction.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Ryan.

MR. RINDONE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Andy, for what you were talking about for the flexibility measures, I mean, what I'm

getting from that is we're not going to allow scamp to be landed under anything but scamp and yellowmouth, but it possibly could be okay for warsaw and speckled hind to be landed under the scamp and yellowmouth ACL, and so like a one-way flexibility measure.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, but we also could have options that eliminate all of the flexibility measures.

MR. RINDONE: Right. I understood that part, but I was just trying to make sure that I understood the one that -- Like a presumptive Alternative 3 there, which I guess, you know, the initial blush on that would just be that basically anything warsaw or speckled hind that's landed under scamp would effectively reduce the amount of scamp that could be landed.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Frazer.

DR. FRAZER: Again, I was going to weigh-in on the flexibility measure. I think there's a number of ways to skin this cat, and, you know, one of them is just to completely eliminate, and the other is to consider, kind of like within complexes, what you might do, and so -- But, again, you're just providing direction to staff here, and so I think there's some options.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: As worded, this almost kind of comes across as a preferred, and I want to make it clear, right, that these would be alternatives to consider, and we would want to, obviously, look at the broader range of alternatives before making any decision.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: I guess, following-up on what Ms. Levy's question was related to the recreational season, I think I would -- I took as just kind of leave it up to staff to kind of maybe come up with some ideas relative to that, looking at landings history and such, and, you know, just like we normally do for season, like determining a season or season length, is just kind of looking at the trends, but go ahead, Ms. Levy.

MS. LEVY: Well, I mean, I guess so I felt -- The reason I'm asking is because the impetus for this was to like move it along, simplify it, and, with general direction like this, I feel like, from my experience, we're going to go back to the IPT and be like what do we mean by recreational season length, and should we just give them data, or should we be trying to propose dates, or should we be like just looking at like when closures should happen, and then we're going to come back with all this information, without a lot of specificity, and then -- So we're going to use another meeting

to deal with what does the council mean about recreational season length, and so that's why I'm asking, but it's up to you how much direction you want to give.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Mara raises a fair point, and so, you know, at least my intent would be to establish either a fixed season that would be consistent with harvesting approximately the catch limit, right, and hopefully avoiding exceedance of the catch limit, or modifying the start date of the season to a date certain, and then, as an accountability measure, giving the Fisheries Service authority to project the end date of the season, like we do currently.

If we don't change the season, right, then we would open January 1, and like, red grouper, we would just make an announcement, like we do each year, and specify the closure of the season. I don't think that's what we want to do, and I think it would be helpful if staff could look at the cooccurring species, like Ryan has shown today, and see if there's maybe some time periods of the year where you're harvesting cooccurring species, and there would be opportunity for us to specify a recreational season.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Yes, and I'm all for coming back with something to review, given the complexity, but I'm also mindful that, when we come back to that, I wanted to honor the intent of the spirit of the pilot study, and not getting into reallocation issues, until that's completed, and so I'm hopeful this generates some out-of-the-box thinking for a way to accomplish that.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think this is going to be a pretty small bit of fish here that the recs and the commercial guys are going to end up with, and so do you want us to consider looking at the bag limit? I think it's a four-fish bag limit for scamp, and the minimum size limit is sixteen inches.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any thoughts? Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Just so I understand what we're talking about, and maybe Ryan could give us a really ballpark figure of what kind of estimate we're talking about here that we need to cut, and he made it sound like it was going to be pretty big, but, from what I read,

I didn't take it that way, and so can anybody give us a hint on what that might be, before we talk about what we're going to do about it?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: It might come from Ryan. Ryan.

MR. RINDONE: Thank you, sir, and so you're talking about a combined ABC of 203,000 pounds, and, looking at the recent MRIP landings, they're going to be, depending on the year, anywhere from -- This is -- Again, MRIP means it's just Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, but anywhere from 150,000 to 350,000 pounds for the recreational side, and then you've got another about 110,000 to 125,000 pounds from the commercial side, and so you're looking at anywhere from 300,000 to 450,000, or even a little north of there. I think there is -- In the presentation, there should be a plot, on Slide 19, that shows the scamp and yellowmouth landings, and there are some years where they peak over 500,000 pounds, and, on Slide 19, you will see a green line going across there, which is the proposed ABC in FES, and so the recreational sector alone has the capacity to land the ABC, never mind anything that might be landed by the commercial sector.

You're talking a considerable reduction for the commercial sector, and, you know, if they're going from landing about 120,000 pounds, on average, right now, and you're looking at the allocation options that were in here, you know, you're looking at cutting them by about half, approximately, and the recreational sector -- I mean, depending on the year, it's kind of variable, but, generally speaking, recreational landings have been going up, and you're going to cut them by about half or so also, and so, I mean, it's going to be considerable.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Dr. Sweetman, followed by Dr. Freeman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Bernie, can you go back to the staff direction there? Thank you. Just a point of clarification, and so the third bullet, maintaining allocation for black grouper and yellowfin, so is that assuming that we're changing allocation for scamp and yellowmouth?

MR. STRELCHECK: So shallow-water grouper doesn't have a current commercial/recreational allocation, right, and so it's a total shallow-water grouper ACL, but, when we set the commercial catch level, right, in the Generic ACL Amendment, we indicated, in that amendment, what percentage was commercial for black grouper and yellowfin, and what percentage was recreational, and the same for scamp and yellowmouth, right, and so what I'm implying there -- The wording might be a little bit off, but just essentially take

that same historical percentage that we were using to set the initial catch limit and move that forward, right, and continue to use it.

Then, for scamp, we would have to revise it, based on the new catch level advice, and, given this issue with MRIP-FES, and not wanting to maybe fully reallocate until that pilot study is completed, the best way I could think of to kind of address that is everyone gets kind of an equitable reduction, based on recent average landings, in order to achieve our target goals for the catch level.

DR. SWEETMAN: So basically an equal pain kind of concept there, across-the board? Okay. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Freeman.

DR. MATT FREEMAN: Sure, and so, just to add to what sort of Mr. Strelcheck was saying, so, if sort of an equitable cut approach was not taken, and the percentages that he mentioned from the Generic ACL Amendment were applied to the proposed total ACL of 203,000 pounds, what that would mean is, with scamp at 19.9 percent, the rec would be looking at just over 40,000 pounds.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Froeschke.

DR. FROESCHKE: I was just going to be, I think, painfully clear that we're -- The original one, most of that allocation, whatever you want to call it, went to the commercial, and so the spirit of proportional reductions -- There's going to be fish moved toward the recreational side, based on the recent landings, if you just look at the Figure 19.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right, and so this is just some ideas, topics, for staff direction, and I guess consideration of Ms. Levy's comments earlier, and trying to expedite the document too, I guess it makes it harder, but, you know, there might be some limitations, I guess, for staff, relative to not making it any more complex, which I think we will, just because we'll be doing some new things here, but, anyway, is there anything else, from council members, that they want to add to this list for staff direction, and is staff comfortable with what's on the board?

DR. FROESCHKE: I am. I feel like that's been very helpful to us.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I don't know if it needs to be added, but just to be clear that we would still include the modified biological

reference points action in the amendment.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Just this is the shallow-water grouper document, and do we want to add that, but some of you talked about some of the deepwater grouper stuff as well, and this is direction for the shallow-water grouper document, correct? Okay.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Not seeing any other comments, that takes care of this portion of the discussion, and so we need to circle back a little bit to the deepwater grouper document. Does anybody have any comments for that?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: (Dr. Simmons' comment is not audible on the recording.)

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Yes, and that would be a good idea, the document with the presentation for deepwater grouper. Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: All right. Let me try to touch on deepwater grouper, since we've really simplified the shallow-water one. Relative to what Mr. Sanchez was saying earlier, it did sound like that -- And in some of my discussions with other people around the table, it does sound like there's some appetite, at least, for looking at yellowedge as kind of an indicator species, and I know, earlier, Andy had mentioned, and just in talking with Dr. Porch about how this could actually be done, and maybe not necessarily -- Maybe indicator species isn't the appropriate word there, but my understanding is that there actually is a deepwater longline and a pretty solid yellowedge grouper index that we could potentially utilize here.

I think that kind of jibes with what Mr. Sanchez was saying of utilizing that as an indicator species, and so perhaps that's some direction, is to explore looking at that deepwater longline survey, using yellowedge as kind of an indicator species with that standardized index of abundance, but I also kind of want to look over at my NOAA colleagues over there, to see if that aligns with what our discussions were and what we talked about at the table here.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Froeschke.

DR. FROESCHKE: Well, if someone else has a comment. Otherwise, I would just reiterate the challenge we have with these indicators is, when you get the catch advice from the single species, you have no way to account for the productivity of the other stocks,

and so then you would set the limits based on the yellowedge, even though there are other stocks that would need landings, and those would count against the yellowedge.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: To that point, yellowedge dominates the landings for the deepwater complex, and so I think the issue is not as extreme as probably the shallow-water grouper there.

DR. FROESCHKE: Well, but just a quick follow-up though, and but think about it the other way. So, really, that -- The ACL came off the commercial, and you're still -- So the way we've done it, in practice, is we've set that buffer to allow for the recreational harvest, which now, under FES, is increasing, and we think it is increasing, and so that's going to cut out that more, and so that's my concern. I don't know all the answers, but just these are the things that we've talked through and thought about.

MR. WALKER: Just stop shooting down all of our ideas.

DR. FROESCHKE: Yes, and I'm really not trying to, but I just -- If there's something that I can -- That it's going to come up in the first three minutes of the discussion at the IPT, I might as well tell you now.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: I think the way that Action 5 I in the amendment is worded is probably the best approach, where we would still maintain deepwater grouper as a whole, and set a total ACL for deepwater grouper. I think the issue here is what proportion is kind of that set-aside for recreational, right, because we've historically had 3 or 4 percent for recreational, and does that need to be changed, and then what is the accountability measure, and so, to me, we haven't had any substantial problems with having a total ACL for deepwater grouper and the accountability measure kind of linked together.

We could look at, you know, kind of improving the accountability measure based on kind of what C.J. is saying and, you know, is there other information and sources that we could look at, like the longline index, that gives us a read of how things are changing, versus just the maybe sampling error that's going to occur from MRIP and some of the recreational data collection, but I don't really have a solid answer, you know, answer right now as to what that would look like.

MS. LEVY: Well, I mean, I guess, to that, I don't think we've had a problem with the accountability measure, because we haven't been catching the total ACL, and so the same problem with shallow-water grouper is going to happen with deepwater grouper, and we're lowering the catch limits enough that we have to have some way to constrain recreational harvest, because the IFQ system runs the entire year, and we won't know, until the end of the year, whether the commercial sector has actually harvested its proportion, and the recreational sector, because they will be going over during that time, and so we either need separate catch limits or we need some assumption, which is almost the same as separate catch limits, that the commercial sector is going to harvest everything, and you're going to then manage recreational harvest for the rest, without essentially setting separate catch limits, but it's the same thing, right, and we have to have a way to constrain the rec harvest, to ensure that the total isn't exceeded.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Freeman and then Mr. Strelcheck.

DR. FREEMAN: Bernie, can you go to the document for a moment, and Table 1.1.3? Okay, and so I brought up this table during the Reef Fish Committee, and so the last column has total landings summarized for both sectors, for deepwater grouper species, and, Bernie, if you can scroll down towards the end, and so I'm going to start with 2019 and just move forward.

Starting in 2019, total landings were a little over a million pounds, and then, in 2020, about 880,000, and then 860,000, about 620,000, and then about 700,000 pounds, and so, Bernie, if you switch over to the PowerPoint, and I'm sorry to make you juggle back and forth, but, if you go to Slide 31, and so Ms. Levy pointed out that the ABC had been 1.024 million pounds gutted weight, and, Bernie, if you move forward one slide, and so we're seeing a significant reduction, with the OFL going to 731,000 pounds and the ABC moving down to 555,000.

Looking at the commercial ACL and quota alone, the total landings will have blown past that, drastically, and so, you know, the issue here, on the next two slides, and, Bernie, if you don't mind advancing to the next one, is that, while the percentage has been specified for the commercial sector, it hasn't been specified for the rec sector, and so, currently, the rec sector has been managed to the total ACL.

With this massive reduction, unless the rec sector percentage is specified, and the rec sector has its own ACL that the council, through an action, could manage it to, we will likely wind up with overages, and so that's sort of that big, glaring issue still

remaining with deepwater grouper, and I'm going to stop there, because I know that Mr. Strelcheck wanted to add some information as well.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Right, and so maybe, Matt, if you can go back to the commercial ACL for Alternative 2, real quick, and so that commercial ACL is based on a ninety-six-and-a-half percent, right, proportion, right, which isn't necessarily consistent now with more recent data, and so I guess that was one of my points, is should we be looking at the different proportion between commercial and rec, first and foremost, and then, not to disagree with my attorney, but I personally believe that it would be a huge mistake to set a recreational ACL for a rare-event species like this.

I think we could set up accountability measures to address her concerns, which is, if we go over in a year, because of the recreational landings, then we could implement accountability measures in the next year, to shorten the season, or whatever accountability measures you want to implement, and I think we could also explore what C.J. was suggesting, which is are there other ways to look at the trends, and changes, that are occurring that may not solely rely on recreational landings variability, and, if so, what would that look like, but that's something that I would want to talk to Clay and Shannon and her team a little bit more about.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: How does staff feel? Is that enough? Do we need to do a staff directive thing, like we did for shallow-water grouper? I don't know if it's as detailed of a complex.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: So I think we're following -- So we're not going to change the sector apportionments, and we're going to move forward with what we have in the document, and we're going to think creatively about a stock ACL accountability measure in out years, and then what other indices we could use to try to reduce overfishing from occurring, and is that right?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: I think that was right. Ms. Levy.

MS. LEVY: Well, so just a comment on the not considering other proportions. I mean, we just said we were going to consider a different proportion for shallow-water grouper, based on recent catch and giving everyone an equal dose of the pain, and so what would be the rationale for leaving the rec portion at 3 percent here, when we need such a drastic cut, and so we either need to explain why that's okay here, when we're doing something -- At

least considering something different with shallow-water grouper, or we need to consider something similar here, I think.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Froeschke.

DR. FROESCHKE: They would be getting 3 percent of the reduced catch limit, right, if we're scaling down proportionally, or am I misunderstanding?

MS. LEVY: Well, in the shallow-water grouper, we said that we were going to look at recent catch and give -- Look at giving each sector a proportion, or a reduction, based on recent -- Right, and so a 50/50 split in the harm or something, but we're saying, here, we're just going to keep it. We're going to cut the ACL dramatically, but we're still going to give the rec sector 3 percent, without looking at recent landings and giving each sector a proportional cut, and that's what --

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Froeschke.

DR. FROESCHKE: Well, one idea is just -- The way I was planning to do that in shallow-water grouper is to use the reference time periods that are presented in Action 1.2 now as the reference periods to look at the relative percent landed for shallow-water grouper. We could do the same thing for the deepwater. I don't know that you would have to pick one of those, necessarily, but, if you wanted to, we certainly -- I think we could do it that way.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Again, it's just a document that we'll come back and look at as a council, and so I'm fine with incorporating that, but putting a little caution in there, and relying on that recreational data, in order to split that up, when we know it's incredibly variable for these super rare-event species, and I'm not going to coin that phrase. Rare-event species.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: So, Matt, I'm going through the document here, and it's probably there, but I don't see it, and can you just tell me -- The commercial side, are they landing -- What percentage of their quota are they landing on deepwater each year, because, I mean, somebody has got to say it, but three-and-a-half percent for the rec sector is a pretty small slice, and there's a lot more guys deep-dropping nowadays, and a 20,000-pound ACL for the entire rec sector is -- My math is it's going to come out to about a month's fishing, on the most barotrauma-affected of all the fish

we manage.

If the commercials haven't caught their ACL in a long time, I mean, maybe somebody could talk about sliding a few percent over to the other side. I know it's a taboo subject, but, I mean, 97 percent to 3 is a significant split.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: I supported Mara's comments, and I think what I was trying to convey earlier was looking at that proportion between commercial and rec. Even if we didn't specify a specific recreational ACL, but we specified a commercial quota, and, just as an example, looking at just the last three years of landings in the amendment, recreational lands 6.8 percent, right, or 6.4 percent, and so it's still variable, and it's uncertain, and there is probably high PSEs around it, but that's the data, obviously, we're using right now for assessment and management purposes, and so I think it's worth exploring what that commercial quota would be set at, based on the distribution of recreational and commercial landings.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Sweetman, did you have your hand up?

DR. SWEETMAN: Yes, and it was more just to kind of talk about Ed's comment there, relative to where commercial has been at in recent years. Last year, 61 percent of the quota for deepwater grouper. Before that, 2022, it was 56 percent, and 81 percent in 2021, 80 percent in 2020, and then 2019 was 97.3, and so definitely some room there, I guess.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Sanchez, followed by Mr. Rindone.

MR. SANCHEZ: My concern is FES numbers are in there, and, if we're going to rely on that, and consider getting into, and let's call it what it is, a reallocation discussion, pending what I thought we had an understanding with waiting on the pilot discussion, and I just -- We're undermining the whole genesis of the pilot study.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Rindone.

MR. RINDONE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the points that have been raised, I mean, the recreational allocation could be 3 percent or 30 percent, and it wouldn't make much of a difference, because, currently, the APAIS survey is not capturing that catch, and so the PSEs, by and large, are all well above 50. In 2021, it was over 100, and so the recreational catch, as recorded by MRIP for deepwater grouper, is uninformative, and it probably shouldn't be

used for making decisions, based on S&T's own guidance on their website.

As far as using those data, like Mr. Sanchez alluded to, extreme caution should be expressed there. Despite all of that, with a 555,000-pound ABC for deepwater grouper, the commercial sector currently could land all of that on its own. The recreational sector, looking at the landings data that we have there, I mean, you're talking about 90,000 pounds, in FES, that is recorded, and, like Captain Walker said, there's a lot more boats that are going out and deep-dropping.

As somebody that goes out and fishes in some of those areas, it's peculiar, sometimes, to see somebody out there, because you're not used to it, but there is definitely more boats, you know, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty miles offshore than there were in years past, and, again, those vessels are not going to be the sorts of vessels that are coming back to public access points, where they might be intercepted by APAIS, and so that catch is just going to go under the radar. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. McDermott.

MR. MCDERMOTT: To John's point, I was just thinking, if he's, you know -- Hearing 97/3 -- I mean, if these recreational numbers are subject to the FES bias, then it would be like 1.8 percent, is what we would be entitled to, and, I mean, that's nothing.

MR. SANCHEZ: I feel for you. I mean, I really do, but these numbers are in error, and to rely on them, and, to get into this, that's the whole reason why we have a pilot study. It's very chicken-and-egg. We're relying on data, that goes into the assessments and what have you, that's in error, and then we get in these situations, and we need to fix that and not engage in these allocation squabbles until we get that right, so we get some good data going in and some good science coming out. Otherwise, I'm sorry, and we're just putting a lot of BS in BSIA. It's that simple.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Bernie, can you bring back the screen that keeps track of the motions during the Full Council discussion here? I thought we had a list going, like we did for shallow-water. Okay, and so here is -- We have nothing that's been written down, and Dr. Simmons is telling me that she needs something written down, because there is a little bit of back-and-forth, and some disagreement here, as to what direction that we take, or instruction that we provide staff, so that they can go back and modify the document. Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: So one thing -- We discussed the accountability measures, right, and I think that's one thing that we can explore in here, and so maybe that can be added to the list.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: As a stock ACL, correct? Okay.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Is there anything else? I'm not -- Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, I mean, I know there's disagreement, and I know there is issues with FES, but I do feel like we need to look at Action 5 and that apportionment between the commercial and recreational sectors. I think that's part of a reasonable range, and, you know, right now, I'm not convinced that we have a strong basis to maintain the ninety-six-and-a-half percent.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Rindone.

MR. RINDONE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just so that the IPT has a little bit of valuable direction here, if -- You know, the landings data being as uninformative as they are, any other things that you guys would like us to look at when evaluating other alternatives to present to you for options there, just so we're not totally relying on something that the people who produced the data are saying we should be extremely cautious, if not disregarded altogether.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Do you want us to copy that bullet you had above, which is looking at the different catch limits based on the equitable reduction, or some other formulation, or do you want to keep what we have in Action 5? We can look at that now, and we have a drafted Action 5, and do we want to keep that as-is and just explore the accountability measures and the indices, or do we want to actually come back with any other proposals for Action 5? That's what we need direction on.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Can we bring Action 5 up, maybe, Bernie? Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Right, and so Action 5, right now, has a range of two alternatives, one of which is the no action, right, and so, to me, Alternative 2 is essentially carrying forward the apportionment between the commercial and recreational, but lowering the catch limit, right, and so, to me, it would be good to explore another option that would equitably reduce harvest for both sectors.

I would also, as kind of Ryan pointed out, love to try to think outside the box, if there's also another way to address this recreational uncertainty in the landings data, and potentially move away from having to even use an apportionment for the recreational sector, but we need to think about that further.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Ryan.

MR. RINDONE: Old hand.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Freeman.

DR. FREEMAN: Mr. Strelcheck, just for my own notes, for the bullet point to look at Action 5, for my notes, and so it's to look at Action 5 to equitably reduce harvest for both sectors, i.e., develop a third alternative? Okay. Perfect.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: So I just leaned over to C.J. and said, you know, can we -- Why are we even talking about doing any of this if Alternative 1 is a viable option, but I was reminded that yellowedge is overfished, and so does that mean that Alternative 1 cannot be selected? So there's only one alternative left there then? Okay. Just pointing that out. It doesn't say that at the end of Alternative 1, like it does sometimes, at least looking at it on the screen here, that this is not a viable option, and so maybe we should add that behind it. If we can't do that, then let's -- Oh, it does. Sorry. I'm looking at it on the big screen, and so there's only one alternative on the board then, if I'm reading that right.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Right, and that's why we're having this discussion, is to see if there's another option that could be more satisfactory, and so, Dr. Freeman, you mentioned that you were taking notes independent on what's on the board there, and so you had that last question to Andy, and so can we put it on the board, I guess, what your thoughts are, or your notes say?

DR. FREEMAN: Certainly, and so, Bernie, what I have for that bullet point is to look at Action 5 to equitably reduce harvest for both sectors, and as you've got in the parentheses, which would be developing that third alternative.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Frazer.

DR. FRAZER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I don't know -- In

the shallow-water grouper complex discussion, Ryan brought up the issue of the shallow-water grouper and deepwater grouper flexibility measures, and I don't know if we have to address that issue in both documents. I mean, what I'm concerned about now is that we know, you know, coming into this discussion, that there was a lot of complexity, and that's why we've pursued breaking up the documents, but --

And it may be premature, based on the discussion that we had earlier in shallow-water grouper, but, if I don't do it here today, I'm certainly going to be inclined to do it in the next meeting, but I'm thinking about maybe floating a motion just to eliminate the shallow-water/deepwater grouper flexibility measures, as they were established in Amendment 29, but, again, there's just so few fish involved, and it's -- You know, it's difficult to keep track of that, and I'm not sure there's an efficiency there, and so I guess I would look to ask staff -- I mean, in terms of how much time they would have to commit to doing those types of analyses and things, and is there some benefit in maybe just considering eliminating it right here?

DR. FREEMAN: Council staff and SERO staff had run some of the numbers, with some of the potential percentages, and, at that time, we were seeing that the amount available to land deepwater grouper with multiuse would be extremely minimal, close to zero percent in some cases, due to the drastic cuts in catch limits. We could certainly do some additional analysis for the November meeting, if the council would prefer, in addition to still exploring the current alternative to remove the flexibility measures altogether, and so at the council's pleasure.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: I am seeing one head nod. Including me, that would be two. Does anyone else have any other thoughts on this, or is that okay, to go ahead and do as Dr. Freeman just said and allow staff a little bit of flexibility to look into that issue regarding -- Okay. All right. Any other discussion on this? Staff is good? Okay. All right, and so I think, if there's no other -- Ryan.

MR. RINDONE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mara, is it better for us to discuss the flexibility measures in the deepwater or the shallow-water? My initial inclination would be in the shallow-water, since the species at greatest risk of being overfished, as a result of any continuation of the flexibility measures, is scamp and yellowmouth, but just before we start like chopping things into pieces and boxing everything up separately.

MS. LEVY: It has to be shallow-water grouper, because we're

changing the share categories, and so we need to address it in the shallow-water grouper document.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. I think that concludes discussion on the items that we needed to pick up in shallow-water and deepwater grouper. I'm not seeing any other hands, and so, Dr. Frazer, if you can continue with the Reef Fish report.

DR. FRAZER: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Discussion: Vision Statement for the IFQ Programs, Tab B, Number 5, staff presented the draft vision for the red snapper and grouper/tilefish IFQ programs proposed by the council during its June 2024 meeting. Based on the previously approved goals and objectives, the council has initiated two regulatory amendments (Reef Fish Amendments 59 and 60). Committee members questioned the need for defining a vision at this time and requested the draft vision be filed for future refence if needed.

Presentation: Reef Fish Amendment 59: Requirements for Participation in IFQ Programs, Tab B, Number 6, Southeast Regional Office staff presented Reef Fish Amendment 59, which addresses participation requirements in the red snapper and grouper/tilefish IFQ programs. IFQ participants can generally be classified as fishermen, brokers, and vertically-integrated dealers.

Action 1 would prevent any entity without a valid or renewable commercial reef fish permit from opening or both opening and maintaining a shareholder account. For any given share category, Action 2 would require that shareholders land at least 25 percent of their annual allocation every year or 50 percent of their annual allocation during every two-year period.

Committee members noted that Action 2 is intended to demonstrate fishing activity and indicated that the percentages required to be landed are too high. They requested lower percentages, for example 5 and 10 percent, be considered as well. The committee expressed support for using a scalar to account for quotas with a low percentage of landings, versus those with a high percentage of landings.

The committee noted that measuring fishing activity over a single year would result in adverse impacts on shareholders who cannot fish due to hardships. Committee members suggested that grace periods could be considered and recommended measuring fishing activity on a multiyear rolling average.

The committee asked about the appeals process. Southeast Regional Office staff responded that the IPT will work with NOAA's National

Appeals Office as the amendment progresses. Southeast Regional Office staff noted that, if fishing activity for a current year is reported on December 31st, the agency would have a very short window to adjust IFQ shareholdings if needed. Committee members concurred and suggested the inclusion of alternative cutoff dates to provide more time to adjust accounts.

Action 3 would require shareholders to possess a valid or renewable commercial reef fish permit to obtain or to both obtain and maintain shares. In addition to permit requirements, Action 3 could also require a preset level of fishing activity. Action 4, Alternative 2 would require a commercial reef fish permit to obtain annual allocation. Alternative 4 would require a commercial reef fish permit to both obtain and maintain annual allocation. Southeast Regional Office staff discussed the implications of various combinations of alternatives with increasing levels of restrictions on shareholders.

Committee members asked how permit requirements to maintain annual allocation would work. Southeast Regional Office staff indicated that permit requirements to maintain annual allocation are problematic, because appeals by shareholders could potentially extend beyond the allocation annual life cycle.

The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 4, to move Alternative 3 to Considered but Rejected. Alternative 3 is reef fish permit to obtain and maintain allocation. That motion carried fifteen to zero with two abstentions. Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: I am not seeing any, and so we'll go ahead and use our clickers again.

3) B.3 In Amendment 59 to Action 4, to move Alternative 3 to Considered but rejected				
First Name	**Last Name**			
Kesley	Banks	Yes		
Dakus	Geeslin	Yes		
JD	Dugas	Yes		
Anthony	Overton	Yes		
Tom	Frazer	Yes		
Kevin	Anson	Yes		
Billy	Broussard	Yes		
Troy	Williamson	Yes		
Troy	Frady	Yes		
John	Sanchez	Yes		
Joe	Spraggins	Yes		
Michael	McDermott			Abs
Jason	Osborne	Yes		
Chris	Schieble	Yes		
Andy	Strelcheck	Yes		
Ed	Walker	Yes		
CJ	Sweetman	Yes		
Results - Passed	**Subtotals**	Yes (16)	No (0)	Abs (1)

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right, and so we have sixteen yes, zero no, and one abstention. The motion carries. Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Just a quick question, before we leave this here, and so, at the committee level, we kind of talked about -- I kind of just want clarification for my own sake here. We talked about Action 2, requiring shareholders to land at least 25 percent, and then we talked about 50 percent every two-year period, but then there was discussion about potentially a lower percentage to be included in there, and I didn't know if a motion needed to be made to include that, or if that's already inclusive, because the document is basically up to 25 percent, and so it could theoretically include those lower levels there.

DR. ASSANE DIAGNE: Given the discussion, the committee and the council discussion, we are going to include options that would consider lower percentages, as well as options that would be based on scalars, to account for low landings.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Dr. Diagne.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: I just wanted to maybe have a little discussion around this amendment, given the public testimony yesterday and some emails that have been shared today, and so there's certainly, you know, I think, perspectives forming, in terms of the value, or lack of value, for this amendment.

What I really -- What really resonated with me, with all the public

testimony yesterday, was actually a comment by Ed, right, and this is the struggle that I've been having with IFQ for some time, but it seemed like there was a lot of support for the reef fish permit among the shareholders that were talking to us, and there was mixed support, or mostly opposition, to requiring some level of activity, but what baffles me, or continues to baffle me, is this idea that shareholders are willing to --

Or non-shareholders are willing to pay more money to lease allocation than what they're actually getting from the fish that they're catching, right, and the ones that are leasing the shares, or allocation, are saying, well, this will negatively impact the market, if you put an activity requirement on it, and this is kind of the law of unintended consequences, which may be true, right, and it's something that I'm concerned about as well, but I feel like we have to do something, and certainly activity requiring, you know, some bar for them meet seems like an appropriate avenue to pursue, and so I just wanted to lay that out there, in terms of kind of where my thinking is at, and I'm not ready to make preferred alternative recommendations.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: To that, and so I immediately had several conversations after the meeting yesterday with -- First, I kind of apologized to the girl that told us that she's okay with renting, and I felt like I came off maybe a little harsh on her, and, just so everybody knows, we're cool, and we're friends still.

A couple of things, and one of the other people that said that renting is great, and I love renting, and I make a great living renting shares from somebody else, and both of those had circumstances that were left out of the discussion.

One's father-in-law owned all the shares that she is renting, and the other one has different circumstances, but I would tell you, as a commercial fishermen, that is not representative of the majority opinion of the commercial fishery. We are not getting the guys that can't afford to come here, because they're broke. We're not hearing from them. Most of the ones I talk to are fed up with this system of renting from somebody, particularly somebody that doesn't fish.

You know, a fish house or something, yes, that's part of the business, but I would put out there that we're not hearing the majority opinion of the fishery, and one other thing I would put out there, that was very interesting to me, was Buddy Guindon, one of the largest shareholders in the Gulf, came up here yesterday

and said that, you know, us talking about this has caused the share price to go down, from fifty to sixty dollars, to thirty-five dollars, and I don't know.

I haven't seen that, but I don't trade shares much, but, if that's the case, then this program is working toward its goals. Just us talking about this is getting some people to come off some of those shares and lowering the price, and that's one of the purposes of all this work, and so it's something to think about there.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. I have General Spraggins, followed by Mr. Sanchez.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I talked to quite a few people yesterday afternoon too about this, and I heard what the people were saying that came in, and, once again, I am not saying that was 100 percent representation by any means.

The thing that I understood by it was the fact that they're not satisfied that they can go out and buy -- If it is twenty-five dollars, or whatever the number is, to buy a share, they're not satisfied that the stock, or the availability for the fish and everything else, is going to be there for them, to be able to put that -- Let's say twenty-five dollars, okay, and that was the low figure that we heard, right, and just say it was twenty-five dollars.

Well, it's going to take them five years to get their money back, at five-dollars a share, if they -- They're not willing to gamble. They're not willing to go out and put the gamble out, because they don't trust that there is enough availability for what is going to come in the future, and that's what I heard yesterday, and I'm not a fisherman, and I'm not a commercial fisherman or anything else, but I'm just saying I heard what they were saying, and, once again, Ed, I understand what you're saying, and I understand that, being a commercial fisherman, and a charter, you understand things, but that's what I heard, is the price.

If it's fifty-dollars a share, then that even makes it that much more, and now we've got like ten years that I've got to gamble to even get my money back, and that's what I heard.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: I'm kind of with General Spraggins a little bit. I'm hearing things, and there are some concerns, but there is also the reality that, with the recreational data being the way it is, and it driving down ABCs and quotas, which affect all sectors,

there is a little level of, I guess -- It's hard to, one, invest a lot of capital in a fishery where you don't know if your share, your quota, your value is going to go down, if you're going to be able to make it all work.

Then there's a little bit of uncertainty in, all right, we have these rules, and they're not perfect, and we're ironing them out. If there was an environment where you felt better about making an investment in doing these things, you might do it, but, right now, it kind of seems like we're moving the goalpost a little bit, after the game has started, and I wouldn't invest money in a scenario like that.

I would like to see some stability in where we're going with these fisheries, where they're not trending downward in recruitment, and that these things I think will work themselves out, and some of this inequity, which there is some, it will take care of, but, right now, I certainly wouldn't be rushing out to borrow against my house to buy shares in something that I don't know what the future looks like.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. McDermott.

MR. MCDERMOTT: I mean, from the numbers that were discussed during yesterday's public testimony, I don't think it's uncertainty that has these folks not wanting to buy shares. It's impossible for these folks to buy shares. I mean, if a share is thirty-dollars, and the gross revenue that the fisherman is getting is $1.50, if they would be able to put all that $1.50 in their pocket, it would take them twenty years to be able to acquire that share.

I would have to guess that their net revenue is probably 30 percent, or less, and so you're looking at sixty years to be able to get that same share, and, I mean, that just seems like an impossible hill for these folks to climb.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Yes, and one other statement that I heard more than one time yesterday, and I didn't hear hardly anybody walk up and say that we feel the stock is there and is going to continue to be great. I did not hear that one time. If I did, I missed it somewhere in there, but the point I'm getting at is they seem to obviously look at -- What Michael was saying too, and they're looking at it, and, if you're sitting here, and they're saying, hey, if you go in here and put a thing on a person who owns them, and say that they have to fish, or they have to have a boat, or they have to do whatever, then they're going to take away from

what I could be able to lease, and that's going to hurt me.

My question is, you know, maybe we need to look at it a little harder, and maybe we need to look at it a little further down the line, but I don't think we need to make a decision today to be able to put a number that says that you have to fish X amount, and you have to do this, if you own shares, or stock, because I think it's going to hurt the person that you're talking about, that's out there that is trying to make a living, and the person who can't afford to come here.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: So I don't disagree with you, General Spraggins, and that was one of the reasons that I suggested a really low bar, and so, if we were to set the bar at 10 percent, that's not going to really have a huge impact on the available allocation on the market. You might be getting it from somebody else, because the guy that don't fish ain't in the business anymore, but the shares, and the allocation, still is, and so to say that the fishery is going to collapse, because some quota lord was required to pick up a fishing pole, I disagree with that. That allocation does not disappear. It just gets shifted, and it's still in the market, and, if you only have to catch 10 percent, that's not a tough qualifier.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: To that point, General Spraggins?

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Yes, and, once again, we've made headway here. We've said you've got to have a permit, right, and we've already, you know, came up with something here. We've got a meeting in St. Petersburg coming up in November, right, and why don't we -- You know, there's a lot of fishermen down there, and, if we're not hearing from them, because they can't afford to come up here, you know, and because of the price, then maybe we ought to go back, and maybe we ought to listen to them, and maybe we ought to look at it in November, before we make a big decision on something we're doing here.

MR. WALKER: I think that's a good idea.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: I wasn't suggesting that we should make a decision today, and I just wanted to -- You know, since it was last night that we had public testimony, to hear from everyone, in terms of what they gathered from that, right, and, like you guys, I had conversations with fishermen after public testimony as well.

My concern was mostly that we're putting a lot of work into this amendment, and it seemed like we were starting to head toward maybe no action, and I think we do need to stay the course, in terms of thoughtfully looking through what are the consequences of this. Maybe, as Ed suggested, we, you know, take a minimal approach to the kind of initial threshold for activity, evaluate it a few years down the road, if that's our preferred, and, if it's not disruptive, and we want to raise the bar, or change things, because it's not fulfilling all of our goals and objectives for the program, then we can always come back and make modifications, and that's the beauty of the process, right, is we can come back and amend what we've done prior.

What I would say is I think we do need to be very thoughtful with regard to how we measure that activity, and that it's very trackable, and that there's things that we can avoid, in terms of any unintended consequences. We don't want to take shareholdings away from people that are working hard and, obviously, contributing to the fishery.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: An idea comes to mind too, and, given some of the reluctance of it, and you can just see it in people approaching the podium, and they're going to go only so far in saying lease things, for fear of they might not have any leases available to them, and we might want to find a way that we can solicit comment from some of those folks in that situation.

You know, we don't have to know who they are, but we get that information, and see if that's a very real concern or not, and you must flush out some discussion that we're not hearing right now, to get the whole gamut of everything.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Ms. Muehlstein, do you have something to that point?

MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN: So I think it's a good opportunity to just share publicly that we do gather public comment through our website. You know, anybody can go to that comment portal and give comment, and I just want to make sure that it's very clear that, although there are fields where you can fill out your name and your address and things like that, those are not required fields, and so there is an opportunity for providing anonymous public comment in a written form right now.

However, if we wanted to sort of take one step further, one of the

ideas that I have had, and Mr. Sanchez and I talked about this offline, is the potential for maybe opening an anonymous voice mailbox, because I know a lot of the commercial fleet are maybe not the same types of people that want to get online and type out a comment, and so one of the things that we could do, specifically to target this portion of this fleet, is open up an anonymous voice mailbox that would allow each commenter three minutes to give their comment, and then I could provide a summary of those comments, much like I do for our public comment summaries, that would then capture the sentiments that we get, but also allow those fishermen sort of an easy way to provide their thoughts.

I would be happy to do that, and I would be happy to entertain other ways to do it, but I think it would require a little bit more direction from the council, as to whether that's an effort that you want us to sort of add on to what we currently do.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. I had a couple of folks here. Mr. Osborne, followed by Captain Walker.

MR. OSBORNE: To the first point on Emily, if she could make sure, when she transcribes those calls, to take out all the bad words. That would be appreciated. You know, obviously, being very new to this, and trying to catch up on the IFQ system, period, what would be helpful, I think, as well, is what Michael put together and sent around, which is kind of these scenarios of, if we do this, then this could happen.

As we look through kind of some of these alternatives, and action items, obviously, you know, the folks on the other side of this issue are going to be going through and figuring out what the loopholes are, and so, to the extent that we're able to identify some possible loopholes could be found in it, I think it would be helpful in us making that decision.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: So I was going to see if we need a motion to make a 10 percent requirement or -- I know we talked about that before, and did we just assume that it's under the 20 percent, or do we need 10 percent? We don't need a motion? Okay. But it's understood then?

DR. DIAGNE: Yes, Captain Walker. I mean, 10 percent, 5 percent, as well as a scalar, to account for low landings, and those are going to be additional options in the document for that action, and, when the time comes for you to pick a preferred, then you will have the full suite.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any other discussion on this portion of the Reef Fish report? I am not seeing any. Dr. Frazer, if you want to continue.

DR. FRAZER: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Draft Options: Federal For-hire Buffer and Fishing Season for Red Snapper, Tab B, Number 7, council staff reviewed draft options which would reduce the buffer between the federal for-hire component of the recreational sector's ACL and annual catch target (ACT) for red snapper and modify the federal for-hire fishing season.

The current ACL/ACT buffer is 9 percent for the red snapper for-hire component. Action 1, Alternative 2 would reduce the buffer using the ACL/ACT Control Rule to implement a 5 percent buffer, while Action 1, Alternative 3 would set the ACL equal to the ACT, which would result in no buffer.

Action 2 would modify the start date of the federal for-hire fishing season for red snapper. Currently, the season opens June 1 every year and closes when the component ACT is projected to be met, or on December 31, whichever comes first. Action 2, Alternative 2 would operate the season similarly to what is currently done. However, the season would open the Friday before Memorial Day every year. Action 2, Alternative 3 would use a hindcasting approach to setting the season, which would result in a slightly different season opening day year-to-year, based on the data used to estimate daily catch for projecting the fishing season duration.

Committee members recounted recent comments received at public testimony regarding the for-hire red snapper season. Stakeholders have frequently expressed a desire for a fixed season opening, which provides consistency when booking trips for customers. There has also been some public support for starting the season over the Memorial Day holiday weekend, or in mid-May, rather than adding days to the end of the season in the fall months.

Additionally, there have been some reports from the industry, especially in the northern Gulf, regarding the health of the stock. For-hire vessel operators have recently observed a reduction in the average size of harvested red snapper and have advocated for modifying the fishing season, while maintaining the current ACL/ACT buffer.

A committee member asked if any novel management approaches, such as managing to a target average weight for harvested fish, could be used to inform the actions within the framework action. Council

staff replied that an examination of any changes in trends of average weight of harvested red snapper would occur as part of the upcoming SEDAR 98 data workshop. However, these data would not be ready until December 2024, at the earliest.

A committee member asked about timing of the document's development and inquired whether it would be feasible to implement the framework action in time for the 2025 federal for-hire red snapper season. Southeast Regional Office staff responded that it was probable that the upcoming change in presidential leadership would affect the rulemaking process. The committee decided to delay making any decisions regarding next steps for the framework action until after receiving public testimony.

Contract Outcomes: Regional and Sector-Specific Gulf of Mexico Gray Triggerfish Age, Growth, and Age-length Key Estimation Derived from Otolith-based Ageing, Tab B, Numbers 8(a) and (b) --

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Frazer. Never mind. We had somebody raise their hand, but they will wait. Go ahead.

DR. FRAZER: Okay. Dr. Will Patterson, from the University of Florida, provided a presentation on the outcomes of recent council-funded research to address ageing error in Gulf gray triggerfish. The next Gulf gray triggerfish stock assessment is planned for 2025.

Rationale for the contracted work stemmed from the recent discovery that previous ageing methods on dorsal spines resulted in underestimation of true age. A new dorsal spine ageing methodology (Potts et al., 2023) was compared to otolith aging and was found to be comparable in accuracy.

Through the work conducted, Dr. Patterson suggested that re-ageing archived dorsal spine sections for fish greater than age-five is an appropriate solution to produce unbiased age composition estimates. Dr. Patterson concluded with a summary of ongoing work to better improve ageing methods.

Dr. Mickle, the SSC representative, provided a summary of SSC recommendations based on the findings of the Gulf gray triggerfish ageing study. The SSC concurred with author's suggestions and noted that the new ageing techniques will be critical to an accurate stock assessment and subsequent management strategies.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Andy, did you want to go now or at the end of the report?

MR. STRELCHECK: I want to come back to red snapper, but we can go through the final section of the report first.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Okay. All right, Dr. Frazer.

DR. FRAZER: Summary of the July 2024 Scientific and Statistical Committee Meeting and Presentation, Tab B, Numbers 9(a) and (b), **t**he SSC received a presentation from Dr. Challen Hyman, from the University of South Florida, who is developing a multi-model framework to predict recreational effort, catch-per-unit-effort, and harvest proportion for Gulf gag using available recreational data.

A committee member asked for clarification on how sea surface temperature was used to estimate discard mortality within the model. It was noted that the SSC suggested Dr. Hyman might consider the interaction between seasonality and water depth when attempting to model discard mortality. Dr. Hyman will incorporate the feedback provided by the SSC to improve the models and plans to present an update to the SSC at a future meeting.

Other Business, Update on the State-Specific Private Recreational Red Snapper Season, Florida reported that landings information was not currently available, but would likely be published by the end of the week. The season opened June 1 and ran consecutively through July 31st. The season will reopen in the fall for three-day weekends (Friday through Sunday) from September 1st through November 30th.

Mississippi opened May 25th and closed July 7th, to avoid exceeding its quota. Mississippi reported that it paid back its previous year's overage. Texas reported harvesting 59.9 percent of its ACL. Based on recent landings history, Texas expects the season to close around Labor Day. Alabama reported harvesting 71.5 percent of its ACL and observed an expected plateau in effort, which is common at this point in the season. The state will continue to monitor harvest and anticipates closing the season at some point prior to the end of the year.

Louisiana opened its season on April 15th, which is earlier than in the past. Louisiana has harvested 80 percent of its ACL and projects that the season will remain open until approximately mid-September, acknowledging that inclement weather and/or shifting effort to other activities may affect the season duration.

Southeast Regional Office staff expressed a desire to receive regular updates from all the states on their private recreational red snapper seasons and recommended continued communication going

forward.

Discussion on Status of the Red Snapper Fishery, the committee reiterated several public comments expressing concern about the status of the red snapper stock by both commercial and recreational sectors. Stakeholders have observed smaller fish and have had to increase effort to harvest red snapper.

Several committee members stated that depredation by sharks and porpoises is an ongoing problem and is likely adversely affecting the red snapper stock. Other committee members pointed out that regional differences may be driving these observations, with some areas in the Gulf experiencing higher fishing effort focused on specific inshore areas relative to others. The committee agreed that the improvement of the red snapper stock has largely been a success and that continued efforts are needed to continue this progress. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Dr. Frazer. Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Going back to the red snapper framework action, we have two actions, in that one is the buffer and the other is the change of the season structure. Just to reiterate, right now, I have the authority, or, you know, NMFS has the authority, to open the fishery on June 1, and then we project the length of the season, based on the catch target, right, and that has been an ever-growing season, and we're now approaching the point where we -- We're approaching the point where may go past the end of August, and into September, which will be hard to estimate landings for a short period of time when a wave is open, right, and so, during public testimony yesterday, we heard a lot of concern about the health and status of the red snapper stock, from many areas, and there did not seem to be strong support for reducing the buffer, from most participants, and there did seem to be support in terms of modifying the start date of the season.

I wanted to ask the council if there is still an interest in pursuing modification of the buffer in Action 1, or if we should consider moving that to Considered but Rejected, and then I have some ideas about the season structure.

DR. SWEETMAN: I was going to say something very similar, Andy, and I heard next to no interest in moving the buffer. Everything was kind of focused on the season itself, and even that was split, I would say, and so, at least from my perspective, I'm totally fine with having that part of this as Considered but Rejected, the buffer.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Andy. Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: I agree, and I've talked to a bunch of those guys, and I'm also a charter boat captain, and, you know, there was a time when every day was a bonus for a charter guy, and you really wanted those extra days, when the season wasn't that long, but I think we all heard yesterday that the guys are starting to say, man, our season might be long enough here, and most of the guys we heard from, including representatives of associations, that represent a lot of charter boat guys -- Universally I think I heard that there's not a lot of support for eliminating the buffer and risking overfishing, perhaps.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Strelcheck, followed by -- Okay. Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I guess it was about three years ago, or maybe four even, that we lowered the buffer from 20 percent to 9 percent, where it is now, and I guess, through this whole process, I never really understood the origination of where this came from, or the request to try to lower the buffer from 9 to 5, or zero, to the ACL. Can anybody refresh my memory on why we have this in here to start with?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and so, you know, there is certainly uncertainty in estimating the overall length of the Gulf-wide season, and so we had established the buffer, to minimize the potential for an overage, but we've had, in recent years, good success in projecting the season and avoiding the catch limits from being exceeded, right, and so the idea here was to consider reducing that buffer, to allow more of the catch limit to be caught.

I think, you know, what I'm hearing is we could do that, but people are wanting to be precautionary, with regard to the health and status of the stock, and they're thinking that maybe we've pushed beyond where we need to be setting the season at this point, and that this isn't necessary at this stage.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: So, to that point, I think, in the analysis, we saw that we would gain four days, or maybe it was five days, if we were to drop this all the way to zero, correct, or was it to five?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Froeschke.

DR. FROESCHKE: If you go from the current 9 to the 5, I think you get four days. If you go from the 9 to the zero, you get about nine or ten days. It's pretty much 1 percent a day, if you look at the way the harvest plays out.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: So I understand, you know, to the industry, four days is four more business days, right, four more trips they can take, four more days they can make more money, but it also increases that inherent risk, to where they could exceed, you know, the allowable catch, and so I tend to agree with Andy said, and also what C.J. said, that maybe this just isn't worth the risk to do this right now. I think maybe we -- **I will make a motion to move this to Considered but Rejected, if I can get a second for that.**

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Bernie, we have a motion. While we're getting the motion on the board, Dr. Frazer.

DR. FRAZER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thought Andy did a good job of kind of explaining the history, but I think there's even a little more to it, right, and I think, you know, this is an idea that was raised, many, many years ago, and Mr. Diaz, when he was on the council, pursued this pretty aggressively, when times were probably a bit better for the fishery, and there was an attempt to try to put more fish in the hands of the for-hire sector, you know, when they were consistently, you know, not exceeding the ACT. That's why it's been carried through for quite a while, but it's a different time, right, and so I probably will support this motion.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right, and so we have a motion on the board. it was seconded by Captain Walker. Dakus.

MR. GEESLIN: One, thanks, Chris, for pointing out that buffer change. I wasn't aware of that, and so that's good to know. Really, I mean, based on what we heard, I will speak in support of the motion. I think a conservative approach is probably the right move for right now. Given those days, the tradeoff in those days, I would like -- You know, whether this motion -- Wherever it goes, I would like to hear, maybe from our charter captains around the table, about the season, the season movement earlier here, after we vote this up or down.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any other discussion on the motion? **Is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Sorry to drag out committee, but a couple of other things that I think we were talking about, just for staff direction, and so we've heard a lot of support, obviously, for opening before Memorial Day Weekend, and it maybe increases uncertainty, but, by not changing the buffer, I think that helps to address that, and I think it's something still worth considering, in terms of modifying the start date.

The comment that Captain Frady made -- You know, he was suggesting that, well, what about closing in mid-August, and possibly reopening, and I think he suggested October, and the challenge with that is we just wouldn't have enough time between when we get the landings data to know how to reopen, right, but my concern continues to be, you know, the season running into September, and having all these days on the backend, and so I was curious if there would be interest in moving -- If we're going to move the season start date up, potentially having just a fixed closed date on the backend of the season, and, if so, what that would be.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: I think we heard really decent rationale for moving the season forward, from some folks last night in the charter business, and, in my view, we didn't really hear great rationale not to move it forward, and leave it at June, other than, you know, stability, or, you know, there was some inferences to, you know, curtailing the catch, by keeping it there, and that's not really the purpose of this, and so, at our function last night, with my good friends from Mississippi, those guys indicated, to me, that they really would like to have the Memorial Day Weekend for their charter business, and we discussed that there's a lot of guys with no bookings at the end of the season, and, if you were to give them those trips early, or particularly Memorial Day Weekend, then those would be booked days, rather than not-booked days, and, as a charter boat guy, I think that's preferable, and so I support moving the start date to the Friday before Memorial Day Weekend.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. I've got several folks here. I've got General Spraggins, followed by Dr. Banks.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I've heard it from our charter boat fishermen, and I think it's a real big deal for them. I would love to see it, and I would support the start date as the Friday before Memorial Day, and I think that, by not changing anything that we've done here, that I think that would work, and I would appreciate if you would look at it.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Banks.

DR. BANKS: So, talking with our guys in our area, moving forward is something that they're interested in. Moving too far forward puts us back in like the windy season, in early May, but, also, one of the suggestions about having a fall season doesn't really work well in the western Gulf either.

We have moved -- Our charter guys have moved to hunting and fishing other things, and we are just wish-washy. We have a washing machine off of Texas in the fall, and so that just cuts off, you know, our crew out, and they were very adamant about that, when that came out, and I know we've had that conversation previously, but I have a question for Andy.

If you're talking about a fixed closed date, are you now talking about changing the first date, and have that shift in May, because we've also heard that they want a hard start date, because they can start booking trips knowing that I'm going on June 1. I may not know when it ends in the summer, but I know that I'm going June 1, that type of thing, and so I guess if you could clarify a little bit there.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: The way I've been thinking about this is the fixed start date would be that Friday before Memorial Day, and that's going to shift around from year-to-year, depending on when Memorial Day falls. The Fisheries Service would still project the season, and estimate a closure, but the idea then of a fixed closed date would be something along the lines of, if the fishery was projected to close after August 31, the season closure date would be August 31, right, or September 1, right, and so it's not going to extend into the fall then, and it would be essentially the Friday before Memorial Day through August 31, and no longer, right, and so we're not going to have a continuing growing season, because we're not catching the catch limit.

DR. BANKS: I have a follow-up to that. So, if they're leaving fish on the table now, because you were projecting to go into September, and you have a fixed closure date, what are the options them for the amount of allocation on the table?

MR. STRELCHECK: I am not sure that I understand the question, but that is the challenge, right, is that -- You refer to it as leaving fish on the table, and I would question whether we're leaving fish on the table or they're just not there to catch in the first place, right, and so they're not catching their catch limit, and we have

a very long season, that's getting longer from year to year, because the fish aren't there to catch.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Frady.

MR. FRADY: I am still getting text message this morning from some of my fleet back in Alabama, and the buffer, that we've already handled, they're okay with that, leaving it at 9 percent. The idea behind all of this, changing our season and -- Because our state opens Memorial Day Weekend, and in order to avoid the confusion, and, for marketing purposes, we wanted to at least match what the state was doing.

I got a few more text messages this morning from part of our fleet, and we have those who are 100 percent red-snapper-centric, and their entire business model is about having as many days of red snapper as they can have, but then you have -- On the other side of that, you just have people who are cognizant now of what we're doing to our fishery, and the average weight continues to plummet. Therefore, their commonsense of survivability, and trying to maintain customer pleasure, or excellent customer experience, is by having a nicer grade of fish to catch.

They have all agreed that, you know, we can back up. I mean, the Friday before Memorial Day is an option, and it's a viable option that everybody would love to have, but, after July 31st, or the 10th of August, everybody is sitting around there, and we're not going to catch the quota anyway, because 80 percent of the fleet is sitting after August 1, with hardly one trip a day, and, no matter what you do, you're not going to make people come down there and go fishing when they're having to spend money to put their kids back in school.

If you take a sliding scale, and you move it back to say May 15th, and see where it ends up, and, if it goes to July 31st, great, but if you could meet in the middle, to where you can go from August 10th, back as early in May as we can, and get as much as we can, to have that opportunity when people are in town.

I mean, the thing is optimum yield. For the federally-permitted charter boats, optimum yield is when people get out of school, in the middle of May, and they go back to school, and that is our most opportune time, but we don't want to overfish our quota. We don't think we're going to catch our quota anyway, but, if there's some flexibility in there -- I mean, the Friday before Memorial Day, or May 15th, and see where it ends up, and I would love to see that, but I would support, like I said, the Friday before, or going back to May 15th, and see where we end up. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We heard some comments yesterday, particularly from the head of our charter boat association, that there was some consternation by our federal fleet in Louisiana, because of the early start for the state charter fleet, and so there's that juxtaposition there with our fishery. This earlier start may help to alleviate some of that.

Also, our amberjack season has been pretty much relegated to the months of September and October now, and so there may be some value in being able to have access for that fleet, in the month of October, to take part of some of that fishery at the same time as the snapper season, and I'm just putting that out there.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I just looked at it, and, you know, Memorial Day is on the 26th day of May next year, and the 25th day of May the next year, and the 31st day of May the next year, and we're not talking a whole lot of difference here, and, you know, we're not talking a whole lot of difference in the days.

I mean, obviously, I understand your points of maybe the 15th or whatever, but I don't know whether that would make any difference. I mean, it might mean that we turn around and say, in Mississippi, we start ours on May 15th, rather than Memorial Day, and I don't know. You know, whatever we do, but I think that, given that opportunity to be able to let that charter boat go out and be able to have that Memorial Day weekend for sure, because most kids are still in school on May 15th, but most of them are out for Memorial Day, and that's when the families are coming south, and that's when they're coming here to be able to fish, and so I would really support either one, but I thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: I was circling back to Mr. Schieble's comment about moving the season earlier for red snapper, when there are seasons open for other species, particularly greater amberjack. In Snapper Check, since we collect mandatory reporting for red snapper, greater amberjack, and gray triggerfish, we do see, when we've had opportunities when the season is open for both species, an increase in catch for greater amberjack in our reporting, and so there could be some additional impacts to allowing folks to be able to access both species. Anyway, any other comments? Do we need to make a motion to amend the document to include this alternative? General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: If there is a motion, I would make a motion that -- (Part of General Spraggins' comment is not audible on the recording.)

CHAIRMAN ANSON: So we have --

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: It's Alternative 2.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: So Troy floated the idea of a May 15th start date, and so I wanted to look to him, to see if he wanted to add that as an alternative. I know that Texas may not support that, because of the windy weather, but I would look to Troy first.

MR. FRADY: Yes, and that would be fine to add it. I mean, we could even do May 15th or May 20th, but, you know, I'm just trying to get as much time as we can, but being realistic, knowing that people don't get out of school until about the 20th or 23rd of May anyway, but, if it would be a viable option for people to consider, yes, I think we at least need to discuss it.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: So the May 15th start date, what would be the projected end date, or the hard stop? I forgot what you said.

MR. STRELCHECK: If it was May 15th, I mean, right now, we're at about around a ninety-day season, and so that would be mid-August, and we would have to look to see if catch rates are elevated in, you know, the first wave, to see if that would impact the projections.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right, and so --

DR. FROESCHKE: If you could just put it in a motion, it makes it easier.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right, and so staff is asking for a motion to include any additional alternative than what is not currently in the document.

MR. FRADY: Could we grab that language and add it to where it begins on May 15th, with an end date of mid-August, and is that correct, the projected end date?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Is that Troy's motion?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Troy, is that your motion?

MR. FRADY: Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Do we have a second for the motion? It's seconded by Captain Walker. Any discussion on the motion? Mr. Geeslin.

MR. GEESLIN: This is just one of those kind of, you know, unintended consequences. As we think about, you know, state management, and the private rec season openings, I think this will prompt us state folks to think about an earlier opening to coincide with this opener as well, to kind of reduce some of that angler confusion along the way, and I'm just kind of -- I'm just throwing that out there, and maybe that's a good thing, to have those two synced up, but I think that is something that we will -- I am looking around to some of my state colleagues, and that's something that we may consider in our own respective states.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Banks.

DR. BANKS: I am fine having this alternative in there. I'm not sure that our guys in Texas are really going to want to go that far into May. We're pretty windy in May, but I'm fine having it in here for comment, but I would remiss not stating, on the record, that I would like to hear more discussion before we pick a preferred.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: I agree with Dr. Banks. I'm not sure that I support it, and I know we kind of fought it for a long time, just to get the May dates included, but, as an alternative for further discussion, you know, put it in there, and we'll move on for the day.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: I support adding this into the document for us to discuss further. You know, this year, obviously, Louisiana started really early, April 15th. What we saw was the access to larger fish closer to shore. Trips didn't have to go out as far, because the water is cooler earlier in the season. We happened to have favorable weather, pretty much near the end of April, the beginning of May, but you never know.

I think Dr. Banks is right, and it can be intensely windy during those time periods as well, and so each season is going to be probably a little bit different, but what we heard yesterday was

that there's that conflict between the federal for-hire and the state fleet, and so the state fleet had a great early part to the season in Louisiana, because they had access to the fish early, and they had a four-fish bag limit, and, you know, maybe this would be helpful to some of the federal for-hire fleet, to be able to have an earlier start, and who knows? Next year, the commission may decide, in Louisiana, to have a closer start for the private recs to this date as well.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Osborne.

MR. OSBORNE: I mean, there doesn't seem to be a lot of, I guess, opposition to the Friday before Memorial Day, and so why don't we do an Alternative 4 that says to open on the Friday before Memorial Day and then extend out to mid-August?

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: It's already an alternative, I think.

MR. OSBORNE: Is it?

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Yes.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Okay. Is there any other discussion on this motion? **Is there any opposition to this motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.** In an effort to maybe clean up the document, we may want to look at the alternatives and perhaps exclude Alternative 3.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: There is no hard start date in --

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Yes, and there's no hard start date mentioned, and working backwards and all those types of things, and so I just wanted to see if there's any appetite from the council, in order to streamline the document and such, to maybe perhaps remove that alternative.

MR. WALKER: I support removing it.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Okay. Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: If you need a motion, I will make the motion to consider Alternative 3 to Considered but Rejected.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We have a motion to remove Alternative 3 in Action 2. It's been seconded by Dr. Sweetman. Is there any discussion on the motion? Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: I mean, just so that we have the rationale, and

I like this one, but, obviously, I'm in support, based on what I heard from public testimony, but certainly fishermen were very adamant that they want a clear fixed start date, right, and so that's obviously why we would be eliminating this for consideration.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any other discussion? **Is there any opposition to this motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: We're almost to the finish line. The last thing I wanted to raise is we heard a ton of public testimony from commercial fishermen, and recreational fishermen, about, you know, their viewpoints on the health and status of red snapper in various areas of the Gulf of Mexico. We have an assessment that has been progressing slowly, and we're not going to have results of that assessment for several years.

It seems like we should be asking the Science Center at least to provide us some data, and information, on what might be happening, what may substantiate, or not substantiate, some of the information we're hearing from fishermen, and so I just wanted to hear from others if, you know, you would like the Science Center to bring some data, and information, at the November meeting.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: I think that's a great idea. You know, it bothers me, eternally, that we hear from zero recreational fishermen at public testimony, you know, and so, if we were to come out of this and say, you know, it was pretty much universal testimony that something is wrong with the fishery, and nobody said it directly, but everybody was hinting that we might need to cut some things back on red snapper, and to go out to the recreational community now and say the Gulf Council wants to cut red snapper back, they're going to throw their hands up in the air, and so it bothers me that we had, with one exception, virtually no input from recreational guys here yesterday.

That being said, I don't disagree with what the guys said. I am a recreational and charter fisherman and all that, and our snapper were tough too where I live, and so something is going on, and I think it would be great if we could get some science to back up people's observations.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Geeslin.

MR. GEESLIN: I am all for looking into the data and getting a handle on, you know, substantiating some of the angler observations

from all the sectors, and I do think you're hearing some geographical variability within those comments, which may speak to more of an east-west split, more of, you know, different stock types of a management approach.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think -- I agree. I think, if more data comes in there, and we will be getting our state director reports at the November meeting, correct, and, in those, there's a template to provide the catch effort, as best we can break that out, and so we'll have those graphics in our individual reports, which may be helpful data right there, just to look at to see if there's a trend.

Obviously, we have some -- You know, state management is the dataset that we'll look at, going back to 2020, but, also, I would like to make the note that one of the reasons that we proposed a four-fish bag limit in Louisiana, through our commission, and they adopted it, was that the goal is to try to find ways to reduce discards, right, and that's a big thing in the Gulf, is looking at different methods to reduce discards.

Our thought process was, if you allow anglers to potentially harvest four fish, instead of two, there may be less of this high-grading to try to get bigger fish right away, and we saw, with an earlier start to the season, they had access to larger fish closer to shore also, and so we think that combination, between a four-fish bag limit, and the earlier season start, may help with the discard thing. I can't say for certain, and I don't know if I'll have that available by November to show you all or not, but -- And maybe that won't work at all. You know, fishermen are fishermen, right, and we can only project, you know, propensities, but we can't really predict them completely.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: I will just make this quick. I am never opposed to looking at more data for this, and so we definitely hear a lot of concerns about the red snapper stock. I'm not exactly sure the specifics of what we would look at, and we certainly definitely -- I agree with Mr. Geeslin that we heard some regional concerns there, and so maybe looking at it from a regional perspective, looking at the different sectors and what's going on with those landings, and those trends in abundance, and I'm just trying to think on the fly for the type of information that we would request from the Science Center, but I'm all in favor of just more data to look at here.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: So I would look to Carrie, in terms of whether you want a motion, or we can just work with the Science Center and, you know, put this on the November agenda, but my thought would not be prescriptive here, but I agree with Dakus, and others, right, that we need to be looking at this from a regional component.

We certainly have fishery-independent abundance surveys that are done, for GFISHER and the longline and video, and so those are the obvious things that we could bring back, but, also, maybe size composition data, and other sources of data, and so I just want to leave it up to the Science Center what their capacity is to provide that by November.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so just a couple of questions. Typically, when we ask the Science Center to do these types of things, we have it to go the SSC first, and then to the council, and so I don't know if there's time for that. I think I did ask Dr. Porch, and you, Mr. Strelcheck, yesterday what we could look at in the short-term, because I did have some concerns as well about the amount of public comment suggesting there was a big decline in the stock, and so I don't know if Dr. Cass-Calay can help us with that, but I think the size compositions are going to take more time, would be my understanding, but maybe we get an idea about how quickly some of that stuff could be looked at, and I was thinking GFISHER and the NMFS bottom longline.

With that new fancy tool that they sent out, the NMFS bottom longline survey for the adults actually goes through 2023, if you want to take a look at it, and there's some other surveys that go to like 2022 and 2018.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Cass-Calay.

DR. SHANNON CASS-CALAY: Thank you, Chair. I agree that the easiest approach would be to prepare a package with the fishery-independent index information for the review by the SSC. It may also be possible to look at some additional sources of data. It would be of interest, certainly, to look at length composition data.

I don't know if that could be made available within a reasonable time, and so I would suggest that the motion be written

flexibility, you know, to ask the Science Center to put together the available information. In particular, the fishery-independent indices can be made available, and then my understanding is you want it for the next SSC meeting, or is there a longer timeframe you're looking at?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Council staff is saying the October SSC meeting, for our November meeting. If you delay it much longer, requiring the SSC to see it first, then it would be into next year, for the next council meeting, and so I have Mr. Rindone that has had his hand up for a little bit, and so let me go to him, and then I will come back to the table.

MR. RINDONE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I went into the archived meeting materials, going back to April and looking at the state reporting of their weight and length compositions for the private vessels, and, generally speaking, east of the river, lengths and weights are consistent-ish, with the exception of the increase from 2022 to 2023 for Alabama's average weights. I think that we discussed, at that time, that it's consistent, in that they're either flat or they show an increasing trend.

Mississippi saw a drop from 2022 to 2023, but it was on a pretty consistent incline prior to that. West of the river, they're declining, marginally, and, again, there is no confidence intervals about this, and so it's, you know, not to say that one year is significantly different from another, but, for Louisiana and Texas, lengths and weights were on the decline, year over year, from 2018 to 2023.

As far as preparing things for the SSC meeting, I agree with being flexible with, you know, as far as what the Science Center can bring. There are things that will be already in a preparation mode for the data workshop for red snapper in December, and so maybe some of those things will be prepared in time, but the SSC meeting is currently scheduled for the 8th to the 10th of October, and so that means that materials would need to be into the SSC for review by September 24th, which is about thirty days from now, and so, if some of those analyses haven't started yet, they would need to probably start pretty quickly, and so just food for thought. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so part of me wants to look at this sooner, rather than later, and not have to wait this entire time to figure out what's going on and substantiate what we've heard, and so part of me is wondering if this even needs to

go to the SSC. Some of this is just informational, and maybe we can just update some of these indices here, but, again -- Once again, the devil is going to be in the detail there, and so, with what Dr. Cass-Calay was saying about the flexibility to come out there, and so, obviously, there's going to be some components of this, if we're diving into certain specific things here, where it may be more complicated, and have to go to the SSC, but I think maybe there's a mix-and-match for stuff that we can bring to the next meeting, that can give us some more information in a more rapid manner.

If stuff does need to go to the SSC, and needs to be vetted by the SSC, maybe that can be done in a kind of separate process there, but my thought is I would rather get more information sooner rather than later, is all I'm saying.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Cass-Calay.

DR. CASS-CALAY: Thanks. Certainly there is already a tool to visualize the fishery-independent indices, and we can certainly summarize that information and bring it to the council. That could easily be done using a council request to respond directly to the council staff.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Okay, and so that's what we'll do. Council staff will write a letter and request such information, you know, recreational information as well, besides the fishery-independent, if that's possible. Anything else related to Reef Fish? All right. So I think we'll go right into the next committee report. No, but we'll take a ten-minute break, and then we'll look to see which committee reports would be next, because we may change the order, in order to possibly break for lunch, but we'll discuss that and come back with an idea. Thank you.

(Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We're going to do one committee report, at least, before we break for lunch. All right, everyone, and so the next up, that was scheduled, after we made the revision to move up Reef Fish, was the Administrative/Budget Committee. The chair has asked to delay that until after lunch, and so we're going to go ahead and postpone the Admin/Budget Committee report, but that will then take us into our next scheduled committee, and that would be Ecosystem and Dr. Banks.

ECOSYSTEM COMMITTEE REPORT

DR. BANKS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Ecosystem Committee report,

the committee adopted the agenda, Tab Q, Number 1, and approved the minutes, Tab Q, Number 2, of the October 2023 meeting as written.

Presentation on Modifications to the 2024 NMFS Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management Road Map, Tab Q, Numbers 4(a) through (c), council staff provided an overview of the 2024 NOAA Fisheries Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management (EBFM) Road Map update, which serves as a guidance document for the agency to implement EBFM and advance climate-ready fisheries.

Council staff summarized the Ecosystem Technical Committee (ETC) discussion and recommendations on the road map and provided an overview of the draft comment letter to NOAA Fisheries in response to the road map. Broadly, the ETC was supportive of the road map and its goals for advancing EBFM and increasing climate resilience for marine resources and fishing communities. However, the ETC expressed concerns about maintaining long-term funding and staffing for EBFM initiatives and thought that the Road Map should provide better guidance for management partners to implement EBFM tools. Committee members discussed the road map and provided recommendations for amendments to the draft comment letter.

Committee members discussed the need for coordination with other regions when considering EBFM for Gulf stocks whose distributions overlap with other jurisdictions. Scenario planning efforts, such as those detailed in the road map, have already taken place for the East Coast, including the South Atlantic region, which jointly manages several fisheries with the Gulf of Mexico.

The Gulf has yet to conduct scenario planning, and committee members recommended that the council take an active role in ensuring that Gulf fisheries ecosystem needs are represented when jointly managing species with other regional councils that already have ecosystem initiatives in place.

A committee member commented that it is difficult to dictate whether science drives management, or vice versa, but highlighted that ecosystem status reports could be integrated into management as a tool for the council to integrate ecosystem and climate resilience considerations into management strategies, including fishery ecosystem plan development. Committee members inquired about funding and staffing for road map initiatives, as well as plans for long-term maintenance and management utility of data streams generated by the road map.

Dr. Clay Porch, from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, commented that, although Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds are

unlikely to be renewed, they have generated three permanent positions in the Southeast to support development of ecosystem status report updates, climate-ready harvest strategies, and other ecosystem initiatives. In regard to EBFM data, Dr. Porch commented that current efforts to streamline data processing, for example developing automated image analysis techniques, will reduce staff load and build capacity for continued data collection in the future. Data will be housed locally at the Science Center or in national data repositories, depending on the data type.

Council staff agreed to amend the draft comment letter to address the importance of long-term maintenance of EBFM data streams and the potential for ecosystem status reports to meet fishery ecosystem plan needs.

The committee recommends, and I so move, to recommend the council approve and send the comment letter on modifications to the 2024 EBFM road map as amended. That motion carried without opposition.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We have a committee motion. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Is there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.** Dr. Banks.

DR. BANKS: SSC Recommendations and Feedback on Essential Fish Habitat Contract Work, Tab B, Number 9(b), council staff summarized the Scientific and Statistical Committee's (SSC) recommendation for the EFH contract work. The award for the contract went to Dr. Bridgette Froeschke at the University of Tampa.

Dr. Froeschke's task was to identify and catalogue the spatial data available for all benthic habitat types. Dr. Froeschke identified where she suspected data were available and not yet provided, and SSC members offered assistance to fill the knowledge gaps. Dr. Froeschke will provide a final report to the council at its November 2024 meeting. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Dr. Banks. We appreciate it. Any other items for Ecosystem? Not seeing any, why don't we just go ahead and take our lunch now, and then, again, we'll pick it back up, and hopefully General Spraggins will be back, and then we'll start off with Admin/Budget and continue on with the remaining committee reports as scheduled, as listed, and so let's do that. We'll break for an hour, and maybe we can get back here at 1:15, maybe, and that's almost an hour-and-a-half. All right. 1:15. Thank you.

(Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on August 22, 2024.)

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August 22, 2024

THURSDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

- - -

The Full Council of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council reconvened at The Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi on Thursday afternoon, August 22, 2024, and was called to order by Chairman Kevin Anson.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We'll go ahead and get started again. We had a little bit of a delay in lunch, and sorry about that, for those that were waiting. Before we get started with the Admin/Budget, Ms. Levy would like to say a few words.

MS. LEVY: Very ominous. No, and so I just wanted to like -- Kind of like remind folks about conducting council business during a public meeting. I think we have a tendency, and like we see emails, and we want to respond to them, and we want to talk about things, and that's great, and I want all of these issues to be aired, but what I don't want to have happen is someone responds to an email, you know, that is maybe sent to everybody, and then there's a behind-the-scenes conversation about a particular issue that should be covered during the meeting, and so, with electronic stuff, it makes it a little more difficult, because we're all used to just looking at our stuff and responding, but I guess would ask that, to the extent you want to include the council as a body in something that you're thinking about, that you do it on the record, while we're talking, so that we don't end up getting into that problematic loop of email exchanges. Thanks.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you. All right, and so let's go to our next committee report, the Administrative/Budget Committee report. General Spraggins.

ADMINISTRATIVE/BUDGET COMMITTEE REPORT

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Administrative/Budget Committee Report, August 19, 2024, the committee adopted the agenda and the August 2024 minutes, Tab G, Number 1 and 2, as written.

Review and Approval of Final 2024 Funded Budget, Tab G, Number 4, upon review of the proposed, funded 2024 budget, a council member asked if there was a plan to increase state liaison funding in the

future periods. Staff responded that the states received an increase of $5,000 in 2023, which brought the liaison annual funding up to $50,000, and so an increase was not planned, or budgeted, in 2024. This is something the council may choose to consider during the review of the next annual budget in 2025.

The committee recommends, and I so move, that the council approve the proposed 2024 funded budget. The motion carried with no opposition. Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. We have a committee motion. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Is there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.**

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: All right, sir. Update of 2020 to 2024 Projected Expenditures and Budget Carryover to 2025, Tag G, Number 4(a), staff presented a table summarizing the administrative award expenditures to-date, projected expenditures by year-end, and anticipated projected funds available to complete work in progress during 2025.

Staff, in consultation with the council leadership, will develop a prioritized list of activities that will be best suited for inclusion in a no-cost budget extension request and submit the request for an extension before the end of October. A committee member asked if funds would likely be fully expended by the end of the extension. Staff stated this should not be a problem, as the remaining unspent funds will be much lower than in previous years. Any questions on that? Okay. Then we'll move on.

All right. Review Activities and Budget for the Multi-Year 2025 to 2028 Council Funding Request, Tab G, Number 5, staff presented the council with the 2025 to 2028 estimated funding request. Due to changes in the funding process, this administrative funding request will cover four years.

Per guidance provided to the council executive directors in January, the request projected the 2025 funding level with the 2024 funded amount. An average annual increase of 7.9 percent was incorporated in future periods. The chair questioned if level funding in 2025 would present a challenge. Staff noted that this factor, combined with the costs related to moving and leasing new space, would be challenging, given the current commercial real estate market conditions in Tampa. However, completing some activities under a no-cost extension would help to offset some activity costs.

The Regional Administrator commented that there are two versions

of the budgets currently working through Congress. One might provide an increase for the councils in 2025, but that budgeting for level funding was appropriate.

The committee recommends, and I so move, that the council approve the 2025 to 2028 council budget request, as presented. The motion carried with no opposition. Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you. We have a committee motion. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Is there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.**

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: All right. Status Update on Inflation Reduction Act Funding for the Regional Fishery Management Councils, staff provided an informational update on the status of funding for the Gulf Council's proposal that was submitted in January 2024 for the Inflation Reduction Act Funding. The award was approved, and the council received the Phase I funding amount of $375,000 on August 15.

NOAA has communicated the anticipated funding for Phase II activities will be fully funded, based on the request, with the exclusion of the summit activities. The council was also informed that the first two years of the Phase II funding may not be received until March 2025. Any questions on that? Okay.

Seeing none, Other Business, staff provided the committee with an update on the results of the recent in-depth NOAA Headquarters site visit. It was noted that this went well, and that they provided a lot of good feedback. Staff explained some of the recommendations made and advised that they would be updating the council's SOPPs and administrative handbook to reflect these changes. NOAA will be providing a site report within the next six weeks, and staff will share it with the committee and council, as appropriate. Mr. Chair, unless there's anything, this concludes our report for Administrative/Budget.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, General Spraggins. Any other items that need to come before Admin/Budget? Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Just to clarify, in the report, and I might have misstated this during committee, but the Senate and House marks indicate a decrease for NOAA Fisheries' budget overall. For the council budgets, I think both do have some increases proposed, although slight, right, and so it says one in the report, but I think both actually have it.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you for the clarification. All right.

Anything else? Not seeing any, then that will take us to our next committee report, and that is the Data Collection Committee and Captain Walker.

DATA COLLECTION COMMITTEE REPORT

MR. WALKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Data Collection Committee adopted the agenda, after including a discussion of the Southeast Regional Office permit database under Other Business, and they approved the minutes of the June 2024 meeting.

Discussion on For-hire Data Collection Program, the first part was discussion of the methodology for trip validation. Council staff provided a presentation reviewing two potential approaches for trip validation in the new for-hire data collection program. One technical method would include the use of a vessel monitoring system or some combination of VMS with a geofence.

A non-technical approach would require several components to satisfy this requirement, including submitting a logbook before offloading catch, dockside intercepts, a combination of trip declaration and pre-landing notification, landing fish at approved landing locations, and did-not-fish reports.

A committee member asked NOAA General Counsel whether a technical validation method using VMS would be legally defensible, given the previous lawsuit decision. Counsel responded that, because the technical validation options require the collection of continuous location data, they would be difficult to justify, given the privacy concerns, and that there is a non-technical approach that appears viable.

Several committee members stated that the non-technical approach would be preferable to VMS, but acknowledged that funding limitations may make this option difficult to operationalize. The committee agreed that exploring collaboration with the state for-hire surveys would be ideal to help any potential financial shortfalls and avoid interruptions in sampling.

A committee member asked about the status of the for-hire data collection program in the South Atlantic. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council liaison stated they were reviewing their program. A committee member replied that coordination between the two councils would be beneficial, as for-hire data collection is being developed in both regions. Council staff added that staff from both councils are in frequent communication and are exchanging regular updates on the progress of the two programs. Any input on trip validation, before I move on in Data Collection?

Okay, and this is also kind of trip validation.

The committee also discussed the progress of an electronic reporting program being developed by HMS. The committee asked several questions regarding the timeline of the HMS program and inquired how potential differences in program structures would affect participants with multiple permit types, such as Gulf reef fish, HMS, South Atlantic permits, et cetera.

The committee suggested inviting HMS staff to provide an update on the development of their electronic reporting program at a future meeting, and so, on this topic, I am told that Dr. Banks has some information for us, as far as HMS, for a potential overlap, and so some information there. Dr. Banks.

DR. BANKS: Bernie, can you pull those slides up for us? So, we mentioned that there was an option that included, in the HMS reporting, for non-HMS species, and I think, Lisa, if you can go into where this is in the HMS process, a little better than I can, but, if you look at Option C1c, that's all species, including -- That's a vermilion down there, and that's definitely not an HMS species, and then, Bernie, if you go one more slide, there's also the economic data reporting, and there is no option for not reporting economic data, and I just wanted to point out that they already are at options, and so I will turn it over to Lisa for that.

DR. LISA HOLLENSEAD: Thank you, Dr. Banks. It's my understanding, and I've actually been looking at the rulemaking process, and they have little like guides for the public here, to try to figure out exactly sort of where we're at, and so it's my understanding that this is sort of beyond scoping, and this is an advanced notice of proposed rule, and so it's a little further along than that.

HMS had a couple of in-person meetings on this, to get public comment, as well as a few webinars, and we had five last summer, in 2023, and so that has been a year, and they're still in this process, but it does seem like there is some hashing out of -- You know, things are starting to come together a little bit, as we talked about in committee. Things are starting to form a bit, and we've sort of been working in parallel, but I don't know -- This almost gets to the point where perhaps they're a little farther ahead, and it's difficult to try to tell in the process where they are, versus us, and so I think some clarification from their office would be helpful.

MR. WALKER: I would agree. I mean, this seems like it has the potential to be a big problem for what we're trying to do, and

does this -- Would this necessarily supersede -- Assuming you have both of these kind of permits on your boat, you would be required to follow the more restrictive one?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Well, yes, and I don't know how it would be written up, but you would have to abide by whatever the specific permitting requirements are, and so potentially we could have double reporting, if it's set up in a way that doesn't include our reporting system, right?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you for bringing this up again, Kesley, and Lisa for explaining this. It's concerning, and I don't think we want double reporting in the slightest bit here, and so, in addition to coordination with HMS -- I mean, is there a way that we can advocate to not go this route with the all species reporting here?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Ms. Levy.

MS. LEVY: I mean, you can clearly talk to HMS, but they're going to decide what reporting requirements they will have, and I will note that our reporting requirement was for all species, and not just those federally managed, and so I don't think it's unusual for it to be all species that a particular vessel with a particular permit is catching.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Banks.

DR. BANKS: Just on a timeline with this, we received the first presentation on this at council in Austin, in August of 2023, and then this came for the HMS spring AP meeting, and it was put on our June background information, and so they are definitely a little further along than we are, and, when we discuss it at the AP, it is with quite a few stakeholders, and not just the Gulf, and how does this fit in with reporting in other permitted fisheries, and there's not an idea, and it's just, oh, we'll see how it goes.

MR. WALKER: Could we back up a slide and see the validation? I haven't seen this one, and it might be in the documents, and I missed it. If not, I would love the chance to look at it a little more in-depth. It doesn't really have the validation, does it? Not on this page anyway, and, I mean, is it requiring monitoring? I guess it isn't just reporting, right?

DR. BANKS: It's just reporting right now, and I don't think they have a validation method.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: So I don't think we're going to solve this today, but maybe what we could do is staff from the Gulf Council and my office can have a phone call discussion with HMS, and ensure common understanding, and be able to bring that back in November, with regard to alignment, as well as share any concerns, based on what we've heard around this table.

MR. WALKER: I think that would be great. I wouldn't mind listening in on that conversation, as the Data Collection guy for the moment. Maybe I can get in on that, because I do have -- I guess a lot of us have both of these permits, and the HMS reporting right now is you catch a swordfish, and you log-in on their website, when you get home, and you say I caught a swordfish. It's that simple, and so this is a big change for them, and overlap could be a real issue here, and so any more comments on HMS?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Was there a timeline, a short timeline that they're going to be implementing this, I thought, or is there quite a bit of time left before making final -- Before they go final action?

DR. BANKS: I think that's unknown. We do have it on the AP schedule, but it's after lunch, as everyone is trying to catch a flight, and so we'll see how this goes, but we are meeting the first week of September.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Froeschke.

DR. FROESCHKE: Does anyone know, offhand, what percentage of the federal for-hire operators have the HMS permit along with the reef fish?

MR. WALKER: I don't know the percentage, but pretty much everybody has one, in case you catch a tuna or a swordfish or something like that, and they're twenty-bucks, and so there's no reason not to have one, and pretty much everybody has one.

DR. FROESCHKE: So, if they were to do this, and you go with Option C1c, it would almost seem that we wouldn't have to do anything, for good or bad, because we would be obligated into their program.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Well, I mean, yes and no. It depends on what the

proportion of those vessels that have a -- Dr. Sweetman.

DR. SWEETMAN: Then just a quick question, and I don't know if anyone -- I feel like HMS rulemaking is a black box for me, but do they still need to go through a draft rule phase, a final rule phase, and how does that work at HMS?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: I got some head nods in this direction, and do any of you know?

MR. WALKER: Dr. Banks had her hand up.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Ms. Levy.

MS. LEVY: Yes, they need to do rulemaking, and so they'll have to do proposed and solicit comment and things like that.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Any other questions? Lisa.

DR. HOLLENSEAD: So it's my understanding, from the little blurb from the Federal Register office, that this is all in developing sort of as a proposed rule, and there's some language in here that says an agency in the preliminary stages of rulemaking may publish an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking, and so that seems to be what this is, in the Federal Register, to more information. The advanced notice is a formal invitation to participate in shaping the proposed rule, and it starts the notice and comment process in motion.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Ms. Levy.

MS. LEVY: I just want to be clear that that's not the proposed rule, right, and so an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking says, hey, heads-up, and we're going to, at some time, issue a proposed rule, and this is the beginning of that process, and we're soliciting advanced comments, but it is not the proposed rule, right, and that's another step.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: I guess a question that came up is what is the additional steps, if there are any, related to notifying the public that there is a point at which you have a final option to provide comment, or they're about to make the final regulation, or is this the only notice there is, relative to this process.

MS. LEVY: Well, I was going to say that they have to actually issue a proposed rule. That advanced notice of -- That wasn't a proposed rule. That was them giving you advance notice that they are going to propose a rule at some point.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Hollensead.

DR. HOLLENSEAD: That's correct. Ms. Levy is correct, and then it's got in here that, you know, the ideas and use is the basis for the proposed rule, and so, again, it's a little bit different than how we do things, which is hard to find -- If we're trying to streamline this together, how directly analogous is it to our process, and that's where I think we could use some clarification.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: I guess maybe just a question, maybe for I guess Mr. Strelcheck. I mean, you guys don't have the headquartered HMS division in your office, but you have local and regional HMS staff, and we have someone from headquarters on our IPT, I think, involved in the Gulf for-hire program, and we talked about more involvement with the South Atlantic, but it is appropriate for you, or me, to convey to them that we need to kind of make sure that we're more involved in this document, and slow things down and get on the same page, because I don't think we've had that back and forth since we got the scoping document, and is that something that is potentially possible?

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and, I mean, I want to go back and obviously talk to HMS, and make sure that we're in better alignment on these things going forward, and so I don't know where the wires got crossed, or where the coordination did or didn't happen, but certainly I'm concerned, obviously, with the path we're on right now.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: I think that would be really helpful, because it has strong implications for both the Gulf and South Atlantic Council. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any other questions about this part of the report? I am not seeing any. Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Moving on, a committee member expressed an opposition to the use of did-not-fish reports and indicated that this extra requirement would be burdensome to the industry. Additionally, he expressed concern that a vessel operator may be penalized for forgetting to submit this extra report. Council staff stated it would be possible to explore the timing of did-not-fish reports, to find an option that would limit reporting burden on program participants, and report back to the committee at the next meeting.

The committee recommends, and I so move, to move forward with non-technical solutions for for-hire trip validation. That motion carried with no opposition.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We have a committee motion. Is there any discussion on this motion? Seeing that we are getting kind of more into the meat of actions that affect folks, and for the transparency aspect of it, I would like to go ahead and use the clickers again for this motion, if you don't mind.

4) F.1 To move forward with non-technical solutions for for-hire trip validation.				
First Name	Last Name	technical solutions for for-hire trip validation.		
Kesley	Banks	Yes		
Dakus	Geeslin			Abs
JD	Dugas	Yes		
Anthony	Overton	Yes		
Tom	Frazer	Yes		
Kevin	Anson	Yes		
Billy	Broussard	Yes		
Troy	Williamson		No	
Troy	Frady	Yes		
John	Sanchez	Yes		
Joe	Spraggins	Yes		
Michael	McDermott	Yes		
Jason	Osborne	Yes		
Chris	Schieble	Yes		
Andy	Strelcheck	Yes		
Ed	Walker	Yes		
CJ	Sweetman	Yes		
Results - Passed	**Subtotals**	**Yes (15)**	**No (1)**	**Abs (1)**

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you. **The motion carries with fifteen yes, one no, and one abstention.** Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Okay. Discussion of Draft Document, the committee was presented the latest version of the draft document and reviewed the current document actions. For Action 4, which considers the collection of economic data, the committee suggested modifications to the options under Alternative 3. Alternative 3 would implement a survey design for sampling program participants completing and submitting an economic survey.

A committee member expressed a desire to include an option for sampling up to 10 percent of trips. Another committee member asked if removing Action 4 and dedicating another document for this program component would be possible. Several committee members advocated for leaving Action 4 within the document, to provide guidance on the sampling design for economic data collection. The committee decided to modify Action 4, Alternative 3 by adding one option and removing another.

The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 4, to make an Option e. Option e is up to 10 percent of trips. The motion carried with one in opposition.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We have another committee motion. Is there any discussion on this motion? All right. If we can go ahead again and use the clicker.

5) F.2 In Action 4, to make an Option e.				
First Name	**Last Name**			
Kesley	Banks	Yes		
Dakus	Geeslin			Abs
JD	Dugas	Yes		
Anthony	Overton	Yes		
Tom	Frazer	Yes		
Kevin	Anson	Yes		
Billy	Broussard	Yes		
Troy	Williamson	Yes		
Troy	Frady	Yes		
John	Sanchez	Yes		
Joe	Spraggins	Yes		
Michael	McDermott	Yes		
Jason	Osborne	Yes		
Chris	Schieble	Yes		
Andy	Strelcheck		No	
Ed	Walker	Yes		
CJ	Sweetman	Yes		
Results - Passed	**Subtotals**	**Yes (15)**	**No (1)**	**Abs (1)**

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right, and we have fifteen yes, one no, one abstention. Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: The committee also recommends, and I so move, in Action 4, to remove Option a, Option a being up to 50 percent of trips. The motion carried with no opposition.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any discussion on the motion? Not seeing any, we'll go ahead and vote via clicker.

6) F.2 in Action 4, to remove Option a.				
First Name	**Last Name**			
Kesley	Banks	Yes		
Dakus	Geeslin			Abs
JD	Dugas	Yes		
Anthony	Overton	Yes		
Tom	Frazer	Yes		
Kevin	Anson	Yes		
Billy	Broussard	Yes		
Troy	Williamson	Yes		
Troy	Frady	Yes		
John	Sanchez	Yes		
Joe	Spraggins	Yes		
Michael	McDermott	Yes		
Jason	Osborne	Yes		
Chris	Schieble	Yes		
Andy	Strelcheck	Yes		
Ed	Walker	Yes		
CJ	Sweetman	Yes		
Results - Passed	**Subtotals**	**Yes (16)**	**No (0)**	**Abs (1)**

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right, and so we have sixteen yes, zero no, and one abstention. Captain Walker.

MR. WALKER: Council staff stated that, for the next revision of the document, an action outlining the non-technical approaches for trip validation, as well as an action to review the program with some frequency (e.g., every five years), would be included. In addition to exploring options for the timing of submitting did-not-fish reports, staff will also report back on options for what a program review would entail that may be most appropriate for the new program.

In Other Business, SERO staff provided an update on issues related to the permit database. SERO staff have identified Reef Fish Amendment 59 and the shrimp vessel and effort monitoring program framework action as documents that rely on permit information for their development.

SERO staff are working with contractors to develop a snapshot permits dataset that would provide the council and IPT data through 2023 for use in amendments. By mid-September, SERO will report whether this snapshot solution is viable and if it will be available in time for staff to develop these documents for the November council meeting. A committee member noted that the updates in the permits office has resulted in more timely processing and encouraged SERO to continue working on improvements within the Permits Office. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Captain Walker. Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Just briefly, to go back to the two motions that we just voted on, I think it would be really important, as this amendment proceeds, to have the economists advise us on what can or can't be done at the different levels that we're suggesting and where there might be kind of a sweet spot, in terms of sampling, right, and if 10 percent is sufficient, or whatever that number is.

The other thing to note -- So we list trips here, and I think I brought it up during committee, as to whether or not this will have to be vessel sampled, versus trips, and so, if we're going to be able to sub-sample trips, then that, I think, points to an electronic solution within the system, where we're randomly selecting for trips, and that, to me, is ideal, because we're collecting the data at the time that it's being entered, but, like the commercial fleet, we do actually select vessels for the entire fishing year, and then they report their economic data, and so that's another thing that I just -- We'll work with the economists to advise on and get back to in November.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Andy. Any other discussion on Data Collection? Seeing none, that will move us into our next committee report, the Shrimp Committee, and Mr. Schieble.

SHRIMP COMMITTEE REPORT

MR. SCHIEBLE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee adopted the agenda, Tab D, Number 1, with the movement of Agenda Item VI before Agenda Item V and with the addition of a discussion of National Seafood Strategy under Other Business. The committee then approved the minutes, Tab D, Number 2, of the April 2024 meeting as written, with the word "receive" changed to "remove" on page 34.

Review of the Expenditures of the Fiscal Year 2023 Funds for the Early Adopter Program for Shrimp cVMS and Update on the Early Adopter Program for Shrimp cVMS, Tab D, Number 4(a), Dr. Lowther, from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, reviewed NMFS' expenditures of the fiscal year 2023 funds for the Early Adopter Program with the Gulf of Mexico federal shrimp fleet. He then provided an update on installations of cVMS devices to-date and discussed the data status from those devices.

A committee member inquired about the fiscal year 2024 funds for the Early Adopter Program and if it would be included in the President's 2025 budget. Mr. Strelcheck stated that it is included in both the House and Senate's budgets.

Dr. Simmons asked when the Southeast Fisheries Science Center would

be able to determine a valid statistical design for sampling of shrimp vessels and if it could occur before the next round of funding for the Early Adopter Program. She noted that information would also be needed for the draft shrimp framework action, to know the extent to which costs to industry would be defrayed. Dr. Lowther responded that they intend to have that information in October 2024. He added that some of the vessels selected for inclusion in the data collection program would have devices installed from the Early Adopter Program.

Dr. Simmons asked if the 2013 and 2016 sample sizes for the cellular electronic logbooks could be analyzed for robustness in design and if a determination could be made on similar application for the sample size of cVMS devices. Dr. Lowther responded that analysis could be conducted. Dr. Porch added that, with periodic resampling, a growing number of vessels with devices through the Early Adopter Program would eventually be selected, such that all vessels may eventually participate in the data collection program.

A Committee member inquired why National Marine Fisheries Service Headquarters requested an additional $61,000 in M&A for fiscal year 2024 funds. Dr. Porch responded that NMFS Headquarters provided updated direction on how M&A is to be applied.

The committee member then asked for clarification on problems vendors faced with the application programming interface. Dr. Lowther responded that initially a security upgrade resulted in one vendor not being able to transmit through the application programming interface (API). A subsequent Oracle upgrade, in anticipation of the Southeast Fisheries Science Center move to the cloud, is now preventing all vendors from transmitting through the API. Dr. Lowther indicated that these problems are being investigated and were not unexpected, given the difficulty and complexity of standing up a new program.

A committee member asked when the draft shrimp framework action would return to the committee and if it would be slated for final action at the January 2025 council meeting. Dr. Freeman stated that he anticipated the document being on the agenda for the November 2024 council meeting. Dr. Simmons added that, due to issues with obtaining permit numbers, which are needed for completion of the document, it would be difficult to determine when final action could be taken.

Recap of Southeast Shrimp Strategy and Planning Meeting, Tab D, Number 6(a), Ms. Picariello, from Texas Sea Grant presented on the Southeast Shrimp Strategy and Planning meeting held March 30 through April 1, 2024. A committee member inquired if Delcambre

Direct in Louisiana could be applied in other geographic areas. Ms. Picariello responded that the volume of shrimp with offshore vessels poses a difficulty for direct marketing. She added that location of where vessels dock can also be a hindrance for availability to the public. Another committee member stated that availability of resources to initiate a program such as Delcambre Direct can also be an obstacle to overcome.

Update on Shrimp Futures Project, Tab D, Number 5, Dr. Gervasi, from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, provided an update on the Shrimp Futures Project, covering the objectives and timeline.

Update on Timing of Reinitiation of Section 7 Consultation, Tab D, Number 7, Ms. Lee, from the Southeast Regional Office, provided an update on the reinitiation of the Section 7 consultation for the Southeast shrimp fisheries. Dr. Freeman inquired if the population viability analyses (PVA) are what would be presented to the SSC. Ms. Lee responded that the bycatch estimates and PVAs could be presented to the SSC. She added that this is an effort to keep the council engaged in the consultation process.

Dr. Froeschke commented that many of the analyses require scaling up to the entire size of the industry and inquired how that scaling can occur without information on the Gulf permit numbers. Ms. Lee responded that bycatch estimates are based on effort, not on the number of vessels. Dr. Froeschke noted that effort is estimated for a sample of the industry and then scaled up for the entire Gulf fleet.

A committee member inquired how the diminishing fleet size is being incorporated into the analyses. Ms. Lee stated that 2023 data is what will be used, unless 2024 data becomes available before completion of the consultation.

Dr. Simmons inquired if pink shrimp fleet effort information from SEDAR 87 would be used primarily for interaction with smalltooth sawfish. Ms. Lee reiterated that the biological opinion would be based on the latest best available shrimp effort data.

Other Business, Discussion of National Seafood Strategy, a committee member noted that, at the January 2024 council meeting, a presentation on the National Seafood Strategy was received. He requested an updated presentation be given at the November 2024 council meeting. He stated that a pilot example was shown, during the presentation at the January 2024 council meeting, and would also like an update on that pilot example at the November 2024 council meeting.

The committee recommends, and I so move, to request that National Marine Fisheries Service provide an updated presentation on the National Seafood Strategy, as well as the pilot program example, during the Shrimp Committee at the November 2024 council meeting. That motion carried unanimously.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: We have a committee motion. Thank you. Is there any discussion on the motion? Seeing none, I apologize for getting off schedule earlier, and so if we can use our clickers for this one too.

7) To request that NMFS provide an updated presentation				
First Name	**Last Name**			
Kesley	Banks	Yes		
Dakus	Geeslin	Yes		
JD	Dugas	Yes		
Anthony	Overton	Yes		
Tom	Frazer	Yes		
Kevin	Anson	Yes		
Billy	Broussard	Yes		
Troy	Williamson	Yes		
Troy	Frady	Yes		
John	Sanchez	Yes		
Joe	Spraggins	Yes		
Michael	McDermott	Yes		
Jason	Osborne	Yes		
Chris	Schieble	Yes		
Andy	Strelcheck	Yes		
Ed	Walker	Yes		
CJ	Sweetman	Yes		
Results - Passed	**Subtotals**	**Yes (17)**	**No (0)**	**Abs (0)**

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right, and so we have seventeen yes, zero no, and zero abstentions. Mr. Schieble.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just one comment, and then it will be the end of the report, and so I spoke with the staff from the Southeast Regional Office about the permitting status, and they also made comments about that earlier in the meeting, and we're going to be able to look at that, hopefully for the next meeting, but that's kind of it. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any other discussion for the Shrimp Committee? Not seeing any, that will take us to Sustainable Fisheries. Dr. Sweetman.

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES COMMITTEE REPORT

DR. SWEETMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee adopted the agenda, Tab E, Number 1, and approved the minutes, Tab E, Number

2, of the June 2024 meeting.

Research and Monitoring Priorities for 2025 through 2028 and SSC Recommendations, Tab E, Number 4, staff provided an overview of research and monitoring priorities for 2025 through 2028 presented to the SSC during its July 31 through August 1, 2024 meeting.

Staff noted that these priorities are updated at the beginning of every grant cycle and noted that, because the SSC requested additional time to discuss the priorities, the 2025 through 2028 research and monitoring priorities and SSC recommendations will be brought to the council during the November 2024 meeting.

Dr. Paul Mickle, the SSC Representative, summarized the SSC recommendations. The SSC noted the difficulty in reviewing the extensive priority list quickly and expressed concerns over too many items marked as Priority A. The SSC suggested that streamlining and categorizing the list could increase its usefulness to funding agencies. The SSC recommended emphasizing high-impact priorities and breaking down priorities further with specific codes to improve the clarity and effectiveness of the document. The SSC recommended an evaluation of how often priorities secure funding. Dr. Mickle indicated that the SSC would recommend a refined priority list for the November council meeting.

A committee member asked whether the research and monitoring priorities list serves purposes other than fulfilling an administrative mandate. Andy Strelcheck, of the Southeast Regional Office, replied that SERO has a regional strategic plan and that the council's research and monitoring priorities list provides guidance to the agency and funding partners.

He also recommended that the council consider consistency between the priority list and the regional strategic plan. Staff will work to restructure and better define the 2025 through 2028 research and monitoring priorities, based on the SSC recommendations and feedback from the committee for the November council meeting. The committee noted that members could suggest changes to the prioritization of research and monitoring items during Full Council. I guess I will pause there, to see if anyone has any thoughts. Okay. Well, it sounds like the SSC is going to be providing recommendations anyway, and so we shall see that in November.

SSC Recommendations on Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) Control Rule, Tab B, Number 5, council staff reviewed the impetus for revising the current ABC Control Rule, specifically highlighting the mismatch of increasing information leading to increasing

buffers, and vice versa, with the latter under accounting for scientific uncertainty. The SSC has not been using the current ABC Control Rule as prescribed, to avoid recommending catch limits which misrepresent this uncertainty.

The Southeast Fisheries Science Center has proposed a revision to this rule, in a manner that better reflects stock status and the amount of information known and considered in a stock assessment. To evaluate the performance of this new approach, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center has recommended conducting a management strategy evaluation to test the proposed rule, which the SSC endorsed.

This simulation approach is expected to take about two years and is not expected to affect the completion of the current stock assessment calendar. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center expects to be able to pursue this work, if directed by the council, once it completes other current work evaluating the potential effects of lower precision in the recreational landings data. In the meantime, the SSC is likely to continue with current practices, based on peer-reviewed literature, and set the ABC at 75 percent of the yield equivalent to the fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield, as it has for many of the recent stock assessments for the last five years. The committee recommends, and I so move, that the council send a letter -- Sorry. We have a committee motion here. Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. **The committee motion is the council send a letter to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to proceed with the MSE analysis proposed to assess management impacts of different ABC control rules for Tier 1 stocks.** Is there any discussion on the motion? Not seeing any, we'll go ahead and vote with our clickers.

8) E. To send a letter to SEFSC to proceed with MSE analysis				
First Name	**Last Name**			
Kesley	Banks	Yes		
Dakus	Geeslin	Yes		
JD	Dugas	Yes		
Anthony	Overton	Yes		
Tom	Frazer	Yes		
Kevin	Anson	Yes		
Billy	Broussard	Yes		
Troy	Williamson	Yes		
Troy	Frady	Yes		
John	Sanchez	Yes		
Joe	Spraggins	Yes		
Michael	McDermott	Yes		
Jason	Osborne	Yes		
Chris	Schieble	Yes		
Andy	Strelcheck	Yes		
Ed	Walker	Yes		
CJ	Sweetman	Yes		
Results - Passed	**Subtotals**	**Yes (17)**	**No (0)**	**Abs (0)**

CHAIRMAN ANSON: The motion carries with seventeen yes, zero no, zero abstention.

DR. SWEETMAN: Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

CLOSED SESSION REPORT
GULF SEDAR COMMITTEE REPORT

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Any other business items for Sustainable? Not seeing any, all right, and so that will take us to the next report, and that was the closed session.

The Full Council was convened in a closed session the afternoon of August 19th and 20th to appoint the Special Shrimp Scientific and Statistical Committee and the working group membership for the recreational initiative. The selection of Special Shrimp Scientific and Statistical Committee members are for the 2024 through 2027 term.

The Full Council was convened to review applicants of the Special Shrimp Scientific and Statistical Committee. The council selected the following appointees: Don Behringer, William Cagle, and Jason Saucier.

Selection of Working Group Membership for the Recreational Initiative, the council reviewed the nomination information and recommendations received for the working group membership for the recreational initiative. The appointees are Hughes Andry, Shane Bannot, Ray Cole, Ken Haddad, Frank Harwell, Robert Hilliard, Robert Hudson II, Ralph Humphrey, Jr., Michael Kuljis, John

Marquez, Jr., Jacob Mouton, and Jeffrey Plumlee. This concludes my report. Any discussion on the report?

Not seeing any, that will take us to the Gulf SEDAR Committee Report. The committee adopted the agenda, Tab I, Number 1, and approved the minutes, Tab I, Number 2, of the April 2024 meeting as written.

SEDAR Assessment Process Changes and Model Complexity, Tab I, Number 4, and Tab B, Number 9(b), Dr. Shannon Cass-Calay, from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC), reviewed proposed changes to the SEDAR process and the Science Center's organizational plan for addressing and implementing these proposed changes. She summarized current data availability and highlighted that current data bottlenecks are proposed to be improved through automated data processing and index standardization approaches.

Dr. Cass-Calay also discussed possible levels of model complexity which might be considered for various managed species relative to the data available for each.

A committee member inquired about the cost savings associated with epigenetic ageing methods, and Dr. Cass-Calay noted that epigenetic ageing was already more cost effective, but work remains to scale and standardize ageing processes for that method across the region. Committee members commented that they placed a priority on assessment throughput, especially to reduce the time between the terminal data year and when management changes can be implemented.

A committee member asked about whether interim approaches could be used to update stock status and if their use could more regularly update catch advice, as opposed to health checks. Dr. Cass-Calay highlighted that there are several interim approaches, and that is index-based approach, update assessment using available data, updated projections with available data, simpler assessment methodology, et cetera, that can be used to provide an update to stock status, but those may be stock-specific and require an evaluation of how well the approaches may address the management needs of the stock.

Dr. Cass-Calay clarified that the majority of the data come from various sources and stressed the need for data partners to appropriately prioritize completing and submitting data requests for upcoming stock assessments. A committee member asked if assessments and subsequent updates will continue to undergo a peer review by the Center for Independent Experts (CIE). It was noted that, for some stocks, a CIE review will take place. However,

more often than not, limited updates may go directly to the SSC for review.

Dr. Cass-Calay noted it is within the council's purview to request additional peer review of assessments prior to use in management decisions. Council staff added that some of the timeliness challenges in the current process are not solely attributed to the timing of assessments, as there are challenges with timing related to development and implementation of regulatory changes, which staff plan to work closely on streamlining with SERO staff via Inflation-Reduction-Act-funded projects.

Dr. Paul Mickle, of the Standing Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), provided a summary of SSC comments and recommendations for this proposal. The SSC highlighted that there is a need to clarify the expectations for management updates between assessments.

The SSC thought that a stable management approach allows for better assessment of stock responses to management changes, whereby management changes can have an effect on the model. Stable management advice is beneficial for multiple aspects of the ecosystem, from the fish to the stakeholders to the analysts, for being able to disentangle management bias from environmental effects.

A committee member asked about how to handle greater amberjack, which has undergone multiple assessments and management changes and failed to rebuild, and how the upcoming greater amberjack absolute abundance study might help improve the assessment of that species.

Dr. Mickle replied that multiple management modifications may introduce significant bias, and that it may be best to just let things play out, to limit the number of factors confounding stock performance. He highlighted using retrospective analyses to inform how management decisions had short and long-term effects on the model. He commended the work being done on the greater amberjack absolute abundance study and thought it would lead to improvements in the understanding of greater amberjack in the Gulf.

SEDAR Steering Committee Summary Report July 2024, Tab I, Number 5, council staff summarized the proceedings from the July 29, 2024, SEDAR Steering Committee meeting, including the SEDAR project reports, SEDAR process changes, and the requested changes to stock assessment schedule for 2026.

Council staff reviewed pending scheduled assessments and those

requested for 2026 through 2028. Also noted was a request for an interim analysis on lane snapper, which was sent to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center on August 19, 2024.

SSC Recommendations, Tab B, Number 9(b), Dr. Mickle provided an update on the ongoing RESTORE project, which was presented to the SSC by Dr. Nathan Vaughan of Vaughan Analytics, LLC, and SSC recommendations on the project.

The RESTORE initiative aims to enhance stock assessment methods to improve overfishing limit (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) decision-making in the Gulf fisheries, utilizing projections to attempt to simulate reference points and short-term OFLs, while considering future fishery dynamics, selectivity-based MSY estimates, discards. An example of this work in practice is with Gulf gag, where red tide mortality and anticipated catches for interim years were used to inform projections for the OFL and ABC.

The SSC recommended that it receive regular progress reporting on the RESTORE project twice a year and to include additional considerations of social and economic factors and discard mortality in the future. Other Business, there was no other business to discuss, and this concludes my report. Any discussion on the SEDAR Committee?

Seeing none, that will take us then to the Supporting Agencies Updates section. We had completed three of those that are listed, and the one that remains, that we have information for potentially, is the one from the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. Mr. Donaldson.

GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION REPORT

MR. DONALDSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Bernie, would you pull up my presentation, please? I've got a little bit of history, a couple of slides of history, just since we've got some new council members, just to give them some information about the commission.

The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission was established in 1949 by Congress, as a compact of the five Gulf states, Texas through Florida, and it promotes the better utilization of marine resources in the Gulf of Mexico.

It's composed of three members from each of the five states, the head of the marine resource agency, a member of the state legislature, and a citizen with knowledge and interest in marine fisheries, and we meet once a year, in October, and those meetings, like the council, are rotated among the five states.

The main goal, or the main function, of the commission is to serve as a forum to discuss various issues regarding data collection, management, industry, et cetera, and to develop coordinated regional policies to address those issues, and we also coordinate and administer a number of the cooperative state and federal programs, including the interjurisdictional fisheries program, SEAMAP, the Sportfish Restoration Program, GulfFIN, and various fisheries disaster programs, and others, and one of the newer projects that we're working on is we did receive some money from NOAA Fisheries, regarding the Inflation Reduction Act, and we have conducted a couple of workshops.

The first was an effort validation workshop that was held in early June, in New Orleans, and it had a variety of different participants from all the state agencies, NOAA Fisheries as well as industry, and we discussed a variety of alternative methods for estimating effort, and the best method, or methods, are still going to be determined, but it will probably be a suite of options, and it may vary by state.

Then, just recently, at the end of July, we had a recreational discards workshop, and again in New Orleans, with participants from all the five Gulf states, the private recreational industry, NOAA Fisheries, and various other agencies.

Presentations addressed a variety of issues, including understanding the magnitude of released catch on key stocks, how current survey efforts collect this data, concerns and struggles regarding collecting these data, as well as various new approaches, including at-sea observers, remote monitoring, using video cameras, citizen science reporting applications, and using pre-trip notification catch cards. Both of these workshops were well attended and provided a large amount of information for the steering committee to digest.

The steering committee is using the findings from both of these workshops to develop a request for proposals, which is -- The purpose of that is to solicit research projects for these two important areas, and we've got approximately $10 million in available funding for the projects, and we're targeting, later this year, the fall of this year, to publish the RFP, and then, in early 2025, to select the projects, using a yet-to-be-determined panel of reviewers, and then, sometime in 2025, after the projects are selected, begin those research projects. That's all I've got, Mr. Chairman, and I will be glad to answer any questions.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any questions for Dave? I am not seeing any.

Thank you very much for the update, Dave. We appreciate it. That will take us then to the next item on the agenda, which is a discussion of council planning and primary activities, Tab R, Number 5. Dr. Simmons.

DISCUSSION OF COUNCIL PLANNING AND PRIMARY ACTIVITIES

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We've gotten a little bit more high-tech with what you asked us to do here in trying to plan and talk about what's scheduled for the next meeting, and so I have to thank Dr. Basher on our staff, and Camilla Shireman, for helping us put this fancy new tool in front of you.

What we have planned right now for November is we're going to get a report on the final contract work on the Generic EFH Amendment, and so we'll be presented that. We're planning to bring the for-hire data collection document back. You have simplified that quite a bit. I am unsure if that will be a final action document or not, and so perhaps we could have a little discussion on that from the agency staff as well.

You've put Spanish mackerel on hold. King mackerel, we are planning to bring a presentation back to the council, and we weren't able to get the information together, with the Science Center and the IPT, to have that ready for this meeting, nor the time to discuss it.

For Reef Fish Amendment 60, we're planning a council discussion, and, for 59, the IFQ permit requirement, right now, we are planning to bring that, and remember that one greatly relies on the permit information, and so we will have to reassess that, with the Regional Office, and let you know if that can get on the agenda or not.

For the shallow-water grouper, Reef Fish 58, this is probably another one that we should have a little bit discussion and feedback for staff on, and so we've split the document, and staff's understanding of this is that the deepwater grouper document now would be a higher priority, because of the overfishing status of yellowedge, and so we would try to bring that back, and then it's maybe possible to bring back a revised draft of the shallow-water grouper catch levels, but that one is I think a little bit more up in the air. I think I mixed up the for-hire data collection with the buffer. Sorry about that.

So the for-hire red snapper framework action and the buffer -- You took the buffer action out, and we're just going to adjust the

season, and that's the one that I'm not sure about whether we can have that ready for final action, and it looks like we have it scheduled, right here, for final action in January.

Shrimp, the framework action for the shrimp vessel position data, again, that's another one that we are planning to have a discussion in November, whether we can get all the information together from the Science Center that we may need regarding the permits, because they have to receive that information and do some analysis, and we will do the best we can there, but we are planning to put that on the agenda, and so I'll go back to the for-hire data collection document, which is the new SEFHIER document, and we were planning to bring a draft of that.

Mr. Chair, I think it will be good to have a discussion on whether or not, with the agency staff, we think we could bring back a final action document for the for-hire buffer, or sorry, the season, or do we slow that one down and then some feedback on the split of the shallow-water and deepwater grouper documents, as far as priorities, to make sure we're on track there.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: All right. Any comments on the requests regarding timing of those specific amendments, or documents? Dr. Banks.

DR. BANKS: If I remember right, Andy, you said there's good chance that we couldn't get the season change implemented for the 2025 season anyway, right?

MR. STRELCHECK: The schedule is tight, and I guess that's -- So the challenge would be, even if we can change it, it could be right up, you know, before Memorial Day when we're announcing it, just because it takes us six months for rulemaking, plus things get slowed down when we have a new administration change.

DR. BANKS: So then I would suggest that one could probably slow down, by maybe one meeting, and give -- I think we also added a new alternative that has to be added to the document, and so I would say that would -- Maybe one meeting push it.

DR. FROESCHKE: Well, to that, do you want us to bring it back in November, or just not bring it until January for final?

DR. BANKS: I don't know if you need a full document in November, but I would still like to hear from the charter guys, during public comment, before we even get to preferreds. I don't personally have a preference if we see a document, or just get through another public comment, but we kind of tacked that on last minute.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: So I guess we would need to -- Ideally, we would need to pick preferreds in November, if we wanted to go final in January, but, if we don't feel like we are going to meet a reasonable deadline, if you will, for the 2025 season, then we can really postpone a couple of meetings, you know, for that matter, and, you know, obviously, earlier in the year, 2026, that the information is already hitting the streets, the better, but I think we have some time there to wait for a couple of meetings. General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I mean, I understand Dr. Banks, what she's looking at, but I would like to see it go forward. I mean, we -- You know, when you talk about what's going to happen, we can maybe come up with that information, and we can hear from the charter boats, and we can do some stuff with that, and we'll have that meeting, and, as a matter of a fact, we'll have public comment, before we make a final decision in November. We'll have a public comment, and so we'll know where we're at, and I would like to keep it as it is, because, if it -- You know, if things don't get bottlenecked, then it could possibly happen, and, if it doesn't, then we understand.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Banks.

DR. BANKS: I'm fine with that. I was just wanting to make sure that we had one more public comment, and I guess our next bottleneck is going to be whoever is in office and if they can flip it around fast.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Any other comments on Dr. Simmons' request for some clarification on timing? Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: Frank and I were having a sidebar with regard to the red snapper action, right, and, you know, it's one of those things where we can try, right, and see if we can pull it off, and I don't want to say that we couldn't implement it before next season, and, you know, one of the things is it's a framework now, and we probably could do a categorical exclusion NEPA analysis, which really could save us some time, and streamline it, and get that action completed quickly.

While I have the mic, with splitting shallow-water grouper and deepwater grouper, obviously, deepwater grouper is important, because we need to address the overfishing. Because I can't see the calendar beyond, obviously, January, the issue with the shallow-water grouper is, if we don't take final action by like next April, then we won't be able to implement something until 2027, because we've got to make changes to the system, once the

council takes action and we do rulemaking, right, and so, timing-wise, you know, shallow-water grouper would be a priority for me as well, to get that into effect by the 2026 start of the fishing year.

With that said, you know, if we're talking about adding something, maybe the king mackerel catch levels get pushed to January then, and we know that's an issue, but it's not an urgent issue, as much as some of these other things.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Ms. Levy.

MS. LEVY: Just with respect to timing for the red snapper, and so, if the preferred ends up being that you want the season to open in the middle of May, remember that you have a cooling-off period, and so a final rule has to publish by the middle of April, and so we're talking about a proposed rule, a comment period, final rule published the middle of April, and so it seems like that is going to be a challenge.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, for king mackerel, we were just going to put together a presentation to look at some of those other things that you asked us to look at, and it wasn't going to be a big document or anything like that, and we just needed to coordinate better, and so, yes, it will save us some council agenda time, but I don't think it's going to help staff a whole lot, because those documents you split are still going to be complicated.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Geeslin. No? Okay. Any other thoughts? Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: So I'm just trying to think of staff time here, right, and so we had talked about an every-other-meeting strategy for 59 and 60, and we had a lot of discussion of 59 at this meeting, and so would we want to have that for the January meeting, and just focus on 60 for the next meeting?

DR. DIAGNE: Yes, Mr. Strelcheck, and I think that's a great suggestion. I mean, it's the same people doing both, and so we can flesh out 60 and address all of those and come with 59 in January.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Mr. Geeslin.

MR. GEESLIN: So that would stagger those two, right? In every-

other, you would have a 59 and 60 every other meeting, until we got -- I think that may make some good sense. That's a lot to take on, both from a staff level, but also for my cerebral capacity level.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Anyone else have any other thoughts or comments on this schedule? All right, and so it sounds like you've got some ideas, Dr. Simmons. Very good. All right. That concludes that. I did not have any other business that was brought up at the start of Full Council. Does anyone have any other business items? I am not seeing any. Then that's going to take us into our last item on the agenda, and that's the Election of Council Chair and Vice Chair. Mr. Donaldson.

ELECTION OF COUNCIL CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

MR. DONALDSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will open the floor for nominations for council chair.

MR. BROUSSARD: J.D. Dugas.

MR. SCHIEBLE: Second.

MR. DONALDSON: We have a nomination for J.D. Dugas by Billy Broussard, and it was seconded by Chris Schieble. Any others? Is there a motion to close nominations?

DR. BANKS: So moved.

MR. DONALDSON: Congratulations, J.D. I will now open the floor for nominations for vice chair of the council. Ed.

MR. WALKER: I would like to nominate Dr. C.J. Sweetman for vice chair.

MR. SANCHEZ: Second.

MR. DONALDSON: C.J. is nominated by Ed Walker, and it was seconded by John Sanchez. Any other nominations?

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I would like to nominate Dr. Kesley Banks.

MR. DONALDSON: Do I have a second? Seconded by Mr. Schieble. Other nominations? Seeing none, I guess we will -- I've got some sheets of paper, and we will -- I will pass those around, and we will -- Please write down your nomination, and me and the Coast Guard will tally them up when you're done.

MR. WALKER: If I say "Mr. Chair", am I asking you now, or am I asking J.D., at this point in this meeting?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: That's a good question. I guess, in the past -- Who does he address for this point forward?

MR. WALKER: I just had a question, but I didn't want to disrespect anybody yet. No, and I just -- It occurred to me that I'm standing in for Data Collection, and when do we close up those committee positions?

CHAIRMAN ANSON: So what normally happens, and this is kind of up to the chair, is that, in the next couple of weeks, you all will be receiving an email with a list of all of the committees that are available and your preference as to which ones you would like to serve on, in order of priority, or interest, you know, and those will be ranked, if you will, and then the chair would go through the rankings, how you picked, you know, and then look at the list, see if it has a good representation of all the interests and, you know, sides of the Gulf, all that good stuff, and then come back to the next council meeting, and put them out there for everyone to look at, and get final approval from the council, but that's where it will come from.

MR. WALKER: Right, and I just didn't know if we were -- I didn't realize if we were redoing all of them, or if we were just going to fill in the holes, but I've been through that original process before, and so I've got you.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: It will mostly be kind of reconstituting, but, you know, certainly those that may have had some history on a certain committee, and they still have high interest, then they will probably be reappointed, but, anyway, it's up to the new chair. General Spraggins.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I would just like to tell you all that I hope each of you have safe travels home today, or tomorrow, whenever you're going, and, if you're flying, hopefully you fly out of Gulfport, because that's our airport, but, if not, we understand that too, but we hope that you all have safe travels, and we look forward to seeing you again next year in Mississippi, and we'll see you all in St. Pete.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, General, and safe travels to your house this evening, too.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I'm going to try to get there.

MR. STRELCHECK: Maybe we should have found some people that could count faster.

MR. DONALDSON: All right. After tallying the votes, congratulations to Dr. Banks. She's the new vice chair of the council. I will turn it back to you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN ANSON: Thank you, Mr. Donaldson. We appreciate it, and so congratulations to J.D. on being chair, and to Dr. Banks as vice chair. I was asked a couple of times, during this meeting, as to, you know, how difficult the job of chair is, and I responded to everyone with the same response, and that is that the job of chair is relatively easy, or very easy, and it really is because of, Dr. Simmons, you and your staff.

I really relied upon you and Dr. Froeschke to, you know, take care of a lot of the things, and I really did not get involved, per se, and all the staff were very receptive, and very attentive, and very quick to respond to any of the inquiries that I had, and it was certainly a pleasure to work with you all this past year, and so thank you very much.

To you all, I wish you all success, and I'll be here at the table, of course, and I look forward to being a little bit more involved in the discussions, but I certainly wish you both well, and, if you need anything, I'm just a phone call away, or just pull me off to the side, and I will be more than happy to talk to you about anything, if you have any questions, but, other than that, I will pass the gavel to you, Chair Dugas.

MR. DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you all for the support, and I look forward to working with all of you, and I echo what Kevin said. I've learned, in the last year as vice chair, that working with staff has been amazing, easy, and that's why I agreed to put my name in the hat. Thank you. Troy.

MR. FRADY: I would like to make a motion, a motion to adjourn.

MR. DUGAS: Mr. Williamson.

MR. WILLIAMSON: I just would like to take this opportunity to thank Kevin for the great job he did.

MR. DUGAS: General.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: I would like to echo that, and thank you very much, Kevin, for the hard work. We appreciate everything you've done.

MR. DUGAS: Mr. Strelcheck.

MR. STRELCHECK: I just wanted to note that the General is going to pay for our extra baggage fees for all of the swag that we're having to take home.

GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Well, that was the whole idea, that we get our money back one way or the other.

MR. DUGAS: All right. Anything else to come before the council? The meeting is adjourned. Thank you, staff.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on August 22, 2024.)

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