

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES COMMITTEE

Gold Nugget Hotel and Casino & Virtual Biloxi, Mississippi

August 19, 2024

**VOTING MEMBERS**

- 10 C.J. Sweetman.....Florida
- 11 Kesley Banks.....Texas
- 12 Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
- 13 Tom Frazer.....Florida
- 14 Michael McDermott.....Mississippi
- 15 Anthony Overton.....Alabama
- 16 Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
- 17 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
- 18 Troy Williamson.....Texas

**NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

- 21 Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama
- 22 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
- 23 J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
- 24 Troy Frady.....Alabama
- 25 Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
- 26 LT Jackson Morton.....USCG
- 27 Jason Osborne.....Mississippi
- 28 John Sanchez.....Florida
- 29 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
- 30 Ed Walker.....Florida

**STAFF**

- 33 Assane Diagne.....Economist
- 34 Matt Freeman.....Economist
- 35 John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
- 36 Beth Hager.....Administrative Officer
- 37 Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
- 38 Sarah Gardiner.....Fishery Biologist
- 39 Heather Graf.....Accounting and Human Resources Assistant
- 40 Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
- 41 Jessica Matos....Administrative Document Editor & IT Coordinator
- 42 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
- 43 Kathy Pereira.....Meeting Planner & Travel Coordinator
- 44 Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison
- 45 Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
- 46 Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director
- 47 Verena Wang.....Fishery Biologist

1 **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

2 Gary Borland.....SAFMC  
3 Frank Helies.....NOAA  
4 Paul Mickle.....SSC  
5 Clay Porch.....SEFSC

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PAGE 19: 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 20.

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1 The Sustainable Fisheries Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery  
2 Management Council convened at The Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino  
3 in Biloxi, Mississippi on Monday afternoon, August 19, 2024, and  
4 was called to order by Chairman C.J. Sweetman.

5  
6 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF JUNE 2024 MINUTES**  
7 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**  
8

9 **CHAIRMAN C.J. SWEETMAN:** I will call the Sustainable Fisheries  
10 Committee to order. The members consist of myself as chair, Dr.  
11 Banks, Mr. Broussard, Dr. Frazer, Mr. McDermott, Mr. Schieble, Dr.  
12 Overton, Mr. Strelcheck, and Mr. Williamson.

13  
14 The first item on the agenda here is Adoption of the Agenda. Are  
15 there any changes or modifications? Seeing none, can I get a  
16 motion to approve the agenda? Can I get a second? All right.  
17 The agenda has been adopted.

18  
19 Moving on to the second action item, Approval of the June 2024  
20 Meeting Minutes, are there any modifications to the June 2024  
21 meeting minutes? If not, can I get a motion to approve them? I  
22 have one from Dr. Banks, and a second from Mr. Broussard. Thank  
23 you. We will consider the June 2024 minutes approved. The next  
24 item is to move into the Action Guide and Next Steps, and I will  
25 pass this over to Dr. Froeschke.

26  
27 **RESEARCH AND MONITORING PRIORITIES FOR 2025-2028 INCLUDING SSC**  
28 **RECOMMENDATIONS**  
29

30 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** Okay, and so we have a couple of items, and  
31 I will just go through them one at a time, and so Item IV is the  
32 Research and Monitoring Priorities for the 2025-2028, including  
33 the SSC recommendations.

34  
35 For those of you that aren't aware, the council has always  
36 maintained a list of research priorities. We post them to our  
37 website, and other funding entities can use them, at their  
38 discretion, for funding priorities for research and other  
39 activities, and so we've always maintained those. At the beginning  
40 of every new grant cycle, we go through a process to revise and  
41 update those, as appropriate, and so that's kind of what we're  
42 engaging in now, in anticipation of our new four-year grant  
43 beginning in 2025.

44  
45 The plan now is a little bit different. Originally, what I was  
46 intending is to go through these in some detail, and then ask for  
47 your approval. We did, however -- We provided these to the SSC,  
48 and they requested some additional time and opportunity to review

1 these, and to provide more feedback at the next SSC meeting, and  
2 so it seems to make sense to do that before we go too in-depth  
3 here, and so we'll bring those back at a subsequent council  
4 meeting.

5  
6 I do think it would be worth bringing up the document, just to  
7 kind of scroll through it, and we can highlight some of the things  
8 that the SSC wanted raised, you know, either questions or points  
9 of concern, and so we can get any feedback you might have, and we  
10 can make sure that we're on the same path going forward, and so if  
11 you want to bring that up.

12  
13 This is the document that we provided to the SSC, and it's arranged  
14 in four categories, and I will give you a little bit, and, in one  
15 of these, the main -- The first category is research and monitoring  
16 priorities, and so it includes priorities -- If you'll scroll down,  
17 Bernie, you'll see things in there about fishery-independent  
18 sampling, and fishery-dependent sampling, monitoring, research,  
19 and so the SSC -- Many of them are academics, and, rightly so,  
20 they distinguished between what they would consider research  
21 versus monitoring activities, and they did express some thoughts,  
22 perhaps, that those could be differentiated, and maybe this should  
23 even focus more on research, rather than monitoring.

24  
25 At least I think maybe I expressed something that, in the purpose  
26 of the council needs and data, these monitoring activities are  
27 critical inputs for what we do.

28  
29 The other thing that we talked about, and, if you have a question,  
30 please just interrupt me, but, on many of these, you will see, at  
31 the beginning of them, there's a priority code, an A, B, or C, and  
32 you will see these here, and, if you scroll through the document,  
33 you will see that there are many As through this, and so they  
34 suggested that we might benefit from taking a hard look at those  
35 and trying to figure out what could be downgraded, perhaps, if you  
36 will, such that, you know, having everything in an A is not any  
37 different than having everything as a B or a C.

38  
39 We will give that some thought, and the second category of this  
40 you will see is the focus on individual species priorities, rather  
41 than these larger programs, and so we have -- I think you can keep  
42 going, but this is the section of the research priorities that  
43 focus on what we perceive as data needs for individual stocks,  
44 whether it be red snapper or gray triggerfish or whatever, and the  
45 idea is that, when we go through these, ideally, we can cross  
46 things off, because that means that they've been completed, or  
47 adequately updated, in the last five years.

48

1 Sometimes they remain, and so, when we went through these, we got  
2 feedback from the staff and tried to do that, and so if you can  
3 scroll down, but, again, we have the priority codes, and the  
4 species in here won't surprise you, the snappers and amberjack and  
5 those kinds of things, and so I won't -- Yes, sir.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Just a question for you, and so, Bernie, if  
8 you scroll down just to the next one here, we've got Gulf gray  
9 triggerfish, and so the categories are -- So, for A, it's species  
10 that are overfished, or undergoing overfishing, or in need,  
11 critical need, of a stock assessment, and is that what we're saying  
12 for the gray triggerfish component? I'm wondering why that over  
13 something like Gulf gag, or something along those lines, is  
14 considered a priority species.

15  
16 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I actually don't recall the rubric for what was an  
17 A in this case. I could look that up and get back to you, and  
18 what you're suggesting seems reasonable.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, and, just reading it through, and it's on  
21 page 4, and stocks designated as overfished and undergoing  
22 overfishing or in critical need of assessment, and so I'm guessing  
23 it's that latter part for gray triggers.

24  
25 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes, and that might be something -- We could update  
26 that, and that would be one of those opportunities. Thank you.  
27 I'll make a note of it.

28  
29 Okay. If you scroll down, the next category is the economic and  
30 social recommendations. We did -- I think, in previous iterations,  
31 it was just socioeconomic, but, based on some of our previous  
32 discussions, with SEFHIER and things, we just divided that up.  
33 This was one of the areas that we did get quite a bit of feedback,  
34 and I think we were receptive to that, or appreciative of it, at  
35 the council staff, and we have some new economists and things on  
36 the SSC, and so they were interested in this, but I don't think  
37 the amount of time that we had was adequate.

38  
39 That was one of the requests at the upcoming SSC, is to provide  
40 more time and rationale and things, so they could better understand  
41 this, and so it seemed reasonable to me, especially as an  
42 economist, if you were coming into our process, and there's a lot  
43 of things happening, and so we will provide more time and  
44 opportunity for them to provide review and feedback, and so we'll  
45 go through that in the next SSC meeting, and hopefully have  
46 something back for you all in November.

47  
48 Then the last category is the ecosystem components, and, you know,

1 this is a little bit of a discussion here. This does include some  
2 of our lower priorities, and it's a little bit awkward of a  
3 conversation, because it doesn't necessarily always reflect the  
4 importance of the item or things, and it's, from a council  
5 perspective, how closely they are to operationalizing some of these  
6 things, and what are the today needs, versus the longer-term, and  
7 so I think that's another opportunity for discussion as well.

8  
9 In general, this is the framework that we've had historically, and  
10 this is kind of what we have now, and I don't know if the SSC will  
11 provide sufficient recommendations that it might look different,  
12 and I'm not sure, but we'll just have to see. If not, what I would  
13 do is suggest we turn it over to Dr. Mickle, and he can go through  
14 some of the SSC recommendations on this.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Froeschke. Dr. Mickle.

17  
18 **DR. PAUL MICKLE:** Good afternoon. It's good to see everybody.  
19 It's been a while. I used to be on that side of the table, and I  
20 was pretty hard on the SSC actually, and so it's coming back  
21 around, and feel free.

22  
23 I'm going to go ahead and go through and give the SSC's perspective  
24 of this specific agenda item, which is the research priorities  
25 stuff. Every four years, this has been what we've returned to,  
26 and the SSC gives its perspective, and the reason I'm bringing  
27 this up is that the SSC has managing scientists, that are managers  
28 as well as academics, and I want to make that clear, and so we  
29 provide what's important from, you know, the research needs, as  
30 the SSC sees it, as we go through our peer review process, and so,  
31 again, it's a different perspective from what you all's perspective  
32 is toward this document, but, again, it's important, and, when  
33 both are giving the perspectives in that way, in my opinion, it  
34 can become a very useful document.

35  
36 The purpose is to guide efforts to resolve knowledge gaps and  
37 expand datasets. The priorities cover the 2025 through 2028 grant  
38 cycle. The review process, like I said before, the SSC and the  
39 council review, and then it's posted on the council website. It's  
40 sent to NMFS and relevant agencies for funding consideration, and  
41 it aims to enhance the management of federal species, and so that  
42 just kind of encapsulates what this document is, I guess, supposed  
43 to do. John really did go into a good background on this.

44  
45 There were concerns raised by the SSC members, and we did have  
46 some new members, that it was our first meeting, and so, when a  
47 document like this is one of the last agenda items, and, again, we  
48 got the materials beforehand, but we're going to review it again,

1 and provide some direction, but there were quite a few comments  
2 of, with short notice, there was difficulty in reviewing the  
3 extensive priority list.

4  
5 There were concerns over too many items marked as Priority A. When  
6 over 80 percent, or 90 percent, of the items, as you can see on  
7 the document itself, are listed as Priority A, the prioritization  
8 process kind of loses its weight, so to speak, in the SSC's  
9 opinion.

10  
11 A suggestion is to streamline and categorize the priorities more  
12 selectively and then increase the focus on the utility for funding  
13 agencies, and so try to provide more focus in the actual document  
14 itself, so the funding agencies can identify and maybe start  
15 crafting RFPs, or the requests for proposals, in more of a way  
16 that caters to what this body really needs, because we do have  
17 some research gaps that would fit really well into some stock  
18 assessments, when we start approaching those ecosystem-based  
19 assessments in the future.

20  
21 All right, and so the proposal is to break down the priorities  
22 further, with specific codes, and so give a little bit more  
23 characterization and bins for kind of the priorities there. We  
24 could improve the document clarity and effectiveness. Like I said,  
25 these funding agencies, both state and local and federal, if  
26 they're clear enough, and pointed enough, and there's a few  
27 priorities, instead of a bunch, then people get excited about them,  
28 and they start crafting RFPs, and, the next thing you know, we're  
29 seeing some research, some very pointed research, heading towards  
30 us.

31  
32 The emphasis is strategic thinking in identifying high-impact  
33 priorities. We all like to do research, but it has to be of high  
34 impact, and I think this group has been very good at that.

35  
36 All right, and so the evaluation for future next steps is to assess  
37 how often priorities secure funding, to consider if time spent on  
38 this list is justified by its impact, and so, you know, have some  
39 accountability and see, if we put out this list, how many actually  
40 work their way into RFPs, right, and how many actually got funded,  
41 and that would be a really good metric to actually look at and  
42 consider, right, as we craft future lists.

43  
44 The value is consider if the time spent on this and the impact,  
45 and so do these research priorities actually end up moving forward  
46 and being somewhat of an impact, or some ecological drivers, some  
47 quantitative data impact in a stock assessment itself in a SEDAR  
48 process, and then next steps are explore practical importance at

1 a future meeting, and we're shooting for our next meeting in  
2 October, I think.

3  
4 The timeline is to refine and finalize the list for our October  
5 meeting, you all's November meeting. I think that's it for that,  
6 but I would like to answer any questions, and, like I said, we're  
7 looking at a list that was from prior, and so this is the perfect  
8 time to add to it and to refine and to do some of the things that  
9 the SSC brought up, and maybe we want to increase efficiencies and  
10 impacts with the priorities list, and things like that, but thank  
11 you very much.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Mickle. We appreciate that,  
14 and so, obviously, there is a lot in this document here. You know,  
15 trying to understand the research priorities for the next four  
16 years is a substantial task, when we already have a lot on our  
17 plate here, and so it looks like the SSC is looking for some  
18 recommendations from this committee, and ultimately the council,  
19 to streamline this document, potentially, or at least consider  
20 reprioritizing what is currently in there, because I completely  
21 agree that, if you have 90 percent of the document as a Priority  
22 A, you're not really prioritizing things. I'm going to look around  
23 the table, to see if there's any thoughts here. Dr. Frazer.

24  
25 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** Thanks, Paul, for the summary, and, you know, I  
26 thought that the discussion in the SSC was a pretty healthy one,  
27 I think, to put a little more pointy end on things, and so, you  
28 know, so the list is -- You know, it's a requirement of the council,  
29 right, and so what wasn't clear, in that meeting, is, you know, if  
30 it's a requirement, is this simply a box-checking exercise, or do  
31 we know how the agency might use this really in an RFP development,  
32 and so maybe that's a question for the agency at this point, is  
33 how do they actually use it, because that does affect how much  
34 time you put into it and think about, you know, the prioritization  
35 process. Maybe I can direct that to Andy.

36  
37 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** I mean, thanks for that, Tom, and so I guess  
38 there's a couple of responses I have. One is, you know, we have  
39 a Southeast Geographic Strategic Plan now, right, and so, to me,  
40 ensuring that there is full alignment, or at least close alignment,  
41 between these is important, and, where they're not aligned,  
42 obviously, being able to advise the council back, with regard to  
43 maybe what's a priority for the council that may not be viewed as  
44 a priority for the agency, or vice versa.

45  
46 The second component is what Paul mentioned, which resonates with  
47 me, which is kind of the thought that, when we have this long list  
48 of priorities, everything is a priority, but then nothing is a

1 priority, right, and it's like it's too much information, and we  
2 know we're not going to accomplish everything, and we really need  
3 to do a triage, to ultimately determine what can be funded, and so  
4 we've been going through this exercise a little bit, for example,  
5 with our MARFIN grant process, right, because we -- I don't know,  
6 and I will say thirty priorities are listed in that, but we only  
7 have a few million dollars in funding to pay for thirty priorities,  
8 right, and it's just not going to happen.

9  
10 I think aligning, obviously, that with the highest-priority needs  
11 is helpful, and then I would let Clay kind of speak to then how  
12 does that integrate into the science and the assessments, from his  
13 vantage point.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Porch.

16  
17 **DR. CLAY PORCH:** Thank you for the question, and so we use this in  
18 a couple of ways, one, as Andy mentioned, when we're developing  
19 our geographic strategic plan and our center-specific strategic  
20 plan. We look at all the priorities from the different councils  
21 and try and, to the extent possible, have our strategic plan align  
22 with it.

23  
24 Now, granted, we don't have much in the way of resources to  
25 dedicate to many of these things, but some of them, like fishery-  
26 independent sampling, the GFISHER program, that is a priority of  
27 ours, and, in this case, we're doing it anyway, and so we're in  
28 perfect alignment there. Other things, we're not ourselves going  
29 to have the resources to invest in, and we've had that conversation  
30 with the council before, and so I see this as strategic guidance  
31 for us and all of our partners in the region, things that would be  
32 useful for the council.

33  
34 The only other thing that I would add is that Congress has set up  
35 a grant program for the Gulf states, and it would be run through  
36 the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, and I think we could  
37 use this as guidance for the terms of reference for that program.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Mickle.

40  
41 **DR. MICKLE:** This is a good time to take it on, and, if we're going  
42 to retool a little bit, or reformat, this is a perfect time for  
43 that, and so that's a good point, but, again, this has had  
44 successes in the past.

45  
46 If you remember, years ago, the triggerfish stock assessment came  
47 out, and we all knew the recruitment side of the model had massive  
48 uncertainties, and so we're trying to understand that sargassum

1 interaction with settlement. If there's more sargassum one year,  
2 versus another, maybe there's recruitment bump, but, again, that  
3 was identified by the SSC, and prioritized, and made it onto this  
4 list, and I think NOAA RESTORE actually ended up funding such an  
5 effort, and I think NMFS has been working on it for a while, while  
6 Frank Hernandez, and others, and so this has had successes. We  
7 just need to identify it, and maybe make it more efficient, so the  
8 impacts and the stories like that one are more numerous.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Carrie.

11  
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so  
13 I had a question regarding us trying to align these with the  
14 strategic plan, and, I mean, as long as I've been working for the  
15 council, we've been doing these, and we write the letters, as Dr.  
16 Mickle said, and we ask the various federal, you know, grant  
17 offices to consider these changes, but I don't really know how  
18 that directly impacts MARFIN, or like S-K, and I guess, if we're  
19 going to try to align this with the regional strategic plan, is  
20 that a big differential from what's been done in the past, and so  
21 that's one question. The other question is are the other regional  
22 councils doing the same thing, in the other regions? Thanks.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Mr. Strelcheck.

25  
26 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, I guess I don't know the answer to your  
27 second question. In terms of aligning with the Geographic  
28 Strategic Plan, I think we're talking about two levels of probably  
29 detail here, right, that are very different, and so this is going  
30 to be much more specific than our Geographic Strategic Plan, but  
31 I would encourage, you know, the council, and working with us, to  
32 kind of take a look at that, just to see how well does this fit  
33 within that broader Geographic Strategic Plan for the Southeast.

34  
35 It doesn't mean that it has to be one-to-one alignment, right, but  
36 that could also then mean that it's a lower priority for the  
37 Science Center, or the Regional Office, just because of how we've  
38 laid out the priorities within our Geographic Strategic Plan.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Are there any further thoughts on this?  
41 I am not seeing any major reprioritization here, which I think is  
42 kind of what the SSC is kind of hoping for. I know that they're  
43 going to look at this again, and I think they would like some  
44 council input, and maybe, if we don't do it today at the committee  
45 level, I would ask for folks to potentially think about that for  
46 Full Council, if need be, and maybe we can make some  
47 recommendations there, because I realize that there's a lot in  
48 this document too, and so I will just put that out there for the

1 committee's consideration.

2  
3 I'm not really seeing any objections or anything there, and so I  
4 think that's a decent plan. A little homework for everyone is to  
5 read this document, and see if there's any way that you can figure  
6 out how to reprioritize it, from your own perspective, and we can  
7 have that discussion at Full Council. Thank you, Dr. Mickle, but  
8 I don't think you're going too far, and so back to you, Dr.  
9 Froeschke.

10  
11 **SSC RECOMMENDATIONS ON ACCEPTABLE BIOLOGICAL CATCH (ABC) CONTROL**  
12 **RULE**

13  
14 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Okay. We're going to move on to Item V, the SSC  
15 recommendations on the ABC, or acceptable biological catch,  
16 control rule. I have the action guide in here, but I want to give  
17 you just a little bit of background, especially for those that may  
18 not be as well-versed in what the control rule is, and what it  
19 does, and so this was created in 2011, what we called the Generic  
20 ACL/AM Amendment, where that was annual catch limits and  
21 accountability measures for everything that we didn't already have  
22 one.

23  
24 In that document, we created this control rule, and what this does  
25 is it tries to incorporate or how to estimate the scientific  
26 uncertainty and make use of that to establish appropriate catch  
27 levels, and so, for example, in a stock assessment, you might have  
28 -- You will have an estimate of the overfishing limit, which  
29 corresponds oftentimes to the maximum sustainable yield.

30  
31 We know, from eons of fisheries, that that's often not sustainable  
32 in practice, and so, through trying to understand the scientific  
33 uncertainty, that gives us an estimate of what an appropriate  
34 reduction is from the overfishing limit to the acceptable  
35 biological catch that can be used to inform the annual catch limits  
36 and annual catch targets and all of that.

37  
38 So we came up with a spreadsheet approach, and it's the briefing  
39 book, if you want to look through that, and, essentially, it's a  
40 rule that has a series of criteria to review, and, the more things  
41 that you are uncertain about in your science, the larger that  
42 buffer would be in your -- Between the catch advice provided for  
43 the overfishing limit and the ABC, the OFL and the ABC.

44  
45 In practice, it didn't really work that well. A couple of things  
46 that seemed to happen were, one, you got very small buffers, and,  
47 two, the less you know, you tended to get smaller buffers, and so,  
48 if you do more science -- The more you look at it, the more

1 variables you -- You actually get more uncertainty, and so, if you  
2 were to investigate a stock with a simple approach and a  
3 complicated approach, you might get a smaller buffer with the  
4 simple approach than you did with the complex approach, which  
5 doesn't always intuitively match up.

6  
7 The Science Center has been working, in the background for some  
8 time, on ways to find better approaches, and, in practice, just so  
9 you know, the SSC -- The control rule, they can use it, and, in  
10 practice, they often have not been using it, for precisely this  
11 reason, that it didn't give them catch advice that they felt  
12 confident in, and so they were using accepted, and widely  
13 understood, approaches to create what they thought were reasonable  
14 buffers, and I think that's okay, but they did ask for this  
15 process.

16  
17 The Science Center, at the most recent SSC meeting, gave a  
18 presentation, based on some work that they had done, and they made  
19 a recommendation to evaluate some of their preliminary  
20 information, through a management strategy evaluation, which the  
21 SSC has been supportive of, and I will turn it to Dr. Mickle.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Froeschke, and I'll turn it  
24 back over to you, Dr. Mickle.

25  
26 **DR. MICKLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. John wrapped it up, Dr.  
27 Froeschke wrapped it up, perfectly, and so understanding, I guess,  
28 the tribulations from the SSC's perspective is my job here today,  
29 and so understanding that we don't like P\*. We want to get away  
30 from it, and the Science Center has recommended that as well,  
31 because it is somewhat flawed, and what John was saying, and it  
32 really -- It takes -- The best way I can -- I guess I'm trying to  
33 break this down to where we were always very insecure, because of  
34 the uncertainties, and understanding that, and, moving forward,  
35 when -- You all need some direction here on the control rule, and  
36 we're trying to provide a quantitative, opinionated, scientific  
37 recommendation, which is very difficult to do in this situation,  
38 because of the uncertainty.

39  
40 When you're calculating ABC and OFL, and you're using a probability  
41 distribution function to do so, which is what P\* really does, like  
42 John said, the more uncertainty you have, the smaller the buffer  
43 gets, and it needs to be the opposite way.

44  
45 I'm going to go through this presentation, and I'm trying to break  
46 it down real simply, because this is quite a quantitatively  
47 complicated topic, but my old days of being a professor -- Maybe  
48 I can break this down, and we can have a discussion here, because

1 the SSC -- We've kicked the can on this, and I will own up to it  
2 with everybody, but we did make a motion on this, at our meeting,  
3 and I will conclude with that motion, with a good direction, at  
4 least in the SSC's opinion, as it was unanimous.

5  
6 All right, and so the purpose was to review alternative approaches  
7 to the ABC control rule, which is what we're talking about here  
8 today, and it's been in place since 2011, mostly because of a  
9 manuscript by Restrepo et al., and it provided some direction using  
10  $P^*$  and a quantitative approach to an ABC control rule, looking at  
11 buffers, and so the key issue is the current buffer between OFL  
12 and ABC often misaligns with stock assessment uncertainty, and  
13 that's what makes the SSC nervous, and I'm assuming the Southeast  
14 Fisheries Science Center, and so the Science Center suggests  
15 modifying the rule to better reflect stock status.

16  
17 BCRIT is a biomass-critical term and so a BCRIT introduction is,  
18 just very simple, assign critical biomass level to halt fishing  
19 below a certain stock size, and so adding a BCRIT, or a biomass-  
20 critical point, allows you to not have those very abrupt long  
21 rebuilding plans. It initiates something before that happens, so  
22 the slope of the rebuilding plan isn't quite as difficult on user  
23 groups or fisheries aspects of a species.

24  
25 When you think about -- If we could separate  $P$  and  $\sigma$ , or not  
26  $\sigma$ , but  $\theta$ , and address  $P^*$ , we can certainly understand the  
27 scientific uncertainty individually, and, again, that's the whole  
28 goal here, is separating  $P^*$  from everything else, because that  
29 allows the buffers to increase with uncertainty, which is what I  
30 think we all would agree is a good approach, from a management and  
31 a scientific perspective.

32  
33 I'm going to talk about the MSE, very quickly, and then go -- I  
34 want to make sure we all understand what the management strategy  
35 evaluation is, and so this is a modeling approach, and we're all  
36 very comfortable, or not comfortable, but we're all very -- We  
37 hear the Stock Synthesis stock assessment modeling efforts that  
38 goes on within SEDAR, and this is somewhat new, and other councils  
39 have used it for a while, and it's a well-established way of taking  
40 management strategy evaluation modeling efforts and trying to  
41 understand, when you make those changes, what the impacts are,  
42 from a biological standpoint as well as a management standpoint,  
43 and it's a very valuable tool, if it's used correctly, in my  
44 opinion, and the SSC's. The motion is up there, but I will come  
45 back to it.

46  
47 Discussions, there were some concerns by SSC members about  
48 revisiting the control rule amid ongoing assessments. We always,

1 or you all, always hit this problem, and so, when we make changes,  
2 both from a management and scientific standpoint, data stream,  
3 what goes on with the stock assessments that are in the mid-throes,  
4 and so those are things that the SSC immediately brought up, and  
5 I assume that you all are interested in as well.  
6

7 Also, the Science Center proposes testing new rule in scenarios  
8 above and below MSY and using MSST, and so really understanding  
9 the minimum stock size threshold is important to identify, if it  
10 can really be separated out, and it starts following that buffer  
11 that we're really looking for from a quantitative standpoint. As  
12 far as buffer sensitivity, the SSC to assess rule sensitivity to  
13 decisions like BCRT and FMSY proxies, and so it's really important  
14 that the SSC really weighs into that and really understands how  
15 BCRT influences that, because, obviously, I think BCRT is  
16 probably the most useful quantitative aspect of the MSE that  
17 hopefully will go forward in understanding these control rules in  
18 the future, potential alternatives.  
19

20 High-level council goals, obviously, we all know this, the emphasis  
21 on avoiding fishery closures and maintaining catch limit  
22 stability, and I barely have to say that, as this is a top priority  
23 for this group here.  
24

25 As far as the management strategy workload, the Science Center is  
26 building capacity. We were given a very good presentation at the  
27 last meeting. The SSC took to it very well, and the work is  
28 expected to take about two years. The SSC recommendation is to  
29 continue using Restrepo et al. currently, in our current  
30 approaches, until a new rule is fully evaluated, and the way that  
31 the SSC got excited about MSE is its usability in other councils  
32 and regions in our country, and I'm optimistic the SSC will  
33 identify the quantitative usability of MSEs and really identify -  
34 - We'll have those numbers to lean on, and so the reason that I  
35 think we've been kicking the can on this control rule, and P\*, is  
36 that we quantitatively can't lean on any number to provide advice,  
37 and that's where scientists get really nervous, and we start  
38 kicking cans.  
39

40 This, in our minds, will give us some quantitative justifications  
41 to lean on our recommendations, and that's why I think the group  
42 is somewhat optimistic about moving forward with an MSE strategy.  
43

44 Stakeholder engagement, of course, emphasize council and the SSC  
45 involvement in the MSE work, and then the council could provide  
46 additional guidance at the August 2024 meeting, as far as maybe  
47 some direction, as you all get more educated on the MSE, as well  
48 as the SSC, and I think there are very few folks on the SSC that

1 have had much experience with MSEs, but the literature is there,  
2 and it's quantitatively very worth getting excited about.

3  
4 This is the motion, and I think it's the last slide on this agenda  
5 item from the SSC, and the actual motion itself was the SSC  
6 recommends that the Science Center proceed with the MSE analysis  
7 proposed to assess the management impacts of different ABC control  
8 rules for Tier 1 stocks.

9  
10 Remember we have data-limited, data-poor stocks that, again -- I  
11 think MSE would be valuable toward that too, potentially, but we're  
12 confining it to Tier 1, because that's where the most data is, and  
13 that's where I think we'll be most confident in our  
14 recommendations, and, again, that motion was carried without  
15 opposition, but, like I said, it's a fairly complicated topic. It  
16 gets in the weeds quickly, but, again, it's important that we have  
17 quantitative justifications for scientific recommendation, and  
18 that's what the SSC's focus is, and, when we stray from it, we  
19 have good members that bring us back to that, and so I would answer  
20 any questions you have.

21  
22 Again, I'm immersed in this somewhat, and we have staff here that  
23 are immersed in this topic much more than I, and we can give -- I  
24 can give the SSC perspectives, and the quantitative  
25 justifications, but, again, folks that deal with this on a daily  
26 basis -- They know this very well, and they can provide any answers  
27 you have. Thank you.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Dr. Mickle. I appreciate that.  
30 This is an important subject matter here. The ABC control rule is  
31 very important in the way that we manage our fisheries here. I  
32 certainly am supportive of this approach. The SSC, and the  
33 Southeast Fisheries Science Center, seem to be as well.

34  
35 I'm familiar with the fact that we haven't really used management  
36 strategy evaluations on the Gulf Council all that much, and we did  
37 get some presentations about this in the past, and the South  
38 Atlantic Council is currently endeavoring in a couple of different  
39 things, but those aren't completed.

40  
41 From my understanding, there's really only been one MSE, and I  
42 think it was bluefin tuna, maybe, that actually has been completed.  
43 I do have a little concern with the reliance of MSEs along these  
44 lines there too, but I think actually, for this perspective, when  
45 you're looking at the ABC Control Rule -- I think it could be a  
46 very valuable tool here, and so I'll just leave it at that, and I  
47 will look around the table for any comments from committee members.  
48 We do have an SSC recommendation moving forward here, and so, at

1 the end of the day, I would like some perspective on what the  
2 committee feels about this motion, to give some guidance there.  
3 Have you got something, Dr. Froeschke?

4  
5 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes, and just, if the committee is supportive of  
6 it, you might request a motion to -- That council staff write a  
7 letter to the Science Center, making this request to complete this  
8 work.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Froeschke. Any comments  
11 around the table on the ABC control rule and the SSC  
12 recommendations here? I am not seeing any. Mr. Strelcheck.

13  
14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Just a comment, and so thanks, Paul, Dr. Mickle,  
15 for your presentation. You know, my only concern, right, is that  
16 I've long felt like we need to move away from P\*, right, but MSE,  
17 at least in my experience, can be very time consuming, right, and  
18 so it's kind of that balance of what we're going to achieve with  
19 the MSE, over time, and making sure that we have a streamlined  
20 process to get this advice in a timely manner.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Go ahead, Dr. Mickle.

23  
24 **DR. MICKLE:** I think that was one of -- It was the first or second  
25 question that one of the members asked, and, from what I think was  
26 shared, it was that it is a somewhat automated process, and it's  
27 coding, and so the models are fairly -- They're adaptable, right,  
28 and they're compartmental, and they're species-dependent, of  
29 course, but, again, from what I understood, the timelines were  
30 realistic and discussed.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Dr. Porch.

33  
34 **DR. PORCH:** I just wanted to clarify, and so you mentioned bluefin  
35 tuna, or, C.J., I think you did, but that's a totally different  
36 type of MSE, where you're integrating a lot of different management  
37 objectives, and not necessarily hinging it on a stock assessment,  
38 and so it's actually an extremely involved process, that did take  
39 many years, and this is not that. This is more what we call a  
40 desk-type MSE, and so, yes, it's just something to evaluate how  
41 well this ABC control rule would typically work, and so I don't  
42 see that as taking many years to complete. It should be a more  
43 manageable timeline, as Dr. Mickle alluded to.

44  
45 **DR. MICKLE:** Just one thing to add to Dr. Porch's addition was  
46 that, from what my understanding was, it has no impact on SEDAR at  
47 all, and it's a completely separate process, and the staff that  
48 does this is separate from the analytical side of the stock

1 assessments, from my understanding.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Yes, that's my understanding, too. Okay. Any  
4 further questions for Dr. Mickle here, or comments in general? If  
5 not, does any committee member potentially want to make a motion  
6 here?

7  
8 **MR. BILLY BROUSSARD:** The motion would be the council send a letter  
9 to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to proceed with the MSE  
10 analysis proposed to assess management impacts of different ABC  
11 control rules for Tier 1 stocks.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Perfect. Thank you, Mr. Broussard. Do I have  
14 a second? Second from Dr. Banks. Any further discussion on the  
15 motion? We'll wait until we get it on the board, actually.

16  
17 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Motion that the council send a letter to the  
18 Southeast Fisheries Science Center to proceed with the MSE analysis  
19 proposed to assess management impacts of different ABC control  
20 rules for Tier 1 stocks.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Is that looking good to you, Billy?

23  
24 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Okay. We have a motion on the board to recommend  
25 the council send a letter to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
26 to proceed with the MSE analysis to access management of different  
27 ABC control rules for Tier 1 stocks, and that was seconded by Dr.  
28 Banks. Any further discussion? Mr. Schieble.

29  
30 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I think it's "assess", right, and not "access". Is  
31 that what you said?

32  
33 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Assess, yes.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Good call. You're agreeable, the first and  
36 second there? Okay. Assess management of different ABC control  
37 rules?

38  
39 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Management impacts.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Management impacts.

42  
43 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Or you could just pull up the SSC motion and add  
44 to send a letter.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. Dr. Frazer.

47  
48 **DR. FRAZER:** I mean, I'm okay with the motion, but I just have a

1 question for Dr. Mickle, right, and so, right now, there's  
2 currently one ABC control rule for Tier 1 stocks, and so, I mean,  
3 we don't currently, or the SSC doesn't currently, have an  
4 alternative suite of ABC control rules, and these are yet to be  
5 developed, right?  
6

7 **DR. MICKLE:** Yes, that is correct.  
8

9 **DR. FRAZER:** Okay.  
10

11 **CHAIRMAN SWEETMAN:** Okay. The motion is on the table. Any further  
12 discussion? **Seeing none, is there any objection to the motion on**  
13 **the table? Seeing none, the motion carries.**  
14

15 All right. We're operating about ten minutes ahead of schedule  
16 here, and we did not have any other business. Thank you very much,  
17 Dr. Mickle, for your presentations. I really appreciate your time  
18 and effort. One last call for other business here. Otherwise, I  
19 will pass it back to our esteemed chair.  
20

21 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on August 19, 2024.)  
22  
23

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