

## GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

## REEF FISH MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Webinar

April 13-14, 2021

**VOTING MEMBERS**

Martha Guyas (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida  
 Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama  
 Patrick Banks.....Louisiana  
 Susan Boggs.....Alabama  
 Leann Bosarge.....Mississippi  
 Dale Diaz.....Mississippi  
 Jonathan Dugas.....Louisiana  
 Phil Dyskow.....Florida  
 Tom Frazer.....Florida  
 Robin Riechers.....Texas  
 John Sanchez.....Florida  
 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi  
 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS  
 Greg Stunz.....Texas  
 Ed Swindell.....Louisiana  
 Troy Williamson.....Texas

**NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC  
 Lt. Nicholas Giancola.....USCG

**STAFF**

Matt Freeman.....Economist  
 John Froeschke.....Deputy Director  
 Beth Hager.....Administrative Officer  
 Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist  
 Mary Levy.....NOAA General Counsel  
 Jessica Matos.....Document Editor & Administrative Assistant  
 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer  
 Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison  
 Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager  
 Camilla Shireman.....Administrative & Communications Assistant  
 Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director  
 Carly Somerset.....Fisheries Outreach Specialist

**OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

Rick Burris.....MS  
 Shannon Cass-Calay.....SEFSC  
 Richard Cody.....NOAA  
 Peter Hood.....NMFS

1 Kai Lorenzen.....SSC  
2 Clay Porch.....SEFSC  
3 Chris Schieble.....LA  
4 Spud Woodward.....SAFMC

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6  
7

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TABLE OF MOTIONS

PAGE 84: Motion to add a new Alternative 3 to modify the red snapper overfishing limit based on the overfishing limit from the SSC's March/April 2021 meeting (25.6 million pounds) and regain the current ABC of 15.1 million pounds. The motion failed on page 89.

PAGE 89: Motion in Action 1 to make Alternative 2 the preferred alternative. The motion carried on page 91.

PAGE 112: Motion in Action 1 to add a new Alternative 6 that would change the state-specific red snapper private angling component annual catch limits using modified percentages from those identified in Amendment 50A in state survey currencies through 2023. Alabama would retain the ACL that was issued in Amendment 50A (1,122,662 pounds). The motion carried on page 115.

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1 The Reef Fish Management Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery  
2 Management Council convened via webinar on Tuesday morning,  
3 April 13, 2021, and was called to order by Chairman Martha  
4 Guyas.

5  
6 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**  
7 **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**  
8 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**  
9

10 **CHAIRMAN MARTHA GUYAS:** Let's start with a little chat about our  
11 agenda. Late yesterday, Kevin distributed a presentation, and  
12 there was some, I guess, discussion about when that will be  
13 discussed at this council meeting, and so we have a very full  
14 Reef Fish agenda.

15  
16 That item was brought up under Data Collection, and so, Mr.  
17 Chairman, I am going to suggest that we cover that when we cover  
18 Data Collection in Full Council, because I just don't know that  
19 we will get there today, and we have a lot of ground to cover  
20 before we even discuss, I guess, anything for Other Business. I  
21 don't know about your thoughts on that, Mr. Chair.

22  
23 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** Thank you, Martha. I didn't hear all of that,  
24 but I guess we have a little technical issue here, but what I  
25 was able to glean is that you would like to consider the  
26 presentation that Mr. Anson provided and bring it up in Full  
27 Council under the Data Collection Committee, rather than do it  
28 here, and is that correct?

29  
30 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Yes.

31  
32 **DR. FRAZER:** I think that's the appropriate thing to do, and we  
33 will bring it up in Full Council under the Data Collection  
34 Committee. Thanks.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Are there any modifications or additions  
37 to the Reef Fish agenda for today?

38  
39 **MS. LEANN BOSARGE:** Madam Chair?

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Leann.

42  
43 **MS. BOSARGE:** Sorry, but I thought it might be easier to just  
44 jump in on this. I just have one item for Other Business that  
45 will take like maybe ten seconds, and it's just a question on  
46 the historical captain permits.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Historical captain permits. Anybody

1 else? Hearing none, can I get a motion to adopt the agenda as  
2 modified, or is there any opposition to adopting the agenda as  
3 modified? Hearing none, we will proceed with this agenda, with  
4 one item of Other Business.

5  
6 Next on our list is Approval of the January 2021 Minutes. Are  
7 there any modifications to the minutes? I'm sure that everyone  
8 has read them very closely several times. Okay. Hearing none,  
9 is there any opposition to adopting the minutes as written?  
10 Hearing no opposition, those are approved. We do have an Action  
11 Guide, Tab B, Number 3.

12  
13 **DR. FRAZER:** Martha, we're having a really difficult time  
14 hearing you on our end, and I'm not sure if it's a volume issue  
15 on your computer.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I'm on my phone, on speaker phone, on full  
18 blast. Let me try some headphones.

19  
20 **DR. FRAZER:** Okay. We'll try to accommodate on our end. Sorry.  
21 Keep going.

22  
23 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Tom, I'm not having any problems hearing  
24 her, and so I'm not sure where the problem is. I don't know if  
25 others are.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Do you all need a minute to fix audio, Tom or  
28 Carrie?

29  
30 **DR. FRAZER:** Go ahead, Martha. I think we'll get it squared  
31 away.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. We do have an Action Guide, and  
34 it's Tab B, Number 3. We'll just go through that item-by-item  
35 as we get to each item, and so, with that, if staff is ready,  
36 let's move into Tab B, Number 4. I don't know if somebody would  
37 like to introduce this before Richard's presentation. Maybe  
38 that someone is Ryan or John?

39  
40 **STATUS OF NOAA FISHERIES MRIP 2020 RECREATIONAL FISHERIES CATCH**  
41 **ESTIMATION PROCESS**

42  
43 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** That is me. Dr. Cody is from NOAA's Office  
44 of Science and Technology, and he is going to present the  
45 methods that they are using for resolving gaps in MRIP's  
46 recreational catch and effort data for 2020, some of which was  
47 postponed and some of which remains postponed, due to COVID-19.  
48

1 The pandemic resulted in varied impacts, depending on the state,  
2 and state-specific and federal suspension of sampling activity  
3 varied by state and by region, and that was done to comply with  
4 respect to regional health ordinances. Dr. Cody is going to  
5 walk you guys through NOAA OST's approach for resolving these  
6 data gaps, and you guys should consider the information  
7 presented and provide any recommendations.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Ryan. Let's move into that  
10 then, Tab B, Number 4. Richard, I assume you're on and ready to  
11 roll.

12  
13 **DR. RICHARD CODY:** Yes, I'm on. With Ryan's introduction, I  
14 probably don't need that first slide, but, basically, this is a  
15 status update on our recreational fisheries landings catch  
16 estimation process for this year, and, as Ryan pointed out,  
17 we've had some challenges in 2020 when it comes to data  
18 collection and then the data gaps that have resulted from that  
19 and their effect on the estimation process.

20  
21 With this presentation, basically, I am providing an overview,  
22 and what I hope to do is to describe the disruptions to the  
23 survey operations, in terms of the effort surveys as well as the  
24 catch survey, describe the data gaps that we experienced, and  
25 then introduce the catch estimation strategy that we used in  
26 2020, with a brief introduction to the methods.

27  
28 The methods themselves are fairly straightforward and simple,  
29 and I will provide a rationale for going that route, rather than  
30 a more complex approach. Then I have some information on the  
31 publication schedule and potential impacts beyond 2021.

32  
33 For the 2020 year, data collection really has proceeded as  
34 normal, I would say, for the FES survey, the Fishing Effort  
35 survey, and for the for-hire telephone survey, particularly in  
36 the Gulf, and so there were no real disruptions to either of the  
37 main effort surveys that we conduct.

38  
39 However, there are data gaps associated with the Access Point  
40 Angler Intercept Survey for 2020, and this is our dockside  
41 survey that collects information on catch rate, but it also  
42 provides, more importantly -- Or not more importantly, but as  
43 importantly, is some of the supplemental effort information  
44 that's needed to adjust effort estimates that come from the FES  
45 and the for-hire telephone survey. Basically, it provides the  
46 information that is used to apportion effort to area fished, and  
47 then also to account for off-frame effort with both of those  
48 surveys.

1  
2 Starting in Wave 2, we started to see the beginnings of  
3 disruptions to the survey, and this began in, I would say, mid  
4 to late March in most states, but it was particularly noticeable  
5 in April, in practically every state that we operate in, but I  
6 will say that most states had resumed sampling, to some degree,  
7 at some point, in May, or by the end of May, and the exceptions  
8 were mostly in the mid and north Atlantic, where we had a couple  
9 of states that didn't resume until July or August.

10  
11 As far as headboat sampling is concerned, we don't conduct  
12 headboat sampling in this area here, but, in the north Atlantic  
13 and mid-Atlantic, that's been suspended, and so we don't have  
14 observer program coverage up there, and I would say, for the  
15 Southeast Regional Headboat Survey, in the South Atlantic and  
16 Gulf, we see a similar effect, where sampling was suspended.

17  
18 This is sort of a graphic of the extent of the data gaps for the  
19 2020 season, and you will see, on the far-left column, there are  
20 numbers listed 1 through 13, and that's really -- Those are just  
21 the months, and, on the graph itself, what you have is 2020 data  
22 expressed as a percentage of the average for the previous three  
23 years.

24  
25 What we do is we look at the numbers of intercepts that were  
26 collected in 2020 and express that as a percentage of the  
27 average that we received in 2017 through 2019, and, depending on  
28 the colors, you can see there are different degrees of coverage  
29 gaps, we'll say, and so the green blocks refer to weeks and  
30 refer to the different regional components of the various state  
31 surveys.

32  
33 To the far-right, we have the Gulf surveys in Alabama, Florida,  
34 and Mississippi, and you will see that, depending on whether  
35 there are separate regions in states, you may have more, a  
36 broader, spectrum of blocks, but the main thing to note here is  
37 that, from April, basically April, within nearly all of the  
38 areas, we had more or less a shutdown of the survey, and so  
39 there's an extensive gap for that timepoint.

40  
41 You will note though that there are data available for March,  
42 and then also, in May, we see a resumption of activity, to  
43 varying degrees, depending on which state you're looking at, but  
44 you'll notice that, for the most part, once sampling resumed, we  
45 are getting coverage in excess of 75 percent of the average for  
46 the past three years, and that average can vary up or down, and  
47 so I think, if you're looking at the yellow boxes and the green  
48 boxes, they are pretty much in line with what we have for the



1 previous years.

2  
3 You can see that, throughout, there are gaps that extend,  
4 depending on the area within the state, or the region within the  
5 state, and you will note that, in Florida for instance, there  
6 are a couple of blocks here, and I don't have them labeled on  
7 this, because the graph is a little bit too small, that extend  
8 throughout the year, where there are gaps that persist.

9  
10 The last slide I showed you referred to the angler intercepts,  
11 and so it was basically an assessment of the loss of intercept  
12 data, we'll say. With this slide, we looked at length  
13 measurements, and you can see that the pattern is basically the  
14 same, but there are more gaps here and there, and the rationale  
15 for that is that, even with resumption of sampling activity,  
16 state requirements, and general just requirements for social  
17 distancing, did affect the ability for samplers to collect data  
18 on lengths of fish. Even though sampling had resumed, and  
19 interviews were being done, we experienced situations where we  
20 were getting less data from anglers, just because of the risk  
21 for personal distance.

22  
23 This is a slide showing the weight values as well, and you can  
24 see a very similar pattern, again, for most of the states, and  
25 you will see that, for the Gulf, we're looking at the three  
26 states on the far-right of the graph.

27  
28 As far as data imputation and estimation, you're seeing that we  
29 had fairly -- In April in particular, a loss of data there that  
30 was fairly substantial, but we had varying degrees of coverage  
31 throughout the rest of the year, and then prior to April, and so  
32 APAIS sampling suspension, and the resulting data gaps, they did  
33 vary by state, depending on when they kicked back in their  
34 sampling again, and we did keep in touch with all of the states,  
35 through the Gulf Council in the Gulf and through ACCSP in the  
36 South Atlantic and the Atlantic, and we maintained a sampling  
37 tracker.

38  
39 I do note that, in this slide here, there's a reference here to  
40 the 2020 sampling status tracker, and that, I think, link is  
41 dead in this document, but we can provide that, if people want  
42 to find out more about the gaps or how we documented them.

43  
44 As far as the imputation approach to fill the gaps, we used an  
45 approach that used 2018 and 2019 data collected within the  
46 corresponding 2020 data gaps, and so, for those graphs that I  
47 presented early on, you will note that there were some grayed-  
48 out, or dark, boxes, and those would represent the data gaps,

1 and so those, technically, would have been filled in with data  
2 from 2018 and 2019.

3  
4 It's not quite as simple of a picture as that, and it would  
5 depend on the estimation domains in question, and so, depending  
6 on whether you're looking at mode or area fished, the gaps could  
7 be more or less, but, generally, that's the approach that was  
8 used, and so gaps are identified within the different estimation  
9 domains and then filled with 2018 and 2019 data within those  
10 gaps. Any, we'll say, domains where we had 2020 data, we didn't  
11 do that process at the outset.

12  
13 To account for the fact that we were using two years of data to  
14 fill in these gaps, basically, we weighted, by a factor of two,  
15 to account for the fact that we were including two years to fill  
16 those data gaps. The process, as I said, is a fairly  
17 straightforward process, and we didn't -- We tried to deviate as  
18 little as possible from the design, the survey design, that we  
19 have in place, and the idea was that, the simpler the process,  
20 the more reproducible it is and the quicker we could get it on  
21 the street, so to speak.

22  
23 We did discuss the methodology with MRIP consultants from  
24 Westat, Jean Opsomer and Mike Brick and others, and we did  
25 receive their advice, and they were in agreement that the  
26 methodology was adequate for the purposes, and so a standard  
27 two-way estimation.

28  
29 You will note that, throughout the year, we did not produce  
30 estimates by wave after Wave 1, and so the standard methodology  
31 that we use, that we'll be employing to generate those two-month  
32 wave level catch estimates, for both catch and effort, and so  
33 those that are in place for the 2020 estimates, and I will note  
34 that the 2020 estimates will be available at the two-month wave  
35 level also, and so we won't just be producing the annual catch  
36 levels, but we'll be producing wave-level estimates in addition  
37 to those.

38  
39 The rationale behind the data imputation and estimation, and I  
40 mentioned a little bit about this already, we did consider more  
41 complex methods, and the decision was made that these methods  
42 would require a bit more resources, in terms of evaluating their  
43 potential for use, and also getting them in place. The danger  
44 with putting a complicated method in place is that -- And having  
45 a deadline that you're trying to adhere to, is that the time  
46 needed for evaluation may be more intensive, and it may require  
47 a peer review, in some cases, if the methodology is complex and  
48 involving modeling procedures.

1  
2 Then, also, in discussions with the MRIP consultants, we  
3 determined that there would probably be a larger deviation from  
4 the standard MRIP estimation methodology. I mentioned earlier  
5 that we wanted to keep this as close as we could to the normal  
6 way that we do our estimation.

7  
8 Then the other component that I didn't mention is that, for a  
9 more complicated, or a more complex, approach for imputation, or  
10 potentially a modeling approach, we would need auxiliary  
11 information, and we did attempt, early on in the year, to put in  
12 place some modifications to the dockside survey and to  
13 incorporate some questions that would get at angling behavior in  
14 the previous month, but, in going through the process for the  
15 requirements for the Paperwork Reduction Act approval, the White  
16 House OMB declined to approve those changes, and so we weren't  
17 able to get that in place for 2020.

18  
19 Then the other point that I will make is that we will revisit  
20 the 2020 estimates as soon as the 2021 estimates are available,  
21 because, right now, we're using the two previous years, with  
22 2018 being the least proximate year, and so it probably would be  
23 preferable, in the future, to at least look at the potential for  
24 using shoulder years, where you have 2019 and 2021 data, and  
25 these can be compared to what we have for the current method.

26  
27 For presentation purposes here today, the only thing that I can  
28 present are the effort estimates, and what I have is 2018 to  
29 2020 effort estimates by region, and then at the annual level,  
30 and then broken out by charter and headboat mode as well, and  
31 then I will do a presentation of those effort estimates with and  
32 without imputed records from the APAIS survey.

33  
34 I can't present the actual catch estimates at this point,  
35 because we're waiting for approval for release of those from  
36 NOAA, but those are expected following the meeting, in the next  
37 few days.

38  
39 On this slide here, we have the 2018 to 2020 effort estimates by  
40 region, and the two blocks, we'll say, on the far-right of the  
41 graph represent the South Atlantic and Gulf, but, for  
42 comparison, you have the New England and Mid-Atlantic regions as  
43 well, so that you can get an idea of -- You can compare what we  
44 see in the Gulf and the South Atlantic with those regions.

45  
46 If you look at the graph, you will see the blue, the first bar,  
47 is 2018, and the second is 2019, and the green in 2020, with  
48 imputation involved, and, as I mentioned, for the effort

1 estimates, we do use some of the information from the Access  
2 Point Angler Intercept Survey to adjust for area fished, but  
3 also to adjust for off-frame effort, and so those would be  
4 anglers not picked up in either the FES -- Effort, I should say,  
5 not picked up in the FES or the for-hire telephone survey.

6  
7 What you will see here is that, in keeping with 2018 and 2019,  
8 2020 effort estimates are fairly similar, and we do see a slight  
9 drop in the New England region, but, for the most part, in the  
10 Mid-Atlantic and the Gulf, we see a slight rise in effort  
11 estimates, and then, in the South Atlantic, we see basically a  
12 stable effort estimation for 2020, relative to 2019.

13  
14 Then this is charter and headboat effort broken out, and there  
15 has been a lot of speculation, and some anecdotal information,  
16 that showed that there was a reduction in the for-hire sector  
17 and the amount of effort, and this is borne out pretty  
18 dramatically in the New England region, but we also see it in  
19 the Gulf of Mexico as well, and this is mostly attributed to the  
20 earlier waves. There was a pickup in general charter efforts  
21 later in the year, and so the reductions in the Gulf are not as  
22 pronounced as we see in the Mid-Atlantic or in the New England  
23 region. As far as the South Atlantic is concerned, the  
24 estimates for charter and headboat effort were about the same.

25  
26 This is an example of effort estimates and basically showing the  
27 effort estimate with imputation, and then there's a second graph  
28 for the New England and Mid-Atlantic regions, and that red bar  
29 that's in those graphs refers to imputation that excludes what  
30 we call zeroes, and those are records for which we don't have a  
31 -- For which we have an FES record of effort, but we don't have  
32 APAIS information.

33  
34 You will see that bar is missing from the Gulf and the South  
35 Atlantic, which reflects the fact that the sampling in the Gulf  
36 and the South Atlantic was subject to less data gaps, and, for  
37 each of the waves for which we had FES data for a given  
38 estimation domain, we also had APAIS information, and so that's  
39 a testimony to the ability of the samplers to continue to  
40 conduct sampling throughout each wave and collect data.

41  
42 What I wanted to show you here is that, if you compare, with  
43 imputation, which is the blue bar, versus without imputation,  
44 you will see that there is very little difference between the  
45 two bars, and so the overall impact of imputation on the effort  
46 estimate for 2020 is fairly minimal at this level, and so we're  
47 talking about an annual level within the region.

1 Obviously, when you drill down to estimation domains that have  
2 greater resolution at the state level or area fished or by  
3 species for catch, that pattern will change, and you will expect  
4 more variation, but, overall, I think it's a good sign that the  
5 imputation had very little overall effect on the amount of  
6 effort that was estimated.

7  
8 I did provide an appendix for a presentation that I have later  
9 on today that provides a couple of different metrics that we are  
10 looking at right now and we plan to provide with the catch  
11 estimates when we publish them within the next few days, and  
12 those metrics really reflect the amount of imputation, or  
13 imputed data, included in the estimate and then the relative  
14 change in the estimate, based on the inclusion of that data.

15  
16 Those are two metrics that we'll be providing with the data to  
17 try and help managers and data users interpret the data,  
18 because, in some cases, there, obviously, would be a larger  
19 effect, due to imputation, than in others.

20  
21 Our next steps, basically, are to finish up the estimate review,  
22 and I will say that the internal review team, which is made up  
23 of the Science Centers, the Regional Offices, and the Office of  
24 Science and Technology, and also the Office of Sustainable  
25 Fisheries, has finished their review of the estimates. We did  
26 get a couple of get-backs that we are looking into right now,  
27 but nothing that we would consider major red flags, and so we  
28 expect that those are not going to hold up the availability of  
29 the data in the next week or so.

30  
31 As far as that is concerned, the estimate release -- As I said,  
32 we were targeting a mid-April release date, and that's our  
33 normal schedule. There are a few little complicating factors in  
34 this year's release, in that there is a communications rollout,  
35 and this is largely because of the interest at the legislative  
36 level, and elsewhere, in the release of the data, and so we are  
37 continuing communications with the regions, and we don't  
38 anticipate any major delays, at this point. We have a briefing  
39 with our leadership on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and we're hoping that, shortly  
40 thereafter, the estimates will be released, and I think that's  
41 the last slide, Ryan.

42  
43 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Dr. Cody.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Dr. Cody. I am going to  
46 give folks a few minutes to put their hands up,, but I have a  
47 question in the meantime. Can we go to one of the block graphs,  
48 and let's say Slide 4, those intercepts? Richard, I've got a

1 question.

2  
3 I guess, in a normal year, if I was shown a graph like this, I  
4 would expect to see some intercepts certainly below the mean,  
5 and I would expect to see some of these blocks like above the  
6 mean, right?

7  
8 **DR. CODY:** Yes.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Are there any above the mean? Is that included  
11 in this green block? I'm just trying to understand why  
12 everything is a reduction here.

13  
14 **DR. CODY:** Well, yes, they're included in the green. Anything  
15 above 75 percent would be included in the green, and so,  
16 technically, if it's over one, or over the average, it would be  
17 in there.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Yes, and so did that happen? I'm just trying  
20 to understand, because, even before COVID, that March/April  
21 block, it looks like everything is a reduction than there had  
22 been with the average three years.

23  
24 **DR. CODY:** Well, I would say that the average is one thing, and,  
25 like you said, you would expect to see some below and some above  
26 for a given week within a month or a wave, but I would say, on  
27 average, most of the assignments were completed to varying  
28 degrees. The ability of the samplers to conduct sampling is  
29 sometimes impacted, but, in general, the samples that we issued,  
30 or the assignments that we issued, were conducted by the states,  
31 and particularly in the Gulf.

32  
33 I would say, in some other regions, that wasn't necessarily the  
34 case, and we had stoppages and starts, and, depending on the  
35 region the sampler was in, there were different controls in  
36 place that affected the efficacy of the sampling, and that  
37 occurred, to an extent, in Florida also, and southeast Florida,  
38 I think, had some restrictions in place, in Palm Beach, and  
39 maybe Miami-Dade Counties as well, at some point during the year  
40 that were different from the rest of the state. I don't know if  
41 that answers your question or if I just started it and danced  
42 around it, but --

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I think it does, but I'm still kind of  
45 wondering if it would be more illustrative of how things were  
46 affected to have I guess a greater-than-one block or something  
47 in here too, because let's say -- Right now, I can't tell, from  
48 this graph, after COVID, if sampling really -- I guess, after

1 that gray block, if sampling really was different than before  
2 COVID or it wasn't. I can tell that it was less than, or I  
3 guess greater than, 75 percent, where there is green blocks, but  
4 I can't tell if there is -- If we go back to having some blocks  
5 above the average or if everything was below average. Do you  
6 see what I'm saying?

7  
8 **DR. CODY:** Yes, and I would say probably -- I mean, there are  
9 plenty of blocks that are above average, but our main purpose  
10 for producing this graph is just to show the extent of the gaps,  
11 and so the ones that we were really concerned with are the  
12 zeroes, or the gray boxes.

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Gotcha.

15  
16 **DR. CODY:** I think we can produce a graph like that, if you're  
17 interested.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I would be.

20  
21 **DR. CODY:** We can do that.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** We have gray blocks, which are zeroes, and then  
24 we have just white, and what's the difference between those?

25  
26 **DR. CODY:** White is just an absence of sampling, and so, in some  
27 modes, there is very little samples collected, and so they  
28 wouldn't be sampled in certain time periods, and so, over the  
29 past three years, for instance, the average would have been  
30 missing, and so there would be nothing in the block.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Let me go to Leann next. I see her hand  
33 is up.

34  
35 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Dr. Cody, I have only praise  
36 today. Won't you be so excited? I really like the approach  
37 that you used, and it was simple, where you pulled from the past  
38 couple of years, 2018 and 2019, to try and fill in some of the  
39 gaps using some averages to smooth, and I like the idea of maybe  
40 looking at 2020 as well using that kind of shouldering approach  
41 that you talked about.

42  
43 I just wanted to say thanks for keeping it kind of simple, and  
44 I'm glad that you tried out the statistical models, but I do  
45 like the fact that we tried not to stray too far from how we  
46 normally process this type of data, and so thanks. I can kind  
47 of garner a little bit of information from those effort graphs,  
48 even though we don't have the actual landings numbers, and I can

1 tell that effort was up, and so, if I know what species people  
2 usually target, then that gives me a little bit of an idea of  
3 maybe what I'm looking at for landings, a ballpark anyway, and  
4 so thank you. I appreciate it, sir.

5  
6 **DR. CODY:** Sure. Thank you, Leann.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Mr. Dyskow.

9  
10 **MR. PHIL DYSKOW:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a two-part  
11 question for Richard. The first part is, during the period of  
12 gaps that we see on these data tallies, did the states select  
13 their data in their normal way? Was there data available from  
14 the states during these timeframes?

15  
16 **DR. CODY:** Well, the states do the collection of the APAIS data  
17 as well, and so, for Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi, they're  
18 involved in those data collections, and, as far as I know, and  
19 you would have to ask the states themselves, in terms of their  
20 state surveys, but there were some similar disruptions there,  
21 but recall that, for at least Alabama and Mississippi, their  
22 data collection would be more focused during red snapper season,  
23 which is after April and most of May.

24  
25 **MR. DYSKOW:** Thank you. That's a good answer, and my question  
26 is specifically to red snapper. It looks like once -- This is  
27 just a layman's observation of this process, but it appears  
28 that, once you get the data, you do the right things to analyze  
29 that data to give it meaningful output, but the real concern I  
30 have is with the quality of the information that you start with,  
31 because of the way MRIP data is collected in the field.

32  
33 Would it not make more sense, particularly with something as  
34 contentious as red snapper, to embrace the state data collection  
35 methodology, because they put a lot more effort into this, and  
36 they have a lot more sampling content that would be meaningful  
37 to prepare all of this analysis that you do. In other words,  
38 it's the old garbage-in-and-garbage-out thing. The better the  
39 data we start with, the more important and meaningful these  
40 analyses are going to be, and so my question is why haven't we  
41 embraced the state data collection efforts more completely in  
42 this process? Thank you.

43  
44 **DR. CODY:** Well, I will try to address that. There are a couple  
45 of things to keep in mind here. You're talking about very, very  
46 different surveys that do essentially different things at  
47 different levels of resolution. For instance, the state surveys  
48 in Alabama and Mississippi focus on, for now, red snapper, which



1 is one species. MRIP is a general survey, and it focuses on all  
2 species, and it covers outside the level of the state, and so  
3 within regions and outside of regions, as well as beyond  
4 regions, and so there are very different methods being used here  
5 to collect the data.

6  
7 I will point out that our calibration process that we have in  
8 place for the MRIP estimates, the FES and the APAIS, was  
9 reviewed independently by a combination of the CIE and the  
10 council SSCs, with members of the SSCs from the Gulf and South  
11 Atlantic involved, and those methods were endorsed by both  
12 panels.

13  
14 Then, also, you have to keep in mind that MRIP has been reviewed  
15 over and over, and, in particular, the 2017 National Academy's  
16 review described it as state-of-the-art, when it comes to the  
17 methods that are being used, and so I can't agree that it's  
18 garbage-in-and-garbage-out. The methodology that we use is  
19 standard survey methodology, and it has its limitations,  
20 obviously. That's why we have in place in the Gulf specialized  
21 surveys that can get at higher-resolution red snapper catch  
22 estimates.

23  
24 That said, I think we have worked very closely with the states  
25 to certify their surveys and to have them reviewed and to get  
26 them implemented and provide statistical support, as well as  
27 funding support as well, in some cases, for the surveys, and so  
28 I can't say that we haven't embraced the process, and I would  
29 say that we have worked very closely to try and ensure that what  
30 we have, as implemented, is the best that we can do.

31  
32 There's a lot that we don't know about the differences between  
33 the different surveys. For instance, we know that the Gulf  
34 surveys provide more precise estimates, in terms of red snapper,  
35 but we don't know much about the accuracy of the estimates. We  
36 haven't had the chance to compare the two surveys and look at  
37 drivers for differences between those surveys, and that would  
38 give us a better understanding of where those differences are,  
39 given that the methodologies are very different and that we're  
40 trying to accomplish different things, and so hopefully that  
41 answers your question.

42  
43 **MR. DYSKOW:** Well, it does, and I thank you very much. That was  
44 a very concise answer. If Madam Chair would allow me one  
45 follow-up question, and then I'll shut up.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Go ahead.  
48

1 **MR. DYSKOW:** The biggest thing left on the table that's a  
2 concern is, as an in-season management tool, MRIP doesn't really  
3 work very well, whereas the state data, being more real time,  
4 does. For example, if we're concerned, and of course we are,  
5 with overfishing, we need this in-season tool to be more robust  
6 and more useful, so that we can see, in closer to real time,  
7 what is actually happening.

8  
9 **DR. CODY:** If I can respond to that, there is a National Academy  
10 review right now of MRIP surveys with respect to its  
11 compatibility with in-season management, and so I think that  
12 report is due out sometime in July, and so we should have more  
13 information there, with respect to that as well, but I do agree  
14 that the MRIP survey is designed to produce wave-level  
15 estimates.

16  
17 There is a careful review process to make sure those estimates  
18 are as accurate as they can be and that they've been -- That  
19 they follow quality control measures, and that's different than  
20 in-season management, which you're monitoring constantly a catch  
21 level.

22  
23 **MR. DYSKOW:** Thank you.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Dale.

26  
27 **MR. DALE DIAZ:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Dr. Cody, I just want  
28 to follow-up on something that we talked about several meetings  
29 ago, and one thing you just said made me think about it, and you  
30 said that you all haven't had time, and I'm paraphrasing here,  
31 but to look at drivers of differences in the state surveys, and,  
32 in one of the meetings, it was noted that there is some issues  
33 that need to be looked at in small states. About two or three  
34 meetings ago, I had asked you a question about that, and has  
35 anything been done to start the process of looking at issues in  
36 small states?

37  
38 **DR. CODY:** I think what you're referring to, Dale, is a sample  
39 size issue, perhaps, in smaller states, and you can expect that,  
40 where you have a low number of sites, that you're limited by  
41 sampling constraints at those sites and that you can't sample  
42 twice at the same time at a certain site, and so you're limited  
43 in the amount of samples that you can actually affect.

44  
45 We have done some work, internally, on small sample sizes, but  
46 we haven't worked with the states yet to look at that, and the  
47 idea of this Gulf transition team sub-group was that we would  
48 sort of hash out those types of issues in a collaborative way,

1 with the states and NOAA being present at the table, and so  
2 we're hoping that, after we get through the next few weeks and  
3 begin the process for the 2021 season, that we get the  
4 transition team moving again and looking at those types of  
5 issues.

6  
7 **MR. DIAZ:** Thank you, Dr. Cody.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. I do not see any other hands right  
10 now, at least that I can tell, and so thank you, Dr. Cody, for  
11 the presentation, and I think we're going to move into our next  
12 item, and so that is Item V, our Review of Reef Fish Landings.  
13 We've got a couple of different presentations there.

14  
15 **REVIEW OF REEF FISH LANDINGS AND PRESENTATION**

16  
17 **MR. PETER HOOD:** I am going to be going over commercial landings  
18 for reef fish. I will do this sort of standard series of  
19 slides, and there's actually two presentations, and one is just  
20 going to be commercial landings for species that aren't under an  
21 IFQ, and then the next one will be those that are in the IFQ.

22  
23 Right now, we have gray triggerfish up on the board, and just a  
24 couple of things. All the slides that you will see, the 2020  
25 and 2021 landings are preliminary, and so those could change,  
26 and then, also, with regard to the 2021 landings, because they  
27 are preliminary, as often happens, the actual landings will,  
28 over time for a given month, increase, as more dealers report  
29 their landings, and there's usually a little bit of a lag there.

30  
31 In this first slide, red is the 2018 to 2020 average, and blue  
32 is what was landed in 2020, and the black is 2021, and you can  
33 see that, for gray triggerfish, 2021 seems to be lagging a  
34 little bit, but that also just could be that all the landings  
35 haven't been reported yet.

36  
37 This is greater amberjack, and, again, 2021 seems to be lagging  
38 from 2020 and from the average. You will note there is a flat  
39 period, and it shows it starts in February and goes through May,  
40 but, basically, that's the March through May closure, and then  
41 landings seem to increase. I would also point out that, even  
42 though the 2021 ACL is 484,000 pounds, roughly, in 2018 and  
43 2019, the ACL was reduced, and so that's why the landings don't  
44 quite rise to the level of the 2021 ACL. Additionally, in 2018,  
45 we had an overage, and so, in 2019, the ACL was reduced to  
46 account for that.

47  
48 This is gray snapper commercial landings, and you can see that,

1 for 2021 landings, they are -- Generally, things start out kind  
2 of slow, and the landings in 2021 are similar to what was seen  
3 in previous years. Gray snapper has not received its ACL --  
4 Well, that's a stock ACL, and so we don't have recreational  
5 landings in there, but you can see that 2020 was somewhat close  
6 to the average, and then 2021 is close to 2020.

7  
8 We have mutton snapper, and I think this is the last slide for  
9 this presentation, but, again, you can see that the 2020  
10 landings were a little bit lower than the average, and, in 2021,  
11 it was a little bit slower than what we've seen in other years,  
12 but we'll wait and see if that may just be some underreporting.

13  
14 Then we'll go to Tab B, Number 5(c). This is for our IFQ  
15 species, and we're starting out with red snapper. The colors  
16 are a little bit different here, or I take that back. They're  
17 the same, and we have -- Anyway, you can see that at least -- I  
18 guess, with the IFQ, the landings that are presented for 2021 --  
19 I mean, that's pretty close to what's there, but it's just  
20 because of the way that landings are reported through the IFQ  
21 program, and so we don't have that lag that we see in the  
22 commercial landings for some of the other species that we looked  
23 at. 2021 seems to be starting out along a fairly typical  
24 pattern that we saw both in 2020 and then for the 2018 to 2020  
25 average.

26  
27 This is gag commercial landings, and gag has not been hitting  
28 their ACL. Again, we can see that, in 2021, at least the way  
29 the year -- As the year has been starting out, it seems to be  
30 fairly close to the average, and, again, 2020 was close to the  
31 average too, and so that's gag.

32  
33 Here we have red grouper, and, again, 2021 seems to be a little  
34 bit ahead of previous years, but it's fairly close, and then you  
35 can see the 2020, again, was fairly close to what the average  
36 had been, and so I think that's the last slide, and, if there  
37 are any questions, I would be happy to answer those.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Peter. Let me give folks a  
40 second to raise their hands. All right. I am not seeing any  
41 hands at this time, and so I think we can move on from this,  
42 too. As soon as I say that, someone's hand is going to shoot  
43 up, but thank you, Peter, for going through all these landings  
44 with us at every meeting, and we really do appreciate these  
45 graphs.

46  
47 **MR. HOOD:** My pleasure.  
48

1 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Let's move on then to our next  
2 series of presentations, and I think we're on our next item,  
3 which is review of the Great Red Snapper Count project. Ryan,  
4 do you want to introduce that before we invite Dr. Lorenzen to  
5 start his presentation?  
6

7 **REVIEW OF THE GREAT RED SNAPPER COUNT PROJECT**  
8

9 **MR. RINDONE:** Sure. We can do that. Dr. Lorenzen is going to  
10 present a summary of the peer review of the Great Red Snapper  
11 Count that was done between the non-principal investigators,  
12 members of the SSC, and three independent consultants, and Dr.  
13 Lorenzen will go over the terms of reference and the main parts  
14 of the Great Red Snapper Count and some of the key findings of  
15 the review.  
16

17 You guys should ask questions and make any recommendations, as  
18 appropriate, and just bear in mind the relationship between  
19 Agenda Items VI and VII, as you're receiving all the  
20 presentations that are starting now and going to follow, and so  
21 there is linkages, obviously, between all of those.  
22

23 **DR. KAI LORENZEN:** Thank you. I am presenting the review of the  
24 Great Red Snapper Count by the Scientific and Statistical  
25 Committee. This is just a quick reminder of what we're talking  
26 about, and I think most people are very aware of that, but I  
27 just wanted to provide a little bit of context. It's a really  
28 large project of unprecedented scale to derive an absolute  
29 abundance estimate and various other pieces of information on  
30 the Gulf red snapper stock.  
31

32 The project used a fairly complex sampling design, sampling  
33 different habitats in the Gulf, using different advanced  
34 methodologies, and then, basically, it combines information from  
35 all these samples to derive absolute abundance estimates.  
36

37 This is the widely-known and published sort of big-picture  
38 outcome of the Great Red Snapper Count, and so there was an  
39 overall estimate produced of about 110 million red snapper in  
40 the Gulf, and this estimate has been around since about October  
41 of last year.  
42

43 I want to provide a little context here, before we get into the  
44 details, and sort of drawing back to the summary that former SSC  
45 Chair Joe Powers gave at the end of the SSC meeting, and so we  
46 were provided with those overall figures in October, and NOAA  
47 Fisheries then committed to working with the SSC to try and  
48 incorporate this information into catch advice for this year,

1 and we received our first presentation, an overview  
2 presentation, of the Great Red Snapper Count during the January  
3 SSC meeting.

4  
5 The SSC then requested an independent review of this  
6 information, in light of the complexity of the study and the  
7 fact that we knew we were going to be asked to provide -- To  
8 basically consider providing catch advice using this  
9 information.

10  
11 The terms of reference for this review were developed by the  
12 council and NOAA Fisheries, and not the SSC, and the process  
13 that we went through for the review was modeled on the SSC  
14 process, and so we had SSC members and three independent experts  
15 who were asked to take a more detailed look at the material and  
16 report, prior to the review meeting, and also be there at the  
17 review meeting.

18  
19 We received the project, draft project, report in early March  
20 for the Great Red Snapper Count, and then a lot of the really  
21 detailed information we received during the actual review  
22 process, and the result of that is that the output of this comes  
23 in several parts, and so we have the independent consultant  
24 reports, and we have a report on the SSC meeting, and then we  
25 have motions.

26  
27 In this process, SSC members who were co-PIs of the Great Red  
28 Snapper Count were asked to abstain from voting on motions, but  
29 they participated in the discussion, and what I am doing now is  
30 I am giving you a picture overview of everything that was  
31 deliberated in this meeting, but I will be drawing in particular  
32 on the independent experts' comments, because we as an SSC  
33 provided a consensus to the terms of reference, because there  
34 simply wasn't the time to do that, and so I will be drawing  
35 mostly on the independent consultants' reports, which have  
36 addressed specifically the terms of reference as they were  
37 written.

38  
39 This is a summary of the terms of reference. The main objective  
40 from the review was to determine whether the absolute abundance  
41 estimate and its variance are reliable and consistent with input  
42 data and biological characteristics, and the review specifically  
43 was not meant to address the tagging components of the Great Red  
44 Snapper Count.

45  
46 I want you to note that it's really about the potential  
47 incorporation of the Red Snapper Count into catch advice at this  
48 stage, and, specifically, the absolute abundance estimate, and

1 so we were not to do a big review of the specific science or  
2 what else has been discovered, but it was very, very specific to  
3 the questions that we knew that we would be asked in terms of  
4 incorporation into management.

5  
6 There were three items in the TORs, and that is study design and  
7 sampling approaches, statistics and data analysis, and the  
8 results. I will go through those points, just summarizing the  
9 main points that the independent consultants made and some other  
10 considerations that came up during the meeting.

11  
12 First of all, the review team, and that's the SSC members and  
13 the independent experts, want to acknowledge and compliment the  
14 Great Red Snapper Count team for an impressive implementation of  
15 this really large-scale study, and, in particular, acknowledge  
16 the scale and complexity of this study, the use of advanced  
17 sampling technologies, extensive collaboration with fishermen, a  
18 wealth of new information beyond the absolute abundance  
19 estimate, and that is something that we really did not focus on  
20 in our review, was the focus beyond the absolute abundance  
21 estimate, and there was impressive educational outreach.

22  
23 We are going through the terms of reference now, and so the  
24 letters here refer to the independent consultants' reports, and  
25 so "MC" is Mary Christman, "DE" is Dave Eggleston, and "SC" is  
26 Steve Cadrin.

27  
28 The main comments here were that, overall, the design covered a  
29 large area of the Gulf of Mexico appropriately. Implementation  
30 sometimes differed from the design, and the reasons and the  
31 implications for possible bias and variance are not always  
32 clear. The use of different technologies and different strata  
33 was unavoidable, for instance because of the visibility, and one  
34 could not use camera systems throughout the Gulf, but camera  
35 systems were used in the less-turbid parts, and then mostly  
36 hydroacoustic methods were used in the parts.

37  
38 That is unavoidable, but, also, the intercalibration studies  
39 affects intercomparisons and combination of data from different  
40 strata, and so, even though the data may be consistent, or would  
41 be consistent, within strata, one cannot necessarily compare  
42 directly between estimates derived say from camera systems in  
43 the eastern Gulf with data derived from hydroacoustic methods in  
44 the western Gulf.

45  
46 Also, questions were then asked by the statisticians about the  
47 degree to which those estimates that are not directly  
48 intercomparable should be combined into an overall -- Limited

1 intercomparisons, mostly off Florida, between hydroacoustic and  
2 optical survey methods indicate that the true observation error  
3 of the study is likely much larger than the 11 percent CV  
4 derived from the stratified estimates.

5  
6 That's really based on looking at comparing the results that  
7 were produced by these two methods, and, really, if those  
8 estimates are made with great precision, you would expect those  
9 estimates to correlate fairly well, and that was sort of  
10 borderline the case. It was also noted that lack of data  
11 collection in some strata, in particular off Louisiana, and,  
12 consequently, to infer mean densities from other places would  
13 affect the variance, and possibly the mean, of those estimates.

14  
15 The focus then moved on to statistics and data analysis, and the  
16 consultants said that, overall, the two independent analyses  
17 were partially correct, with some issues arising from non-  
18 random, or cluster, sampling and lack of clarity about post-  
19 stratification decisions, and I should add here that those were  
20 two independent analyses produced on the same dataset.

21  
22 Estimated variances were likely low, due to additional sources  
23 of variability not currently included. Some of these can be  
24 estimated and included now, and others can't, and so the overall  
25 estimate of uncertainty will probably always be somewhat lower  
26 than what the true uncertainty is. There were some questions  
27 about the effect of imputations for unsampled strata, and this  
28 would be difficult to judge.

29  
30 Arithmetic means are unbiased estimators of density, but  
31 observed distributions of observation suggest that other  
32 estimators may have been better suited to undertake those  
33 estimations.

34  
35 Results, and this is on the overall results, results, if  
36 corrected for noted statistical issues, can be useful, at least  
37 in a regional context, and regional context here means, for  
38 example, the western region or the eastern region or smaller  
39 sub-regions, so that, basically, the problem of intercomparison  
40 and combination of data collected with different methods doesn't  
41 occur, and so that's where the regional comes in here.

42  
43 It's not appropriate to combine the eastern and western Gulf  
44 into a single value of absolute abundance, due to the  
45 differences in technology and lack of calibration, and the  
46 eastern Gulf estimates, with a more credible variance, can be  
47 included as abundance estimates in an assessment, and western  
48 Gulf estimates could be included as a lower-bound constraint.



1  
2 Confidence in abundance estimates for the uncharacterized bottom  
3 is lower than for abundance in the other habitats, due to the  
4 relatively-small sample size in the uncharacterized bottom, and  
5 that's significant, because that's where a very large part of  
6 that 110 million red snapper, or about seventy million red  
7 snapper, have been estimated for this uncharacterized bottom,  
8 but that estimate is extremely uncertain.

9  
10 Assumptions appear appropriate, and not likely to introduce  
11 bias, except in variances, and stock-wide estimates may be an  
12 underestimate, but that wasn't entirely clear, and so there were  
13 some different opinions on that.

14  
15 Putting all this information together, and conscious of the fact  
16 that we were being asked to consider taking this forward into  
17 management advice, we worked on a motion to essentially  
18 characterize, in one motion, all of what I just described, and  
19 here we are.

20  
21 The review team (external consultants and SSC) considers that  
22 the Great Red Snapper Count provides a representative estimate  
23 of abundance for the eastern Gulf and --

24  
25 **MR. RINDONE:** Kai, can I interrupt you? You broke up there for  
26 a second. Can you start back about fifteen seconds in your  
27 train of thought? Right when you were just starting this slide,  
28 and, if you could start over there, that would be great.

29  
30 **DR. LORENZEN:** Okay. I'm just reading the motion at the moment,  
31 and so the review team (external consultants and SSC) considers  
32 that the Great Red Snapper Count provides a representative  
33 estimate of abundance for the eastern Gulf and a highly  
34 uncertain estimate for the western Gulf. However, the review  
35 team also considers that the true uncertainty in both estimates  
36 is substantially larger than implied by the 11 percent CV stated  
37 in the report and that the estimate for uncharacterized bottom  
38 is particularly uncertain.

39  
40 As you can see, that motion carried with twenty-one to one and  
41 five abstentions, and the five abstentions here were the GRSC  
42 co-PIs who were asked to abstain.

43  
44 I want to provide a little bit of a perspective on this, and  
45 that is that, like the Great Red Snapper Count, our stock  
46 assessments are uncertain, some more so than others, and they  
47 often underestimate the true uncertainty, and so the key points  
48 here is that this is not unusual, and it's also not something

1 that bars us from using results like this in analyses, and most  
2 of our assessments seem to think that uncertainty is less than  
3 it really is.

4  
5 The only way to enter into the further use of that is that we  
6 add additional buffers to basically account for uncertainty that  
7 we know is there, but hasn't been really quantified in the  
8 assessment.

9  
10 Secondly, it's very important to consider that both the stock  
11 assessment, in this case SEDAR 52, the related assessment for  
12 Gulf red snapper, and the GRSC estimate of abundance are  
13 estimates, and I say that because it's mainly the title of the  
14 GRSC, or how it's sometimes being presented, it makes people  
15 think that it's essentially a census, that people went out and  
16 counted 110 million red snapper in the Gulf, and that's not  
17 true.

18  
19 People went out and took samples, and then they applied  
20 statistical methods to expand from samples to the totals, and so  
21 it's an estimate, just very much in the same way, but derived in  
22 a different way from the estimates that we get from stock  
23 assessments, and integrating data from both should help to  
24 reduce uncertainty and possible bias, improve management advice,  
25 and it will help identify new management options, I am quite  
26 sure.

27  
28 In addition to the absolute abundance estimate that was the  
29 focus of our review, the Great Red Snapper Count provides  
30 exciting new information on many aspects of red snapper ecology  
31 and fisheries, and that concludes my presentation. Thank you.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Dr. Lorenzen. At this  
34 point, I would welcome any questions for Dr. Lorenzen. Greg.

35  
36 **DR. LORENZEN:** I am going to log off just for one second, to try  
37 and improve my internet reception.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. So just give Kai a minute, and we'll  
40 wait until he pops back on the screen here. In the meantime, we  
41 can build the queue.

42  
43 **DR. LORENZEN:** Okay. I'm back.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right, and so Kai is back. Go ahead, Greg.

46  
47 **DR. GREG STUNZ:** My question wasn't -- It's a point, and then I  
48 actually have a couple of questions for Kai. I mean, obviously,

1 this was a high-profile project on an iconic species that we  
2 live and breathe in this council, and there was a lot of public  
3 interest. Normally, this would have taken place in a SEDAR data  
4 workshop with very limited attendance, and there was pretty much  
5 140 people on this call at any one time.

6  
7 To clarify, this was mainly to deal with the pressing management  
8 that we need to use some of these fish for this interim  
9 assessment that we're talking about ahead of a formal stock  
10 assessment that will happen a year down the line.

11  
12 Kai pointed out that -- As he mentioned, none of our assessments  
13 that we do are perfect, and they generally don't capture that  
14 uncertainty, and variance especially, and so I wanted to make  
15 that clear, that there's not something special, necessarily,  
16 against this study, and that that's normal. In fact, in our  
17 normal assessments, like snapper or shrimp or you name it, we  
18 cap the variance in those assessments. We control for that.  
19 Otherwise, the models wouldn't converge or give us meaningful  
20 output, and so that's important.

21  
22 The other key thing with this review process -- You know,  
23 normally, this is exactly how science works, but it's an  
24 anonymous, written exchange that occurs, but the whole value of  
25 this is that that's how we improve the science. You have these  
26 expert reviewers that tell you things that you may not have  
27 realized, which is exactly the case that happened here, that we  
28 can improve upon and eventually produce a final product, and  
29 that's really the gold standard peer review process of science.

30  
31 Our team was generally happy with that, and, in fact, there were  
32 some very interesting things that captured more of the  
33 uncertainty that the team brought up that we can easily do, and  
34 some we can't do, because we don't have that information, like  
35 for most studies, but, anyway, we were happy with that external  
36 review team, but not such much with some of the review of the  
37 SSC reviewers, and I will explain a little more my basis for  
38 that in a second, because I have a question for Dr. Lorenzen.

39  
40 One of the key points that I guess wasn't made, even in this  
41 presentation today, that several of the reviewers, if not all  
42 three of them, didn't have any problem with the point estimate,  
43 the actual number, and it was the uncertainty, or the bias, but  
44 it was Dr. Lorenzen's position that it might have been unclear,  
45 and it was very clear, and it's very written in the main  
46 conclusions from at least two of the reviewers that I am looking  
47 at here, that it's biased towards an underestimate.

1 What was ignored by the SSC was that the reviewers are  
2 recommending that the western Gulf of Mexico number be used as a  
3 lower bound, and somehow that keeps not making it to the  
4 surface, and I want to make sure that it's very clear that this  
5 estimate -- There were some instances that might increase the  
6 abundance estimate, in terms of the uncertainty, but, by far,  
7 overall, we were very, very conservative towards an  
8 underestimate. Anyway -- And that that Gulf of Mexico should be  
9 a lower bound, and I want to make sure that I make that point.

10  
11 My last question is really -- I don't know if it's to you, Madam  
12 Chairwoman, or Madam Chair, or Dr. Frazer, but I thought this  
13 presentation was going to be given by Dr. Powers, but it's my  
14 understanding that he has resigned, and so my question is what  
15 is the nature of that resignation, or have you shared that  
16 letter with the council? At least I didn't see it.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I am going to punt that.

19  
20 **DR. LORENZEN:** Dr. Powers did not provide a written reason for  
21 his resignation.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Hang on. I think Carrie wants to jump in on  
24 this one, Dr. Lorenzen. Go ahead, Carrie.

25  
26 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Dr.  
27 Frazer stepped away for just a moment, and so I will fill in.  
28 That is correct that we did not receive an explanation of the  
29 resignation in writing, but just that he was resigning effective  
30 immediately. I did, after we had a chance to call him, send  
31 that information to the council, after we sent it to the SSC.

32  
33 **DR. STUNZ:** To that point, Madam Chairwoman?

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sure.

36  
37 **DR. STUNZ:** Because the reason that our team, and myself as a  
38 councilman, are concerned with that is, one, that that was a  
39 curious resignation, but, right out of the gate, the Chairman  
40 had pointed out, and it's on the record, if you want to review  
41 the minutes, and he certainly guided, steered, this conversation  
42 for the SSC portion of this review that he had not read the  
43 report.

44  
45 Well, that, obviously, is pretty concerning for a project of  
46 this magnitude, and there are many implications in this fishery,  
47 and so I had to go back myself to make sure that I heard that  
48 correct in the minutes, but it's clearly there, and so that is

1 kind of concerning, when you're making key decisions like that,  
2 but it was clear, at least to our team, that many are not  
3 understanding the report, and maybe that's because some have not  
4 fully read it.

5  
6 **DR. LORENZEN:** Can I just comment briefly? Dr. Powers made a  
7 closing statement to the review that is available in the  
8 minutes, and that pretty much, I think, explains his concerns  
9 and essentially the reasons for his subsequent resignation, and  
10 so I would urge you to look at that statement, if you would like  
11 more explanation. Thank you.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Greg, did you have other questions?

14  
15 **DR. STUNZ:** Well, I will hold off for now.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Sounds good. I am going to recognize --  
18 I think Carrie is already done. Kevin, you're up.

19  
20 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Dr. Stunz brought up  
21 one or two of my questions, or comments, but I just wanted to  
22 reiterate what he said, that that was what I heard and gathered  
23 from the report, was this was a very conservative point  
24 estimate. Yes, there were questions about the variance and the  
25 confidence intervals and such of the data, and it was a multi-  
26 state, and multi-group by state, or groups within a state, using  
27 different gears and different sampling strategies, and so there  
28 are going to probably be some differences there, or something  
29 lacking.

30  
31 Again, I just wanted to stress that it was a conservative point  
32 estimate, and just looking ahead, as we try to talk about some  
33 of these issues that we're dealing with, that the stock is  
34 probably in a little bit better condition than we think, and so  
35 I just wanted to make that point.

36  
37 Just another thing about some of the makeup of the group and  
38 such is that one of the sampling groups dropped out, and I  
39 didn't hear much discussion as to why a group dropped out of the  
40 sampling and another state had to come in and pick up the  
41 sampling, or they tried to fill in holes in the data, and so,  
42 anyways, that's all. Thank you.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Kevin. I am going to move  
45 down the list here, and so next we have J.D.

46  
47 **MR. J.D. DUGAS:** Thank you, ma'am. I have a couple of  
48 questions, and I'm not sure who to direct them to, but I am

1 wondering how many -- On the Great Red Snapper Count, how many  
2 sites were sampled versus the longline sampling sites, and I  
3 don't know if that's a question for Clay or Greg, and it's a  
4 two-part question. Thank you.

5  
6 **DR. STUNZ:** Madam Chairwoman, when you're ready, I can answer  
7 that question for the snapper component, the Snapper Count  
8 component.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sure. Go ahead, Greg.

11  
12 **DR. STUNZ:** Well, I think, J.D., you're referring to the  
13 uncharacterized bottom, or what we're calling the open bottom,  
14 which really isn't open, that we have discussed, and there is  
15 things out there that hold red snapper. For that area, it  
16 represents about 100,000 square miles of the shelf of the Gulf  
17 of Mexico, and so it's a huge area, and don't get me wrong, and  
18 so, had we known there would be that many fish out there, we  
19 would have sampled a lot more in that area, but we didn't know  
20 that going in.

21  
22 Even then, you could never -- Even for \$12 million, or \$120  
23 million, you could not cover that vast of an area as much as I  
24 think anyone would like, or a pure statistician might prefer,  
25 and it's just not possible, but, within that area, from Key West  
26 all the way to Brownsville, Texas, we had 9,400, or something  
27 like that, roughly. It was roughly around 9,500 samples on that  
28 open bottom. Now, that's still a small percentage of it, but  
29 9,000 samples is a heck of a lot of samples, given the nature  
30 and work that it takes to conduct research in that area.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Greg. Clay, I don't know if you want  
33 to respond to the bottom longline question or come back to that  
34 once we get into that part of the discussion, and I will leave  
35 that up to you. If you have that handy, then go ahead and chime  
36 in. I see your hand is up. Clay, is it to that?

37  
38 **DR. CLAY PORCH:** We make several hundred sets with the longline  
39 fishery, but keep in mind that you can't compare the sample size  
40 between the Great Red Snapper Count and the longline, because  
41 they're different types of gear that they're putting on the  
42 bottom, and it depends on how you characterize the video  
43 transects that they're making and whether you split them up in  
44 pieces or what have you, but it's different types of gear.

45  
46 The key point is that the longline survey is a time series, and  
47 so we've been doing it for something like thirty years, and so  
48 you can see the time trends, and one of the things that the SSC

1 considered is that very thing, that it actually gets you time  
2 trends of abundance, and I think the status of the longline  
3 survey, as an index of red snapper abundance, really went way up  
4 in the estimation of the SSC, because of the Great Red Snapper  
5 Count.

6  
7 Remember that the stock assessment that we did was based on  
8 catch information that, of course, comes from where the fishery  
9 operates, which is mostly on artificial reefs and high-relief  
10 natural relief. If you look at the estimates from the Great Red  
11 Snapper Count and those areas, they actually match up really  
12 well with the stock assessment.

13  
14 The new thing was that we found out that most of the red snapper  
15 actually live on that uncharacterized bottom, and that's exactly  
16 where the longline survey goes, and so I think that the SSC felt  
17 that the longline survey gave a pretty good picture of the  
18 trends for the majority of the red snapper population, and so  
19 that's why they used it in terms of setting the ABC.

20  
21 I guess the other thing that I would add to this, in support of  
22 the logic that the SSC used, is that they were concerned about  
23 what has happened to the red snapper population since the Great  
24 Red Snapper Count. Remember that the Great Red Snapper Count  
25 does not give you an idea of stock status. It gives you an idea  
26 of the absolute abundance, but, during the SSC, they did talk  
27 about the fact that we don't have a survey in 2020, because of  
28 COVID-19. We did -- We managed to get out there, but we didn't  
29 sample enough to give a valid index of abundance.

30  
31 Then there was a fair amount of testimony from state scientists,  
32 and some of the independent scientists, that they see some  
33 concerns, especially in the eastern Gulf, in terms of trends of  
34 abundance, and so I think the SSC used a different logic to  
35 generate the OFL and the ABC, the OFL being based on the Great  
36 Red Snapper Count, but they were concerned about the uncertainty  
37 issues raised and some potentially concerning recent trends in  
38 abundance, plus the fact that we don't know what happened  
39 exactly in 2020, and so they elected to use the bottom longline  
40 survey to scale the previous ABC, and that's where they came up  
41 with the 15.4 million pounds. I think I characterized that  
42 accurately, but, Kai, you may want to weigh-in.

43  
44 **DR. LORENZEN:** That is accurate. Obviously, we have another  
45 presentation and a whole other presentation on that coming up.

46  
47 **DR. PORCH:** Okay.

1 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Yes, and so we're divulging a little bit and  
2 getting a little bit ahead of ourselves, and so, for now, let's  
3 ask questions of the presentation in front of us for Kai, and  
4 then we're going to get into the interim analyses and catch  
5 recommendations in the next presentation that Kai provides us.  
6 J.D., do you have other questions on this presentation?

7  
8 **MR. DUGAS:** No, ma'am. Thank you.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. I'm going to move on down the list then.  
11 Troy Williamson.

12  
13 **MR. TROY WILLIAMSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am unclear as  
14 to a couple of responses. We heard a definite number from Greg,  
15 regarding the sampling size on the uncharacterized bottom, and I  
16 have two questions, I guess, and I don't know who to direct  
17 these two, and I didn't hear an accurate number for sampling  
18 sites for the bottom longline survey, similar to the Great Red  
19 Snapper Count, and, number two, the abundance, gross abundance,  
20 number for the Great Red Snapper Count was over 100 million, if  
21 I recall correctly, and I don't think we've had a number,  
22 similar number, that was produced by the bottom longline survey,  
23 and could someone provide that? That's all I have.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Troy. I am going to maybe look to Clay  
26 for that.

27  
28 **DR. PORCH:** I was going to say, if you want me to weigh-in now,  
29 I can. Again, the longline survey does not give an absolute  
30 abundance estimate. It gives trends in abundance over time.  
31 It's a relative index of abundance, and it's not designed to try  
32 and get an absolute abundance estimate.

33  
34 That's where the Great Red Snapper Count is unique and what  
35 makes it a landmark type of study, in that it does attempt to  
36 estimate the total number of fish, but the longline survey is a  
37 time series, and, again, I can get back to you on the exact  
38 number of samples, but remember the number of samples are not  
39 comparable, because it's a different type of gear.

40  
41 One is a longline survey, and you're laying the longline down on  
42 the bottom and catching fish and looking at catch rates. The  
43 Great Red Snapper Count relied heavily on towed video cameras,  
44 and so it's a completely different type of gear, and you cannot  
45 compare sample sizes.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Clay. Andy.



1 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Martha. Certainly I'll have some  
2 comments when we get to the catch analysis, but I did want to  
3 first thank Kai for presenting to us and the SSC's work on this.  
4 I know you had a long week, a few weeks ago, reviewing the Great  
5 Red Snapper Count, and, obviously, the catch advice.

6  
7 Greg led earlier with some comments about the scientific process  
8 and really being pleased with, obviously, what came from the  
9 review, and certainly I think that also is kind of a part of  
10 kind of the decision-making that the SSC was basing their work  
11 on during that week, and one of the things that I wanted to ask  
12 you, Kai, is, specifically, kind of from a scientific process  
13 standpoint, we heard a lot about kind of the rushed nature of  
14 the Great Red Snapper Count review and how that's been funneled  
15 into management advice, and so I would be curious to kind of  
16 hear, from your perspective, how this could have been done  
17 better.

18  
19 Then, more importantly, kind of how you see this playing out  
20 going forward, and I know you alluded to that some in your  
21 conclusions, but, from my sense, the SSC will take this up and  
22 look at Greg's analysis, the team's analysis, at some later  
23 date, and potentially can inform management advice going  
24 forward, in addition to potentially a research stock assessment,  
25 and so if you kind of respond to that, in terms of kind of the  
26 scientific process and then next steps, as you see it from the  
27 SSC's view.

28  
29 **DR. LORENZEN:** I guess that's a multipart question, and let me  
30 start with the scientific process. Overall, what we have done  
31 mirrors what we would normally do with this sort of information,  
32 and I want to say that also to the many members of the public  
33 that I know that are listening and who may not have watched up  
34 take apart a stock assessment before, but we do that on a very  
35 regular basis with similar rigor.

36  
37 Usually, this process basically rolls out over a much longer  
38 period of time, and so we would have a data workshop that is  
39 just looking at data issues, and we would have an assessment  
40 workshop that is looking at the calculations and the estimations  
41 and so on, and then, usually, there would be a review workshop,  
42 where a different set of eyes looks at everything that has been  
43 done before, and a lot of these workshops actually are not a  
44 single occurrence, but they take place over several weeks or  
45 months, and panel members have questions, and they ask the  
46 investigators to make changes, and the investigators come back,  
47 and then we look at that again.

1 Sometimes we -- Well, usually, we end up getting something that  
2 we consider useful and take it forward into management advice.  
3 Sometimes it turns out that there's no way of really getting to  
4 something of the quality that we need, and we abandon those  
5 things, and so we have, over the last few years, abandoned  
6 several stock assessments, because it became clear that there  
7 was no way forward.

8  
9 This is a normal process, and, indeed, I think what was  
10 different was, overall, the rash nature of it and the fact that  
11 a lot of the detailed information only really became available  
12 at the workshop, rather than a long time before then, as is  
13 usually the case, or, if it's not there, we would postpone that  
14 discussion until it's provided, and so the time scale -- I would  
15 also say that -- I would characterize it as pressure.

16  
17 I think there was a lot of pressure on the SSC, and not only to  
18 undertake this in a very expedited fashion, but it was also  
19 clear that there were very strong expectations that this would  
20 result in a substantial increase in catch, and I would note, as  
21 one point of concern from my side, for example, the fact that  
22 the outreach contained about this number was made right the week  
23 before the SSC had a chance to actually review the information.

24  
25 That's not how we usually do it, and we review all of this  
26 information and so on, and then, eventually, we get to the  
27 decision, and all of this -- By the way, this is a little  
28 different from the normal scientific peer-review process that  
29 Dr. Stunz alluded to, in that usually we have anonymous  
30 reviewers and so on, and our reviews, for management purposes,  
31 are extremely transparent, and so we have named people in the  
32 room, and we record all their comments and so on, and it's very  
33 transparent, but usually it happens over a much longer time  
34 period.

35  
36 I think, in spite of all those issues, we have conducted a  
37 thorough review, and I think, if we had more time in the usual  
38 way, probably the end result, which are the catch level  
39 recommendations that we'll come to in the next section, might  
40 have been a little more coherent, I will discuss how we ended up  
41 where we ended up in that section.

42  
43 Let me answer your other question, which was what's the way  
44 forward for that Great Red Snapper Count information, and it's  
45 already -- Other than saying, yes, we will look at that for the  
46 sort of interim advice at this stage, we have not passed any  
47 further judgment on it.

1 I know this information is already being considered for  
2 inclusion into SEDAR 74, the research track assessment for Gulf  
3 red snapper, and I think what we will see is, instead of those  
4 point estimates that were bantered around, we will see that this  
5 information will be integrated into the analysis at a much more  
6 detailed level, and so there will be -- The count information  
7 from different places and so on will be used in the assessment,  
8 to improve the assessment, and that's really what needs to  
9 happen, I think, is that integration, and I will expand on that  
10 in my next presentation.

11  
12 It's that integration of the Great Red Snapper Count information  
13 with information that we already have about how the fishery  
14 behaves, and so I think that's what needs to happen, and that's  
15 what will happen, and I'm sure that it will greatly improve our  
16 understanding of red snapper population dynamics and the red  
17 snapper population dynamics and fisheries.

18  
19 As I have the floor, I just wanted to comment on a couple of  
20 points that were brought up in questions, and one was about the  
21 fact that the committee said that the point estimates, at least  
22 for the eastern Gulf, were likely to be an unbiased point  
23 estimate, but that the variance would be much larger, and it's  
24 correct, of course, that that means that, yes, the point  
25 estimate stays the same, but the point estimate really is only  
26 the central tendency in that sea of uncertainties.

27  
28 To say that, well, the point estimate remains the same, but  
29 they're saying the variance is a lot larger, it's sort of not  
30 the right sense, but it says that we actually are very uncertain  
31 about how many red snapper there are, and the point estimate is  
32 just the middle in that big band of uncertainty, and so, yes,  
33 the point estimate hasn't changed, but it does have implications  
34 when we say that the variance is actually a lot larger than it  
35 was originally reported.

36  
37 The second part concerns the question of it being an overall  
38 underestimate, and this is interesting, and I think that  
39 accurately reflects, probably, the majority view on the SSC,  
40 although we haven't had a lot of time to discuss that, and, if  
41 you watched what we were doing, the eventual motion actually  
42 started by saying that it was likely an underestimate in the  
43 western Gulf, and that was changed by a friendly amendment,  
44 based on comments by -- I can't remember who it was who said  
45 that they weren't that sure that it really was an underestimate.  
46 So, in order to be able to move it forward, we changed it from  
47 likely an underestimate to particularly uncertain.

1 I would say that's accurate, and the reason is that there are  
2 many decisions that are made in the analyses of these data, and  
3 a lot of those were made in the spirit of being conservative,  
4 and that's absolutely correct.

5  
6 There are other decisions that we haven't been able to really  
7 review, and those may be biasing the estimates upwards or  
8 downwards, and so some of the results, for example, from the  
9 change in the survey practice, from the survey design, and so,  
10 if you have a design and you follow it completely, then those  
11 questions don't arise, but, if you change it, then it really  
12 matters why you changed it and how you changed it, and even the  
13 little details matter, how you choose what to do.

14  
15 Those questions is what a very strict design is trying to avoid,  
16 and then there are other decisions that we -- Say, if you  
17 remember the stratification, the probability of current  
18 stratification that is done in the survey, and that's based on a  
19 continuous output of a model that describes the probability of  
20 occurrence, but that is then chopped up into three categories of  
21 low, medium, and high abundance, and, quite likely, exactly how  
22 you chop that up will make a difference for the estimates,  
23 because it influences how samples are combined into strata.

24  
25 That can be explored, and one of the consultants brought that  
26 up, but we haven't been able to see that information, for  
27 example, and so the bottom line there is that we did not feel  
28 comfortable to make a general statement that it was an  
29 underestimate, and so we opted for highly uncertain. Thank you.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Dr. Lorenzen. We have got a number of  
32 hands up, and so, if you don't mind, since you've got the bottom  
33 line out there, I am going to move through the queue. I am  
34 going to try to work us towards our break at 11:15, and then  
35 we'll see where we are at that point. Kevin, your hand is up?

36  
37 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I wanted -- Even though  
38 I've already spoken regarding this topic, I want to thank the  
39 SSC, and I want to thank the independent reviewers for the work  
40 and the time that they put in, not only during the week of the  
41 SSC meeting, but also beforehand.

42  
43 I mean, a 315-page report, thereabouts, was dated March 1, and  
44 so people had a month, basically, to go through it, and so I was  
45 impressed with the level of detail that the independent  
46 reviewers brought and a lot of the discussion that was had  
47 during the SSC meeting about a variety of issues, related not  
48 only to the sampling, but also to the concerns for variance.

1  
2 It's good that Andy asked the question about how the SSC members  
3 -- What their frame of mind was as they deliberated and  
4 discussed the Great Red Snapper Count, and Dr. Lorenzen kind of  
5 affirmed that there was some pressure there, and it seemed like  
6 things -- That there needed to be some sort of result for  
7 management, and that there are lots of questions yet to be  
8 answered and clarified and to make people more comfortable with  
9 the results of the Great Red Snapper Count.

10  
11 A couple of things that I think we ought to start thinking  
12 about, if that in fact is what the council needs or wants, is a  
13 more thorough analysis and give the SSC members more time, and  
14 we ought to think about that.

15  
16 I took away one comment that one of the independent reviewers  
17 had, Dr. Eggleston, that he was impressed that red snapper  
18 abundance was basically 50 percent across the region, and I  
19 would be curious to know what the abundance is for other snapper  
20 species throughout the Atlantic Basin, because it's a comment  
21 that I have made, based on my little bit of knowledge, at least  
22 here in the northern Gulf of Mexico, is that snapper are just  
23 different.

24  
25 They are different snapper than other snapper in this particular  
26 geographic location, located on what was once referred to as the  
27 fertile crescent, and we have lots of potential here in the  
28 waters here in the northern Gulf of Mexico, and I think red  
29 snapper are taking prime advantage of that.

30  
31 Then, also, in this review, I think it would be important for  
32 that point estimate, in addition to other point estimates that  
33 could be derived with the federal data, to be compared to what  
34 the state data shows, and I think there's lots of information  
35 that, if you take one data stream and look at the results and  
36 compare it to the Great Red Snapper Count information, as you  
37 look at the different regions, you can then do the same analysis  
38 and compare those results using just the state data, and to see  
39 how that then compares to the population estimate off of each  
40 state and then look at trends in each of those data streams, as  
41 far as catch rates, as far as size composition and age  
42 composition and all of those things.

43  
44 I think that would all be very valuable, but that takes time to  
45 do that, and then just to follow-up, and I know it's on our  
46 agenda item, but Dr. Porch has provided some comments to  
47 providing the council with some information about the bottom  
48 longline survey. If he could also then provide the number of

1 sets by year and region that the bottom longline survey was  
2 conducted, that would be very helpful. Thank you.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Kevin, and I will note, just for the  
5 committee, since this keeps coming up, and, of course, we'll get  
6 to it later, but there are background reports along with Kai's  
7 presentation, and I believe a lot of the information that people  
8 are asking for, relative to the bottom longline survey, are  
9 contained in Table 2 of Tab B, Number 7(b). We will discuss  
10 that later, once we get to that agenda item, but just for those  
11 that maybe wanted to hunt and look for that information. I am  
12 just going to go to Greg.

13  
14 **DR. STUNZ:** Thank you, Madam Chair. This will be the last  
15 comment that I make, but I want to make sure, because it was  
16 maybe not clear at our last council meeting, and this one as  
17 well, but to Dr. Lorenzen's comment.

18  
19 With this Great Red Snapper Count, we're really on two tracks.  
20 Keep in mind we're not the Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
21 stock assessment team, and we're a group of independent  
22 scientists, and, while we're happy to facilitate council needs  
23 on this interim basis, in terms of meeting some real dire  
24 management needs that we're considering at this meeting this  
25 week, we're not necessarily responsible to the council like  
26 that.

27  
28 We're responsible to our funding agency and the appropriations,  
29 and we're guided by those sponsors timelines, in terms of when  
30 we finish the report, when do we outreach to the public and that  
31 sort of thing, and so it's two independent tracks, and so I want  
32 to make sure that that's very clear.

33  
34 It was interesting when Dr. Lorenzen brought up the pressure and  
35 expectation, and so this is kind of a tough comment, but it's  
36 something that I want to make, based on an email that's  
37 circulating starting late last evening, the SSC, that is our  
38 governing sort of independent advisory body to give us  
39 scientific advice to this council, but, in the email, Dr.  
40 Lorenzen, you put that -- This was in reference, obviously, to  
41 the Great Red Snapper Count, but we all know that there's an  
42 amberjack and a South Atlantic count that's very similar going  
43 on right now, but you had put that there's a need to  
44 proactively, meaning before the studies begin, to manage  
45 congressional, principal investigators, and managers  
46 expectations, and you agreed with the context of that.

47  
48 I guess the reason I'm bringing that up is that's sort of

1 concerning, from a scientific body that is supposed to be an  
2 independent advisory to the council and not be influenced by  
3 pressures and expectations and that sort of thing, and so, but  
4 to proactively manage expectations ahead of the science is about  
5 as far from science as we get, in the sense that's kind of like  
6 saying, well, we're going to manage expectations that COVID  
7 vaccines don't work prior to the COVID vaccine studies being  
8 done, and that's just sort of out of place.

9  
10 I guess I wanted to bring that up, because I think it's maybe a  
11 discussion, a broader discussion, that the council needs to  
12 have, in the sense that we need objective, independent advice on  
13 what's at-hand, but not management of expectations prior to  
14 studies that, in some cases, have not even started or are just  
15 in the very beginning phases.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. I am going to move down the list  
18 and go to John Sanchez.

19  
20 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Thank you, Madam Chair. As a follow-up to  
21 those comments, I have always viewed the SSC as hallowed ground,  
22 a place where scientists can gather in an objective forum and  
23 review data and offer what turns out to end up being the best  
24 scientific information available.

25  
26 That information is in fact the cornerstone of this management  
27 process, and it's a place -- It benefits the fish, which don't  
28 have a seat at the table, and I think the SSC should be allowed  
29 to conduct itself in an objective forum, and, yes, let's leave  
30 the politics out of it. The politics more appropriately belong  
31 in the council process, where we have appointed individuals.  
32 The scientists should be left alone to review their data, and  
33 the results are what they determine and what they are, with no  
34 pre-prescribed outcome.

35  
36 I want to say that I have the -- After working with Dr. Powers  
37 for thirty years, I have the utmost respect for him, and I want  
38 to thank him for his leadership on the SSC and his contributions  
39 and his service. I thank you all very much.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, John. Clay, you're up.

42  
43 **DR. PORCH:** Thank you, and I think you actually already made one  
44 of my points, in that the total number of longline samples is in  
45 that report in Tab B, and I think it's Report Number 7, and it  
46 fluctuates, from year to year, between 250 and about 120. I  
47 don't think we have it by region, but we can get that for you,  
48 and it could be circulated.

1  
2 The only other thing that I wanted to say was this -- Everybody  
3 really made a great effort to try and accommodate the results of  
4 the Great Red Snapper Count for the review and for the SSC  
5 deliberations, because it was on a very compressed time  
6 schedule, and we had an accelerated review.

7  
8 The data, the final data, weren't available until sometime in  
9 March, and so the people who had to put together the interim  
10 analyses had to work rather quickly, and, fortunately, they had  
11 been communicating with the Great Red Snapper Count folks all  
12 along, and they had a system in place so that they could deliver  
13 those estimates in time for the SSC to review it, but just keep  
14 in mind that everything was on a very compressed time schedule,  
15 because people wanted to accommodate the council, so they could  
16 possibly use this for management advice this season. Thank you.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Clay. Next, I have Dr.  
19 Frazer.

20  
21 **DR. FRAZER:** Thank you, Ms. Guyas. I want to apologize that I  
22 had to walk away earlier to take a phone call, but I wanted to  
23 take a minute to address a few of the comments that were raised  
24 when I walked away.

25  
26 The first one has to do with Joe Powers' resignation, and so  
27 everybody is on the same page. Joe did provide an email to me  
28 indicating his intent to resign, and that email was forwarded,  
29 just recently, to the council, but, prior to that, notification  
30 of his resignation was distributed to the group.

31  
32 When I received the email, I did call Dr. Powers and ask him to  
33 confirm that in fact that was his decision, and he confirmed  
34 that it was, and, at that point, we did provide, again, notice  
35 to the SSC regarding his decision.

36  
37 With regard to the comments about his reading the report, I have  
38 actually had an opportunity to review the audio transcript, and,  
39 in fact, it clearly indicates that Joe said "having read the  
40 report", and so it's clear to me that he read the report, and I  
41 know, for a fact, that he spent a considerable amount of time on  
42 it, and so I just wanted to assuage any concerns that in fact he  
43 was ill prepared or did not read the report, and he's always  
44 been a respectful member of the SSC. In fact, he has nearly  
45 forty years of service, and certainly I want to thank him for  
46 his service.

47  
48 The other thing I would like to ask people is this is clearly an



1 important issue that we're discussing here today, and one of the  
2 things that I have been extremely proud of, over the last  
3 several years, is the collegial manner and the way that we  
4 handle our business, and I would ask that, when questions are  
5 raised, we try to keep to answers to the point of the question,  
6 and I would ask that individuals try to be respectful of another  
7 moving forward, so we can move efficiently and professionally  
8 through this process. I will hand it back to you, Martha.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Great. Thanks, Tom. Next, I am going to go to  
11 Mr. Swindell.

12  
13 **MR. ED SWINDELL:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a quick  
14 question, and I think it may have been answered before, but I  
15 just want to clarify it in my mind, and is there any significant  
16 differences that were discovered in the Great Red Snapper Count  
17 as to the size of the fish in the uncharacterized area versus  
18 the size of the fish for the red snapper in the artificial and  
19 natural reef areas, and was this considered by the SSC in their  
20 deliberations? Thank you.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Part of that I feel like is a Greg  
23 question, and part of it is a Kai question, but Kai can probably  
24 answer both. Greg, do you want to speak to the Great Red  
25 Snapper Count?

26  
27 **DR. STUNZ:** That would be fine if you want me to, Madam Chair.  
28 In fact, Clay could probably answer that most appropriately, in  
29 terms of how they were integrated into that interim analysis,  
30 but we provided the Science Center with some size data for those  
31 fish.

32  
33 Generally, the fish on the uncharacterized bottom are in fact  
34 larger than fish from where the fishery occurs on artificial  
35 reefs and natural banks, although the main focus of the Snapper  
36 Count was not to do traditional age and growth studies, in the  
37 sense of generating that age composition, and our guidance was  
38 more towards counting the actual number of two-plus fish.

39  
40 However, subsequently, obviously, that's a very important  
41 parameter to know, and we clearly recommend, in the report,  
42 especially since discovering so many fish over the  
43 uncharacterized bottom that we weren't necessarily expecting,  
44 that more studies go out there and collect those fish and better  
45 characterize that age structure, but that's sort of a research  
46 recommendation, where more information is needed.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Greg.

1  
2 **MR. SWINDELL:** Madam Chair, may I respond?

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sure. Go ahead.

5  
6 **MR. SWINDELL:** Greg, from the -- Since the SSC looked at an  
7 east-west kind of scenario here, with this Great Red Snapper  
8 Count being better for one or the other side, was the size of  
9 the fish generally bigger in the east or the west  
10 uncharacterized areas? Is there any just general estimation on  
11 that?

12  
13 **DR. STUNZ:** Madam Chairman, to that point, if I may.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Yes.

16  
17 **DR. STUNZ:** Yes, in general, the fish are bigger in the western  
18 Gulf, although our studies show, just for the sake of argument,  
19 that it was roughly evenly split in the eastern versus western.  
20 The size patterns were not that at all, in terms of the biomass  
21 may hold up, although our job was not to calculate changes in  
22 biomass, but I can tell you that, as you get out to Florida,  
23 where the fishery is recovering and they're moving into areas  
24 where they had traditionally been, but not for many decades,  
25 it's being colonized by a higher abundance of small fish.

26  
27 In those regions, in the eastern Gulf, we had to adjust some of  
28 our numbers to account for that age that they recruit to age-  
29 two, and the size can be a little bit problematic, because  
30 there's a wide range that they can do that. That was very  
31 characteristic of the eastern Gulf, especially in Florida, where  
32 not so much in the western Gulf, where they typically were much  
33 larger fish.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Greg. Anything else, Ed? All right.  
36 Let's move on to Ms. Bosarge.

37  
38 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to take a  
39 step back for a second, and we're getting into a lot of the  
40 details, which is good, but I think maybe there's a larger  
41 perspective that was helpful, to me at least, as I listened to  
42 that meeting, and, before I get to that, I think I should say  
43 thank you to Greg and his team and to the SSC and to staff and  
44 all the reviewers, the independent reviewers.

45  
46 That was quite an undertaking to put that meeting together, and  
47 I really thought, as I listened to it, and the information was  
48 presented, there was a scientific process that took place, and

1 everyone was very respectful and asking some tough questions,  
2 but respectful, and getting good answers, and so I appreciated  
3 that.

4  
5 It was very similar to what happens when we review a Science  
6 Center, or federal, NMFS stock assessment, and the SSC --  
7 Honestly, they put their stock assessment scientists through  
8 their paces. If I was one of those stock assessment scientists  
9 that worked at the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, I would  
10 probably go home and cry at night, but they have pretty thick  
11 skin, and they know that it's all in the name of good science,  
12 and so I appreciate that.

13  
14 The analogy that I heard during the SSC meeting really helped me  
15 to take the Great Red Snapper Count and the multitude of stock  
16 assessments that we've had on red snapper and the actual fishery  
17 itself and what I see and what I hear from the fishermen and put  
18 it all together and understand it as one picture, and that was  
19 this analogy to a car, of all things.

20  
21 The analogy went that we have this population of red snapper,  
22 and, over the years, we have kind of -- If it was a car, we see  
23 how it handles, and we've been managing it and watching it  
24 scientifically for a while, and we can tell kind of how it  
25 corners and how it drives, how it does this and does that, and  
26 maybe we might say that sometimes it seems a little sluggish,  
27 right? If it was a car, it's a little sluggish.

28  
29 Then now we have this realization, after we've driven this --  
30 Let's call it rental car, and we've driven this rental car for a  
31 couple of days, and we've gotten used to how it handles, and we  
32 go, you know, let me look under the hood of this thing, and so  
33 you pop the hood, and you say, man, that's a big engine. Holy  
34 cow, look at that thing.

35  
36 Then you think to yourself, but this thing is sluggish. Well,  
37 that big engine that you just saw kind of helps you understand  
38 how that car is handling. It's sluggish, even though it has  
39 this big engine. Well, that's because, oh, the car must be  
40 really heavy. Well, it is. God, it's a big dually truck that  
41 you've been driving, right, and so it really helped me to  
42 understand how to put all these pieces together.

43  
44 We have this population of red snapper that we've been fishing  
45 on for many, many, many years. I mean, over a hundred years,  
46 right, and we have fished that population down during those  
47 times, right, and we have seen how long it takes to fish it  
48 down, and how does it bounce back, how does it recover, what

1 takes it down again, and I felt like this Great Red Snapper  
2 Count was really finally that look under the hood, and it said,  
3 wow, there is this big population of red snapper out there, and  
4 it helped me understand why that population of snapper, why that  
5 car, has been handling the way it's been handling all these  
6 years.

7  
8 I have to take into account that I also can see past history of  
9 what it takes to fish it down, and so that -- I thought that  
10 really brought everything together, and so I just thought I  
11 would do my best to give the rest of the people in our meeting  
12 that viewpoint, and hopefully I summarized it well, but, anyway,  
13 there it is, and hopefully that helps others as it did me.  
14 Thanks.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Leann. I remember that analogy from  
17 the meeting, too. I see Robin's hand, and then we're going to  
18 take a break, because we're coming up to our break, and so,  
19 Robin, you've got the last word here.

20  
21 **MR. ROBIN RIECHERS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, like  
22 Leann just did, I want to thank all the participants of the  
23 workshop, from Greg's team and all of those folks to the SSC,  
24 the reviewers, the independent reviewers, and the people who did  
25 a lot of work getting to that point, all very important stuff,  
26 and we certainly appreciate that effort.

27  
28 I think it was Dr. Porch, and it was either Kai or Dr. Porch,  
29 and I may not be recalling, but I think it was Dr. Porch who  
30 made the statement about some reviewers, and I certainly  
31 understand the discussions regarding the uncertainty and those  
32 discussions, and maybe somewhat the lack of non-comparability  
33 between bottom longline and the other studies.

34  
35 I think we can maybe look at comparison of at least bottom that  
36 was touched in those different transects, and so there may be  
37 some ability to at least make some comparisons, when we think  
38 about the uncertainty surrounding those two types of approaches,  
39 but I guess, more importantly, I heard some discussions about  
40 that some of the reviewers and the SSC members having concerns  
41 about what has happened since the time of the Great Red Snapper  
42 Count.

43  
44 I am assuming then that that really speaks to a 2020 timeframe,  
45 and the beginning of this timeframe, and I guess I'm trying to  
46 dig in, and I'm not asking for people to read other people's  
47 minds here, and it may have been just statements or some  
48 concerns, but I'm kind of wondering whether there was some data,

1 or whether it was some of the data that fed into the assessment,  
2 or was it our bottom longline data, or what data would have led  
3 people to have those concerns, and if there's anything there  
4 that we should also be taking a look at.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Robin. I think we'll actually get to  
7 that in our next set of agenda items, when we go through the  
8 catch analyses.

9  
10 **MR. RIECHERS:** Okay.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Kai, I see your hand is up. Was it to a point  
13 that somebody made?

14  
15 **DR. LORENZEN:** Yes, and I wanted to respond to something that  
16 Dr. Stunz said a little while ago that we passed through an  
17 email that's going around, and I don't know which email he  
18 means, but I suspect he's referring to a comment that I made to  
19 the steering committee of not the Great Red Snapper, but the  
20 Great Amberjack Research Project, and it was about integrating  
21 some of those projects that are happening somewhat, as Dr. Stunz  
22 pointed out, outside the usual way of doing -- You know,  
23 collecting fisheries management information and analyzing it,  
24 and that there should be, earlier on in those projects, that  
25 integration should be given consideration.

26  
27 I think, in particular, I want to point out that the comment I  
28 made about managing expectations was meant in the exact opposite  
29 way of Dr. Stunz stated. It's managing expectations as in not  
30 putting out expectation that research projects will lead to  
31 particular changes, changes in particular directions, and so  
32 it's the exact opposite of spreading misinformation, and I just  
33 wanted to make that very clear, that it's really about being  
34 careful not to give people any particular expectations of what  
35 the results of a study might be or how they would be used.  
36 Thank you.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. 10-4. Thanks, Kai. All right.  
39 Let's take that break. We're about on time at this point, and  
40 we'll come back at 11:30, and, at that point, we'll get into the  
41 catch analyses, and we'll pass it back to Kai for his next  
42 presentation. Thanks, everybody.

43  
44 **MR. RINDONE:** Martha, you were breaking up a little bit for us  
45 there, and we're just trying to make sure that -- We're trying  
46 to identify where the audio gap is, if it's between us or you.  
47 From what I think I heard you say, you were saying it was time  
48 to take a break?

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Yes, let's take a break until 11:30.

3  
4 **MR. RINDONE:** I think Tom wants to jump in real quick, before we  
5 do that.

6  
7 **DR. FRAZER:** Thank you, Martha. We are in fact going to take a  
8 break, and we will reconvene at 11:30, and I just want to remind  
9 folks that, when they come back, we have a fairly lengthy and  
10 aggressive agenda, and if we can try our very best to keep our  
11 comments and questioning appropriately focused, and I think that  
12 would be to the best benefit of the group. Thank you. See you  
13 at 11:30.

14  
15 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Let's move into I guess Part 2 of Kai's  
18 presentation regarding the interim analysis and catch advice,  
19 and so just one note. It's 11:39 now, and we will stop at  
20 12:30, no matter where we are.

21  
22 **MR. RINDONE:** Ms. Guyas, maybe we should go through the scope of  
23 work for this item first, because this does bring us to the next  
24 agenda item, which is the Final Action Item for the Framework  
25 Action to Modify the Annual Catch Limits for Gulf Red Snapper.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. We can do that first.

28  
29 **FINAL ACTION: FRAMEWORK ACTION: MODIFICATION OF ANNUAL CATCH**  
30 **LIMITS FOR GULF OF MEXICO RED SNAPPER**

31  
32 **MR. RINDONE:** Dr. Lorenzen's presentation falls underneath this  
33 agenda item, and, as we stated, at its previous meeting, the  
34 council had directed staff to start a new framework action to  
35 modify red snapper OFLs, ABCs, ACLs, and ACTs, and this  
36 framework action uses the catch advice from the SSC's  
37 March/April 2021 meeting, and council staff will present this  
38 information to the committee to consider after Dr. Lorenzen  
39 walks you guys through the SSC's catch recommendation.

40  
41 You guys will hear a summary also of the written public comment  
42 received and be able to review the codified text, which, right  
43 now, because there aren't any preferred alternatives, it's  
44 what's currently codified for the catch limits. If you guys are  
45 prepared to do so, you can select a preferred alternative, and,  
46 if you further consider it appropriate, you can recommend that  
47 the council ask the Secretary to implement these management  
48 measures. Madam Chair.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks, Ryan. Let's pass it back to Kai  
3 for his presentation, and then we'll take questions, and I  
4 suspect that's going to take us to lunch at 12:30, but, Kai, I  
5 will turn it over to you.  
6

7 **SSC REVIEW OF THE RED SNAPPER CATCH ANALYSIS**  
8

9 **DR. LORENZEN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. This is the review, the  
10 SSC review, of the GRSC-informed catch analysis and interim  
11 analysis. The setting here was that all SSC members were now  
12 eligible to participate and vote, and so the co-PIs of the Great  
13 Red Snapper Count participated, and I think one or two chose to  
14 abstain from the final motion, but they were not asked to.  
15

16 These are agenda items directly from the SSC briefing book, so  
17 to speak, and so we were presented with two separate items, one  
18 a review of the GRSC-informed catch analysis and, secondly, a  
19 review of the red snapper interim analysis based on the NMFS  
20 bottom longline, and then there's a discussion about those two.  
21

22 These were, essentially, originally separate items, and, in a  
23 way, Leann has stolen my thunder here, by restating the analogy  
24 that I used in the SSC meeting, and we really need to sort of  
25 consider, together, what we have in the Great Red Snapper Count  
26 and the information that we already have about this fishery, and  
27 so the analogy, as she stated, is really you drive the car, you  
28 learn how it drives, and that's your driving experience.  
29

30 Then you look under the hood, and you see it's got a bigger  
31 engine than you thought, and that basically forces you to  
32 recalibrate some of your ideas about that car, and so, if the  
33 car is kind of sluggish in accelerating, and you thought, well,  
34 it doesn't have a big very engine, now you know it has a big  
35 engine, and probably it's quite heavy, and that's why it's still  
36 not really quick in accelerating, and so you have to recalibrate  
37 your understanding of the vehicle, but you, obviously, have to  
38 be aware that you're still driving the same vehicle, and so just  
39 knowing that it has a bigger engine will not allow you to  
40 suddenly accelerate through an intersection much faster than  
41 before. In fact, if you tried that, you would probably be dead.  
42

43 It also -- Once you have done that recalibration, even though  
44 that will not really affect how the car will operate under the  
45 conditions that you have previously driven it under, it may open  
46 new options, and so, for example, if you know you have a big  
47 engine and a heavy car, you can trailer a big boat, and that's  
48 cool, and so you didn't know that before, and now you do, and

1 you can go and buy yourself a big boat and pull it to the boat  
2 ramp, and so it can create new opportunities, but you have to  
3 understand those opportunities, and you have to go and actually  
4 buy that boat, in order to take advantage of it, and I will come  
5 back to that, because that's also an important aspect of that  
6 analogy.

7  
8 Now I want to translate that back to the fisheries world, and so  
9 the situation we're in here is we have that driving experience,  
10 and so we have extensive information already on the red snapper  
11 fishery. We know its historical pattern of depletion and  
12 recovery after management intervention, and we have a lot of  
13 history information and so on.

14  
15 Much of that information is really synthesized in the stock  
16 assessment, and, for the first time now, we have something new  
17 and amazing, and that's an absolute abundance estimate. That  
18 estimate, in itself, doesn't tell us how to manage the fishery,  
19 just as knowing how big your engine is doesn't enable you to  
20 drive the car.

21  
22 We have to basically combine that information with other  
23 information, in particular in order to actually get management  
24 advice, and, in a sense, the big question is not how many fish  
25 there are, but how many fish you can sustainably take, and so  
26 you need some way of assessing what fraction of that abundance  
27 that you think there is can be sustainably harvested. Much of  
28 the information we need to get to that point is in other sources  
29 of information and, in particular, in the stock assessment.

30  
31 I have added a little bit here that I want to go through, and  
32 that's really to explain to you the situation that we're in and  
33 what it implies, and so this is a little bit of Fisheries  
34 Science 101. You will see that it's made-up data, and it's not  
35 an assessment of the Gulf red snapper fishery, although it has  
36 some elements that look similar, and so don't take the numbers  
37 for real or exactly how this behaves, but I want to explain,  
38 because I think this is important for everyone to get.

39  
40 Our driving experience, so to speak, consists of two things. We  
41 have catch data over a long period, and this was like forty  
42 years or so, and we have indices of abundance, and so those  
43 indices of abundance are things like the NMFS bottom longline  
44 and the headboat index indices and so on, and, basically, it's  
45 catch per unit effort or catch rate information that we  
46 interpret in terms of what it tells us about how the relative  
47 abundance of the stock changes over time.



1 Here, we have a pattern in that index of abundance that's a  
2 little bit -- That is a little bit like the pattern we've seen  
3 in Gulf red snapper, and so there's been a dramatic decline,  
4 followed by a recovery, and, as I said, this is made-up, and so  
5 don't take it for the real thing, but it's the principles that  
6 matter.

7  
8 That information we use to judge how the fishery responds to the  
9 levels of harvest that we take from it, and the stock assessment  
10 does that in a formal way, by basically modeling the dynamics of  
11 the stock -- What the stock assessment does is basically it  
12 reconstructs the population, and then it takes away what we know  
13 has been harvested, and it adds what we think is being produced  
14 by the stock, through say the stock-recruitment relationship and  
15 all those things, and it does that over time. Then it provides  
16 us with an estimate of the biomass, and it provides us with an  
17 understanding of the dynamics that we can then turn into a catch  
18 level recommendation.

19  
20 Usually, we don't have an absolute abundance estimate, and so we  
21 rely on the model estimating the abundance and all sorts of  
22 other parameters and then turn that into management advice.

23  
24 Now, we have our amazing new thing, and so we have that  
25 abundance estimate, and I have made it up here to be a little  
26 bit like the Great Red Snapper Count, and so the abundance  
27 estimate we have here is a lot larger than the abundance that  
28 was estimated in our stock assessment, and so then the question  
29 is how do we reconcile those two things.

30  
31 The easiest way to try and reconcile it is to basically fiddle  
32 with the model, and, for example, make the unexploited  
33 recruitment higher, and so we can do that. We can change  
34 something about the model to get it up to that level of the  
35 observed abundance, for example by assuming that the maximum  
36 recruitment is higher than we thought, and so that's what I have  
37 done here, but doing that in a partial way means that we now  
38 have a model that has some aspects that correspond to the new  
39 abundance estimate and some aspects that still correspond to our  
40 previous understanding.

41  
42 For example, if we have our original model, basically it told us  
43 that we have a small, highly-productive stock, and then, by just  
44 increasing the recruitment level, we're now saying that we have  
45 a large, highly-productive stock, and that's great, because you  
46 could fish the hell out of that, but the only problem is this no  
47 longer corresponds to what we understand about the fishery  
48 historically.

1  
2 In this case, for example, you can see that, when we do that,  
3 our model no longer -- What we have now is this sort of ad-hoc  
4 analysis that no longer corresponds to what we know about the  
5 behavior of the fishery. It also, in this case, and I have  
6 indicated sort of predicted MSY levels next to the catch  
7 information there, but it predicts that we can take a lot more  
8 from that stock, and the reason for that is that we're now  
9 assuming that we have a big, highly-productive stock, but that  
10 conflicts with our historical experience, because then we should  
11 not assume that big decline in the Gulf red snapper in the 1980s  
12 and 1990s.

13  
14 We need to wholly integrate this, and so we need to basically  
15 recalibrate this model to reflect both the new abundance  
16 estimate and our experience with the exploitation of the stock.

17  
18 That is what we're doing here, and, basically, we're allowing  
19 the model to change in multiple ways, and, in particular, in  
20 this case, the change would be that we adjust our expectations  
21 of the productivity of the stock downwards, because clearly we  
22 don't have a big, highly-productive stock, and we probably have  
23 a big, not-so-productive stock, and that's basically what the  
24 model will do, and then you end up with a model that fits the  
25 new abundance estimates and fits what we know about the history  
26 of the fishery.

27  
28 Also, in this case, you see, once we have that fully-integrated  
29 model, it would actually probably produce a lower estimate of  
30 MSY than the partially-ad-hoc-adjusted model, because we now  
31 understand that, although our stock is bigger than we thought,  
32 it's also less productive than we thought, and so what we end up  
33 with is basically a new estimate of management quantities that  
34 will likely be somewhat higher than the old one, but notice that  
35 it's unlikely to be massively higher than the old one.

36  
37 In particular, it would not be higher by as much as you might  
38 think if you just look at the difference in the abundance  
39 estimate, and that's exactly because we need to reconcile that  
40 with the information we have with our driving experience. Since  
41 you're adding to that big body of information, some of that  
42 change will be accounted for by recalibrating our understanding  
43 of what's going on.

44  
45 The other thing that's important to note here is that,  
46 throughout all of this, we rely a lot on the index of abundance,  
47 and the index of abundance, as a source of information, is data,  
48 and so it's not the assessment model, and it's some of the most

1 important and useful data that we have about the behavior of the  
2 fishery, and we would expect any of our new model insights to  
3 correspond reasonably to those data, and so that will not be  
4 affected by the rescaling of the modeling.

5  
6 I think that's enough as an introduction, but I think it's  
7 important to put this here, and, in fact, this is one of the  
8 things that I mean when I say that we need to manage  
9 expectations. I think we need to get across the basic ways in  
10 which these things work, and this is not in any way specific to  
11 the Great Red Snapper Count or the Gulf red snapper or anything,  
12 and this is just what happens when you integrate a new estimate  
13 of absolute abundance with a fishery for which you already have  
14 a lot of information. It will not make as big of a difference  
15 as you think just from the difference from the estimate.

16  
17 Now we get into the meat of the advice that we have here, and so  
18 there were two analyses that were presented by the Science  
19 Center, and one is catch advice based on the numbers of the  
20 Great Red Snapper Count, and so I want to emphasize here that we  
21 did look at this, and so we did carry the results of the Great  
22 Red Snapper Count forward into this consideration.

23  
24 The Southeast Fisheries Science Center was asked to produce this  
25 advice, and, basically, what they did was convert the Great Red  
26 Snapper Count estimates of age-two-plus fish into numbers-at-age  
27 by region, and they re-estimated the fishing mortality rate and  
28 used the numbers-at-age, F-at-age, and mean landed weight to  
29 estimate catch.

30  
31 There are several assumptions behind this analysis, and one of  
32 those, obviously, is that the Great Red Snapper Count point  
33 estimates of regional abundance are assumed to be correct as  
34 reported. Secondly, there is an underlying assumption here that  
35 the SEDAR 52 estimates, which are used for a lot of the other  
36 information that is needed here, and the overall abundance  
37 estimates correspond to abundance on structure, whereas  
38 abundance in the uncharacterized bottom represents cryptic  
39 biomass previously not quantified in the assessment.

40  
41 That's sort of the conceptual model that has been broadly  
42 described for why are we seeing the difference in overall  
43 abundance, and that's a -- It's a reasonable conceptual model.

44  
45 It has some issues, I would say, one being that the  
46 correspondence of the SEDAR 52 estimates and the estimates on  
47 structure may be more of a coincidence, and I'm saying that  
48 because, obviously, the confidence limits around both are quite

1 large, and we know that, if the Great Red Snapper Count  
2 estimates were recalibrated to reflect the differences in  
3 sampling efficiency, for example in the western and the eastern  
4 Gulf, that estimate will change, and so it will no longer  
5 correspond -- Even the estimate on structure would no longer  
6 directly correspond to the SEDAR 52 estimate.

7  
8 The other point that I want to point out here is that we know,  
9 from the NMFS bottom longline survey, that the -- The bottom  
10 longline survey really is thought to be representative more of  
11 the biomass on the uncharacterized bottom than on structure,  
12 because of the way it's implemented. The NMFS bottom longline  
13 showed very low abundance in the 1980s and 1990s, and I can't  
14 remember exactly when it started, and then an increase, and so  
15 that suggests that the biomass in the uncharacterized bottom is  
16 not entirely removed from the influence of fishing.

17  
18 With those caveats -- Still, I mean, this is one hypotheses, and  
19 there might be others, but it's a reasonable hypothesis, but  
20 it's important to bear in mind that that underlies the whole  
21 further analysis.

22  
23 Then the analysis says, well, a proportion of that cryptic  
24 biomass may be vulnerable to fishing and can be added to the  
25 fishable abundance, and different assumptions can be made about  
26 the vulnerable proportion of the biomass in the uncharacterized  
27 bottom, and the Science Center did present information for  
28 different assumptions of that sort, and, also, the necessary  
29 adjustments to the FMSY proxy.

30  
31 They are currently using FSPR 26 percent, and the Science Center  
32 also provided projections for FSPR 40 percent, and that comes  
33 back to what I described previously, the fact that, since we now  
34 think of red snapper as a larger, less-productive stock, FSPR 26  
35 percent is no longer a really credible proxy for MSY, because,  
36 if the abundance indeed is that much larger, the productivity  
37 must be lower to basically reproduce the same historical  
38 patterns, and so we should use a different SPR proxy.

39  
40 The analysis that was provided by the Science Center essentially  
41 presents calculations based on various assumptions about those  
42 two things, the vulnerable biomass in the uncharacterized bottom  
43 and the FMSY proxy.

44  
45 In a sense, what these are is they are kind of what-if analyses,  
46 and so you basically say, well, if we assume that this  
47 proportion is vulnerable at that FSPR proxy, then we get that  
48 number, which is a big difference from what we usually do, and

1 this doesn't quite allow us to basically assess the  
2 sustainability consequences of these options in the same way  
3 that we usually do, and you would only really be able to do that  
4 once that information is fully integrated into the stock  
5 assessment.

6  
7 This is the catch projections table that came out of that  
8 analysis, and, in fact, this is the table that came out of a  
9 revised analysis on the second day, and the revision, I think,  
10 concerned the proportion of uncharacterized biomass, or  
11 uncharacterized bottom biomass, that was considered vulnerable  
12 to fishing, and so 13 percent and 22 percent. These are the  
13 catch projections for those assumptions at the different FMSY  
14 proxies, and I will come back to that, and so this is the table  
15 that we worked on.

16  
17 The second piece of information -- Just to repeat, what we had  
18 here was, in the scheme of things that I described before, it  
19 sort of corresponds to that sort of partial ad-hoc integration  
20 of information, and I want to make it very clear here that, at  
21 this stage, of course, it was not possible to provide anything  
22 else. To get to the full integration, it will take months, or  
23 probably a year or longer, because many aspects of the  
24 assessment will change, and it's a really, really big  
25 undertaking that is done in SEDAR 74 right now.

26  
27 Another piece of information the Science Center provided is this  
28 traditional interim assessment based on the NMFS bottom longline  
29 index, and traditional, I guess, is in quotation marks because  
30 we have not done this traditionally very much, but it's  
31 something that has entered the management realm over the last  
32 few years, and the idea is really to adapt our catch advice in  
33 the light of changes in relative abundance that are observed.  
34 You may recall that, for example, one case I think where that  
35 was used was to do with red grouper.

36  
37 Here, basically, the purpose was to adapt catch advice in the  
38 light of changes in the index of abundance, and so these are the  
39 NMFS bottom longline index values, and there are two plots here,  
40 one for terminal year 2019 and one for terminal year 2020, and  
41 those are both provided together with the information that the  
42 survey in 2020, for reasons of COVID impact, was more curtailed,  
43 and so there was less information, and it wasn't as  
44 representative of the Gulf as a whole as this normally is.

45  
46 One of the decision points here was whether we should use that  
47 index of abundance up until 2020 or only until 2019, because the  
48 2020 value was considered not to be really that reliable.

1  
2 What you can see when you look at this, you can see that,  
3 basically, around 2016, the index peaked, and, since then, it's  
4 been either stable or declining somewhat, and what this tells  
5 us, obviously, is that the abundance of red snapper in the Gulf  
6 is no longer increasing, but it's either stable or it's somewhat  
7 declining, and that's important, and, obviously, and we'll come  
8 to that, we will have to reconcile that information with the  
9 other information which we have which came from the Great Red  
10 Snapper Count.

11  
12 Then the method to make this adjustment is actually a tested so-  
13 called management procedure, and we were given multiple choices  
14 here, and one was the terminal year, and we decided to not use  
15 2020, because of the issues around that, that we didn't really  
16 think that point was very reliable.

17  
18 Then there was a choice of using either three-year or five-year  
19 averages, and you can see here that, actually, here, that makes  
20 a big difference, whether you base your analysis on a three-year  
21 or a five-year average, and the reason being that, really, the  
22 main declines have been in the more recent past, and so, if you  
23 go for a five-year average, you will, basically, produce less of  
24 a decline in the catch advice, or in fact an increase, as we'll  
25 see, compared to the ABC we have on the books than if you use a  
26 shorter timeframe.

27  
28 In a sense, using the five-year adjustments here gives us the  
29 least conservative use of this, and it gives us relatively high  
30 levels. In fact, it suggests that we should increase the catch  
31 level a little bit, to 15.4, as compared to 15.1, which was the  
32 ABC value on the books, even though we can see that the index is  
33 actually probably declining.

34  
35 Now comes the interesting part. Basically, we were asked, as an  
36 SSC, to come up with catch level recommendations, and so we had  
37 to make an OFL determination and an ABC determination, and,  
38 normally, that happens after a long, drawn-out process of  
39 modeling and information synthesis, and that typically will  
40 result in a very clear projection of what the OFL should be, one  
41 value, and it will give us an uncertainty to consider around the  
42 OFL, and then we will determine the ABC either using that  
43 uncertainty as it comes out of the model, or, if we feel that  
44 the model uncertainty is too small, and the actual uncertainty  
45 is larger, we slap some extra buffer on that.

46  
47 Usually, we discuss this for quite a long time, how much  
48 uncertainty is incorporated and so on, but, in the grand scheme

1 of what we're looking at here, those are relatively small  
2 decisions on really well-defined numbers. Here, we have  
3 something totally different.

4  
5 We have all that information in the room from the Great Red  
6 Snapper Count and the existing SEDAR assessment, and we have  
7 specific analyses, two different alternative analyses, one that  
8 is a somewhat ad-hoc use of the Great Red Snapper Count  
9 information and the other that doesn't use that information, but  
10 it uses the bottom longline index that we know is usually  
11 treated as being representative of the stock abundance, relative  
12 abundance, changes.

13  
14 Basically, the SSC members are on the right, and so we were  
15 basically looking at all of this information, and every SSC  
16 member had to interpret this and come to some judgment about all  
17 that information on the table, and then, of course, different  
18 people may have come to different interpretations and judgments,  
19 and then we had to somehow go from there to management advice,  
20 and one would say that one could almost have done the process of  
21 putting up a scale of different numbers and get a show of hands  
22 and then go with whatever most people are comfortable with.

23  
24 That was sort a democratic way of getting expert opinion, I  
25 guess, but, of course, it's not science in the usual sense, and  
26 so we really were left somewhat to making those judgments, and  
27 the way that worked is that we made motions, as we always do,  
28 and so one motion was made for the OFL, and that motion happened  
29 to be made on the basis of the GRSC-informed analysis. Then  
30 another motion was made by someone else, and that happened to be  
31 made on the basis of the bottom-longline-survey-based analysis.

32  
33 These were the motions. The first one is the SSC defines the  
34 OFL for Gulf of Mexico red snapper for 2021 as 25.6 million  
35 pounds wet weight in CHTS units based on the GRSC interim  
36 analysis, using 13 percent of the uncharacterized bottom and  
37 using a three-year average at FSPR 26 percent on the structured  
38 bottom representing the exploited fishery. That motion, as you  
39 can see, carried with a small majority and a couple of  
40 abstentions.

41  
42 Then the next motion was about the ABC, and remember that,  
43 normally, we have a very clear procedure for getting from the  
44 OFL, with additional information, to the ABC, but, really, we  
45 did not have anything like that on the table, and so it was  
46 clear that it was going to be motions-based, and so the second  
47 motion here says that the SSC defines the ABC for Gulf of Mexico  
48 red snapper for 2021 as 15.4 million pounds wet weight in CHTS

1 units, based on the Southeast Fisheries Science Center interim  
2 analysis informed by the NMFS bottom longline survey, based on  
3 the terminal year of 2019 and the five-year moving average.

4  
5 That motion just about made it, with a majority of eleven to  
6 ten, and, again, I would point out that, although this does not  
7 directly involve the information from the Great Red Snapper  
8 Count, the choice of going with the least conservative of these  
9 I think is somewhat reflective of people trying to integrate  
10 that information of the abundance from the Great Red Snapper  
11 Count with their judgment on how to use the bottom longline  
12 index. There was some integration of information happening, but  
13 not in the highly structured and quantitative way that we  
14 usually have.

15  
16 This is really just for context, and this was the recent -- Not  
17 recent for quite a while, but the landings history of red  
18 snapper in the Gulf, and you can see that the ABC values that  
19 were on the books for last year and the new recommended ABC are  
20 quite close, and so the new ABC is marginally higher than the  
21 old one, whereas the recommended OFL is really very, very  
22 different from the OFL that we have on the books for last year.

23  
24 You can see, when you look at this -- Since we're still in  
25 judgment territory, I think it's important to think about the  
26 fact that the OFL is much, much higher than anything that this  
27 fishery has actually yielded in the past.

28  
29 There's a little bit of a perspective here, and so this is where  
30 we've arrived, and I think I have tried to explain our process,  
31 which, again, happened under very rushed circumstances, and so  
32 we have arrived at this for now, but this really is only the  
33 prelude to using information from the Great Red Snapper Count in  
34 management, and it's not even quite the first chapter, because  
35 we're basically -- In the request from the council, we were  
36 using that preliminary information and preliminary analyses to  
37 take a look.

38  
39 The first chapter is being written, I guess, with the  
40 integration of this information into SEDAR 74, the stock  
41 assessment, and, also, I think the main -- In many ways, the  
42 main -- That will be the first real chapter, but then I think  
43 there will be other chapters, and those chapters come back to  
44 the idea of getting a bigger boat and using all this information  
45 that you now have to essentially use that fishery differently.

46  
47 I'm talking about information to do with regional distribution  
48 and with movement patterns and so on that will probably allow us



1 to manage this fishery in more different ways and to attain  
2 greater gains in overall yield than may be implicated right now  
3 or may come out of the SEDAR 74 assessment, but, of course, I  
4 have no idea what will come out of that, but I do think it's  
5 important to recognize that there are broader options for making  
6 changes that will emerge from this information, and we don't  
7 really yet know what those are. Thank you.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Dr. Lorenzen. It is 12:20  
10 now, and I mentioned before that we were going to have a hard  
11 stop at 12:30, and so I'm going to recommend that we take our  
12 questions and get into this after lunch, and just go ahead and  
13 break now. I'm going to pass it back to the Chair.

14  
15 **DR. FRAZER:** Thank you, Martha, and thank you, Kai. I thought  
16 that was a really well-thought-out representation of the kind of  
17 discussion that took place in the SSC committee meeting. Again,  
18 thank you for distilling all of that information.

19  
20 I do think that there are going to be a number of questions  
21 asked, and I think that, given that we're now eight minutes  
22 prior to our scheduled lunch break, I would encourage people to  
23 take the time to organize their thoughts, so we can have a  
24 productive discussion after lunch. With that said, we will go  
25 ahead and break for lunch, and we will reconvene at 1:30. Enjoy  
26 your lunch, guys.

27  
28 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on April 13, 2021.)

29  
30 - - -

31  
32 April 13, 2021

33  
34 TUESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

35  
36 - - -

37  
38 The Reef Fish Management Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery  
39 Management Council reconvened via webinar on Tuesday afternoon,  
40 April 13, 2021, and was called to order by Chairman Martha  
41 Guyas.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Right before we broke for lunch, we had the  
44 presentation from Kai on the SSC's discussion on the interim  
45 analyses and catch level recommendations, and so, at this point,  
46 let's have some discussion and questions for Dr. Lorenzen. We  
47 may want to have his presentation queued up, just in case  
48 there's questions on slides, but, at this point, I will take

1 some hands.

2  
3 **MS. ROY:** Martha, we're having trouble getting sound in the  
4 room. Could you repeat what you wanted me to pull up? I  
5 apologize.  
6

7 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** It might be good to have Kai's last  
8 presentation on hand, in case there are questions on it. We're  
9 in discussion on that, and so I see some hands. I am going to  
10 recognize Patrick Banks.  
11

12 **MR. BANKS:** Thank you, Martha, and I apologize if this was  
13 discussed before the break for lunch, and I was in a different  
14 meeting, but the biggest curiosity I have, after reading most of  
15 the SSC meeting minutes and talking with some of the SSC, and I  
16 would certainly love to hear Dr. Lorenzen's explanation of the  
17 thought process behind the SSC feeling comfortable raising the  
18 OFL by ten million pounds but only feeling comfortable raising  
19 the ABC, or recommending raising the ABC, by 300,000 pounds, and  
20 I was hoping that Dr. Lorenzen could try to help me understand  
21 that thought process a little bit better from the SSC. Thanks.  
22

23 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Patrick. Kai.  
24

25 **DR. LORENZEN:** I mean, this was a somewhat disjointed process,  
26 because we had to make sense of a wealth of disparate  
27 information, in the point of view of us, and, really, it might  
28 illustrate, a little bit, how we ended up with the OFL as the --  
29

30 Initially, that had a smaller number, and I think something on  
31 the order of twenty-one million, and then a substitute motion  
32 that had the exact same text, but a bigger number, was put up,  
33 and that motion was voted on, and it passed with a small  
34 majority. I think that's the best explanation that I can give  
35 you of how we ended up with that number.  
36

37 I guess, if that motion had failed, we would have reduced that  
38 number to something lower and voted again, and maybe that would  
39 have stuck, and so, I mean, that's the sort of level of  
40 uncertainty really surrounding the OFL estimate, in this case.  
41

42 As far as the ABC goes, of course, in principle, the same  
43 process applies, only that, in this case, the SSC -- The motion  
44 that was made and passed with a slim majority was based on the  
45 bottom longline index, and that is information that we would  
46 have used to make that recommendation in a normal year without  
47 that information we had from the Great Red Snapper Count.  
48

1 That value, I would say, is consistent with the advice that we  
2 would normally have provided, but the OFL probably is not, but,  
3 since we had multiple sources of information, and we had not  
4 decided to just use one or the other, and we couldn't, because  
5 that wouldn't answer all of our questions.

6  
7 Really, as you pointed out, we have a very structured process,  
8 and there is a clear correspondence between the OFL and the ABC,  
9 because we determine the OFL, and then we determine the ABC on  
10 the basis of the same information, while accounting for any  
11 uncertainty that may not have been characterized. Then there is  
12 a clear correspondence between the OFL and the ABC, and, in this  
13 case, that really could not be achieved in that way.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Does that answer your question, Patrick?

16  
17 **MR. BANKS:** Yes.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thank you. Next is Mr. Dyskow.

20  
21 **MR. DYSKOW:** Thank you. I know we're having some problems with  
22 the audio, and can everybody hear me okay?

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Yes. It sounds like maybe it got fixed right  
25 at the end of when you were speaking.

26  
27 **MR. DYSKOW:** My question for Dr. Lorenzen, and I certainly I  
28 appreciate his analysis, and it was very thorough, and I have to  
29 admit that portions of it were probably over my head, but a  
30 couple of observations. One, it appears to me that these were  
31 very conservative decisions, and basically knowing the --

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Hold on, Phil.

34  
35 **MR. DYSKOW:** The intent was to make a relatively conservative  
36 decision, and, in looking at the votes, both on the OFL, but  
37 particularly on the ABC, these votes were very close. In other  
38 words, there were just about as many people against it as there  
39 were for it, and what was the other side of this argument? I  
40 know the analysis that you gave was based on the decision that  
41 was made as to OFL and ABC, but, since about half of the SSC  
42 didn't agree, what was the alternative argument?

43  
44 **DR. LORENZEN:** Well, of course, there were probably many  
45 arguments in many people's heads, and we did not have the time  
46 to explore all of those, but my interpretation would be that  
47 clearly there were members of the SSC who felt that the ABC  
48 recommendation was too conservative, in light of the information

1 from the two different sources that we had on the table.  
2 Likewise, there were many SSC members who felt that the OFL was  
3 not conservative enough.

4  
5 That is really all I can say about it, because, actually, we  
6 made those motions in fairly quick procession, and it was clear  
7 that there really was, in the information we had in front of us,  
8 nothing that we could use to arrive at a more coherent picture,  
9 unfortunately, and that comes back, and that is really part of  
10 the criticism that Dr. Powers had of this process, that we were  
11 not provided with what we would have needed to come up with  
12 something more coherent.

13  
14 **MR. DYSKOW:** Thank you.

15  
16 **DR. LORENZEN:** I wish I had better news.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Kai. Let's see here. I don't know  
19 what order these hands went up, but I'm just going to scroll  
20 through the list here. I see Andy's hand is up. Andy, go  
21 ahead.

22  
23 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Martha, and thanks, Kai, for the  
24 presentation and answering our questions. I asked, during the  
25 SSC meeting, a similar question that Patrick just asked, and  
26 what I would like, Kai, is if you could expand a little bit more  
27 about the ABC decision, and certainly I think correct me if I'm  
28 wrong, but, from what I heard, listening to the SSC meeting, the  
29 SSC was certainly concerned about the bottom longline index  
30 trending downward, and they were also weighing-in on individual  
31 studies and research, where their own observations were  
32 indicating some declines in abundance on the structured habitat.

33  
34 The decision to set ABC based on the bottom longline analysis,  
35 versus the Great Red Snapper Count, kind of really hinged on a  
36 lot of personal observations and the fact that the population  
37 might have plateaued, or even declined, despite having this kind  
38 of high abundance of fish in the uncharacterized bottom, and so  
39 can you elaborate on that? Is that a correct characterization,  
40 or are there other things factored in when making your decision  
41 about the ABC?

42  
43 **DR. LORENZEN:** Thanks, Andy. Well, indeed -- Remember that, of  
44 course, the bottom longline index is what we think actually is  
45 somewhat representative of the fish in the uncharacterized  
46 bottom, and so it's sort of a mix, I guess, of that and  
47 structure, but it's certainly not leaving that out, and what we  
48 see, when we look at that index, is that the relative abundance

1 of those fish is either stable or declining, and that  
2 observation is completely independent from the observation of  
3 absolute abundance that we have from the Great Red Snapper  
4 Count.

5  
6 It doesn't matter what that is, but what we're seeing is that  
7 the relative abundance is stable or declining, and so that trend  
8 is not influenced by an estimate of absolute abundance, and it's  
9 literally an observation of where, in its change over time, the  
10 stock is headed.

11  
12 Usually, if we had used this, honestly, I would have looked at  
13 it and said, and I think I actually did that, but I would have  
14 looked at it and said we've got to be conservative, and the  
15 council, of course, has done that in other cases, and think of  
16 red grouper, for example, where the council has looked at  
17 indices of abundance and made decisions that were conservative.

18  
19 In this case, essentially, we could have done the same, which  
20 would have resulted in a reduction of the ABC, but there was  
21 also, of course, the information about the apparently high level  
22 of absolute abundance on the table, and I think that prompted  
23 many, including myself, to be less conservative in interpreting  
24 the bottom longline data.

25  
26 Remember that, even though we have looked at that information,  
27 we have actually made the least conservative decision we could  
28 make on the basis of the bottom longline data, which actually  
29 resulted in an increase of the ABC, even though, in recent  
30 years, the index was going down. In light of that, we have  
31 taken a not conservative decision. I don't know if that answers  
32 your question, but I am happy to expand more if need be.

33  
34 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Kai, that's helpful, and I had the benefit of,  
35 obviously, hearing most of the SSC meeting, and so I wanted to  
36 make sure, if I'm characterizing what I heard from the SSC, that  
37 that's accurate, and I don't want to, obviously, misconstrue any  
38 sort of decisions that you reached and the rationale for  
39 reaching them, and so thanks for clarifying.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Andy, and thanks, Kai. Next up, we  
42 have Kevin.

43  
44 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Dr. Lorenzen,  
45 for the presentation. It was a good move, on your part, to go  
46 ahead and include some of those Kai Lorenzen thoughts slides and  
47 explain and give some more detail on how the conversations  
48 developed during the SSC meeting.

1  
2 I have a specific question or two about Slide 10, and so if that  
3 can be brought up from your presentation. That's the slide,  
4 and, first, I guess I want to -- You made a comment, or there  
5 were comments made in the SSC meeting, about the productivity of  
6 the red snapper stock, and is it the general feel, or sense, of  
7 the SSC that, generally, in a relative sense, the Gulf of Mexico  
8 red snapper stock is considered to be not very productive, or  
9 not highly productive?

10  
11 **DR. LORENZEN:** I did not -- You were breaking up, and I did not  
12 hear the early parts of your question, but are you asking  
13 whether there is the impression that the stock is not highly  
14 productive?

15  
16 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, and is that currently how the SSC perceives the  
17 stock?

18  
19 **DR. LORENZEN:** Right now, I mean, if you look at the SEDAR 52,  
20 the traditional perception was that this was a small, but  
21 highly-productive stock, and so we know that, once it was  
22 depleted, it was able to bounce back. It was very badly  
23 depleted, and it was able to bounce back, because we thought it  
24 was a small but highly-productive stock.

25  
26 Now, if we incorporate the abundance estimate that came out of  
27 the Great Red Snapper Count, the -- Well, maybe not -- I guess  
28 there could be different hypotheses, but, more or less, the  
29 conclusion will have to be -- (Part of Dr. Lorenzen's comment is  
30 not audible on the recording.)

31  
32 Basically, that is more or less a necessary consequence of  
33 integrating the greater abundance estimate into what we already  
34 know about the stock, and I think that's -- That's not a -- It's  
35 also something that I think Dr. Porch has alluded to before, and  
36 so it changes our perception of some of those fundamental  
37 aspects of the stock, and all of that, of course, is assuming  
38 that the final estimates of the Great Red Snapper Count and so  
39 on will turn out in the way that the preliminary estimates are.

40  
41 **MR. ANSON:** You did break up there a little bit, and I don't  
42 know, Madam Chair, if you want him to go back or -- I mean, it  
43 was a small part, but --

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I hate to say it, Kai, but can you concisely  
46 try to answer that again? You did cut out for probably --

47  
48 **DR. LORENZEN:** Yes, and so what I was said was that, right now -

1 - I mean, if you look at the stock assessment, so far, our  
2 impression has been that this is a small but highly-productive  
3 stock. The estimate from the Great Red Snapper Count, the  
4 absolute abundance estimate, when we integrate that with our  
5 understanding and our knowledge of how the stock responded to  
6 different levels of fishing in the past, it will lead us to the  
7 conclusion that this is a larger, less-productive stock, and so  
8 that's an inevitable consequence, essentially, of combining the  
9 high abundance estimate with what we know about how the stock  
10 behaves.

11  
12 I wanted to point out that this something that Dr. Porch has  
13 also discussed before, and so this is not an SSC opinion, but  
14 it's something that will more or less inevitably be the  
15 consequence of integrating this abundance estimate with the  
16 information we have about how the stock responds to fishing.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Dr. Lorenzen.

19  
20 **MR. ANSON:** I have a couple more questions, if you want to come  
21 back to me.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Go ahead.

24  
25 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you. Kai, at this Slide Number 10, let's just  
26 assume -- Let's assume two things. Let's assume that there is a  
27 high abundance, and let's assume that it's highly productive.  
28 Where would the curve go on that lower-right-hand graph there?

29  
30 **DR. LORENZEN:** It would do what the curve actually on the  
31 previous -- If you can go back two slides. That would be what  
32 we have here, that I called the -- This would be basically what  
33 the stock would do if it's had a high abundance and a high  
34 productivity, and you can see that, under that assumption, there  
35 would not have been that depletion that we know that has  
36 occurred, because, basically, you have a lot of fish, and they  
37 would be very productive, and so the catches that we know were  
38 taken would not have depleted this population in the way that we  
39 know that they did, and so that assumption is inconsistent with  
40 what we know about how the stock has behaved in the past.

41  
42 **MR. ANSON:** So it does rely a little bit -- In the context of  
43 all the information that's provided to it, it does rely upon the  
44 inputs of fishing mortality, correct?

45  
46 **DR. LORENZEN:** Well, the fishing mortality is estimated from  
47 fitting the assessment model to catch data and abundance indices  
48 and size and age structure data, which is not here, and I do

1 remind you that this is here for illustration, and so don't  
2 mistake this for the red snapper stock assessment, but I am  
3 trying to illustrate those principles.

4  
5 So the fishing mortality rate is estimated, and, in fact, in  
6 this case, because the catches are still the same, the abundance  
7 that we estimate is greater, and so the fishing mortality rates  
8 would be lower that come out of this model estimate, but also --  
9 No, I think that answers the question.

10  
11 **MR. ANSON:** I think that -- Just one other question then. In  
12 terms of the issue of vulnerability and the uncharacterized  
13 bottom, how does that translate to the actual proportion of  
14 catch that is estimated or thought to be occurring? Is that --  
15 I think it was related to how much they thought of the harvest  
16 was being attributed to the uncharacterized bottom, the 13 and  
17 the 22 percent.

18  
19 **DR. LORENZEN:** Yes, and so the assumption -- This is sort of a  
20 fundamental assumption behind that analysis that the Science  
21 Center did, was the idea that the SEDAR 52 assessment really  
22 basically characterizes what's going on on structure, and then,  
23 in addition to that, there is a biomass in the uncharacterized  
24 bottom.

25  
26 Of course, it's sort of, logically, a little difficult to think  
27 about this by saying, well, maybe 20 percent of that is  
28 vulnerable to fishing, and, if that's so, why is it not already  
29 in the fishery, right, and so you would have to -- You would  
30 have to struggle a bit for an explanation there, and I think, in  
31 reality, the biomass in the uncharacterized bottom is not  
32 unaffected by the fishery, quite clearly, because we can see  
33 that the bottom longline index does more or less the same,  
34 historically, as the other indices of abundance that have been  
35 derived more from structure.

36  
37 There is a connection, and it might be through the life history,  
38 and so it might be that these fish recruit to structure and that  
39 the biomass in the uncharacterized bottom then reflects the  
40 harvesting that went on on the younger ages of those fish that  
41 later end up in the uncharacterized bottom, and it may be  
42 harvesting of fish on the uncharacterized bottom, and the  
43 information about age and size structure and so on may help us  
44 to figure out, really, what's going on there.

45  
46 We have not reviewed that information, and I think that will be  
47 part of the research track assessment that's going on at the  
48 moment, and so you see the level of uncertainties that we're



1 dealing with here in terms of interpreting what this difference  
2 means and how it actually affects the dynamics of the stock.

3  
4 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, sir. That's all I have for right now.  
5 Thank you.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Kevin. Troy Williamson.

8  
9 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. My comments are pretty  
10 much observations here, and I listened to the committee, as they  
11 discussed these issues, and I guess it was last week, and  
12 particularly the final day, when these motions were made and  
13 passed, and it was interesting to me that two reviewers, in  
14 particular, commented that they thought that the population  
15 densities in the uncharacterized bottoms were grossly  
16 underestimated.

17  
18 I don't think those folks were, if I recall correctly, given the  
19 opportunity to vote on these motions, and certainly the  
20 acceptable biological catch may have had a different outcome had  
21 they been, and still what is disconcerting to me is that we use  
22 a different yardstick, and we measure the OFL using the  
23 abundance, and then we flip-flop back to another method that  
24 we've learned does not have as many sites for information taken,  
25 detail points, as the Great Red Snapper Count.

26  
27 Ultimately, I am having a hard time with it, but I guess the  
28 good news is that the SSC's recommendations on OFL and ABC are  
29 advisory in nature, and not they're not binding on the council,  
30 and so, with that, I will conclude my remarks.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Troy. Clay, you're up  
33 next.

34  
35 **DR. PORCH:** Thank you. Obviously, there's a lot to unpack here,  
36 and I see Dr. Frazer is on the list, and so I'm not going to  
37 address a couple of points that were raised, but I do want to  
38 address this issue of productivity.

39  
40 You have to keep in mind that there's a lot of other studies  
41 that have been going on at the same time as the Great Red  
42 Snapper Count, and, actually, one of the members of the Great  
43 Red Snapper Count team mentioned, during the SSC meeting, that  
44 it does seem like red snapper are really a series of smaller  
45 metapopulations.

46  
47 If you look through the history of this fishery, you can see,  
48 even early on, as early as the 1800s, that they were able to

1 drastically deplete populations in certain areas, and they had  
2 to keep expanding their range and fishing bigger and broader  
3 areas, and you even see that today, in that the Dry Tortugas is  
4 only now really coming back with some fish, but, at one point,  
5 that was a big part of the fishery, where a huge amount of tons  
6 of fish would come out of that.

7  
8 Then it just dried up to nothing, and, like I said, now, only  
9 now, it's really starting to come back, and it's not anywhere  
10 near what it used to be, and so, obviously, the dynamics here  
11 are a lot more complicated than maybe we thought. We're still  
12 learning about it, and there's multiple populations that  
13 partially replenish themselves and partially seed other areas,  
14 but Kai is correct, conceptually.

15  
16 On the one hand, when we conducted the assessment, we thought we  
17 had a smaller, highly-resilient population, and resilient in the  
18 sense of productive on a per-capita basis, and now we see, in  
19 order to get the same trends, but we have a much bigger  
20 population, yet we get the same trends with the same catch, and  
21 it does imply that the stock is less productive than we formerly  
22 thought.

23  
24 A lot of things need to be rethought about this stock, and we  
25 need to look at all the information, including the Great Red  
26 Snapper Count, in the upcoming SEDAR assessment, and I think  
27 we'll find that, once we start piecing all this information  
28 together, we'll have a much better picture and a much better  
29 story than we do at this point.

30  
31 The other thing I wanted to mention is the reviewers sent the  
32 Great Red Snapper team home with a fair amount of homework, and  
33 I think, when some of those points are addressed, next year, the  
34 SSC might have a little more confidence to step forward with a  
35 different catch analysis.

36  
37 One of the other things that they would have next year is an  
38 updated bottom longline survey and an updated video survey.  
39 Remember, in 2020, it was almost the year with no data, because  
40 of COVID-19, and we didn't have any survey results, really, and  
41 even the bottom longline was only a partial survey, and so  
42 that's why the SSC elected not to use it to update the ABC.

43  
44 Next year, we'll have, hopefully, complete surveys in 2021, and  
45 we'll have a little better information to make a decision on,  
46 and I think, at the same time, and maybe Dr. Stunz could comment  
47 on it, but, unfortunately, they weren't able to survey a large  
48 fraction of Louisiana this year, which led to some of the

1 uncertainty that the SSC had, but there is a study ongoing now  
2 that hopefully could remedy that, and so I think we'll be in a  
3 very different situation next year. Thank you.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Clay. Just one question to your point  
6 there. Is the Science Center back online and doing a lot of  
7 that field work now?

8  
9 **DR. PORCH:** Yes, and, in fact, we're out doing the video survey  
10 now. We're on point to do the longline survey, and now we're at  
11 a point in our automation that we can process the data much  
12 quicker, and I would expect that, by December or January, we  
13 would actually have updated indices of abundance from the  
14 longline survey. The video still takes a little longer to  
15 process, because you have to read all those videos, but we're  
16 working with artificial intelligence, automated image analysis,  
17 to try and speed that process up too, but I would expect, by  
18 this time next year, we'll have a lot more information to go on  
19 than we did at this SSC meeting.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Great. Thanks, Clay. Let me go to Greg, since  
22 a couple of those, I think, comments were for Greg, and  
23 questions for Greg, and do you want to respond to those?

24  
25 **DR. STUNZ:** Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. Clay is right. Part  
26 of the value of this review process, which I mentioned earlier,  
27 was they gave us some things to look at, in the sense of maybe  
28 some other ways to capture some of the variability that we  
29 couldn't, for example, and our team is more than willing to do  
30 that. We don't know what it will look like, obviously, until we  
31 go do it, but it's likely going to help.

32  
33 Do I think it's going to affect the actual estimate? No, but  
34 perhaps it will reduce some of that uncertainty, and so there is  
35 some time for us to do that still. The other thing that I want  
36 to comment on is the uncharacterized bottom, and, while Clay and  
37 John Walter and his team did a good job of what they could do  
38 quickly, I think, to piece together the amount of fishing effort  
39 that's occurring over that uncharacterized bottom, I think we  
40 still have a long way to go. I think hopefully Clay agrees with  
41 me on that, because that's going to be very key, in the sense to  
42 better understanding that uncharacterized bottom and the fishery  
43 exploitation that actually occurs out there better than we can  
44 just right now with what we have at-hand.

45  
46 One of the big questions to understand there is how much  
47 exchange is really occurring in that area, and we simply don't  
48 have that data, but I can inform the group that, even since

1 we've been having this discussion today, I'm getting a lot of  
2 text traffic and things from anglers and fishermen, and even  
3 commercial fishermen, that there is a lot of exploitation  
4 occurring out over that uncharacterized bottom, and so that's  
5 something that we need to explore a lot more, as well as the  
6 size structure out there.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Greg. I would agree with that. Dr.  
9 Frazer, you're up.

10  
11 **DR. FRAZER:** I wanted to first clarify a couple of things and  
12 respond to some of the comments that I've heard with regard to  
13 the role of the peer reviewers and the meeting that was held a  
14 week or so ago, and there were two parts to that. One included  
15 the peer reviewers, and they were able to participate fully in  
16 that process.

17  
18 The second part of that meeting falls under the purview  
19 specifically of the SSC, for the purpose of generating catch  
20 advice, and the peer reviewers did not participate in that, from  
21 a voting perspective, and that's not their role. Then, with  
22 regard to the council's ability to respond -- Excuse me. With  
23 regard to the council's authority, I guess, to override,  
24 perhaps, and maybe that's the wrong word, the catch advice  
25 provided by the SSC, that's not the case.

26  
27 In fact, the council can recommend something lower, but they  
28 cannot recommend something higher than the recommendation coming  
29 from the SSC, and so I just want to make sure that everybody  
30 understands that.

31  
32 I just want to also make a few other general comments. There's  
33 a lot of discussion about fisheries management and the science  
34 part of it and kind of the socioeconomic side of things, and the  
35 United States really sets the standard for successful fisheries  
36 management, I think in large part because we have the MSA, and I  
37 didn't want to let that fact be lost on people here.

38  
39 In fact, it's successful because it's a science-based process  
40 that we've set up, and it includes our SSC, and I respect all of  
41 the members of the SSC, every one of them, and I think that what  
42 they have done here is provided their assessment. Although  
43 viewed fairly conservatively by a lot of people, it's certainly  
44 within their purview to do that, and they have a responsibility  
45 to offer catch advice that doesn't put the stock in a  
46 particularly bad situation. In fact, they want to ensure that  
47 it's sustainable for everybody to use.

1 Having said that, I think what people are looking at is the fact  
2 that there's a great deal of uncertainty surrounding some of the  
3 data that were incorporated into this most recent kind of  
4 interim catch advice, and the fact that there was a vote of  
5 eleven-to-ten reflects that there's a great deal of variability  
6 among the SSC members and their comfort level as it relates to  
7 risk.

8  
9 Moving forward, and I'm not sure that we can accomplish that  
10 here, necessarily, other than to point out, as Dr. Lorenzen did,  
11 that we will certainly take advantage of all the great work that  
12 was done as part of the Great Red Snapper Count to increase our  
13 understanding of the fishery and the fisheries dynamics, and we  
14 will improve our certainly around some of those estimates, and I  
15 think that that will lead to better decision-making and better  
16 advice moving forward.

17  
18 This is, in fact, just Chapter 1 of this process, but what would  
19 we be looking for? Moving forward, I think, speaking on behalf  
20 of the council, it's more than just simply getting catch advice,  
21 right? It's about understanding, I think, the implication of  
22 perhaps alternative advice. If we had, for example, a greater,  
23 or a higher, ABC, and let's say, for example, and I'm just  
24 giving -- I'm not on the SSC, and so I'm going to be careful not  
25 to make their decision for them, but we have a large part of the  
26 ocean bottom in the Gulf of Mexico that is uncharacterized, but  
27 it actually has -- Because it's uncharacterized, there are  
28 structured habitats, and probably exploited habitats, out there  
29 that hold fish and may have some influence on the available  
30 fish, or the fish that might be available for exploitation.

31  
32 That gets to this idea of how much risk are we willing to take,  
33 but there's another part of that, and the other part of that is,  
34 okay, if we were to be a little less risk-averse, perhaps, and  
35 were to generate a higher ABC, what would we use? What type of  
36 scientific information would we use, aside from the bottom  
37 longline survey, that would allow us to evaluate our decision  
38 and whether or not we made a good one or a poor one?

39  
40 A lot of that would come, in fact, from the state data, in my  
41 view. The concern, a large concern, coming from the SSC, based  
42 on the conversations that they held in their meeting, was that  
43 you might have localized depletion, and even localized  
44 extinction, and, if you had that, that's essentially the  
45 hypothesis, right, and that's the risk-aversion part of this.  
46 You don't want to leave the situation like that, but, in fact,  
47 if you were to allocate more fish, and you were to go down that  
48 road, what would you expect to see, and what data could you

1 collect that would allow you to correct course, if need be?

2  
3 Because each of the states have generated data, or provide data,  
4 in-season, you would expect, over time, that you would have a  
5 reduced catch per unit effort. You would expect, for example,  
6 that you would have a lower size-at-catch, and we have that  
7 data.

8  
9 The question for the SSC over time, and perhaps in the next  
10 phase of this, is at what CPUE, and at what-size at-catch,  
11 should you be concerned that you're in fact starting to cause a  
12 problem on the fishery?

13  
14 These are things that I think, moving forward, we should talk  
15 about, and I think that I will take the responsibility, as Chair  
16 of the council, perhaps, for not giving more clear advice to the  
17 SSC and the types of the things that we find beneficial here on  
18 the council, and I will endeavor to do a better job moving  
19 forward, but I just wanted to share some of these thoughts as we  
20 move forward, because there's a lot of really good people that  
21 work on our SSC, and there's a lot of really well-intentioned  
22 council members here, and there is certainly a very informed and  
23 well-intentioned public out there as well, and so I am just  
24 trying to set the tone here for a continued conversation. There  
25 you go, Martha. Back to you.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Tom. I have a number of  
28 hands up. I am going to go next to John Sanchez.

29  
30 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Due to the distance  
31 associated and the difficulty in assessing the fish biomass in  
32 the low-relief, uncharacterized bottom, one might argue that  
33 those fish have always been there, and, since those fish have  
34 always been there, it begs the question of what happened that  
35 rebounded this fishery so greatly since approximately 2007?

36  
37 The answer to that, at least to me, is pretty obvious. It's the  
38 management measures that were put in place by this council that  
39 helped rebuild this fishery. My concern is, if we rush in and  
40 dramatically increase the ABC, we risk reversing the rebound  
41 that this fishery -- That is taking place right now, and we  
42 potentially move in the wrong direction, where we're depleting  
43 instead of rebuilding.

44  
45 The million-dollar question, given everything that's going on  
46 and all the needs of everybody involved, is what is a risk-  
47 averse percentage increase, if the 300,000-pound increase is  
48 maybe too conservative? I think we should be focusing on that

1 and see if we can be, all of us, a little bit reasonable in our  
2 risk-averse approach of this, and maybe arrive at that number  
3 and move on. Thank you.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, John. Next up, I've got Robin.

6  
7 **MR. RIECHERS:** Kind of building a little bit off of that, and  
8 something that Clay had said, as well as Kai -- Kai, when you  
9 were discussing the uncharacterized bottom and the movement into  
10 the fishery and what part of that is available -- Of course, the  
11 science you were presented was based on the two F approaches and  
12 then the 13 and the 22 percent, I believe is what it is.

13  
14 Can you or Clay -- I mean, I'm assuming that's some measurement  
15 of what we believe is the portion that's available into the  
16 fishery, and that's what you shared with us earlier, and do we  
17 know how that was derived? How did we go about estimating --  
18 Where did we get the 13 and the 22, as opposed to, Kai, as you  
19 kind of indicated a moment ago, 20? How did we come about those  
20 two differences?

21  
22 **DR. LORENZEN:** I think I will let Dr. Porch answer that.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Clay, do you want to take that one?

25  
26 **DR. PORCH:** What we did is look at the VMS tracks for the  
27 commercial fishery and find out how many of them basically  
28 overlapped with what we think was how the uncharacterized bottom  
29 was mapped by the Great Red Snapper team, and that's where, as  
30 Greg mentioned, probably we could do a little more work, just to  
31 make sure that our characterization of the uncharacterized  
32 bottom is the same as the Great Red Snapper Count, but we think  
33 it's pretty close, since we used pretty much the same data and  
34 looked at their report.

35  
36 The bottom line is we looked to see how many of the commercial  
37 fishing tracks stopped to fish in what is perceived to be the  
38 uncharacterized bottom, and it ranged somewhere between 13 and  
39 22 percent, and then the problem was -- A bigger problem was for  
40 the recreational fishery, because we don't have that, and so we  
41 had information by iSnapper and others that give us some idea of  
42 how far recreational fishermen go offshore.

43  
44 We tried to get a rough idea of how much of that might be going  
45 into what was called the uncharacterized bottom, because  
46 remember that uncharacterized bottom isn't just unconsolidated  
47 sediments. It's punctuated by various types of relief, whether  
48 it's bio-excavations or other creatures burrowing in the mud and

1 creating structure or a small wreck or some other artificial  
2 reef that just isn't mapped in the artificial reef universe or  
3 natural bottom that just is poking up out of the mud, so to  
4 speak.

5  
6 No doubt some fishermen have numbers in those areas, and so we  
7 did the best we could to account for that, but what essentially  
8 the argument was is that the F 26 percent reference point that's  
9 used to define OFL was based on estimates that came from where  
10 the fishery actually operates, and so the analog with the Great  
11 Red Snapper Count is we would use that F 26 percent benchmark  
12 reference point over the fraction of the Great Red Snapper Count  
13 where the fishery -- That range where the fishery actually  
14 operates, and that's why we came up with those particular  
15 numbers.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Clay, let me ask, because I know this came up  
18 at the SSC meeting, and so that analysis especially looked at  
19 landings coming from what's considered, I guess, the  
20 uncharacterized bottom, but were you able to look at all harvest  
21 and catch, including discards from like bottom longline  
22 fishermen that don't have quota to land those fish?

23  
24 **DR. PORCH:** In the case of the commercial fishery, we're looking  
25 at where they were fishing, and so we didn't necessarily -- We  
26 did look at the total kill, and just try and get rough  
27 exploitation rates, and apparently -- Shannon is chatting me,  
28 and she said that I got the 13 percent wrong, and that actually  
29 came from the random forest model that was actually used in the  
30 Great Red Snapper study design, and that was the proportion and  
31 the uncharacterized bottom determined to have a high probability  
32 of red snapper encounters.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Got it.

35  
36 **DR. PORCH:** John Walter said that we did not account for the  
37 discards when we looked at the distribution of commercial  
38 fishing effort, which makes sense, because we only have a  
39 fraction of that that's actually covered by the observer  
40 program.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. I think that would be really  
43 interesting, and I think it came up, but maybe that's another  
44 one of those next steps things for the assessment. Okay. Next,  
45 it looks like we have Susan.

46  
47 **MS. SUSAN BOGGS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. My question is kind  
48 of probably a next-step question, but there's been a couple of



1 comments, and Greg made one, about that he was responsible to  
2 his funding source, and I understand that, and I know that the  
3 council has leaned hard on the Great Red Snapper Count, and I  
4 hear the SSC saying that they sent some homework home with the  
5 Great Red Snapper Count, and how does all of that work together?

6  
7 I mean, once Greg, and maybe this is a Greg question, but the  
8 report is submitted on June 14, 2021, does that mean we're done  
9 with this, or is this something that we can continue to build on  
10 and help answer some of these questions, because it sounds like  
11 -- I read bits and pieces, and I've listened to a lot, and it is  
12 information overload, but we've got a lot of great information  
13 here, and I hope we can continue building one on the other and  
14 look at some answers that might get us a little further along  
15 than where we are this meeting today. Thank you.

16  
17 **DR. STUNZ:** To that point, Madam Chair?

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Go ahead, Greg.

20  
21 **DR. STUNZ:** That's a good point, Susan, and thanks for bringing  
22 that up for the team, and the review team brought up some very  
23 interesting things that we hadn't considered, which we think are  
24 valuable, and our team has agreed to do that ahead of turning in  
25 our final report, and, of course, obviously, the money is spent,  
26 and it costs people time and effort, and there's other projects  
27 going on, and we don't have a fixed salary that we live off to  
28 keep doing this forever and ever, but we recognize the  
29 importance of this, Susan, and so we want to do what we can  
30 before the final report is due in June, and we will.

31  
32 Now, post-then, I don't know if the Science Center would  
33 continue with exploring these things. As everyone is well  
34 aware, many of the SSC are part of this project, and I can't  
35 imagine that they wouldn't want to continue using this data and  
36 exploring options and that sort of thing, but we wouldn't have a  
37 formal project or funding to do that, although we would be very  
38 interested. I mean, we don't want to have done all this work  
39 not for it to be fully utilized, and so we just need to come up  
40 with mechanisms to keep this going, but I don't know what those  
41 mechanisms are right now, post-June, but it's something we need  
42 to discuss.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Greg. I suspect that all the work that  
45 you all have done will keep many future graduate students busy  
46 trying to answer some of these questions that have come up.

47  
48 **DR. STUNZ:** Yes.

1  
2 **DR. LORENZEN:** Can I quickly chime in?

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sure. Go ahead.

5  
6 **DR. LORENZEN:** I agree with Dr. Stunz here, and this is one of  
7 the questions that really was brought up with this type of  
8 project, where you have a study team that is not in NMFS, and so  
9 they get funded, and we're all in the same boat as academics,  
10 and we get funding to do our work, and we submit reports and  
11 publications, but we're not necessarily there to then engage in  
12 years of follow-up.

13  
14 Of course, that's different with the Science Center. If we send  
15 something back to them, they will -- They are still getting  
16 paid, and they're coming back with new information and so on,  
17 and I just wanted to emphasize that it's really an important  
18 thing to consider going forward.

19  
20 Of course, we now have other projects that are somewhat like the  
21 Great Red Snapper Count for the South Atlantic red snapper and  
22 for greater amberjack and so on, and so we have to find  
23 modalities to solve these issues of how we interact, how the  
24 fisheries management process interacts, with those projects.  
25 It's really, at the moment, not quite clear how best to do that,  
26 but I wanted to flag that, and there's a need for a broader  
27 discussion of how this can be achieved. Thank you.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Kai. Next up is Troy  
30 Williamson.

31  
32 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. There's a lot of good  
33 conversation, and I am not going to try to dilute it any  
34 further, and I know we're running out of time, but just one  
35 point as to the interpretation of the council accepting the  
36 advice of the SSC. The restriction that was noted may be an  
37 agency interpretation of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, but there is  
38 no such restriction placed on the council in the Act itself, and  
39 so, with that, I will sign off.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Greg, I think you've already gone, but is your  
42 hand up?

43  
44 **DR. STUNZ:** I will pass.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Great. Thanks, Greg. Then I'm going to  
47 recognize Ed Swindell.

1 **MR. SWINDELL:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I have one general  
2 comment. I am sitting here listening to all this conversation,  
3 and I have been a big supporter, as you all know, of the SSC,  
4 and they've out come out, to me, to be the scientific  
5 information that I can depend on. With this past meeting, and  
6 all the stuff that's gone on with this particular meeting of the  
7 SSC, I have got to rethink my strong support at this time,  
8 because of -- Especially when you take a couple of members, or a  
9 few members, and don't allow them to vote, and you're telling  
10 them that, because they've done certain work here and there,  
11 that they're not good scientists to fully evaluate what's being  
12 presented, and I think that's wrong.

13  
14 As an engineer, I look at everything that's available to me to  
15 do anything, and so I just am having grave difficulty believing  
16 that, and I can't believe that, with the vote that was taken,  
17 and only a 2 percent difference between the vote, that it's  
18 presented to this council as the best scientific information  
19 available. I'm sorry, but that doesn't fit the bill.

20  
21 I would rather have them come back and say the vote was so close  
22 that we've got to continue to review this some before we can  
23 give you a good recommendation, because this just doesn't seem  
24 proper, and so, Madam Chair, I'm sorry, and I just -- I am just  
25 having a lot of trouble with this scientific information that's  
26 been provided to us as being the best scientific information  
27 available. Thank you, Madam Chair.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Ed, and I see Mara's hand is up. Let  
30 me just clarify, again, that the folks that worked on the Great  
31 Red Snapper Count that are on the SSC were and did, I think in  
32 most cases, vote, or were able to and did vote on the OFL and  
33 ABC motions. Mara, go ahead, and I know that you're probably  
34 responding to that.

35  
36 **MS. LEVY:** Thank you. Actually, I was just going to respond to  
37 the idea that the council isn't bound by the SSC's ABC  
38 recommendation, and so I was just going to point you to the  
39 section of the Act, which is 302(h)(6). 302(h) tells you what  
40 the functions of the council are, and (6) says develop annual  
41 catch limits for each of its managed fisheries that may not  
42 exceed the fishing level recommendation of its scientific and  
43 statistical committee. I just wanted to make sure that everyone  
44 knew what that provision in the Act was.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks, Mara. Thanks for looking that  
47 up for us. Andy.

1 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Martha. Mara made my point, and I was  
2 going to read the Act as well. Also, to add to the comments  
3 about who was authorized to vote or not vote, the only thing  
4 that I would add is there was one Great Red Snapper Count  
5 scientist that chose to abstain on the decision for ABC, but  
6 everyone involved in the Great Red Snapper Count that sits on  
7 the ABC was authorized to vote if they so chose to make that  
8 decision.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Andy.

11  
12 **DR. LORENZEN:** If I could just briefly comment, the question of  
13 the quality of advice that came out of -- (Part of Dr.  
14 Lorenzen's comment is not audible on the recording.)

15  
16 I want to emphasize, as he said, that the SSC was put in a  
17 pretty untenable position to come up with this, because the --  
18 that we had to give this advice was just not ready for  
19 primetime, and so, basically, I think the response to that, in  
20 order to essentially maintain the normal quality of the SSC  
21 advice, would have been -- (Part of Dr. Lorenzen's comment is  
22 not audible on the recording.)

23  
24 -- we have, but it really should not be laid at the feet of the  
25 SSC that we were -- That we did not have the information of the  
26 sort of quality and coherence that we normally use to make our  
27 decision. Thank you.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks, Kai. I am going to do one more  
30 sweep for hands here. J.D., is your hand up?

31  
32 **MR. DUGAS:** Yes, ma'am. I have a question, maybe a question or  
33 a clarification, for Mara. As from the council's perspective,  
34 we can't exceed the OFL recommendation by the SSC, but we can,  
35 as a council, increase the ABC, and that's a question.

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Mara.

38  
39 **MS. LEVY:** No, that's not correct. The language in the Act  
40 talks generally about fishing level recommendations from the  
41 SSC, and the National Standard 1 Guidelines put more specificity  
42 on that and say that the ABC is the fishing level recommendation  
43 that the councils cannot exceed when setting their ACL.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks, Mara. I am going to go to  
46 Leann, and then I think it sounds like we're ready to talk about  
47 the document itself, and so we'll move into that after Leann  
48 goes. Go ahead, Leann.

1  
2 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thanks. It's something that I've been thinking  
3 about, and I didn't know whether to bring it up or not, but,  
4 since we sort of touched on it, I will briefly give my thoughts.  
5 As we went through that SSC meeting, as was stated before, the  
6 PIs, and so the scientists that worked on the Great Red Snapper  
7 Count, during that first, I guess, two days of the meeting,  
8 where it was really a review of the Great Red Snapper Count and  
9 learning all about it and this and that.

10  
11 At the end of that, they didn't vote on where the review landed,  
12 right, but then, after that, when we moved into catch level  
13 recommendations, catch advice, they did vote after that, and  
14 someone mentioned that one of the scientists from the Great Red  
15 Snapper Count actually ended up abstaining on that ABC vote, and  
16 he made some comments that he had voted on the OFL, and, after  
17 voting on that, he thought better of it, that I don't know that  
18 I should be voting, even though we're done with the review of my  
19 work.

20  
21 Before the meeting, the way that we lined it out, it made  
22 perfect sense to me. Yes, you would abstain when you review the  
23 work, but then, after that, you should vote freely, but I guess  
24 sometimes hindsight is 20/20, and it's a question of what are  
25 you -- What do you want people to abstain from?

26  
27 You're wanting them to abstain from a vote that would say  
28 whether you should be using that work for management advice,  
29 right, and so, had things gone differently, and sometimes we do  
30 make these motions, where we say the best scientific information  
31 available, and, once we do that, then that has an implication  
32 that you will use it for management, period. It's free for all,  
33 and you can use it for whatever you want, as long as you do it  
34 in a properly scientific manner, right?

35  
36 However, during this meeting, because there were some things  
37 that needed to be clarified and work that needed to be brought  
38 back, and we didn't go down the path of actually making any  
39 determinations on that, and so we didn't say how it would be  
40 used.

41  
42 However, the next vote, the next part of the meeting, did just  
43 that, and it was another essential discussion of are we going to  
44 use this, and how, and we did allow votes from the scientists  
45 that were part of the work, and so I just think it's something  
46 we may want to revisit in the future, knowing more now, and  
47 determine what is the best path forward, and so thanks.

1 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Leann. Ryan, I saw your hand go up for  
2 a second. I don't know if you want to speak, and I don't know  
3 if we want to go through the public comment before we go into  
4 the document. I don't see public comment posted yet.

5  
6 **MR. RINDONE:** I would think that's probably a good idea, Madam  
7 Chair, to go through the public comment before we go through the  
8 document. Just what I was going to speak to is about the co-PIs  
9 for the Great Red Snapper Count not voting during the peer  
10 review portion of the meeting, and that was in keeping with the  
11 guidance from National Standard 2, having to do explicitly with  
12 peer review, and we reviewed that a few different times during  
13 the SSC meeting, and also with the co-PIs prior to the SSC  
14 meeting. There was an understanding about essentially not  
15 voting on one's own work, which is outlined, like I said, in  
16 National Standard 2, and that's why that was done that way.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks, Ryan. That's helpful. Kai, did  
19 you want to jump in one more time?

20  
21 **DR. LORENZEN:** Yes, one more time. One thing, and I did check,  
22 and I think, actually, if had asked the co-PIs to abstain from  
23 the vote on the catch level recommendations, I think that would  
24 not have made a difference, and both motions would still have  
25 passed, but I'm not 100 percent sure, but I did look at that.

26  
27 There were votes that surprised me in that process, individual  
28 votes, and I what that tells us that -- I mean, really, everyone  
29 on the SSC was voting their expert conscience at that stage, and  
30 that was -- But I also want to, since this my appearance on this  
31 topic, I just want to emphasize that it's been challenging for  
32 all of us, and -- I want to reiterate my thanks to everyone  
33 involved, the Great Red Snapper Count team and the independent  
34 reviewers and the SSC and the council members.

35  
36 I think there are many lessons that we can learn from what has  
37 happened here over the last few weeks, and I look forward to us  
38 doing that, and I just wanted to express my thanks to -- a  
39 testing but collegial exchange. Thank you.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Kai. You were breaking up a little bit  
42 for me, but I think I get the gist of what you were saying, and,  
43 yes, I think everybody recognizes the huge effort that the Great  
44 Red Snapper Count team put forth in this effort, because that  
45 was a long review and SSC meeting, and everybody was really  
46 impressed with a lot of the Great Red Snapper Count team members  
47 that spoke about their work, the reviewers, the SSC members, and  
48 so thank you all, and thank you, Kai, for -- I don't know what

1 that is. All right. We're having sound issues. Carrie or Tom,  
2 are you guys --

3  
4 **DR. FRAZER:** We're experiencing some sound challenges at the  
5 moment. Let's just sit tight for just a second, and let's see  
6 if we can get this squared away. Is that all right? In fact,  
7 why don't we just take a five-minute break, and don't hang up or  
8 anything, but just sit on the line, okay?

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sounds great.

11  
12 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Let's give it another try, and let's move on to  
15 the next item on our list under this Item VII, and so I think  
16 that is going to be public comment. Do we have Emily on the  
17 line?

18  
19 **PUBLIC COMMENT**

20  
21 **MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN:** We sure do. Thank you, Madam Chair.  
22 Council members and members of the public, if you would like to  
23 look at the full text of the comments that we received, under  
24 the meeting materials, they would be found in Tab B, Number  
25 7(c).

26  
27 I just want to give you guys a quick review of sort of what  
28 happened here and how we tried to gather comment. As you know,  
29 the SSC reviewed the interim analysis, as well as the Great Red  
30 Snapper Count, two weeks ago. Last week, on Thursday, we  
31 finished writing the document and published it immediately, and  
32 then, on Friday morning, we published sort of blog notice and  
33 pushed it out on social media to let the public know that the  
34 materials were up on line, and we sort of briefly explained what  
35 was being considered.

36  
37 We did get 166 views of that blog that we posted, and we also  
38 got 1,600 views on Facebook of the shared post, and then, today  
39 alone, we had 700 engagements on Facebook, and we gathered  
40 sixty-eight comments on Facebook. As you know, that does not  
41 constitute a public record, but, those of you that do have  
42 Facebook, if you sort of want to look at some of the public  
43 sentiment that's bouncing around, it might be useful.

44  
45 I sort of primed this because I want you guys to sort of  
46 recognize that we only received seven official comments that are  
47 added into the comment record for this, and we recognize that  
48 the timeline was really tight for everybody, staff, and mostly

1 also for the public, right, because we sort of gave them from  
2 Friday until Monday at noon, and so it was sort of an over-the-  
3 weekend call for comments.

4  
5 I don't think that the number of comments we received is an  
6 accurate reflection of the number of feelings and thoughts that  
7 people in the public do have about this issue, but I will go  
8 ahead and summarize the seven public comments that we did  
9 receive.

10  
11 First, we heard that underfishing snapper has done more harm  
12 than good and that snapper are ravenous and dominant and that  
13 it's not unusual to release over a hundred snapper in one hour,  
14 and other species like amberjack and grouper are suffering  
15 because of it.

16  
17 We heard that the Great Red Snapper Count should be the basis  
18 for all snapper decisions, beginning immediately, for the 2021  
19 fishing season. We also heard that the council should use the  
20 data provided by the Great Red Snapper Count to correct the  
21 flawed NOAA data and allow reasonable fishing seasons,  
22 especially in the wake of COVID-19.

23  
24 Next, we heard that calling the results of the Great Red Snapper  
25 Count final is premature and that the SSC peer review shows that  
26 uncertainty is greater than reported and requires revisions to  
27 the study and its conclusions. At this point, the rush to use  
28 the Great Red Snapper Count for management has eroded faith in  
29 management, caused confusion, and put undue pressure on the SSC,  
30 and the SSC should be commended for taking the precautionary  
31 approach, because of the uncertainty and conflicting abundance  
32 reported in the interim analysis and since red snapper is  
33 undergoing overfishing and in a rebuilding plan. Moreover,  
34 catch levels cannot be increased unless state and federal data  
35 calibration issues are addressed.

36  
37 We also heard support for the SSC's decision and incorporation  
38 of the final report into a full stock assessment. This  
39 precautionary approach to ABC setting will provide long-term  
40 access to all fishermen.

41  
42 We have received two sort of form letters that were sent into  
43 our office. Fifty-four letters came from commercial fishermen  
44 in the eastern Gulf that explained that, when allocation was not  
45 awarded to fishermen in the eastern Gulf, and now that the stock  
46 has come back to a healthy level, but the concentration of  
47 allocation remains in the western Gulf, this creates a situation  
48 where eastern Gulf fishermen have to buy the right to harvest



1 red snapper from western Gulf fishermen, and those fifty-four  
2 fishermen that signed the letter are asking for any quota  
3 increases that come as a result of the Great Red Snapper Count  
4 to be distributed to eastern Gulf commercial fishermen.

5  
6 We received a second letter from sixty-nine fishermen, and they  
7 were from the eastern Gulf, and their letter asked that any  
8 increases in the red snapper annual catch limit that comes from  
9 incorporating the Great Red Snapper Count into best available  
10 scientific information should be used to implement an eastern  
11 Gulf red snapper discard reduction program.

12  
13 The letter, which is linked on the comment record, outlines the  
14 proposed program and explains the benefit of such a program,  
15 including reduction in discards, increase in profitability, and  
16 better utilization of the resource, and also creation of new  
17 pathways of entry into fishery, and so that summarizes what we  
18 heard from our public in that very short window that they had to  
19 give us comments.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Emily. I appreciate that, and all the  
22 explanation, and really all you all have done to try to get some  
23 feedback in a very short amount of time. I am looking to see if  
24 there are any hands, and I don't see any at this point, and so  
25 let's go ahead and move into the document, which is Tab B,  
26 Number 7(d), and it looks like Dr. Froeschke is going to take us  
27 through that.

## 28 29 **DOCUMENT AND DISCUSSION**

30  
31 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** Yes. While they're getting this pulled up,  
32 just to kind of give you guys a timeline of this, as you know,  
33 it's been -- We began working on this in response to a motion at  
34 the January meeting, and, once we got the ABC and OFL  
35 recommendations from the SSC, we developed the document on an  
36 accelerated timeline, if you will, and made it available to the  
37 council in the briefing materials late last week.

38  
39 We have developed Chapters 1 through 3, and this was noticed for  
40 final action, in the event that final action was recommended at  
41 Full Council, and there would be some additional NEPA work in  
42 the Chapter 4, et cetera, that would need to be completed before  
43 the document could be transmitted.

44  
45 If you could bring this up, I will just go through a couple of  
46 things quickly. If you could go to Table -- I believe it's  
47 1.1.1, and, again, this document, just for clarity, is to  
48 consider making changes to the red snapper catch advice based on

1 the results and recommendations of the SSC at their March  
2 meeting, and this would consider an alternative that would raise  
3 the OFL and ABC and would affect all sectors and components.

4  
5 Table 1.1.1, just to give you a brief synopsis, the current  
6 management advice is based on a three-year constant catch  
7 recommendation. In that lowest row, the 2019 through 2021, the  
8 OFL is currently 15.5 million pounds whole weight, in CHTS  
9 units, and the ABC is 15.1 million pounds whole weight, in CHTS  
10 units.

11  
12 If you go to Table 1.3.1, and I won't spend any time on this,  
13 but there is a table of the best estimate of the historical  
14 landings for the fishery, going back quite a few years, from  
15 1986 through 2019. 2019 is not finalized yet, but it should be  
16 very close to what the final landings are going to be, and so  
17 that is available there.

18  
19 If you go to the purpose and need, Section 1.4, the purpose is  
20 to modify the Gulf red snapper catch limits, including the OFL,  
21 ABC, sector ACLs, and sector ACTs, based on the interim analysis  
22 completed by the Science Center.

23  
24 The need for this action is to use the best scientific  
25 information to prevent overfishing, while achieving optimum  
26 yield consistent with the red snapper rebuilding plan and the  
27 requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and  
28 Management Act. Again, this is the first time you've seen this  
29 document, and I will stop there, if there are any questions on  
30 what I have presented so far. If not, we can go to Chapter 2.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Let me just do a quick scan for hands. I do  
33 not see any, and so I think you're safe to move on.

34  
35 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. This document is  
36 a single action, and it considers modification of the Gulf of  
37 Mexico red snapper catch limits, and there are two alternatives.  
38 Alternative 1 is the no action, and then Alternative 2 would  
39 implement the recommendations based on the SSC's meeting last  
40 week, and so, if you scroll to Alternative 1, I just want to  
41 walk you through the tables, primarily, because Alternative 2  
42 builds on this.

43  
44 There is nothing new in here, and so, essentially, we continue  
45 the current management and harvest limits. I have put this  
46 table in the document such that you could see the OFL values,  
47 and ABC, et cetera, and then the column on the right shows the  
48 calculation that was used to compute it, and so everything is

1 based on the OFL, and the ABC is reduced 2.581 percent, and this  
2 was based on the review of SEDAR 52.

3  
4 The ACL is equal to the ABC, and so there's no reduction for the  
5 total ACL. The commercial ACL is related to the total, in that  
6 it's simply 51 percent of the total ABC and/or total ACL, and  
7 that's based on the allocation of the fishery. Likewise, it's  
8 49 percent for the recreational.

9  
10 As you know, the recreational is further split into the federal  
11 and private angling components, and the federal for-hire ACL  
12 comprises 42.3 percent of the 7.399-million-pound ABC, and then  
13 the private angling component comprises the 57.7, which is 4.269  
14 million pounds. Then, from this component down, each of the  
15 states are apportioned a percentage of the private angling ACL  
16 that was derived in Amendment 50, and those percentages are  
17 reflected in the right column, under calculation for each  
18 corresponding row, and so that's nothing different.

19  
20 If you scroll down to Alternative 2, you will see the same  
21 table. The only difference is that these same calculations are  
22 essentially -- Or the same allocations are made based on the  
23 recommendations from the Scientific and Statistical Committee  
24 last week. The difference -- If you look at the calculation for  
25 the ABC, you will see, instead of the two-point-five-percent-  
26 and-change buffer, now it's much larger, and it's 39.8 percent.

27  
28 From there, the total ACL, again, is equal to the ABC, and all  
29 the other values correspond in the same way, and so each state  
30 just gets the same percentage, albeit from a slightly higher  
31 ABC, and so the poundages are slightly higher than Alternative  
32 1.

33  
34 Then, if you scroll down to the next -- There is one more table  
35 down there, and then we'll stop for questions. It's Table  
36 2.1.1, and, essentially, what this does is, in the column on the  
37 right, it just summarizes the difference in the increase between  
38 Alternative 1, which is the no action, and the Alternative 2 for  
39 each management metric in here, and so, as you'll see, there's a  
40 large increase for the OFL, over ten million pounds, and there's  
41 a modest increase in the ABC, and then that cascades down, and  
42 so each state, or component, you can see what increase in their  
43 ACL they would expect if Alternative 2 was selected as  
44 preferred. I will stop there for questions.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks. Are there any questions  
47 for Dr. Froeschke? Mara.

1 **MS. LEVY:** Thank you. Not so much a question, but just a  
2 comment. I understand why the tables for the alternatives are  
3 not showing a private angling ACT, because, with state  
4 management, it's not really in use, but, I mean, I will note  
5 that there is still one on the books, because we have the part  
6 of state management that addresses default regulations if  
7 required, and so that would be -- That would be changed,  
8 consistent with whatever change in the catch limits happen. We  
9 may want to add that somewhere, but I don't want to confuse  
10 things when people are looking at it.

11  
12 **DR. FROESCHKE:** As a follow-up, there is verbiage below the  
13 table and in the text to reflect that, and the reason we didn't  
14 add it is we were trying to avoid confusion, but fair point.  
15 Thank you.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Mara, and thanks, John.

18  
19 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I have one other comment, if there's no  
20 questions.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Go ahead.

23  
24 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Just one other thing to keep in mind is that the  
25 values that are on the screen are based solely on the SSC's  
26 recommendation. As I'm sure you're all aware, there is a  
27 related action that Mr. Rindone will be going through to  
28 consider calibration, potentially. This does not reflect those  
29 calibrations, and so, in the event that the calibrations or  
30 buffers or what have you are considered for the private angling  
31 ACL, those numbers would be further modified, and we will be  
32 presenting those in the next document.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Good point. All right. Thanks for bringing  
35 that up. All right. I'm seeing some hands go up now. Kevin.

36  
37 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't have any questions.  
38 I was going to offer a motion, if that's appropriate, or, if you  
39 want to answer questions first, I can wait.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Well, I don't see a lot of questions, and so  
42 this is a document up for potentially final action today, and so  
43 I think a motion would be appropriate. Go right ahead.

44  
45 **MR. ANSON:** All right. I did not send the motion to staff.  
46 It's relatively short, but I will read it. **The motion is to add**  
47 **a new alternative, Alternative 3, which would be to modify the**  
48 **red snapper OFL based on the OFL from the Scientific and**

1 Statistical Committee during their March/April 2021 meeting and  
2 retain the current ABC of 15.1 million pounds.

3  
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Anson, can you slow down and  
5 read that one more time?  
6

7 **MR. ANSON:** Certainly. Add a new alternative, which would be  
8 Alternative 3, to modify the red snapper OFL based on the OFL  
9 from the SSC's March/April 2021 meeting and retain the current  
10 ABC of 15.1 million pounds.  
11

12 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. I think we've got it on the board now.  
13 I'm going to read it, and then we'll shop it out for a second.  
14 The motion is to add a new Alternative 3 to modify the red  
15 snapper overfishing limit based on the overfishing limit from  
16 the SSC's March/April 2021 meeting and regain the current ABC of  
17 15.1 million pounds. Kevin, I think that's what you said. Is  
18 there a second for this motion? Going once. If you would like  
19 to second it, just shout it out.  
20

21 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** I will second, for discussion.  
22

23 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. It's seconded by Troy Williamson.  
24 Kevin, do you want to provide some rationale, before we start  
25 going to hands?  
26

27 **MR. ANSON:** Certainly. We had, obviously, lots of conversation  
28 today, and there was lots of conversation during the SSC  
29 meeting, and Dr. Lorenzen, I think, did an excellent job of  
30 providing some information as to how the meeting was set up, and  
31 it was a little rushed. Again, kudos to everybody involved for  
32 doing the work, and that's all the preparation on the Science  
33 Center, and all the folks in the SSC meeting, and all the  
34 interviewers, and all the council staff.  
35

36 It was a herculean effort, and I do applaud everyone for going  
37 through the exercise, and I do appreciate that there was some  
38 acknowledgment of the increase in our understanding of red  
39 snapper, and that increase in understanding relates to a  
40 dramatic increase in the abundance of red snapper in the Gulf of  
41 Mexico, and so I think that's important for us, as managers, as  
42 we look ahead, and not only look ahead to the next agenda item,  
43 but we look ahead to the immediate future and look out a few  
44 years.  
45

46 Trying to get there, and get us to a point where everybody feels  
47 comfortable about the science, and everybody feels comfortable  
48 about how the science generated numbers and how much uncertainty

1 there is. As was mentioned, we're still waiting on final edits  
2 to the Great Red Snapper report, and they haven't even come in  
3 yet, and so that question is set yet unresolved.

4  
5 I think there is some opportunity there for us to try to proceed  
6 with caution in the next several years, and I will be speaking  
7 to that in the next section, but, at least in this regard,  
8 recognizing that the Great Red Snapper Count had high abundance,  
9 that's what this motion attempts to do, is to recognize that and  
10 utilize that for management.

11  
12 Then the second part of the motion deals with the ABC, which  
13 pertains more directly to our job as council members, is to  
14 determine how we access the fish that the SSC determines are  
15 available, and so this number, as people will note, is slightly  
16 less than what came out of the SSC meeting, and so there's lots  
17 of questions yet remaining as to how the fishery is prosecuted.

18  
19 There is lots of questions as to the methods and surveys being  
20 used to determine the level of prosecution on the resource, and  
21 there are still lots of questions there yet to be resolved, and  
22 there's some questions, in my mind at least, and, unfortunately,  
23 there was not time yesterday, as to how dead discards are  
24 accounted for in the two sectors relative to monitoring catch or  
25 harvest.

26  
27 That might cause certain sectors to increase their harvest, and  
28 so this is an opportunity to try to utilize that additional  
29 pounds that came out of the March/April meeting, to try to use  
30 as a, quote, unquote, buffer for that, and I realize that,  
31 according to information that was provided relative to the 2019  
32 information that NOAA calculated, using calibrated landings for  
33 the state surveys, that we exceeded the previous OFL, and so I  
34 am going to argue --

35  
36 It's no secret to anyone, and I'm going to argue that we  
37 continue that in the next discussion, or agenda item, and so, in  
38 preparation of that, again, trying to recognize and take  
39 advantage for us, management-wise, of the additional pounds, as  
40 we have that available, and, yet, there's still some questions  
41 on the scientific side of the house, as to the uncertainties  
42 related to that and the uncertainties related to some of the  
43 data collection activities that we have to monitor harvest, and  
44 I tried to incorporate a little bit of a buffer.

45  
46 Everybody remains status quo, and I know that may not be what  
47 everybody is looking for, but, in reality, all we were looking  
48 forward to split among the three groups of folks is 300,000

1 pounds, and so I don't think that would have made much of a  
2 difference, is my opinion, but that's my rationale, Madam Chair.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks, Kevin. I guess I will just  
5 suggest one clarification to the motion, just so it's super  
6 crystal clear what we're talking about with the OFL, is if we  
7 could put the poundage in there, which I think is 25.6 million  
8 pounds.

9  
10 **MR. ANSON:** Very good idea.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. All right. Andy, your hand is raised.  
13 Go ahead.

14  
15 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Martha, and thanks, Kevin, for the  
16 explanation of your motion. I guess I will speak to kind of two  
17 parts of it. With regard to the OFL, given the new advice,  
18 obviously, from the SSC, it certainly makes sense that we would  
19 move forward and adopt that OFL in this action.

20  
21 With regard to the ABC, I'm struggling, really, with your  
22 rationale, Kevin. I recognize that it's a modest increase, and  
23 it doesn't really provide the benefits that maybe many of us  
24 were hoping for with a catch limit increase, but it is something  
25 more than status quo, and, although there is certainly  
26 considerable uncertainty surrounding the Great Red Snapper Count  
27 and some of the estimates that will ultimately be derived from  
28 that, this is really a very modest increase, and it's something  
29 that I would expect would not have, obviously, a major  
30 detrimental effect on the stock if we increased the catch limit  
31 by 300,000 pounds, and so I would speak against kind of mixing  
32 the OFL and status quo ACL For this motion.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Andy. I am looking for  
35 more hands. Robin.

36  
37 **MR. RIECHERS:** Kevin, this is to you, I guess, and it's hitting  
38 on a little bit of what Andy just said. It seems, to me, that  
39 the ABC has now been set, at least based on the past discussion  
40 we just had, by the SSC, and maybe it's just the wording in the  
41 motion, but are you really wanting to set an annual catch limit  
42 that is then 300,000 pounds below the ABC, continuing what is in  
43 effect the catch limit now? I am not certain how I'm going to  
44 vote on the motion today, or, if it moves into Full Council, how  
45 I would vote on it, but that's what I am seeing that you're  
46 trying to attempt to do here, since the ABC is set by the SSC,  
47 as I recall that discussion a little bit ago.

1 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Robin. I think the SSC set the upper  
2 limit for what the council can consider for the ABC, but I think  
3 Kevin's motion is within bounds, because we can go lower, but we  
4 just can't go higher, if that helps.

5  
6 **MR. RIECHERS:** Okay. Thanks. Yes, that does help.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I don't know if you want to chime in on that,  
9 Mara, but that's at least my understanding.

10  
11 **MS. LEVY:** Martha, I think you're right.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Anybody else with a question or a  
14 comment? I am not seeing any, and so I guess we can vote.  
15 Let's try a voice vote. I have a feeling that's going to break  
16 down, but let me ask this. Is there any opposition to this  
17 motion?

18  
19 (There are multiple yes's on the audio.)

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** In that case, let's go ahead and do a roll  
22 call, just so that we're clear where we're at.

23  
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you. Mr. Riechers.

25  
26 **MR. RIECHERS:** No.

27  
28 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Banks.

29  
30 **MR. BANKS:** No.

31  
32 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Stunz.

33  
34 **DR. STUNZ:** No.

35  
36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Swindell.

37  
38 **MR. SWINDELL:** No.

39  
40 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Shipp is absent, I believe.  
41 Mr. Diaz.

42  
43 **MR. DIAZ:** No.

44  
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Anson.

46  
47 **MR. ANSON:** Yes.



1 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dugas.  
2  
3 **MR. DUGAS:** No.  
4  
5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Ms. Bosarge.  
6  
7 **MS. BOSARGE:** No.  
8  
9 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dyskow.  
10  
11 **MR. DYSKOW:** No.  
12  
13 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** General Spraggins.  
14  
15 **GENERAL JOE SPRAGGINS:** Yes.  
16  
17 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Williamson.  
18  
19 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** Yes.  
20  
21 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Sanchez.  
22  
23 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.  
24  
25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck.  
26  
27 **MR. STRELCHECK:** No.  
28  
29 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Ms. Boggs.  
30  
31 **MS. BOGGS:** No.  
32  
33 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** The motion fails four to ten.  
34 Madam Chair.  
35  
36 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Carrie. Okay. This is potentially  
37 final action for this council meeting, and so, at this point, if  
38 there's anybody who would like to offer a different motion, I  
39 would be happy to accept that at this time. Dale.  
40  
41 **MR. DIAZ:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I will make a motion that we  
42 make Alternative 2 the preferred alternative.  
43  
44 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Great. Let's get that on the board. We  
45 have a motion for Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative.  
46 Now that we've got that on the board, is there a second to this  
47 motion?  
48

1 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Martha, I will second it.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Andy. Okay. Dale, do you want to  
4 speak to this?

5  
6 **MR. DIAZ:** Sure. I will give it a try. Leading up to this  
7 meeting, it's not really where I thought we were going to be.  
8 We had a lot of discussion, earlier in the day, and I'm not  
9 going to try to rehash all of that, and I think this is -- Out  
10 of options we have before us -- Neither one of the options are  
11 really very appealing, and this is the best of the two options.  
12 I know there's a lot of user groups that had higher hopes for  
13 more access to the fishery, and I would like to offer them the  
14 Alternative 2, which gives them the most that we have available  
15 to us. Thank you, Ms. Guyas.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Diaz. I am looking  
18 for any other questions or comments on this motion. I think  
19 it's pretty straightforward. I think we all, at this point,  
20 know the numbers that we are looking at here, based on this  
21 morning's and this afternoon's discussion, but I will just do  
22 one more look for hands, and I don't see any, and so let's just  
23 -- I am going to assume that everybody is ready to vote, and so  
24 let's just do a roll call on this vote. well, I will try it.  
25 We'll try a voice vote. Is there any opposition to this motion?

26  
27 (There are multiple yes's on the audio.)

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Then let's do a roll call vote on this  
30 as well.

31  
32 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Ms.  
33 Bosarge.

34  
35 **MS. BOSARGE:** Yes.

36  
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** General Spraggins.

38  
39 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** Yes.

40  
41 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Stunz.

42  
43 **DR. STUNZ:** No.

44  
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Banks.

46  
47 **MR. BANKS:** Yes.

1 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck.  
2  
3 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes.  
4  
5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Ms. Boggs.  
6  
7 **MS. BOGGS:** Yes.  
8  
9 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Diaz.  
10  
11 **MR. DIAZ:** Yes.  
12  
13 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Shipp is absent. Mr. Anson.  
14  
15 **MR. ANSON:** Yes.  
16  
17 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Riechers.  
18  
19 **MR. RIECHERS:** No.  
20  
21 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dyskow.  
22  
23 **MR. DYSKOW:** No.  
24  
25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Swindell.  
26  
27 **MR. SWINDELL:** Yes.  
28  
29 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dugas.  
30  
31 **MR. DUGAS:** Yes.  
32  
33 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Sanchez.  
34  
35 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.  
36  
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Williamson.  
38  
39 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** No.  
40  
41 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** The motion carries ten to four with  
42 two abstentions and one absent. Madam Chair.  
43  
44 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Carrie. All right. We do have some  
45 codified text, although are we ready to review that at this  
46 point? I am just trying to flip through it right now.  
47  
48 **DR. FROESCHKE:** It's available, but it's going to be fairly

1 general until we incorporate the preferred alternative.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. In that case we'll wait to look at  
4 codified text at least until Full Council, so we can see what  
5 the potentially final language looks like at that point. Since  
6 this is potentially a final action item, if the committee would  
7 like at this point, I think it would be appropriate to  
8 potentially send a motion to the council recommending final  
9 action here, and maybe just leave out that codified text  
10 language at this point, and so I will just kind of put that out  
11 there as an option for the committee, and it looks like staff  
12 may be trying to pull that language, to make it easier on  
13 whoever would like to make that motion, if anyone.

14  
15 It looks like it's crickets at this point, which is okay, and we  
16 can certainly handle this in Full Council, if that's where you  
17 all want to go. I am checking one more time for hands. Are  
18 there any other questions or comments on this document, or,  
19 John, is there anything else that we need to cover relative to  
20 this document before Full Council?

21  
22 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Nothing additional for me at this time. Thank  
23 you.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. All right then. Mr. Chair, it looks  
26 like we're scheduled for a break in about twelve minutes. Do  
27 you want to break now, or do you want to at least start  
28 calibration first? I would maybe suggest that we take a break  
29 first.

30  
31 **DR. FRAZER:** I think what we'll do -- I'm going to try to make  
32 the most of our time, and perhaps I will let Ms. Muehlstein give  
33 her presentation first, and then we'll take a break.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. That sounds good.

36  
37 **FINAL ACTION: FRAMEWORK ACTION: GULF OF MEXICO RED SNAPPER**  
38 **RECREATIONAL DATA CALIBRATION AND RECREATIONAL CATCH LIMITS**  
39 **PRESENTATION**  
40

41 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Okay. Thank you. As Bernie pulls this  
42 presentation up, I just wanted to give you guys a little bit of  
43 rationale here and talk about what we're doing. Since we're  
44 going through this red snapper calibration process, as you know,  
45 sort of as an internal audience, which is a really complicated  
46 process, and it's a really hard one to explain, and so, with the  
47 help of Dr. Ava Lasseter, we have come up with this quick  
48 PowerPoint that is hopefully going to sort of give everyone,

1 council members as well as our fishing audience that's  
2 listening, just sort of a brief primer on this calibration and  
3 what we're doing.

4  
5 Hopefully I'm the appropriate person to give this presentation,  
6 since I'm not a statistician, and, in order to sort of figure  
7 out the document and what we're doing, I had to actually learn a  
8 little bit about currency exchange, and so bear with me if this  
9 is elementary. It is on purpose.

10  
11 We are looking at calibrating, or, in other words, sort of  
12 exchanging currencies between different data collection  
13 programs, and, in order to sort of explain what that means, I  
14 think the best thing for us to do is talk money, and so we're  
15 thinking about, if you were going to travel to another country,  
16 and you have U.S. dollars, but you wanted to go somewhere else,  
17 and you wanted to have money in whatever denomination that they  
18 were using.

19  
20 You know that it would be very rare that your U.S. dollars would  
21 be dollar-for-dollar the same value as the currency of wherever  
22 you were traveling, and so, for example, if we had U.S. dollars,  
23 since we are in the United States, we would use this equation,  
24 and your own currency, the one you're starting with, Currency 1,  
25 would always be sort of at the bottom on this.

26  
27 Let's say you're going to Europe, and so, if you were going to  
28 Europe, and you had U.S. dollars, you would need to figure out  
29 the exchange rate between U.S. dollars and euros, in order to  
30 make sure that the money you had was of equal value in the money  
31 that you were buying.

32  
33 Right now, the exchange rates from U.S. dollars to euros is  
34 0.836, and so, if had ten U.S. dollars, and I wanted to purchase  
35 euros with it, I would end up with 8.36 euros. If we were in  
36 Europe, and we had a good time, but it was time to come home,  
37 and we happened to have some money left over that we wanted to  
38 exchange back to U.S. dollars, the exchange rate is not the  
39 same, and it's actually the inverse, and so what you will see  
40 here is that the exchange rate between euros and U.S. dollars is  
41 1.196, rather than what we had just used, and so, if I had that  
42 same 8.36 euros in my pocket when I was leaving from travels,  
43 and I wanted to exchange it back to U.S. dollars, I would  
44 multiply it by 1.196, and there we would go, and I would have  
45 the same value in U.S. money back.

46  
47 This exchange rate and these data currencies are very similar to  
48 what we're attempting to do in this document. The CHTS, the

1 MRIP-CHTS, and each state measures their harvest differently,  
2 and so we're going to need an exchange rate in order to compare  
3 systems. Now, this doesn't change the values of either one of  
4 the systems, the landings from system, but it just makes it so  
5 that we're speaking in the same language.

6  
7 Also, these calibration ratios that we've been talking about are  
8 exchange rates, and it's exactly what an exchange rate is, and  
9 it's sort of a number that we're using to make sure that we can  
10 convert our different data currencies into the same language.  
11 Since CHTS is how we're setting our annual catch limits for red  
12 snapper, we're going to sort of use that like it is U.S.  
13 dollars, and what we need to do is find a calibration ratio, or  
14 exchange rate, for each one of the state data collection  
15 programs, to make sure that we're using the same currency.

16  
17 One of the things that you're going to see, as we look through  
18 this document, is predicted landings, and what I want to do here  
19 is make sure that you understand the way that this was done and  
20 sort of how we're looking at this working.

21  
22 If we set -- I'm going to use Alabama as an example. In CHTS,  
23 we set the Alabama sort of state allocation at one-million-and-  
24 some-change in CHTS currency. Now, what we presume has been  
25 happening is that, in Alabama Snapper Check, we've been landing  
26 that same number, but it's in a different currency, and so, in  
27 order to arrive at what that would actually be when we converted  
28 it back into CHTS, we have to divide it by our exchange rate.

29  
30 What you end up with is, rather than using the same number in  
31 two different currencies, it's we're getting our predicted  
32 landings by taking that number in Alabama Snapper Check currency  
33 and dividing it by the exchange rate for CHTS to Alabama Snapper  
34 Check.

35  
36 Then the next thing that I want to address is what happens when  
37 you're trying to calibrate multiple currencies. As we know,  
38 each one of the currencies has its own exchange rate between  
39 itself and the other ones, and so we can't sum the units from  
40 different currencies. It just doesn't correspond to the sum of  
41 the units in a single currency, and I will walk you through what  
42 I mean by that.

43  
44 If we're starting with ten U.S. dollars, and we want to convert  
45 it to euros, like we had talked about, we end up with ten U.S.  
46 dollars, and we convert it to euros, and we end up with 8.36  
47 euros. Well, if we also take another \$10, and we decide to  
48 convert it to yen, we would end up with 1,086 yen. Now, what we

1 cannot do is simply add those two together, the euros and the  
2 yen, and come up with some total. It would be a meaningless  
3 total, and so adding that 1,086 yen with 8.36 euros does not  
4 actually add up to this number that we're calling 1,094.36, and  
5 that is sort of a meaningless number.

6  
7 Since it's a meaningless number, what you can't do is then  
8 subdivide that number back, and let's say we decided to divide  
9 it in half, and so we would have 547 euros and 547 yen, and what  
10 you will see is that's not going to equal the initial \$20 that  
11 you started with, right, or the \$10 that you bought euros in and  
12 the \$10 that you bought yen in.

13  
14 When we are going through the document, you are going to see  
15 that there is a sum of five different currencies everywhere, and  
16 we have tried to sort of hashmark that out, or gray that out, to  
17 help you understand that adding up different currencies and  
18 coming up with some number doesn't have valid units, and so it's  
19 not actually a valid number, and that we are only displaying  
20 that for comparison purposes.

21  
22 Sort of the idea of adding them all up, the units, and then  
23 dividing them back and having them be meaningful is something  
24 that is addressed in one of the alternatives, and so I just  
25 wanted to sort of walk through that example, so that everybody  
26 sort of recognizes that you can't work with the currencies  
27 unless they're all exchanged into the same denomination.

28  
29 This slide simply shows that the calibration ratios, or the  
30 exchange rates, are for each of the state data collection  
31 programs, in comparison to the CHTS. I think most of you guys  
32 have seen these ratios before, but just for simplification's  
33 sake, and then the next slide will show you sort of just a  
34 summation of what we're about to look at in the document, and it  
35 will show you --

36  
37 What we've done here is tried to break it down so you can see  
38 the currency in CHTS, and you'll see that in the blue column,  
39 and then we also have those columns that I mentioned, where  
40 we're going to add up the sums of all the different currencies,  
41 and we end up with a number, but that number is really only for  
42 comparison purposes, and it's not a useful number.

43  
44 What you can see here is I'm actually using an outline of each  
45 state to represent that that is in the state currency, and so  
46 think of that like a dollar sign, but it's an Alabama dollar  
47 sign, or a Florida dollar sign, and so I just wanted to sort of  
48 put this table out there, to make sure that you guys have that

1 to think about as we are going through the document. With that,  
2 it just sort of concludes my overview, and hopefully our sort of  
3 primer on what we're about to get into after break.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Emily. I think that was helpful, but I  
6 think, at this point, let's take our break. Then, when we come  
7 back, we can go into questions.

8  
9 **DR. FRAZER:** So we'll return at 4:15.

10  
11 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Are we ready to roll?

14  
15 **MR. RINDONE:** Bring us in for a landing.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I will try.

18  
19 **MR. RINDONE:** Please put your tray tables and seatbacks in the  
20 upright and locked position. All right. This is -- Obviously,  
21 this all pertains to our final action for the framework action  
22 for Gulf red snapper recreational data calibration and catch  
23 limits. Emily did a great job on that presentation, and, Emily,  
24 do you want to go through the public comment before we get into  
25 the document?

26  
27 **PUBLIC COMMENT**  
28

29 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** I would be delighted to. If you would like to  
30 read the full text of the comments that we received on this, you  
31 can look for Tab B, Number 8(c). We have been collecting  
32 comments for this for over a year now, and so we did end up  
33 having sixty-four comments.

34  
35 We did publish a public hearing video, early last week, and that  
36 video has had 135 views. I am going to go ahead and summarize  
37 these comments sort of in the best way that I know how, and I'm  
38 going to kind of break it up, and I will walk you through that.

39  
40 We received a number of different comments that just gave  
41 general support for action here, and I will give you some of the  
42 rationale that was provided. We heard that the council should  
43 make the appropriate ACL adjustments to make sure that red  
44 snapper overharvest does not happen in the recreational sector.

45  
46 We heard that Texas should be held to the same standard as the  
47 other states, for the sake of fairness and the future of the  
48 fishery, and we heard that calibration must be addressed



1 immediately, to ensure that Amendment 50, state management,  
2 complies with the Magnuson Act. We heard that, without  
3 calibration and comparison of state survey landings with an  
4 MRIP-based ACL, it would be statistically indefensible.

5  
6 We heard that, if calibrations are not addressed until the next  
7 stock assessment, that the private angling sector could harvest  
8 three million pounds over the ACL, which would result in  
9 declines in stock biomass, especially in the eastern Gulf.

10  
11 We heard that calibrating now is the best way to reduce the  
12 severity of paybacks later and that Amendment 50 requires each  
13 state to pay back overages in the following fishing year.  
14 Arguably, 2021 payback for overages in 2020 should use  
15 calibrated numbers, and, the longer this is delayed, the harsher  
16 the required paybacks are likely to become.

17  
18 We heard that the council should request that National Marine  
19 Fisheries Service issue a temporary rule to calibrate the ACLs  
20 immediately. We heard that data discrepancies related to in-  
21 season monitor require immediate attention, and resolving the  
22 issue in a timely manner would help prevent further conflict  
23 among stakeholders.

24  
25 We heard that allocating each state a portion of the private  
26 recreational red snapper ACL, using federally-collected data,  
27 while still using state data collection to monitor in-season  
28 harvest, would likely lead to systematic underreporting of  
29 harvest, if they are not calibrated to a common currency.

30  
31 We heard that the lack of calibration to state survey landings  
32 has caused red snapper to undergo overfishing for the first time  
33 in over a decade. We heard that common currency is a big issue  
34 for many aspects of the fishery and that it has implications for  
35 all stakeholder groups. Ignoring the issue cannot be an  
36 approach to continue taking.

37  
38 We heard that greater biomass found in the Great Red Snapper  
39 Count does not solve the common currency issue. We heard that  
40 the council should move forward to finalize the framework to  
41 prevent recreational overages. We heard that overfishing the  
42 ACL, due to a lack of calibration, impacts all sectors and the  
43 for-hire and commercial sectors should not be penalized.

44  
45 We heard serious concerns over the continued lack of restraint  
46 provided by the states on private recreational harvest, and  
47 there was concern about the reduction of quota in the commercial  
48 fishery due to constant overfishing from the recreational

1 sector.

2  
3 We also heard that time is running out to take action on the  
4 issue before the 2021 fishing season, and we heard that the  
5 council must take final action in this meeting in order to  
6 address overages due to a lack of common currency and to correct  
7 flaws with Amendment 50 that allows states to violate MSA.

8  
9 We did hear specific support for Alternative 2 in the document,  
10 which would use the calibration ratios, and we were told that we  
11 should apply the NOAA Office of Science and Technology simple  
12 ratio calibrations to the 2020 season and publish all reporting  
13 information on a central location on the National Marine  
14 Fisheries website in order to support state management of red  
15 snapper.

16  
17 We heard that each survey has its own strengths and biases. If  
18 the states continue to use their own programs, the state data  
19 should be calibrated to match the federal currency or the  
20 federal currency should be calibrated to the state currency, to  
21 make sure that the ACL is not being exceeded.

22  
23 We also heard that the council and National Marine Fisheries  
24 Service should develop a process for implementing and revising  
25 calibrations on a regular basis. We also heard quite a bit of  
26 support for a no action alternative in this document, and I will  
27 give you some of the rationale provided there.

28  
29 We heard that MRIP was not designed to manage in-season  
30 monitoring and was clearly flawed and not widely accepted.  
31 Calibrating warps legitimate state data programs to fit an  
32 agenda to disallow recreational harvest. This framework should  
33 be abandoned, or Alternative 1 should be selected.

34  
35 We heard that the council has not considered a shred of  
36 scientific evidence that does not support the commercial fishing  
37 agenda and that the rules have caused tremendous environmental  
38 turmoil and imbalance. We heard that red snapper are the only  
39 fish that you can catch off a rig, they're everywhere, and  
40 restricting a small number of recreational fishermen occasional  
41 harvest is disgusting.

42  
43 We heard that we should keep the state management plan, because  
44 the federal system is flawed. We heard that recreational  
45 fishermen should be allowed to catch 50 percent of the snapper,  
46 and commercial fishermen should not be favored. We heard that  
47 NOAA should not be allowed to make up whatever calibration  
48 changes they want to penalize anglers for the season that has

1 already taken place and that Amendment 50 was supposed to give  
2 states control, but NOAA continues to implement bad science to  
3 ruin recreational red snapper fishing.

4  
5 We heard that state management is working, and so we should  
6 leave it alone. We heard that recreational fishing seasons  
7 should not be reduced. Wrecks are covered with red snapper, and  
8 the states should have control over harvest.

9  
10 We heard that state-collected data is correct. Since the  
11 council prides itself on using the most recent and accurate  
12 science available, it's time to do that now. We heard that  
13 calibration needs to be vetted more thoroughly and that states  
14 with better data reporting systems should not be penalized.

15  
16 We heard that calibrating now, before the results of the Great  
17 Red Snapper Count are fully integrated, would be punitive to  
18 anglers for no reason. We heard that reducing the allocation of  
19 red snapper available to Mississippi recreational fishermen is  
20 absurd. The population is healthier than ever.

21  
22 We heard that action on converting state data to MRIP should be  
23 delayed until the Great Red Snapper Count can be incorporated  
24 into the stock assessment. We were asked to adhere to National  
25 Standard 6 and not penalize fishermen based on inaccurate data  
26 and to transition to a new data program. Reducing recreational  
27 seasons would cause a derby and negatively impact the economy.

28  
29 We heard that it is in the best interest of the states to ensure  
30 a viable recreational and commercial fishing industry, and so we  
31 do not need to fix what isn't broken, and we also heard that the  
32 MRIP numbers do not accurately reflect the snapper population  
33 and that management of the resource should remain with the  
34 states.

35  
36 We also heard some general comment that was not necessarily  
37 related to the calibration of the data collection programs, and  
38 we did hear that the fishery is more healthy than ever and that  
39 recreational anglers should have longer seasons. We heard that  
40 the red snapper stock has never been better and that fishing  
41 pressure has never been higher. The days of open harvest are  
42 over, and every resident should be given an annual tag or  
43 allotment, so that anglers can choose when they want to fish  
44 throughout the year.

45  
46 We heard that anglers used to catch a variety of species, but  
47 are now catching only red snapper, because they have pushed all  
48 other species, and a zero-day season is ridiculous.

1  
2 We heard a system that protects the larger fish, which produce a  
3 lot of eggs, would be useful. Maybe the council should create a  
4 slot limit of fifteen to twenty-two inches, with an allowance  
5 for one oversized fish per person, and, finally, we heard that  
6 the daily limit should increase to four fish per day, and that  
7 concludes my summary of the comment that we heard.  
8

9 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Ms. Muehlstein. Are there  
10 any questions for Emily, either on the public comment or on her  
11 calibration presentation? Let me give folks just a minute. I  
12 am not seeing any hands, and so I think we can move on. Thanks,  
13 Emily.  
14

15 **MR. RINDONE:** Are you ready for me to go through the document?  
16

17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I think so.  
18

#### 19 **DOCUMENT AND DISCUSSION**

20

21 **MR. RINDONE:** The codified text that's available for you guys to  
22 review right now is basically just the current codified text,  
23 because there's not a preferred alternative, at present, for  
24 this framework action.  
25

26 We'll go to Chapter 2, and so we only have one action in here  
27 that would set modifications to the Gulf state-specific red  
28 snapper private angling component annual catch limits. As Emily  
29 talked about in her presentation about how the state currencies  
30 are not additive, that's something to keep in mind here, and we  
31 will be cleaning the alternatives, and mostly just the tables,  
32 up, to make sure that that's well represented here, and so to  
33 reduce any potential confusion.  
34

35 At the last meeting, you guys added a couple of alternatives,  
36 Alternatives 4 and 5, and, as we go through the discussion,  
37 we've included some tables in here to detail essentially what  
38 the predicted landings would be under each of the alternatives,  
39 and so, here, for Table 2.1.1, you can see that, if we do  
40 nothing, the expectation would be that there would be an  
41 overharvest for the private angling component of almost 1.3  
42 million pounds.  
43

44 Alternative 3 would use the calibration ratios that were  
45 developed by the NOAA Office of Science and Technology and the  
46 Gulf states and recommended by the council's SSC, and these are  
47 shown in 2.1.2.  
48

1 Like Emily said, these are different currencies, right, and so  
2 yen and euros and Australian dollars and everything else, and so  
3 that far-right column there -- We can't add those numbers up,  
4 because those are all being used by the states under their own  
5 data collection programs, but we do expect that, by using these  
6 ratio calibrations, that the states' landings would be able to  
7 be constrained to the ACL, as described in that common currency  
8 of MRIP-CHTS, which I guess we could look at as dollars.

10 If you scroll on down to Alternative 3, this is one of three  
11 buffer alternatives, and so the Southeast Regional Office did  
12 some simulations to arrive at this 23 percent buffer to the  
13 total private angling component ACL that the simulations  
14 described as being sufficient for constraining the private  
15 angling harvest below the private angling component's total ACL.

17 It would do that by about 5,100, or 5,200, pounds there, and you  
18 can see, if you look at this table, essentially, how it shakes  
19 out for each individual state by having this buffer applied, but  
20 this is a 23 percent buffer that's applied across-the-board  
21 here.

23 If we go down to Alternative 4, and please, guys, just jump in  
24 and interrupt me, and I can stop at any point, but Alternative 4  
25 has a lot of similarities to Alternative 4, in that it also  
26 starts with that 23 percent buffer, but Alternative 4 also has a  
27 couple of options for how to handle any increases in the ABC.  
28 Option 4a says that any increase to the ABC, or, in Option 4b,  
29 any increase in at least 25 percent, would see the ratio  
30 calibrations that are shown in Alternative 2 used to correct  
31 those subsequent ABC increases as they apply to the private  
32 angling component for red snapper.

34 Lastly, Alternative 5, which was also proposed at the last  
35 meeting, would establish a state management ACL that uses an  
36 11.819 percent buffer against the total private angling  
37 component's ACL. In this alternative, it took the difference  
38 between the combined state-specific ACLs and the MRIP-CHTS data  
39 currency and the combined state-specific ACLs, after applying  
40 the ratio calibrations from Alternative 2, and then it applied  
41 that 11.819 percent different uniformly, as a buffer, across-  
42 the-board, and, again, just a reminder here that the sum of the  
43 state-specific ACLs, after calibration in Alternative 2, those  
44 are not additive.

46 If we scroll down to Table 2.1.4, we can see how, under  
47 Alternative 5, we would still predict that the landings  
48 resulting from this alternative would exceed the private angling

1 component's ACL, and so, if we go down to the last table, which  
2 is 2.1.5, this table shows, essentially, how everything shakes  
3 out in terms of the predicted landings in MRIP-CHTS currency for  
4 each of the alternatives.

5  
6 The way that this shakes out right now is that, under  
7 Alternatives 1 and 5, we would still expect an overage to occur,  
8 which makes both of those alternatives not viable, and then,  
9 under Alternatives 2, 3, and 4, we would expect that the  
10 landings would be constrained to or just below the private  
11 angling component ACL. Madam Chair.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Ryan. Are there any  
14 questions for Ryan about these tables or any of the alternatives  
15 in this action? I am not seeing any questions. Dare I ask if  
16 anyone is interested in putting forward a motion for a preferred  
17 alternative? Leann, I see your hand.

18  
19 **MS. BOSARGE:** Well, I am certainly not putting out a motion for  
20 a preferred, but I did have a question about the document, if  
21 there's time for that, Madam Chair.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Yes, please.

24  
25 **MS. BOSARGE:** Okay. Can we scroll to page 26? I thought I  
26 would ask this before we get too deep in the discussion that  
27 probably won't have anything to do with this. This was a new  
28 section that we've been adding to our documents recently, and  
29 it's back in the Chapter 3 stuff, and I just had a question,  
30 because I remember that year, 2017, and so pretty much the  
31 paragraph talks about what happened in 2017, which that was that  
32 year that the Secretary of Commerce extended the recreational  
33 season, and so we had like, I think, a forty-two-day season or  
34 something like that, instead of three days.

35  
36 It talked about what was landed that year and how it did exceed  
37 the OFL, and then it talks about, however, based on the SEDAR 52  
38 reference point projections, the overfishing didn't occur, and  
39 it kind of goes into why that is. We had some big recruitment  
40 that came in, and that kind of outweighed some things, and so I  
41 sort of understand that.

42  
43 What I wasn't aware of is kind of the paragraph above it, and  
44 so, if you scroll up to the page right before that, it talked  
45 about this definition of "overfishing", and so, if we hone-in on  
46 that sentence where it says -- It's the third sentence at the  
47 bottom of that page down there, under definition of  
48 "overfishing". In years where there is a stock assessment,

1 "overfishing" is defined as the fishing mortality rate exceeding  
2 the MFMT, the maximum fishing mortality threshold.

3  
4 In years where there is no stock assessment, overfishing is  
5 defined as the catch exceeding the overfishing limit, the OFL,  
6 which is, as we just went through in the last document, that's  
7 what is set by our SSC. The SEDAR 52 that we did, the terminal  
8 year for that assessment was 2016, I think, and I'm pretty sure  
9 that it assessed 2014, 2015, and 2016, and so it did not assess  
10 2017.

11  
12 Based on that definition that I think we have to use, the OFL  
13 that was on the books for 2017 and the landings that we had in  
14 2017 to determine if overfishing occurred, and, if you look at  
15 what that was, which is in the next paragraph, we landed --  
16 Well, 15.65 million pounds is what we landed, and the OFL was  
17 14.79, and so we did exceed it.

18  
19 I don't know, and this is kind of new in our document, and so I  
20 just wanted to talk about it, and we hadn't really talked about  
21 that year in a while, and I know we had some projections that  
22 were run, but I don't think that was really fleshed out with the  
23 definition of overfishing, and I'm not sure we can use those,  
24 and so I thought I would bring it up for discussion.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Leann. I see Andy's hand up, and I  
27 suspect that he would like to respond to that.

28  
29 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Actually, I was not going to respond to that,  
30 but I do want you to bear with me, because I have a number of  
31 points that I want to make. First and foremost, I know many of  
32 you are probably thinking this is not the position that we  
33 wanted to be in, and some of you might think otherwise.

34  
35 We have waited now for a number of meetings to take final action  
36 on calibration, with the hope that the Great Red Snapper Count  
37 might offset some of the potential impact of this calibration.  
38 That, obviously, hasn't transpired, and so the position of the  
39 agency still remains much the same, which is we have well  
40 documented now, for quite some time, and not only discussed with  
41 the council, but worked with the states on their surveys, to  
42 emphasize the need for calibration, and this goes back to our  
43 MRIP program and calibrating when we made some APAIS changes and  
44 to when we approved state surveys and sent letters to each of  
45 the states in 2017 and 2018, indicating that calibration was  
46 required to be used for stock assessments and management.

47  
48 We emphasized that in Amendment 50 and our rulemaking, and now

1 we, obviously, have been discussing this for a number of council  
2 meetings. The one thing that I did not hear Emily state, and  
3 maybe she did discuss it in her presentation, is kind of the why  
4 we're doing this, and I hear a lot of criticism about why are we  
5 trying to standardize relative to MRIP, or bad federal survey  
6 data, and that this is trying to fix a bureaucratic glitch.

7  
8 I think we have, obviously, made it very clear that the intent  
9 here is we need to have comparable quotas across states, among  
10 states, since we're running five different survey programs, and  
11 we need to have surveys that are counting landings in the same  
12 units as the quotas, and we need to make sure, obviously, those  
13 quotas aren't exceeded.

14  
15 All of those reasons have not changed in the timeframe that  
16 we've been working on this action, and so I certainly would  
17 encourage the council to take action during this meeting.

18  
19 The one other thing that I will mention, which maybe relates a  
20 little bit to what Leann was saying, is we have lost several  
21 lawsuits over the last decade related to recreational  
22 management. 2017, obviously, was an increase in the fishing  
23 season length, and we as agency didn't even choose to defend  
24 that justification for setting the season longer. Back in 2014,  
25 we lost a lawsuit to the commercial industry, who sued related  
26 to allocation decisions, and part of the argument, at least in  
27 that lawsuit, was that the recreational sector had frequently  
28 exceeded their quotas and shouldn't benefit from any shift in  
29 the allocation.

30  
31 There is a long history here, and I know it's a difficult  
32 decision, and there are impacts, obviously, to different states,  
33 or across all five states, depending on the preferred  
34 alternative we choose, and I would encourage the council to move  
35 forward with action. Thank you.

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Andy. I am going to ask what probably  
38 is going to sound like a fairly basic question, but I guess it's  
39 worth -- I guess it's worth the committee thinking about, given  
40 the position that we're in.

41  
42 We may be in a position to have a significantly greater OFL, if  
43 we move forward with the previous action, and a moderately  
44 higher ABC, and so it's clear, if we go over the OFL, we are in  
45 an overfishing situation, and Magnuson dictates that the council  
46 then has to take action to correct that.

47  
48 Can we talk about what happens when the ABC is exceeded? What



1 are the consequences of that, and I mean, I guess, legal  
2 consequences, other than potentially getting sued, biological  
3 consequences, et cetera, and I think it might be helpful to  
4 maybe put this in perspective a little bit and just kind of  
5 understand what we're working with here, and so maybe that's a  
6 question -- I guess it's a question to Andy or Mara, and then  
7 also to Clay, since you're on the science side of things. Don't  
8 all jump at once.

9  
10 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I was waiting to see if Mara wanted to speak  
11 first, since it was a legal question.

12  
13 **MS. LEVY:** I can speak, although, Martha, I missed part of what  
14 you were saying that related to the legal question. I know you  
15 were talking about the calibration and the other document that  
16 you potentially have to take final action on. Can you repeat --

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** What I'm trying to get at is, if we are looking  
19 at potentially having a significantly-higher OFL, and a  
20 moderately-higher ABC, what are the consequences -- It's clear  
21 what happens when the OFL is exceeded, right, what the  
22 consequences of that are, and what are the consequences of  
23 exceeding the ABC? That's the question that I'm asking, from  
24 multiple perspectives, whether that's legal, whether that's  
25 management measures that we then have to take, biological  
26 consequences, et cetera, et cetera, because I think that is  
27 relevant to where the council may go here.

28  
29 **MS. LEVY:** Okay. Got it. From the legal perspective, I don't  
30 know that the consequence is related to exceeding the ABC. The  
31 issue is that the FMP, to be compliant with the Magnuson Act,  
32 has to have catch limits, which are not exceeded, and  
33 accountability that will ensure that happens.

34  
35 Consistent exceedance of the ACL is a problem, from the ACL  
36 perspective, and there's also that special provision that  
37 relates to red snapper that requires a commercial and a  
38 recreational quota, and it requires a prohibition on fishing  
39 when the recreational quota is met, and, just because we have  
40 divided the recreational quota up more, it does not mean that  
41 that provision does not apply, and so exceeding the recreational  
42 quota has implications with respect to that provision, and we do  
43 have an established allocation.

44  
45 One of the issues in the prior lawsuit was this idea of the de  
46 facto reallocation by allowing the recreational sector to  
47 consistently exceed its required quota, and so, from a legal  
48 perspective, that's a potential problem as well.

1  
2 Just generally, the thing that I started out saying was the FMP  
3 needs to be in compliance with the Magnuson Act, and so, right  
4 now, we have an FMP that is not in complete compliance, and we  
5 have recognized, in the state management final rule, that  
6 compliance means we have to address those calibration issues,  
7 and so we just have an overall legal issue that is hanging over  
8 this FMP.  
9

10 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks, Mara. I guess I would pose the  
11 same question maybe to Clay, from a scientific perspective.  
12

13 **DR. PORCH:** If the OFL is to be believed, that it's in the right  
14 ballpark, the ABC is so much lower that it just depends on how  
15 much you would exceed the ABC by. I mean, if it's just a small  
16 amount, then there's not much chance of actually causing any  
17 major problem with the stock, and, as I said before, we have the  
18 potential to monitor it in not quite real time, but in months  
19 time, and so, if there's any particular problem, we should be  
20 able to detect it by January from the longline survey.  
21

22 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks, Clay. Phil Dyskow.  
23

24 **MR. DYSKOW:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to follow-up  
25 on the coattails of what Clay was saying. The real issue that  
26 we're struggling with, right at this very moment, is that the  
27 Science Center, despite their best efforts, and it's a great  
28 group of people doing all the right things, but we have an OFL  
29 level that sort of makes sense, based on the Great Red Snapper  
30 data, but the ABC seems very conservative, simply because they  
31 were forced to make a decision in a compressed timeframe, and  
32 they acted very conservatively.  
33

34 If the ABC was set correctly, or I shouldn't say correctly. If  
35 the ABC was set higher, we wouldn't be having this discussion  
36 right now, because we would have a way out of this temporary  
37 situation, and hopefully over the long term, long term meaning  
38 not in the next few months, we would have an opportunity, and  
39 the SSC would have an opportunity, to full integrate the Great  
40 Red Snapper Count information.  
41

42 We would have the opportunity to manage this fishery more  
43 intelligently, and the states would have an opportunity to  
44 formulate solutions for calibration, and so, really, the issue  
45 we have is no different than the issue that the SSC had, where  
46 we're being forced to make a decision in a very compressed  
47 timeframe with imperfect data.  
48

1 What we probably can consider is a band-aid solution that would  
2 get us through the next season, and exceeding the ABC by some  
3 acceptable amount, as long as we're way below the OFL level,  
4 makes perfect sense. Maybe we can't solve this thing the way we  
5 all want to at this meeting, but we can certainly make a  
6 decision that would get us forward into the future, to a point  
7 where we can make a better decision, a more intelligent  
8 decision.

9  
10 I guess what I am trying to say is maybe we understand that this  
11 fifteen-point-whatever ABC is going to be exceeded, but we'll be  
12 within the OFL level for a season, until we can fully absorb the  
13 Great Red Snapper data and come up with a more intelligent  
14 decision. Thank you.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Phil. I see a couple of hands going  
17 up. Kevin.

18  
19 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Kind of carrying on the  
20 discussion that Phil just had, it is a lot to take in, although  
21 we have been talking about it for a while, as Andy said, but we  
22 have not had time, really, to digest the implications of the  
23 Great Red Snapper Count, and there are some issues there.

24  
25 People have been saying, in order to fix regional management, or  
26 the current situation we're in, we need to calibrate to the  
27 Coastal Household Telephone Survey, of which we have a two-times  
28 difference between the Alabama Snapper Check and the Coastal  
29 Household Telephone Survey estimates for red snapper during the  
30 time period for which they were compared.

31  
32 Alabama has been trying to set itself up to get away from the  
33 federal data, because we've been penalized, for years, with the  
34 federal data collection system and how it was used in the  
35 assessment and how then the assessment produces a result and  
36 goes to the SSC process and then is available to management.

37  
38 This goes back to the reauthorization and how things kind of  
39 were shuffled around, as far as who had say, and I am not  
40 arguing that having science have a first crack at the number is  
41 not the way to go, and that's not what I am saying. What I am  
42 saying is that science -- When we have a bunch of science, and  
43 we need to be able to look at each of those numbers and compare  
44 them to one another.

45  
46 We have an assessment, or had an assessment, that was using the  
47 Coastal Household Telephone Survey information, and it produces  
48 a number, and we had the Great Red Snapper Count, and it has

1 produced a number, and both of those are trying to ascertain  
2 what the status of the stock, what the level of the stock, is in  
3 the Gulf of Mexico, of which we're all trying to access that  
4 resource.

5  
6 Again, we have had this discrepancy for years with the Coastal  
7 Household Telephone Survey and then the application, when it  
8 comes to management and distribution of those pounds, we feel  
9 like it has not been totally reflective of the fish that are  
10 available off of Alabama and that we have been penalized for the  
11 amount of fish that we have.

12  
13 The Great Red Snapper Count kind of puts that into more focus,  
14 and you can look at that, and so we've had some preliminary  
15 numbers provided to the council, which we have discussed in  
16 committee and at Full Council, and I will just go back to one of  
17 my comments that I made at the last council meeting, and that's,  
18 for Alabama at least, for each coastal mile, it has twice as  
19 many fish as the average coastal mile in the Gulf.

20  
21 Why is that? I don't know. It might have something to do with  
22 the habitat, and it's preferred, and it's able to result in a  
23 very productive red snapper population off of our section of the  
24 coast, relative to other areas, or perhaps maybe we haven't been  
25 able to fish it at levels that other people have been able to  
26 fish their stock and matching their productivities. Those are  
27 all questions that are still yet to be resolved in order for us  
28 to get to a better place for management.

29  
30 Currently, red drum are managed on a state-by-state basis, using  
31 escapement rates, and I think that's something that we ought to  
32 be looking at, so that we can fully capture the productivities  
33 off of each state and being able to better access the fishery  
34 using that information.

35  
36 I will just go and close with this is Version 1.0 of calibration  
37 that we're going through right now, and it's messy, and it  
38 doesn't look good, but, if we continue down this path, and  
39 Alabama still participates and gives the data, both from the  
40 state currency side of things as well as the APAIS is being in  
41 the future, according to the FES effort component -- Let me just  
42 kind of describe to you what we're looking at at that point.

43  
44 We're looking at numbers that are three-times higher than the  
45 Coastal Household Telephone Survey for similar years as what was  
46 used in the calibration, and that would result in numbers that  
47 are six-times greater than the Snapper Check numbers, and so we  
48 have a point estimate, and I understand there is -- On the

1 scientific side, you have to worry about uncertainty, and,  
2 certainly, the more uncertain you are, the less confidence you  
3 put in that point estimate, but, when it comes to management, we  
4 have to get that money out of the bank, and whether we're going  
5 to France, or we're going to Brazil, to get the currency there,  
6 we still have to go to one bank account.

7  
8 We have to go to the Gulf of Mexico, and, for Alabama, we have  
9 to go to our slide of the Gulf of Mexico, and so we have a point  
10 estimate of around 9.8 million fish for Mississippi and Alabama,  
11 and it's about 82 percent that are off of Alabama, and so that  
12 gives you 8,080,000 fish that are estimated to be two years of  
13 age or older off of Alabama, and it could be higher, and it  
14 could be a little lower, but that's the point estimate that we  
15 have right now.

16  
17 If you were to use FES estimates and compare those estimates to  
18 the population of fish in the Great Red Snapper Count, if you  
19 were to use all of the habitats, of which that eight million  
20 fish was estimated to occur, we would be harvesting, in 2017, of  
21 which it was recorded through FES to have 8.9 million pounds of  
22 harvest from the private recreational sector, which is more than  
23 the entire recreational ACL for the Gulf of Mexico, I would like  
24 to remind folks.

25  
26 That would represent 15.5 percent of the number of fish that are  
27 off of Alabama that were harvested, in order to get that, just  
28 for charter boats, state and federal, and private recreational  
29 boats. If you were to remove the uncharacterized bottom, of  
30 which there's a lot of contention and concern as to whether or  
31 not that's an accurate number, that would leave you with a  
32 harvest of 21.7 percent of the fish in 2017.

33  
34 If you look at the biomass, it gets a little worse, if you're  
35 looking at percentages for 2017, with that 8.9 million pounds of  
36 FES and private. If you add up the charter and the FES numbers  
37 for private in 2017, you would end up with 34 percent of the  
38 biomass that's estimated off of Alabama, using a 3.5-pound  
39 average per fish, on that eight million fish, and you would end  
40 up harvesting 34 percent of the biomass.

41  
42 Then, if you were to remove the uncharacterized bottom and the  
43 fish that are associated, or counted, for it, and still apply  
44 the 3.5 pounds to the difference, which would be five-and-three-  
45 quarter million fish, and then use the harvest in FES from 2017  
46 off of Alabama, you would have harvested, according to FES, 48.2  
47 percent of all of the fish in artificial and natural habitats,  
48 where we think most of the people are going to catch these fish.

1 That's where the majority of the effort is occurring.

2  
3 You go forward in time to 2018, of which the Great Red Snapper  
4 Count did its Gulf-wide accounting, and, in FES, in pounds, you  
5 would end up harvesting 22.6 percent of Alabama's biomass, using  
6 all habitats, and 31.7 percent if you were to exclude the  
7 uncharacterized bottom. That's a lot of fish.

8  
9 Is that biologically -- Are snapper able to support that?  
10 Current information suggests that that is not possible, and yet,  
11 in 2019, we harvested 21.6 percent, using FES, of all the  
12 habitats, and 30.4 percent if you remove the uncharacterized  
13 bottom.

14  
15 I would think, if you were harvesting a third of your biomass  
16 over three years, you would probably be able to see a reduction  
17 in the number of fish that would be available, as well as the  
18 sizes. That's my personal opinion, and so, if you throw Snapper  
19 Check in there, and use its numbers, in 2017, of all the biomass  
20 caught from all habitats, looking at charter and private mode  
21 estimates from Snapper Check, both modes estimated in Snapper  
22 Check, we would be harvesting 4.8 percent of the biomass for all  
23 habitats, or 6.7 if you were to remove the uncharacterized  
24 bottom.

25  
26 In 2018, when the Great Red Snapper Count was performed, we  
27 would be harvesting 6 percent of all of the biomass, based on  
28 Snapper Check landings in 2018, and then 8.4 percent in areas  
29 without the uncharacterized bottom. Then, in 2019, it's 5.8 and  
30 8.2.

31  
32 Again, in our EFP, we were accounting for those fish, and we  
33 estimated a number, and our number was less, according to the  
34 Great Red Snapper Count, because we didn't use the methodologies  
35 that were used in the Great Red Snapper Count, and so it was a  
36 little less, but our management target was 0.1, 10 percent, and  
37 here we are, and we're at -- Now, this doesn't include  
38 headboats, and it doesn't include the commercial, and so we are  
39 very close to harvesting the amount of fish that, according to  
40 current wisdom, is 0.1 would be the exploitation target.

41  
42 We have very, very strong issues, or problems, with continuing  
43 down this road with calibration, and we have data and  
44 information, and, when you compare that information to what is  
45 available, what went into the number that we're trying to use  
46 for management, we have a hard time trying to justify it. Thank  
47 you.

1 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Kevin. Mara.

2  
3 **MS. LEVY:** I honestly don't remember what I was going to say.  
4 Sorry.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** It's all good. We'll go to Andy then.

7  
8 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I wanted to respond back to Kevin's comments,  
9 and it's not directly, and so, Kevin, I certainly appreciate,  
10 obviously, your thinking, and the data and information,  
11 obviously, you have before you, with regard to Alabama, your  
12 concerns about the differences between FES and CHTS and Alabama  
13 Snapper Check, and all of that I think has been on the table for  
14 some time, and certainly there is recognition that we need to  
15 somehow determine which surveys are biased, or what those biases  
16 are, whether they are biased low or high, and try to explain  
17 those differences going forward. We haven't been able to  
18 determine that and figure that out.

19  
20 What I guess I do though want to emphasize here is that's not  
21 the question on the table right now. We wouldn't be having this  
22 discussion about calibration if we had an assessment that  
23 incorporated state survey estimates and was able to produce  
24 annual catch limits based on those state surveys. We don't have  
25 that. We haven't incorporated the state surveys into that  
26 assessment, and the Great Red Snapper Count hasn't been  
27 incorporated into that assessment.

28  
29 We have advice right now that's in a currency that is just not  
30 consistent with, obviously, how the states are counting fish,  
31 and so that is, obviously, the question on the table here, is to  
32 come up with a method that standardizes those surveys to the  
33 same common unit as the quotas are set in.

34  
35 How we do that, obviously, it's through calibration or some sort  
36 of buffer that affects all the states. None of it, obviously,  
37 is good for Alabama, because you do incur a reduction, and  
38 Mississippi as well, but we need to get to a common currency,  
39 obviously, to manage this fishery, with the goal, obviously, of  
40 incorporating the Great Red Snapper Count and making adjustments  
41 to the stock assessment process as we move forward. I just  
42 wanted to refocus the council on the issue at-hand, which is,  
43 obviously, that common currency.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Andy. I am looking to see if there are  
46 any other hands. I am not seeing anyone else with their hand  
47 raised at this time. Okay. This is potentially a final action  
48 item at this meeting. For the council to do that, we would need

1 a preferred alternative, and so -- Kevin.

2  
3 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Since there was a pause in  
4 people raising their hands, I have sent a motion to staff. I  
5 will give them a second to get it. I appreciate Andy's  
6 comments, but we feel fairly passionate about the information  
7 that we have, and I will -- If I get a second, I will explain a  
8 little bit more as to why we feel that way and what some of the  
9 implications are, if we go with any of these other alternatives  
10 besides no action in the document. I will read the motion.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Go right ahead.

13  
14 **MR. ANSON:** It is to add a new alternative, Alternative -- I  
15 believe it's 3, and it might be 4, that would change the state-  
16 specific red snapper private angling component annual catch  
17 limits, using modified percentages from those identified in  
18 Amendment 50A in state survey currencies through 2023. Alabama  
19 would retain the ACL that was issued in Amendment 50, which is  
20 1.122662, and then the corresponding ACLs, with their pounds and  
21 the percentage allocations, are there, with the new ACL that we  
22 just passed in the previous document.

23  
24 I don't know if I need to read it again for the record. It was  
25 a little disjointed there, and I can if you would like, Madam  
26 Chair.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. This is to add a new alternative, which  
29 is now Alternative 6, that would change the state-specific red  
30 snapper private angling component ACLs, using modified  
31 percentage from those identified in Amendment 50A, in state  
32 survey currencies through 2023. Alabama would retain the ACL  
33 that was issued in Amendment 50A. Then the others are -- I am  
34 just trying to understand what this does, looking at the  
35 percentages here and the poundages.

36  
37 **MR. ANSON:** If I can, Madam Chair.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Yes, please. Explain.

40  
41 **MR. ANSON:** I just kept Alabama at the same pounds that we have  
42 had for the last several years, and, again, this is all under  
43 the context of state currencies, and I know that's a point of  
44 contention, but trying to work within the system the best we can  
45 with the information that we have available to us that is passed  
46 through the SSC.

47  
48 Alabama would -- The private recs would still retain their



1 1.122622 pounds, which is what they have had for the several  
2 years, and then I deducted that from the 4.35 million pounds  
3 that, again, was just approved. Then everybody got a higher  
4 percentage, based on doing the same exercise with the old ACL  
5 and what the total was for theirs and their percentages, based  
6 on the remaining pounds in the last 4.269 million pounds.  
7 Everybody's percentages went up, and everybody's pounds went up,  
8 except Alabama's. Our pounds stayed the same, and our  
9 percentage allocation went down.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Is there a second for this motion?  
12 Shout it out, or not. Going once.

13  
14 **MR. RICK BURRIS:** I will second it.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. That was a second on behalf of General  
17 Spraggins from Rick. I am going to go to some hands then,  
18 unless -- Kevin, I think you just explained kind of where you're  
19 coming from on this. Ryan.

20  
21 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to point a  
22 couple of things out to the committee. Under this alternative,  
23 based on the ACLs that would be established and that the states  
24 would be fishing to, using their own data currencies, that an  
25 overage would be expected for this alternative, just as it would  
26 under Alternatives 1 or 5, and, also, that this alternative,  
27 based on how it's written and based on the intent that was  
28 provided, is tantamount to reallocation, which would require a  
29 plan amendment and is not something that we can do like this in  
30 this document.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Right. Okay. Thanks, Ryan. I was going to  
33 ask that question. Mara.

34  
35 **MS. LEVY:** Thank you. I will echo some of that. This isn't  
36 really an alternative to the action in this document. This  
37 action is addressing somehow figuring out a way to adjust the  
38 state catch levels into their currency, such that we don't  
39 exceed the private angling ACL. This is something that does a  
40 reallocation based on the catch levels you are presumably going  
41 to adopt in the other document.

42  
43 If it's relevant to anything, I think it would be relevant to  
44 what's in the other document, although it's an allocation shift,  
45 a direct allocation shift, and so it would need to be a plan  
46 amendment, but it doesn't seem to me to be an alternative for  
47 this particular action.

1 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Mara. Any other questions  
2 or discussion on this motion? Seeing none, let's do a roll call  
3 vote.  
4  
5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I'm ready, Madam Chair.  
6  
7 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Go ahead.  
8  
9 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Anson.  
10  
11 **MR. ANSON:** Yes.  
12  
13 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Stunz.  
14  
15 **DR. STUNZ:** Yes.  
16  
17 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Ms. Bosarge.  
18  
19 **MS. BOSARGE:** No.  
20  
21 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Shipp is absent, I believe.  
22 Mr. Sanchez.  
23  
24 **MR. SANCHEZ:** No.  
25  
26 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Williamson.  
27  
28 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** No.  
29  
30 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck.  
31  
32 **MR. STRELCHECK:** No.  
33  
34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Diaz.  
35  
36 **MR. DIAZ:** Yes.  
37  
38 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Burris.  
39  
40 **MR. BURRIS:** Yes.  
41  
42 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dyskow.  
43  
44 **MR. DYSKOW:** Yes.  
45  
46 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Riechers.  
47  
48 **MR. RIECHERS:** No.

1  
2 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dugas.

3  
4 **MR. DUGAS:** Yes.

5  
6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Banks. Mr. Swindell.

7  
8 **MR. SWINDELL:** Yes.

9  
10 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Ms. Boggs.

11  
12 **MS. BOGGS:** No.

13  
14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Banks or Mr. Schieble.

15  
16 **MR. BANKS:** Yes.

17  
18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** The motion carried eight to six  
19 with one absent and two abstentions. Madam Chair.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. We have added that to the document.  
22 Tom.

23  
24 **DR. FRAZER:** Thank you, Martha. So I appreciate all of the  
25 difficulties with this particular document. What I would like  
26 to do is ask the folks at NOAA, either Andy and/or Mara, what  
27 our options are moving forward, and I will give you a little  
28 more context, right?

29  
30 First of all, I'm concerned that we -- With regard to the last  
31 motion, that it's a reallocation, as Mara already pointed out,  
32 and I think that's beyond the scope of a framework action and  
33 would require a plan amendment.

34  
35 Having said that, I just want to think about where we are with  
36 regard to an Alternative 1, which is essentially no action, and  
37 I just want to walk through this for everybody. That's  
38 essentially no calibration, and, if you do that, and Alabama was  
39 to catch let's say one million pounds of fish, thereabouts --  
40 What I am trying to do is to think about the consequences of  
41 allowing essentially an uncalibrated catch into this equation,  
42 and, essentially, it equates to about 500,000 pounds.

43  
44 The reality is, if you do that, you will exceed an ABC, and my  
45 understanding is, under the current situation, that NMFS would  
46 be required to impose a payback mechanism, which ultimately  
47 would put Alabama in a very precarious situation in 2022, and I  
48 don't think anybody wants to do that.

1  
2 What I think we're trying to do, at this point, is to work  
3 through all of the viable options without undue economic harm to  
4 any particular sector or any particular state, but we don't  
5 have, in this document, in its current, I guess, configuration,  
6 an option that allows us to do that.

7  
8 On the other hand, we have a great deal of uncertainty around  
9 the catch advice, and some discussion by the Science Center that  
10 would indicate that, if in fact you exceeded this ABC by that  
11 amount, you would not subject the fishery to -- You wouldn't  
12 unnecessarily or unduly compromise the rebuilding plan.

13  
14 We may -- If you did do that, the question is, all right, will  
15 we have made a mistake, and how would we evaluate that, and how  
16 would we know, and, as Dr. Porch pointed out, by January of  
17 2022, we will have an update to the bottom longline assessment,  
18 and we will have catch data from each of the states, and we will  
19 be able to evaluate that information on a much finer resolution  
20 than MRIP would ever allow us to do, and we would be able to  
21 look at the catch per unit effort, and I would expect, for  
22 example, if there was a real problem, as Mr. Anson pointed out,  
23 that the CPUEs would decline precipitously, and I would also  
24 expect that the size of the catch would decline with time.

25  
26 My question to the NOAA and NMFS folks is, given all of this  
27 information, is there a path forward that you could envision  
28 that might help this council to move forward with a solution  
29 that doesn't impose undue economic harm on any of the states or  
30 any of the sectors, and so I'm going to open that up to either  
31 Andy or Mara.

32  
33 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Tom. I will start, and certainly I  
34 would have Mara weigh-in here. I guess a couple of thoughts,  
35 just based on the motion we just passed and the amendment, and  
36 so a path forward, to me, is, if we're adopting that  
37 alternative, it would be a delay in the action for at least  
38 another meeting for some sort of decision point, as staff  
39 incorporates that alternative into the document, plus we have to  
40 turn it into a plan amendment rather than a framework action and  
41 change the purpose and need, because what's been selected really  
42 isn't consistent with the purpose and need.

43  
44 There's a lot of, obviously, workload administrative  
45 implications on this, which the council, obviously, can take  
46 into consideration however they see fit.

47  
48 Really, what we've done with this new alternative is select

1 status quo, right, and we are essentially setting the ACLs  
2 consistent with the ABC that we just approved in the previous  
3 action and not accounting for any differences in state surveys  
4 relative to how the quotas have been established through the  
5 stock assessment process.

6  
7 I see a number of legal vulnerabilities that, obviously,  
8 continue to remain, and I spoke, obviously, about a number of  
9 cases that the agency has lost over time with regard to red  
10 snapper management and recreational overages, and those continue  
11 to remain, and certainly they open the agency up for further  
12 litigation, if this continues to be the preferred alternative or  
13 path the council goes down.

14  
15 In response to your question about reducing the economic and  
16 social impacts of, obviously, this action, obviously, we were  
17 all banking on -- Or at least many of us were banking on an ACL  
18 increase that didn't transpire. None of us really have a good  
19 sense, at this point, as to whether that will transpire, but  
20 given, obviously, the high abundance estimates in the Great Red  
21 Snapper Count, there is certainly the potential for that.

22  
23 Given we're in April, any sort of council action at this point  
24 would take a considerable amount of time and rulemaking by the  
25 agency, and I don't expect that we would be able to get any sort  
26 of changes to catch limits or calibrations in place much before  
27 the fall, and so the only, I guess, social and economic option  
28 that I see that would at least minimize impacts for 2021 would  
29 be to consider requiring calibration beginning in 2022.

30  
31 It does not avoid the legal vulnerabilities, obviously, for NOAA  
32 Fisheries, but it does give the states another year to kind of  
33 adapt to this new management system and whatever results come  
34 from the Great Red Snapper Count.

35  
36 I am not overly concerned about overfishing occurring if the  
37 council adopts the new OFL, because there is now an enormous  
38 buffer between the OFL and ABC, but the states, obviously, have  
39 signed up for delegation through state management, and they're  
40 on the hook to pay back overages going forward, based on  
41 decisions made by this council and the calibrations that occur.  
42 That is really the only path that I see, but it does also have  
43 its legal vulnerabilities, and Mara might want to say more.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Mara, did you want to jump in?

46  
47 **MS. LEVY:** Yes. I mean, I guess I just want to -- There's a lot  
48 of talking like whatever the council chooses here automatically

1 gets implemented, and I just want to be clear that the agency,  
2 in order to implement anything, has to make a number of  
3 determinations, one of which is that what is being implemented  
4 is consistent with the Magnuson Act.

5  
6 If you're going to select an alternative that is knowingly going  
7 to allow exceedances of the ACLs and the recreational quota, I  
8 think the agency is going to have an extremely hard time finding  
9 that consistency and actually implementing it.

10  
11 Also, just reiterating that the alternative that you just added  
12 -- Again, it's status quo with an allocation adjustment, based  
13 on what you did in the other document, and it is not an  
14 alternative that is consistent with the purpose and need of this  
15 document, and you have kind of, I feel like, mixed the two  
16 issues together here, and I think it's going to make this  
17 document that much more confusing, because it's not a real  
18 alternative, given that purpose and need.

19  
20 **DR. FRAZER:** I just want to circle back then, for clarity, with  
21 regard to Andy's last point. Is it the discretion of the agency  
22 to adopt the calibration as they choose? Could they wait until  
23 2022 to adopt them? Is there flexibility to do that or not?

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Andy.

26  
27 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Certainly Mara can correct me, but we have been  
28 working to, obviously, implement calibration, and we stated  
29 clearly in our Amendment 50 rulemaking that we need to impose  
30 the calibration as soon as possible, and certainly the council  
31 could make a decision as to when they would want to recommend  
32 implementing calibration, but it doesn't alleviate the agency  
33 from potentially legal vulnerability or potentially being able  
34 to approve that action, as Mara was considering.

35  
36 **DR. FRAZER:** Thank you. I'm done, Martha.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks, Tom. Susan. Thanks for  
39 waiting.

40  
41 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you. This actually is probably a question for  
42 Mara. Based on the motion that just passed, my understanding is  
43 that really is not dealing with the calibration issue. Are  
44 Alternatives 3, 4, and 5 that are currently in the document  
45 dealing with calibration? I mean, it's dealing with the  
46 reduction, but it's still not calibrating from the states to  
47 CHTS. Thank you.

1 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Mara, do you want respond to that?

2  
3 **MS. LEVY:** Sure. The purpose that's stated is the purpose is to  
4 reduce the likelihood of exceeding the red snapper private  
5 angling component ACL by adjusting the state catch limits to  
6 account for the monitoring programs used by each state.

7  
8 One of those options is to apply the straight calibration. The  
9 other option that works, that I think goes with Tom's idea about  
10 lessening impact to some of the states, is the 23 percent  
11 buffer, because then you're sort of spreading those impacts out  
12 for now and giving everyone a slightly reduced catch level, to  
13 account for the fact that all these different state reporting  
14 systems are being used, and so both of those options do go to  
15 that purpose.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Mara. Ryan.

18  
19 **MR. RINDONE:** I would just say what Mara said. Thank you.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Patrick.

22  
23 **MR. BANKS:** My question has to do with the timing of this. If  
24 calibration was instituted, and let's just say, hypothetically,  
25 you went with Alternative 2 and you implemented calibration,  
26 based on what I heard Andy say, by the time the federal rule  
27 came into place, sometime in the fall, that's when these new  
28 numbers would take effect, and most of us would be finished with  
29 our season at that point, and so, effectively, you would have to  
30 fish under new numbers until the 2022 season. I just wanted to  
31 make sure that I was right in that understanding of what Andy  
32 said, if Andy or Mara can confirm for me, please.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks for asking that. I guess, just to build  
35 on that, if the council wanted to go down that path and not  
36 implement this until 2022, would the council need to make  
37 modifications to the alternatives to dictate that, or would it  
38 just be something that we would, I guess, suggest on the side to  
39 the Secretary, when she implements this? Andy or Mara, whoever  
40 wants to jump in on that.

41  
42 **MS. LEVY:** Ultimately, I think it's the agency's determination  
43 about when to implement it. I mean, I think, if the council  
44 dictates the implementation date, and the agency can't justify  
45 that implementation date and make a consistency finding with the  
46 applicable laws, then the agency would be in bind, in terms of  
47 implementing it, but, I mean, I don't -- That's sort of a down-  
48 the-road question.

1  
2 It's not something that I think can be given a firm answer right  
3 now, but, just to Patrick's point, if the catch levels get  
4 implemented this year, they are effective this year, and so, if  
5 a final rule is actually effective in say September, those are  
6 the catch limits that would apply to 2021, and I think what the  
7 states would have to do is, if the council votes this up and  
8 decides to submit it for review and implementation, the states  
9 would have to be aware that these could be implemented in 2021  
10 and adjust their management accordingly. Otherwise, they could  
11 end up being over, when they get implemented, and be subject to  
12 a payback.

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Leann and then, Tom, I see your hand is  
15 up.

16  
17 **MS. BOSARGE:** Just a couple of things. Thanks, Madam Chair. We  
18 discussed this a little bit at the last meeting, because I had  
19 concerns, in January, that we probably should have taken final  
20 action and done something last year, in order to make sure that  
21 we did not end up in a position where we possibly overfish again  
22 this year.

23  
24 There was some, I thought, at that time, very constructive  
25 feedback from the states to reassure me that, no, Leann, even if  
26 we don't take final action until April, we will know, at that  
27 point, what our catch recommendations are for each state, and we  
28 can go ahead and adjust our state management accordingly, to  
29 make sure that we don't exceed those levels, knowing that  
30 they're coming down the road that year. I hope that that's  
31 still the case, because I had some big concerns about that at  
32 the last meeting.

33  
34 Then this other idea about there is this OFL that we just picked  
35 a preferred for in the last document of twenty-five million  
36 pounds, and so, if we exceed these catch levels, it's okay,  
37 because the OFL is so high. Well, first off, that's not how  
38 Magnuson reads. You don't shoot for the OFL. You have a catch  
39 level, and that's what you're aiming for, but let me kind of  
40 turn the tables on that logic for a second.

41  
42 If that is how the council wants to manage, then I guess we  
43 would also need to go ahead and get rid of hail-in and hail-out  
44 for the commercial sector and VMS and reporting of your IFQ red  
45 snapper catch, because, hey, we're shooting for the OFL, and we  
46 ought to get a piece of that twenty-five million too, if that's  
47 the way we're going to manage this fishery.



1 Just think about -- I think sometimes we think about this in the  
2 context of just recreational fishing, and, although the  
3 calibration itself -- Yes, it applies to private anglers, but  
4 everything we're discussing here has a larger context.

5  
6 There are other sectors that pursue red snapper, and, as you  
7 exceed any catch level recommendation, whether it be the ACL or  
8 ABC or overfishing limit, it does have ramifications for others,  
9 because it means foregone yield in the future, and,  
10 unfortunately, that foregone yield, the way that we manage --  
11 When you get stock assessments, and your stock is not as big as  
12 it once was, because you have fished it harder than what was  
13 recommended, there is foregone yield, and that doesn't come out  
14 of the sector that got the benefit of catching those extra fish.  
15 That comes off of everybody.

16  
17 We need to take a step back and remember that. Now, I  
18 understand that this is very difficult for the private rec  
19 sector, and I do not envy the position that you are in right  
20 now, and I realize that it is difficult, but we do have to  
21 remember that the decisions that we make for private anglers do  
22 have ramifications for others if we do not stick to catch levels  
23 that we're supposed to stick to. Thank you.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Leann. Tom.

26  
27 **DR. FRAZER:** I apologize, Ms. Guyas, and I realize this is your  
28 committee to chair, but we are running up to a hard stop, and we  
29 have a different meeting that we have to join here at 5:30, and  
30 we're a little past the time, and I am going to suggest that  
31 people think long and hard about this discussion.

32  
33 We'll bring this particular item up in Full Council, and, again,  
34 it's slated for a final action item, and so think long and hard  
35 about what a preferred might be and where you might stand and  
36 what our options are moving forward.

37  
38 If it's okay with you, we can just go ahead and adjourn this  
39 meeting today. We will pick up -- I would like to -- We have  
40 some red grouper things that we need to take care of in the  
41 morning, and we will try to move expeditiously through that,  
42 and, as time allows, we will tackle some parts of the Habitat  
43 Protection Committee, if time allows, and so, anyway, I think  
44 that's all we have time for today, Ms. Guyas, if you're okay,  
45 and we can go ahead and adjourn.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks for that, and thanks for the reminder  
48 about the session after this, because I completely forgot, and I

1 don't want to run into that time. Okay.

2  
3 **MR. RINDONE:** Ms. Guyas, just a reminder that, after red  
4 grouper, we also still have a few other remaining items, and so  
5 you guys might want to keep an eye on what your time looks like  
6 in the morning and figure out if any of those need to be  
7 rescheduled.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Right. I'm hoping, depending on how the week  
10 shakes out, that we can either pick up stuff in Full Council, or  
11 we'll just have to move it to the next meeting, depending on  
12 urgency, and so thank you for that reminder.

13  
14 **MR. RINDONE:** 10-4.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Cool.

17  
18 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Ms. Guyas, we are hosting the question-and-  
19 answer session after this with NOAA and council leadership, and  
20 so I just wanted to remind everybody that if anybody that's on  
21 the webinar right now wants to hop over to that session when we  
22 adjourn, and you can go to the council meeting materials, and  
23 there is a registration link there, and we've also posted it on  
24 Facebook, for anybody that's interested.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Emily. Thanks, everyone,  
27 especially staff, that navigated a lot of audio issues today.  
28 These meetings are, I know, challenging, but I think we made it  
29 through just fine.

30  
31 **DR. FRAZER:** All right. We'll see everybody tomorrow at 9:00.

32  
33 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed on April 13, 2021.)

34  
35 - - -

36  
37 April 14, 2021

38  
39 WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION

40  
41 - - -

42  
43 The Reef Fish Management Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery  
44 Management Council reconvened via webinar on Wednesday morning,  
45 April 14, 2021, and was called to order by Chairman Martha  
46 Guyas.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Dr. Freeman, are you going to run through the

1 action guide for us and get us started?

2  
3 **REVISED PUBLIC HEARING DRAFT AMENDMENT 53: RED GROUPER**  
4 **ALLOCATIONS AND ANNUAL CATCH LEVELS AND CATCH TARGETS**  
5

6 **DR. MATT FREEMAN:** Yes, ma'am, I will. For this agenda item,  
7 the committee will receive the requested presentation on red  
8 grouper average weights from NOAA OST and Science Center staff.  
9 The committee should ask questions and provide any relevant  
10 feedback.

11  
12 Following that presentation, staff will review the actions and  
13 alternatives in the revised public hearing draft of Reef Fish  
14 Amendment 53. The committee should discuss the actions and  
15 determine if any modifications are needed. The council selected  
16 preferred alternatives and directed staff to begin public  
17 hearings at the January 2021 meeting. If no additional  
18 revisions are requested, staff will conduct public hearings  
19 following the April 2021 council meeting.

20  
21 Staff will also review the deliberations and recommendations on  
22 the actions in the document by the council's Reef Fish AP, which  
23 discussed the document via webinar on February 24. I will hand  
24 it back over to you, Madam Chair.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks. Let's go ahead and go into  
27 our first presentation then on the weight estimation methods.  
28 It looks like Dr. Cass-Calay is going to give this one, if she's  
29 on the line.

30  
31 **PRESENTATION: WEIGHT ESTIMATION METHODS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENT:**  
32 **RED GROUPER 2015-2019 LENGTHS AND WEIGHTS**  
33

34 **DR. CODY:** Martha, I think we're planning to split the  
35 presentation. Is that right, Shannon? I do the first part and  
36 you do the second part?

37  
38 **DR. SHANNON CASS-CALAY:** Yes, that's correct.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sounds great.

41  
42 **DR. CODY:** I will just go ahead and lead off with the MRIP  
43 methodology, and then Shannon can provide details on the  
44 Southeast Science Center treatment of the weight information.  
45 The procedure that I'm going to present today basically is the  
46 methodology that's used by the Office of Science and Technology  
47 in coming up with an average weight for an estimation domain for  
48 each species, and these are the estimates that you will see on

1 our web query tool.

2  
3 There are a few references, I think, that are helpful for this  
4 discussion, and the first is there are lots of references out  
5 here on imputation in general, and this one is particularly  
6 useful, and I found it useful, and it's David Haziza and Rao  
7 basically looking at variance estimation for cluster sampling  
8 under imputation of missing data, and so it's the type of  
9 sampling framework that we use for the MRIP APAIS survey.

10  
11 There are a couple of other things here that I posted links to.  
12 At the NOAA Fisheries website, we have the weight data  
13 information in a glossary form, and we also have a survey  
14 statistics overview page, and then there's a more detailed  
15 treatment of the statistical methods for estimation of catch and  
16 effort, and so those are all available through the NOAA  
17 Fisheries website, and hopefully these links are still active in  
18 the presentation.

19  
20 Then there are couple of workshops that I wanted to draw your  
21 attention to. One is, most recently, and it was in August of  
22 2020, where we did a similar presentation for the Gulf Council  
23 SSC. The year before that, we presented this information for  
24 the South Atlantic Council SSC, and there's a reference here to  
25 SEDAR 67 that has a discussion of sample size and sensitivity  
26 analysis for MRIP weights, and so those are all relevant to the  
27 discussion.

28  
29 Just to start with an overview of the survey and the survey  
30 design and how weights are collected, basically, we're talking  
31 about the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey, which is in-  
32 person interviews of anglers, and these are intercepted at  
33 public access sites, and so these sites are maintained largely  
34 by the state partners that conduct the surveys, and they're  
35 updated regularly, and that's the basis for our sample frame.  
36 Then data are collected continuously and used to estimate catch  
37 rates, as well trip characteristics on a wave level two-month  
38 period.

39  
40 Here's a little bit about the design. I mentioned, in the  
41 Haziza and Rao reference, the multi-stage cluster design, and  
42 the APAIS itself is what we call a stratified cluster multistage  
43 design, and so the multistage really refers to the different  
44 stage units, and so, in the primary stage, we have your sample,  
45 and that comes from your sample frame, and this is set up as  
46 site cluster day and time.

47  
48 Then the secondary sub-units is duration, or time, spent on site

1 sampling, and so, obviously, if you have a cluster of sites that  
2 you're visiting, and you have six hours to conduct sampling,  
3 some of that time is spent traveling between sites, and so you  
4 end up with not quite six hours spent on site, and so you have  
5 to adjust for the time that was spent off site.

6  
7 There's a tertiary sample unit, and this is the angler trips,  
8 and so we go from the interview to the angler trips, and then,  
9 beyond that, we have what we call a quaternary, or a final  
10 stage, sample unit, and that's the catch. That's the basic  
11 design used in MRIP, and each of these stages have what we call  
12 sampling weighting associated with each stage.

13  
14 Not to confuse the issue here, but we have a weighted sample  
15 design, and so there are two references here to weights. We  
16 have weights that we collect in the field from anglers, and that  
17 refers to the fish weights, and then we have the sample weight,  
18 and so that's basically, at the primary stage, one over the  
19 inclusion probability, and so it would be the chances of  
20 selecting a certain site on a certain day at a certain time  
21 interval.

22  
23 Then you have, for Stage 2, you have the weighting that adjusts  
24 for time spent traveling between sites, or time not spent at  
25 sites, and then, at Stage 3, we have an adjustment for numbers  
26 of anglers that are intercepted versus the total number that are  
27 on site, and then, in the final stage, there's a weight  
28 adjustment there for numbers of fish that are sampled of the  
29 total that are harvested for any given angler trip. I know this  
30 is a lot of information, but this is how we weight our samples  
31 to get to the point where we include the weight information  
32 that's collected in the field.

33  
34 Really, this is just meant to provide you with some background  
35 information for how we calculate or how we do our estimates, and  
36 so how do these weights figure into the overall estimate? Well,  
37 as I said, we do estimates by domain, and that includes catch  
38 rates as well, and so, for our final sample weights, there are  
39 two different processes.

40  
41 We use the first three weights, if we're doing numbers of fish,  
42 and so that is used to calculate the numbers of fish, but then  
43 there's an adjustment where a fourth weight is added to end up  
44 with total weight, and so this information is also presented in  
45 detail on our website, as I mentioned, in our procedures  
46 methods.

47  
48 The information that I talked about, basically the catch

1 information, is three different types, and where we get our mean  
2 lengths and weights from are from the Type A harvest, and this  
3 is the observed harvest that samplers are able to collect a  
4 weight or a length for a fish, and the only thing I'm pointing  
5 out here, really, is that there are two different types of  
6 harvest. There is unobserved harvest, and there is observed  
7 harvest, and so we use the Type A to obtain the fish lengths and  
8 weights.

10 The efficacy of that process really depends on a number of  
11 different factors. You can have samplers in the field that are  
12 at a busy site, anglers that are in a hurry, and so there are  
13 occasions where they don't get all the weights and lengths for  
14 the species that they observe.

16 What I just mentioned really are the different scenarios where  
17 you might not get a weight or a length for a fish, and so there  
18 are two -- Really, there are two things we have to worry about  
19 when we're trying to do estimates for average length or average  
20 weight, and that is, if there's a missing length, for instance,  
21 or a missing weight, or we can have a situation where both  
22 length and weight information are missing, and so we use two  
23 different approaches, depending on whether both are missing or  
24 whether one is missing.

26 For the first scenario, where either a length or a weight is  
27 missing, we use standard length-weight relationship models to  
28 impute a weight, if there's a weight missing, for a given  
29 length. In those situations, if we have one or the other, we  
30 can calculate a length or a weight, using a standard formula  
31 that's set up by species.

33 The other situation that I refer to is when you have both  
34 species of information missing, and so you don't have a length  
35 or you don't have a weight, and so, for that process, we use a  
36 mix of what's called hot and cold deck imputation, and, so  
37 really, hot deck imputation really refers to grabbing  
38 information from a similar dataset, or the same dataset, and  
39 then cold deck means going to a different dataset, and so it can  
40 be from a different year, or it could be from a different  
41 location, although we avoid that, generally.

43 For length and weight imputation, we do what are called a series  
44 of round of imputation, starting with the hot deck components,  
45 and so we start with the most similar data, and we kind of work  
46 our way out from there, and you end up getting to the end of  
47 five rounds.

1 If you have a weight or a length at that time, then fine, but,  
2 if you don't, that process ends, and so you don't always end up  
3 populating fields for missing lengths or weights.

4  
5 One thing I will point out here is that most of the imputations  
6 occur within the first three rounds, and so it's generally not  
7 necessary, except in the case of a few rare species, or  
8 infrequently-encountered species, where we have to go beyond the  
9 first three rounds, and one other thing I will point out is  
10 that, in terms of just specifics of the imputation, it always  
11 targets the same species and the same sub-region, and so you may  
12 go out of state within a region, but you will stay within the  
13 sub-region, and we don't go beyond that. Then, to reduce the  
14 potential for introducing unknown biases to the data, the sample  
15 weights are not factored into the imputation.

16  
17 This is a summary of the basic information, in terms of the  
18 rounds of imputation that occur, and you will see there are  
19 three different columns here. You have Rounds 1 through 5 on  
20 the far left, and, as I said, the first two round really refer  
21 to the hot deck imputation. You start getting into hot and cold  
22 mix at the third round, and then it's a cold mix after that.

23  
24 What we try to do, in the first round, is we complete that round  
25 if we obtain a minimum of ten observations, and so that doesn't  
26 mean that the sample size is limited to ten, and it can be quite  
27 a bit larger, depending on the availability of data. If there  
28 are more than ten observations available, those will be used, or  
29 taken. If we don't reach the ten, the minimum of ten, it then  
30 flips to the second round, and you will see, in the first round,  
31 we concentrate on the current year, wave, sub-region, state  
32 within sub-region, mode, area fished, and then species.

33  
34 For the second round, it goes to -- It breaks the year up into  
35 half-years, and so you would have the year, the half-year that  
36 encompasses the domain there is missing information, and that is  
37 the process that is used throughout, until we get to the final  
38 round.

39  
40 I mentioned about catch estimation, and we have a weighted  
41 sampling approach that requires weighting the catch rates and  
42 the effort information to come up with a total catch, and there  
43 are various adjustments in there, and I think this is sort of  
44 relevant to the imputation methods that I mentioned yesterday in  
45 the discussion of the 2020 catch estimates.

46  
47 I mentioned that there were pieces of information that we get  
48 from APAIS to inform the effort estimates, and so, in the

1 weighted effort estimate, you will note that there are two  
2 bullets at the bottom there that refer to those adjustments that  
3 we make to those weights.

4  
5 I will just speed through this part here, because it's not  
6 really that relevant to the actual methodology, but it's just  
7 showing you where it fits in, where the catch rate is multiplied  
8 by the effort to come up with a total catch.

9  
10 Then the weighted estimation process is figured in here, and so  
11 you have total catch by wave here, and you have a weighted  
12 effort FES effort, and then you have the weighted APAIS catch  
13 adjustment as well, and so, for total catch on the annual level,  
14 the weight level information is summed.

15  
16 I have tried to give a brief summary of how our imputation  
17 methods are done. In addition to that information, I have  
18 provided a set of tables for red grouper, and they refer, I  
19 think, to the past five years, 2015 through 2019, of available  
20 data, but, on those tables, basically, they are set up as three  
21 separate tables. You have year, state, mode, and area fished in  
22 the first table, and then you have year, state, and mode fished  
23 for the second table, and then, in the last table, you have it  
24 broken out by wave.

25  
26 What I wanted to direct your attention to are the two far-right  
27 columns, and those, you will see, if I pull up my version of  
28 this, have -- You will note there are two columns to the very  
29 right, and there are two metrics there that I mentioned  
30 yesterday as a way for you to evaluate the impact of the imputed  
31 data on the estimate, and so, in this case, we're dealing with  
32 mean weight, and it gives you a percentage of sample that was  
33 imputed.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Hey, Richard.

36  
37 **DR. CODY:** Yes? Go ahead.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** We can't see whatever you were trying to show  
40 us.

41  
42 **DR. CODY:** It's in the table that was provided to the council,  
43 and so it would be included in the materials. We can pull it  
44 up, if you would like, but it would be the length-weight  
45 information for red grouper.

46  
47 **MS. BOSARGE:** Martha, it's that background document in our  
48 briefing book.



1  
2 **DR. CODY:** Yes.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I just want to make sure that everybody is on  
5 the same page.

6  
7 **DR. CODY:** Okay.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** I think you're talking about B-9(b).

10  
11 **DR. CODY:** Yes, that's it. It's pretty hard to see what's on  
12 there, but, basically, I just wanted to direct your attention to  
13 the two far-right columns, and so what we looked into, recently,  
14 is a way that would give people some way to directly assess the  
15 impact of imputed values on the actual weight, average weight,  
16 estimate.

17  
18 In the first, and we'll just take the very first table, and you  
19 have 2015 Alabama charter, and, in that, you'll see there's a  
20 mean weight of 2.25, and then you have a mean weight calculated  
21 without the imputed data included, and it's a little bit lower.  
22 It's 2.1.

23  
24 If you keep going, you'll see there are two other columns there.  
25 One is the percentage of sample that was imputed, and so,  
26 basically, that's the amount of sample that contributed to --  
27 The amount of imputed sample that contributed to the estimate,  
28 and then the percentage change in the mean weight value is just  
29 looking at the difference between the final mean weight and the  
30 mean weight without the imputed data, and so it gives you that  
31 as a percentage, and these are two different metrics that we  
32 have looked into recently as a way that we can provide data  
33 users with a little bit more information on the weight  
34 information, because sometimes the actual sample size may not be  
35 included in the raw data, or it would be difficult to ascertain.

36  
37 Basically, it gives you an idea of how much of a contribution  
38 there is from the imputed data, and I also included the final  
39 sample size numbers as well, and then the sample size without  
40 imputation, and so you have that to look at as well.

41  
42 I don't know if we can get back to that summary slide quickly,  
43 but the points that I want to make here is that the imputation  
44 is an established practice in large-scale surveys, where you  
45 have missing data situations, and, oftentimes, that's due to  
46 item non-response. For instance, if an angler is not willing,  
47 or able, to stick around so that a sampler can measure all his  
48 fish, or measure some of his fish, then that's that type of a

1 situation.

2  
3 With MRIP, we use what I would say is a very conservative  
4 imputation approach to assign average weights to an estimation  
5 domain, and we do this only in situations where both lengths and  
6 weights are missing for the estimation domain in question.

7  
8 There is limitations to any imputation approach that is used,  
9 and, obviously, there are some concerns that, for instance, when  
10 you borrow data, that it may not be borrowed from an appropriate  
11 domain, or cell, but, for instance, if you're missing data from  
12 an inshore trip, let's say, and you borrow with an offshore  
13 trip, for some species, that might mean that the average weights  
14 or average lengths are larger than you would expect for the  
15 waters that you are trying to replace the data for.

16  
17 We are looking at ways to improve the current methods, and, as I  
18 said, these metrics that I provided here are just some of the  
19 ways that we're trying to do that, and we will be providing  
20 these types of metrics with the 2020 catch estimate, and so that  
21 should give people an idea of how much influence the imputed  
22 data has on the final estimate.

23  
24 Then one other caveat here to remember is that our imputations  
25 for missing data, or data gaps, within 2020 is taken from 2018  
26 and 2019 data, and so that would mean that, for the 2020 year,  
27 the weight and length information would be pulled from two years  
28 instead of one year. I think that's everything that I have on  
29 the MRIP methodology.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Dr. Cody. I think let's go  
32 ahead and move into Dr. Cass-Calay's part of the presentation,  
33 and we'll take questions at the end, if there are any.

34  
35 **DR. CASS-CALAY:** Thanks, everyone. This is Shannon Cass-Calay  
36 at the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, and I will be  
37 acknowledging work that was done for this presentation by Vivian  
38 Matter, Matt Nuttall, and Skyler Sagarese. I will discuss the  
39 Southeast Fisheries Science Center weight estimation.

40  
41 MRIP provides species-specific catch estimates by a variety of  
42 strata, and so these include the species, the year, the sampling  
43 wave, sub-region, state, fishing mode, and the fishing area.  
44 The data are provided in numbers of fish, and corresponding  
45 weight observations are not always available, due to sampling  
46 constraints or incomplete self-reporting.

47  
48 Traditionally, and historically, recreational landings were

1 provided, for the purpose of stock assessment, in numbers of  
2 fish, and our stock assessment models are able to use either  
3 numbers of fish or weight of fish. However, when management  
4 measures, such as ACL monitoring, began, and we needed to  
5 monitor fish in pounds, there was a need to estimate the  
6 recreational landings in weight on a routine basis, and,  
7 therefore, the Science Center developed a standardized  
8 methodology to estimate those missing recreational weights, and  
9 that methodology was first described in a document in SEDAR 22,  
10 from the data workshop, Document Number 16.

11  
12 The main need, from a stock assessment context and for  
13 monitoring of ACLs, is to ensure that there is a consistent  
14 weight estimation procedure applied across all years of sampling  
15 for the recreational statistics. A general methodology to  
16 estimate recreational weight estimates is also documented in  
17 SEDAR 32, in Data Workshop Document Number 2, and, in general,  
18 it's a very simple approach.

19  
20 We are simply calculating the average weights by strata, and the  
21 strata that we use, and the hierarchy of that, is, first,  
22 species, then region, wave, year, state, mode, wave and area  
23 fished, and I will explain more about this in just a moment and  
24 show you some graphics that will make this much easier to  
25 follow.

26  
27 Currently, we do use the new MRIP size datasets, including those  
28 imputed weights from the sampling program, and this has been  
29 available since November of 2018. There has been, in the  
30 Southeast Fisheries Science Center, a change in our methodology,  
31 in that we went from a minimum sample size of thirty fish per  
32 strata to fifteen, in the fall of 2019, and that change is  
33 described in the SEDAR working document described here.

34  
35 Now, that thirty-minimum-weight threshold actually does not  
36 significantly improve the standard error of the weight  
37 estimation, compared to using fifteen, and, furthermore, using a  
38 fifteen-minimum-weight threshold results in more precise weight  
39 estimates within the strata, because it requires less  
40 aggregation from coarser strata, and we will show you that that  
41 change in methodology from thirty to fifteen did not result in  
42 any systematic bias in the weight estimation.

43  
44 This is, in mathematical terms, the weight estimation procedure.  
45 In Step 1, we calculate the average weights from the intercept  
46 data, and I am just calling that WGT, for weight, for each  
47 strata, which is i, and, again, the hierarchy is shown here, and  
48 so, literally, for each strata, we're calculating an average

1 weight in the typical fashion.

2  
3 Step 2 is that we identify the strata that meet the minimum  
4 sample size threshold of fifteen fish, and we have to apply  
5 appropriate average weight to convert those estimates of  
6 landings in numbers, and, again, we're using AB1 for landings,  
7 and that is the fish landed and observed by the sampler, as well  
8 as those fish that are dead and harvested, but not observed, the  
9 B1 component.

10  
11 We're applying that average weight by strata to compute the  
12 landings in weight at the finest possible strata, and so you  
13 will see here that the landings, AB1 in pounds, is simply the  
14 AB1 landings in numbers by strata times the average weight, and  
15 so it's very simple, straightforward procedure.

16  
17 This plot is a cumulative proportional plot, and so these bars  
18 sum to 100 percent, and this just shows you, by year, the  
19 proportion of MRIP weight estimates by the various sampling  
20 schemes for Gulf of Mexico red grouper, and it is a little bit  
21 difficult to read, but I will walk you through it.

22  
23 You will see, in this later part especially, that about 50  
24 percent of these bars are in the darkest-blue color, and that is  
25 actually our finest possible stratification. That includes all  
26 of those strata that I spoke to you earlier about.

27  
28 Now, to get our minimum sample size, we do sometimes have to  
29 aggregate to the next finest stratification, and so, as those  
30 color bars go lighter, we are aggregating across more strata,  
31 and so the way you would read this is that about 48 percent of  
32 the total weight estimates are estimated at the finest level of  
33 stratification, and so that would include species, region, year,  
34 state, mode, wave, and area.

35  
36 For about another 30 percent, we do have to drop the area and  
37 move back to the next level of stratification, which would just  
38 be species, region, year, state, mode, and wave, and so you will  
39 see how this progresses to meet that minimum sampling size  
40 criteria, but the important take-away here is that about 78  
41 percent of our weight estimates are able to be made at the  
42 finest stratification or just by dropping the area.

43  
44 This is what the number of available samples of weight look like  
45 annually, and so this plot actually goes from zero to about  
46 2,800 samples, and so we typically have hundreds of weight  
47 samples a year, and, in some cases, more than a thousand.

1 You will see, also, that, in the early part of the time series,  
2 there are smaller sample sizes available, and so the natural  
3 consequence of that is that, in these early years, the weight  
4 estimates are estimated with relatively coarser strata, and so  
5 we do have to do more aggregation in the early time series, but,  
6 nonetheless, red grouper are well sampled throughout the time  
7 period.

8  
9 Now we're going to talk very specifically about the red grouper  
10 weight estimation for the model, and so this is the SEDAR 61  
11 model of red grouper that I will be discussing.

12  
13 A little bit of background information about the red grouper  
14 model, and the data were initially provided in November of 2018,  
15 and they did not include the recreational landings in weight.  
16 They were not reviewed at the data workshop or assessment  
17 workshop, because there had been a backlog of assessments, due  
18 to the new release of the MRIP-FES/APAIS-adjusted estimates.

19  
20 There were significant updates needed to the Southeast Fisheries  
21 Science Center data processing, as a result of these new data,  
22 but, more importantly, the SEDAR 42 model, the previous red  
23 grouper model, had used recreational landings in numbers of  
24 fish, as do most Gulf assessments, and, since SEDAR 61 was a  
25 standard assessment, the recreational landings in weight had not  
26 been requested or prioritized at that time.

27  
28 Many have noticed that, in the case of the SEDAR 61 stock  
29 assessment model, there does appear to be a large difference  
30 between the landings estimate in the stock assessment model and  
31 the ACL monitoring dataset, and there are a few reasons for this  
32 disparity, which I will discuss. One is the input data itself,  
33 and the second is the uncertainty that is assumed in the stock  
34 assessment, and the third difference is the differences in the  
35 weight estimation procedure, and so I will go through each one  
36 of these.

37  
38 The input data for the SEDAR 61 stock assessment, I will remind  
39 you that the recreational landings were entered into that model  
40 in numbers, as is customary in Gulf stock assessments, and so  
41 the model fit to the numbers of recreational landings and not  
42 the weight.

43  
44 There was also a relatively large uncertainty that was assumed  
45 in the recreational landings, and even larger than that was  
46 assumed for the commercial landings, and so, in the case of the  
47 SEDAR 61 stock assessment, we assumed that the commercial  
48 landings were known, with a CV of about 0.15, which is much

1 larger than some other stock assessments in the Gulf.

2  
3 The CV applied to the recreational landings was 0.3, and that's  
4 quite a large estimate of uncertainty, and so the model actually  
5 has substantial flexibility, and, when it's fit to the other  
6 data sources contained in the model, including discards and the  
7 age composition data and the indices of abundance, the model has  
8 the ability to say -- To basically down-weight the fit to the  
9 recreational landings, and they are not fit exactly. I will  
10 show you a picture of that here shortly.

11  
12 What this results in is that the predicted landings from SEDAR  
13 61 are in numbers that are not identical to the data we input  
14 into the model in numbers.

15  
16 This just shows this graphically, and so I will walk you through  
17 the way this slide is composed, and so we have here, on the far-  
18 left-hand side, the commercial vertical line and commercial  
19 longline fit for the first column, SEDAR 61, and the second  
20 column, SEDAR 42, and the black dots are the SEDAR 61 observed  
21 values. The black line between those dots show you the expected  
22 value. Sorry about that. Now, the blue -- The black lines are  
23 actually the observed, and the blue is the expected in this  
24 plot.

25  
26 You will see here that, for the commercial vertical line and the  
27 commercial longline, there is some lack of fit between the  
28 observations and the expected values, which is the result of  
29 using that CV of 0.15 for the recreational landings, and the  
30 same was true for SEDAR 42, which is that second column, except  
31 that the time series for SEDAR 42 was shorter, because the  
32 review workshop truncated the early information.

33  
34 That third column now is SEDAR 61. The top is the commercial  
35 trap, and the bottom is the recreational fishery, which is a  
36 single recreational fleet, and so, for SEDAR 61, you will see  
37 that there is a substantial uncertainty applied to the  
38 recreational landings, which result in differences between the  
39 observed values in black and the expected values that are in  
40 blue, and that far-right-hand panel is the model fit to the  
41 SEDAR 42 estimates, which, again, have been -- The early years  
42 have been removed, at the discretion of the review workshop.

43  
44 There is also, as I mentioned, a difference in the weight  
45 estimation. Now, recall that, in SEDAR 61, we input the data in  
46 numbers of fish and not in weight. We also, in the model, use a  
47 length-weight relationship, which is what is shown here in the  
48 figure, and so now the assessment model actually uses this

1 length-weight equation to convert the predicted numbers of fish,  
2 the predicted landings from the recreational fishery in numbers,  
3 into recreational landings in weight, and so this estimation is  
4 completely different than what is applied in the MRIP program or  
5 in the Southeast Fisheries Science Center weight estimation.  
6 The SEDAR 61 model took the numbers of fish and applied the  
7 length-weight relationship to estimate the weight of those fish.

8  
9 There is a research track assessment ongoing right now for Gulf  
10 scamp, and it's SEDAR 68. The questions have come up of why  
11 have we traditionally used recreational landings in numbers,  
12 rather than in weight, and the reason for that is the numbers  
13 are essentially the native units of the MRIP program, and they  
14 are considered the most reliable measure of the landings.

15  
16 In past assessments, it's been the accepted practice to go ahead  
17 and use the numbers of fish. However, we have a choice now,  
18 because weight estimates are now consistently provided for all  
19 MRIP recreational landings. However, I will note that the  
20 weight estimates are not available for the discards from  
21 recreational fisheries.

22  
23 We can look into modeling recreational landings in weight,  
24 rather than in numbers, and this is being considered through the  
25 ongoing research track assessment. The advantage of this is  
26 that it would be more consistent with -- The OFLs and ABCs would  
27 be more consistent with the ACLs that are monitored in weight,  
28 but this will require an assumption about the CV around these  
29 estimates, because, if we apply large uncertainty, then we will  
30 still get disparities between our observed landings, whether  
31 they are in numbers or in weight, and what the model will  
32 predict, because the model is fitting many sources of  
33 information, including the recreational landings.

34  
35 I will show you a few comparisons of the various weight  
36 estimation approaches. What you see here, and this is probably  
37 the most important slide in this presentation, is that, in  
38 black, the lowest values that you see here, it's actually the  
39 model estimates from SEDAR 61 of the weight of fish landed by  
40 the recreational fishery. The red line, green line, and blue  
41 line are all very similar to each other, and, in fact, nearly  
42 overlaid throughout most of the time series, and they are the  
43 MRIP weight estimates, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
44 weight estimates with the fifteen-sample minimum size threshold  
45 in green, and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center weight  
46 estimation with the thirty-estimate minimum sample size  
47 threshold.

1 In these very first years of the survey, there are some  
2 disparities in this different weight estimation approaches, and  
3 that's because there are relatively small sample sizes in those  
4 initial years, and there is more need to make decisions about  
5 aggregating to get to a meaningful sample size, but, after say  
6 1990, these three different weight estimation procedures produce  
7 almost exactly the same estimate of the recreational landings of  
8 red grouper in weight.

10 The very different solution is from the SEDAR 61 model, which,  
11 again, is a function of putting the recreational landings into  
12 that model in numbers, using a length-weight relationship to  
13 estimate the weight of those landings, and then also allowing a  
14 very large uncertainty in the model, which allows the model to  
15 predict that the recreational landings were lower than what we  
16 observed. I hope that that explains the disparities that have  
17 been noted for red grouper.

19 In summary, red grouper are well sampled throughout the vast  
20 majority of the time series, and 78 percent of the total  
21 Southeast Fisheries Science Center weight estimates use the  
22 average weight from the two finest levels of stratification that  
23 we have available.

25 The difference in the landings estimates and weights between  
26 those predicted by the SEDAR 61 stock assessment model and those  
27 predicted by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center and MRIP  
28 weight estimation procedures is not a function of the weight  
29 estimation procedures applied. It's a function of how the  
30 recreational landings were input into the stock assessment model  
31 in numbers and how they were treated with a large uncertainty in  
32 the stock assessment model.

34 That is all that I had available, and so I'm very happy to take  
35 any questions that relate to our procedure, and I think that  
36 Richard Cody is online too to take questions about the MRIP  
37 weight estimation.

39 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks to you both. Leann, I see  
40 your hand is up, and so what I want to do here -- Leann, we can  
41 take your question, but we've got to keep moving, I think, and  
42 so we'll take your question, and then we're going to go into the  
43 Amendment 53 presentation, so that we can get those under our  
44 belt before Full Council. Go ahead, Leann.

46 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. If you can just back up  
47 one slide, I had a question for Shannon and then one question  
48 for Richard here. For Shannon, that bullet that says 30 percent



1 of the -- Excuse, me, Dr. Cass-Calay. That bullet that says 30  
2 percent at the species, region, year, state, model, wave, area  
3 level, then the next thing that happens after that is you drop  
4 the wave, and you're switching modes, and so how much -- Is it  
5 70 percent then that doesn't get to that, and you're having to  
6 shift modes to try and pull the average weights? I am trying to  
7 figure what the reverse of that is.

8  
9 **DR. CASS-CALAY:** I would have to -- Basically, we're talking  
10 about that kind of cumulative frequency, and so, 48 percent of  
11 the time, we have fifteen samples at the finest level of  
12 stratification.

13  
14 **MS. BOSARGE:** Your fifteen samples includes the imputation?

15  
16 **DR. CASS-CALAY:** It does. Then 30 percent -- After that first  
17 48 percent, there's a further 30 percent of the time that we can  
18 get to the fifteen-minimum-sample threshold by dropping area.

19  
20 **MS. BOSARGE:** I've got you. Okay. So there's this other, I  
21 guess, round about 50 percent of the time that we're having to  
22 maybe shift modes and to pull some average weights from a  
23 different mode, and a mode is either private rec or charter, and  
24 those are the modes, right?

25  
26 **DR. CASS-CALAY:** I believe that is correct. I have Vivian  
27 online.

28  
29 **MS. BOSARGE:** No, that's fine, and I'm pretty sure that's the  
30 mode, and so can we pull up that --

31  
32 **DR. CASS-CALAY:** We drop wave first, because we drop mode, and  
33 so you see where it says 48 percent? That is the actual  
34 hierarchy of our stratification, and so, first, we would drop  
35 area, and then wave, and then mode.

36  
37 **MS. BOSARGE:** All right, and so can we go to the background  
38 document? I am trying to be quick for Martha, and I'm sorry,  
39 Shannon, and I know she wants to get past this. If you go to  
40 page 3, scroll down so we can see 2017, please.

41  
42 We had a graph, and highlight those first three rows in 2017 for  
43 me. This is Wave 1 for 2017, and I think this is kind of where  
44 the rubber meets the road, because we don't estimate landings by  
45 the year. We estimate rec landings by the wave, and this is why  
46 I kind of asked for the raw data, so I could see what we're  
47 really dealing with.

1 There is a column for 2017, and the next column says "1", and  
2 that's for the wave, and then you go over, and you can tell this  
3 is Florida, and then you get to this mode, charter versus  
4 private boat less than ten miles out and private boat greater  
5 than ten miles, and so call it federal versus state waters,  
6 although it's a little off.

7  
8 You go over two more columns, and there's an eighteen and a zero  
9 and a zero. That is the actual samples that were taken for  
10 weights, sample weight for that mode. Now, the landings for  
11 that mode were 57,000 pounds for recreational landings, and they  
12 had zero samples of weights for the private sector, which the  
13 lion's share of the landings for red grouper are private sector  
14 versus charter, and it's private sector, and so that is what I  
15 am getting at in the uncertainty with these private rec numbers  
16 that we're looking at with our estimates that we're using right  
17 now for allocation purposes.

18  
19 If you go to the next wave, Wave 2, and you look there, we had  
20 two samples for private rec in federal waters, and we had one  
21 sample for private rec in state, and so most of red grouper is  
22 in federal waters, but let's give them the benefit of the doubt,  
23 and let's put both of those sample sizes together, and it was  
24 three average weights that were used to generate the total  
25 landings for that wave, and I will just summarize it.

26  
27 Wave 3 was -- I guess you would call it a good wave for sample  
28 weights, and we actually got about fifteen sample weights for  
29 the entire private rec landings in Florida, which is where most  
30 of them come from, and, when you start pulling from charter,  
31 when you have to get to the point where you didn't get enough  
32 samples that you're having to change modes and pull a weight  
33 from a different mode, I think that's where things probably  
34 start to get a little screwy.

35  
36 Even in what's highlighted right here, you can see that -- These  
37 are in kilograms, but the top row highlighted, the charter, has  
38 an average weight of about 3.5 kilograms, and private has an  
39 average weight of about 2.7. Well, when you convert that to  
40 pounds, that's a pretty big difference.

41  
42 If you go a little farther down on this page, you will see where  
43 charter has some samples that actually have it at an average  
44 weight of 7.7 kilograms, and then another one is 5.6, and so  
45 that's a twelve to fifteen-pound fish, versus the samples you're  
46 getting for the rec side are somewhere around five to seven  
47 pounds, or seven-and-a-half, somewhere in there, and so I think  
48 -- I'm going to come around to a point here, and you can come

1 off this screen, and if staff will pull up that spreadsheet I  
2 sent you, and I will show you that real quick, Martha, and I  
3 will be done.

4  
5 What happens is the -- I appreciate the presentation, and I am  
6 feeling good about understanding what is driving these big  
7 differences between the MRIP-FES numbers that we have on the ACL  
8 monitoring database and the stock assessment, where you gave it  
9 some leeway to estimate what rec landings were, and it's almost  
10 always lower. Even when you estimate the rec landed more fish,  
11 it ends up less pounds, considerably, than what is on the ACL  
12 monitoring database.

13  
14 If you go to that first tab, where it says, "rec average  
15 weights", that's the differences, and, now, I did that. That's  
16 my calculations, but I used you all's raw data and just did a  
17 straight average, and that's the difference in the average  
18 weights that MRIP comes up with for these fish versus the  
19 length-weight curve that's used as a different methodology in  
20 the stock assessment.

21  
22 That's what is driving these big differences. Now, I'm not here  
23 to say which one is more accurate or less accurate, the point  
24 being the uncertainty that surrounds the MRIP-FES landings, and  
25 we have to take that into account when we start to use them in  
26 management to make certain decisions, and, now, I'm not talking  
27 about in the science side.

28  
29 You gave it some leeway in that stock assessment, and you saw  
30 the uncertainty around those numbers too, and that's why you put  
31 that 0.3 CV in there, and that's what allowed that model to do  
32 what it needed to do and say, you know, some years, we really  
33 think the recs caught less fish, in numbers of fish, and some  
34 years they caught more, and it did that. It bounced around on  
35 both sides of the MRIP-FES landings, in numbers of fish.

36  
37 However, when an average weight is applied to it, in all but two  
38 years, it gives you significantly lower landings than what we're  
39 using for allocation purposes, and you can see that on that next  
40 tab, that rec harvest difference. Staff, if you could click on  
41 the next tab, which is a pretty beefy one, and it's got a lot of  
42 data, but you can just focus in on the highlighted staff.  
43 Staff, if you can click on the next tab that says, "rec harvest  
44 differences", on that spreadsheet. Thank you.

45  
46 That's fine, and you don't have to see it all at one time, but  
47 that gives you the numbers of fish that we put into the model  
48 and the numbers of fish that the model estimated, and you see

1 those years that are highlighted in yellow, and that's where the  
2 model said, hey, I think the recreational sector actually  
3 probably caught more fish than what MRIP-FES said they did, and  
4 so I put a "yes" out next to those, that, yes, the model  
5 estimated more, rather than less.

6  
7 It would stand to reason that, if the model thought that they  
8 caught more fish, in numbers of fish, then their landings in  
9 pounds from the model should have been more than what was on the  
10 FES website, right, the FES landings. However, if you go over  
11 to that next column highlighted in yellow, and you see those  
12 "no", and, even though the model said they landed more fish, it  
13 didn't equate to greater historical landings in pounds, because  
14 of that average weight.

15  
16 If you go over one more column, that difference between the  
17 MRIP-FES harvest and the expected harvest, that's what it is in  
18 pounds. We're talking about landings of rec, on MRIP, that is  
19 3.5 million pounds, and the stock assessment says, well, it's  
20 probably closer to 1.7, and that's a 100 percent difference.

21  
22 The percentages are out next to it, and they're big percentages,  
23 and, again, I don't know which method is better, but I just  
24 wanted to highlight this so that, when we get into this document  
25 in a second, we don't look at these numbers as if that point  
26 estimate is the gospel.

27  
28 I think it has to be viewed in the same light as things that we  
29 talked about yesterday, where there is this sea of uncertainty  
30 around it, and that's somewhere in the middle of that sea, but  
31 you've got to give a little leeway, when you go to thinking  
32 about it, and use some common sense.

33  
34 That was all I had to say. I really appreciate the  
35 presentation, and thank you for digging into this, both Dr. Cody  
36 and Dr. Cass-Calay, and it was an excellent presentation from  
37 both of you. Thank you.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Okay. Thanks, Leann. We've got about twenty  
40 minutes, and we have two presentations that we need to cover, so  
41 that we can potentially discuss red grouper in Full Council, and  
42 so I am going to turn it over to Dr. Freeman and Dr. Simmons to  
43 cover as much as they can on the Tab B, Number 9(b)  
44 presentation, and I am going to ask all committee members to  
45 please hold your comments, questions, motions, et cetera,  
46 regarding red grouper until Full Council, because we've got to  
47 get through these presentations.

1           **AMENDMENT PRESENTATION: MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS FOR USING**  
2                                   **INTERIM ABC ANALYSIS**

3  
4   **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I will go  
5 ahead and start with Tab B, Number 9(b). I have a very short  
6 presentation to explain why the 2020 interim analysis for red  
7 grouper can't be used for changing the catch levels that are in  
8 Reef Fish Amendment 53.

9  
10 During the Reef Fish AP meeting, there was a lot of conversation  
11 and questions, and I think confusion, around how this relatively  
12 new tool could, and can, or should, be used.

13  
14 There was a council motion, after the SEDAR 61 was completed and  
15 reviewed by the SSC and provided to the council in 2019, and  
16 that motion was to ask the Science Center to conduct an interim  
17 analysis of red grouper annually, starting in 2020, and that was  
18 really due to the fact that there was still a lot of concern  
19 about recruitment and vulnerability of the stock to red tide.

20  
21 Just a reminder that the interim analysis uses the harvest  
22 control rule, where the acceptable biological catch from the  
23 assessment is used, and what we're doing right now -- What's  
24 being used is the 4.9 million pounds gutted weight that was  
25 recommended by the SSC in September of 2019, and that is  
26 currently based on the sector allocations of the 76 percent  
27 commercial and 24 percent recreational. This ABC is in the  
28 MRIP-FES units, and this analysis also assumes that the future  
29 catch projections, in 2019 landings, will be equal to the total  
30 ACL.

31  
32 If you look at the range of alternatives that the council is  
33 currently considering in Reef Fish Amendment 53, you can see  
34 that the 4.9-million-pound gutted weight ABC is not the  
35 council's current preferred alternative, and it is based on the  
36 sector allocations that are currently on the books, the 76  
37 percent commercial and 24 percent recreational.

38  
39 This would not -- The current interim analysis would not take  
40 into account the preferred alternative the council is  
41 considering or the other range of alternatives the council is  
42 considering, and so, essentially, if we were to update the  
43 document and use these, we would be asking the Science Center to  
44 conduct one more interim analysis, potentially, and then running  
45 it through, I believe, back through the stock assessment to  
46 estimate the OFL.

47  
48 Until the council decides on sector allocations and the

1 corresponding catch advice that goes with those from the stock  
2 assessment, the interim analysis should not be used to modify  
3 catch advice. Instead, we could use this tool as a health  
4 check, as I think was the intent and spirit of the council when  
5 they passed this motion, and the Science Center has indicated  
6 that they could provide updated indices of abundance annually,  
7 without catch recommendations.

8  
9 Then, once the council has selected allocations and the  
10 corresponding catch advice, then those interim analyses can be  
11 updated to include that new catch advice, and the council can  
12 act on that, either through a framework action or perhaps  
13 another vehicle that we might be able to develop in the future  
14 where we can implement management changes more quickly. Madam  
15 Chair, thank you.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Dr. Simmons. Dr. Freeman, do you want  
18 to pull up the amendment presentation, really quick, and just  
19 remind everybody where we are with red grouper?

20  
21 **DR. MATT FREEMAN:** Certainly. If you don't mind, the AP made a  
22 motion that ties into Dr. Simmons' presentation, if you don't  
23 mind me just discussing that very quickly.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sure.

26  
27 **DR. FREEMAN:** Okay. So this was a motion that the AP made  
28 following the presentation on Reef Fish 53. As noted, this was  
29 a new presentation by Dr. Simmons, and so this was a discussion  
30 by the AP sort of in lieu of that, and they made a motion to  
31 modify the Reef Fish and CMP Fishery Management Plans to  
32 automate catch advice based on interim analysis. That motion  
33 carried with no opposition.

34  
35 Again, following some of that AP discussion, that's part of why  
36 Dr. Simmons prepared this presentation, to provide some  
37 additional explanation of how that interim analysis could be  
38 used by the council. We'll go ahead, at this point, if it's  
39 fine with you, and go into the presentation for Amendment 53.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Sounds good.

42  
43 **DR. FREEMAN:** The purpose and need statements, I did want to let  
44 the council know that we have modified, the IPT, the language of  
45 both the purpose and the need slightly since you all last saw  
46 this in January.

47  
48 I will start with the need statement first. Here, in that

1 second line, we added the language "and ACT", and so both of the  
2 modifications to the purpose and need statements were just to  
3 thoroughly address what Action 2 is accomplishing with that  
4 ACL/ACT buffer. Previously, it had said "to establish Gulf red  
5 grouper sector allocations and ACLs", and so we added the  
6 language "and ACTs".

7  
8 In the purpose statement, in that third line, where you've got  
9 the word "and", we previously had "and the total and sector  
10 ACLs". To encompass the ACLs, as well as the ACTs, we changed  
11 that to "and to modify the allowable harvest of red grouper". I  
12 just wanted to point that out, that the IPT did tweak that  
13 language a little bit, like I said, just to make sure that we  
14 were encapsulating what Action 2 is going to accomplish.

15  
16 If we go to the next slide, you all have seen this at several  
17 council meetings at this point, and so, for the sake of time, I  
18 will just note that, again, the SSC has reviewed the OFL and ABC  
19 under Alternatives 2 through 5. Alternative 6, which was  
20 requested by the council at the last meeting, the SSC has not  
21 reviewed any estimates of OFL and ABC from that.

22  
23 As I mentioned, the council did select preferred alternatives  
24 for both actions at the last meeting, and, also, they requested  
25 development of a new alternative, Alternative 6, and I will  
26 cover that in just a moment. The Reef Fish AP did discuss this,  
27 at its February meeting, and they made motions related to both  
28 actions, and I will discuss those at the end of the  
29 presentation.

30  
31 Alternative 1, which is no action, again, these first several  
32 alternatives, 1 through 5, you all have seen multiple times, and  
33 so I'll try not to go into too much detail at this point, and  
34 this would hold the allocation at 76 percent commercial and 24  
35 percent recreational. However, it's not legally viable, because  
36 it is not based on the best scientific information available.

37  
38 Alternative 2 would maintain those sector allocations at 76  
39 percent commercial and 24 percent recreational. However, it  
40 would be revising the OFL and ABC based on SEDAR 61. Preferred  
41 Alternative 3 would modify the allocations to 59.3 percent  
42 commercial and 40.7 percent recreational, again revising the OFL  
43 and ABC based on SEDAR 61.

44  
45 Alternative 4 would modify the allocation to 60.5 percent  
46 commercial and 39.5 percent recreational, again revising OFL and  
47 ABC based on SEDAR 61. Alternative 5 would revise it so that  
48 the allocations wind up being 59.7 percent commercial and 40.3

1 percent recreational, and, again, revising OFL and ABC based on  
2 SEDAR 61.

3  
4 This is the new alternative that was requested at the January  
5 meeting. Here, it was asked that the commercial ACL be retained  
6 at 3.16 million pounds gutted weight. In doing so, that would  
7 result in a 68.7 percent commercial and 31.3 percent  
8 recreational allocation. The OFL and ABC would be revised, so  
9 to retain that commercial ACL.

10  
11 Again, this table is not new to the council. The only addition  
12 is that last row for Alternative 6. In this case, OFL would be  
13 5.03 million pounds gutted weight, and the ABC would be 4.6  
14 million pounds gutted weight. Again, we're holding ABC and  
15 total ACL equal to each other for Alternatives 2 through 6.  
16 With the commercial ACL being held at 3.16 million pounds gutted  
17 weight, the recreational ACL would wind up being 1.44 million  
18 pounds gutted weight.

19  
20 This is a new table that the council has not seen before. We  
21 have had a similar table in Action 2 that Jeff Pulver from the  
22 Southeast Regional Office had prepared and previously presented  
23 to the council, but we wanted to have this prepared for the  
24 council, and it's in the document as well.

25  
26 As a reminder, for the commercial sector, they are harvesting to  
27 the commercial ACT. For the recreational sector though, they  
28 are harvesting to their recreational ACL, and they are only  
29 harvesting to the recreational ACT when a post-season  
30 accountability measure is triggered, and so, assuming no post-  
31 season AM is triggered, this table shows the predicted closure  
32 dates for the recreational ACL. In the case, under the current  
33 preferred Alternative 3, that closure date would be December 19.

34  
35 Action 2, again, Alternative 1 is no action, and these are for  
36 the ACL/ACT buffers. The commercial would be retained at 5  
37 percent, and the recreational would be retained at 8 percent.

38  
39 For Alternative 2, the commercial buffer would be zero percent,  
40 and the recreational buffer is 9 percent, and that's applying  
41 the ACL/ACT Control Rule. Preferred Alternative 3 is a  
42 combination of the previous two alternatives, and so the ACL  
43 Control Rule would be applied to the recreational sector, for a  
44 9 percent buffer, while the current buffer would be retained for  
45 the commercial sector of 5 percent, and that was suggested  
46 previously to account for multiuse with gag and red grouper.

47  
48 This shows the combination of commercial and recreational ACTs



1 based on the selections from Action 2 and Action 1, and so,  
2 taking the current council preferred alternatives, the  
3 commercial ACT would be set at 2.4 million pounds gutted weight,  
4 and the recreational ACT would be set at 1.57 million pounds  
5 gutted weight.

6  
7 As mentioned, this table the council has seen before, and it  
8 shows the predicted closure dates based on the recreational  
9 ACTs. The combination of the current preferred alternatives is  
10 highlighted. In this case, it's Alternative 3 from both Action  
11 2 and Action 1. What this shows is that, if a post-season  
12 accountability measure were triggered, and the recreational  
13 sector were then to harvest only to its ACT, then the predicted  
14 closure date would be November 16.

15  
16 Following this, and as I mentioned during the action guide,  
17 there was the motion from the January council for staff to take  
18 the document to public hearing. However, there was the request  
19 for the new alternative to Action 1, and so that requires some  
20 further work before we will prepare it for public hearing.

21  
22 Then additional steps are contingent upon council motions, which  
23 could include SERO sending a Notice of Availability for the  
24 DEIS, and, before I discuss the two Reef Fish AP motions related  
25 to Action 1 and Action 2, if it's okay with you, Madam Chair,  
26 Ms. Muehlstein is prepared to very briefly discuss how we would  
27 solicit public comments on this document, and so I will hand it  
28 over to her.

29  
30 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thank you. Emily, we've got three  
31 minutes to cover all this.

32  
33 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** All right. I will do it. Based on the  
34 conversation that we had during our January council meeting, we  
35 are planning to make a dedicated effort to gather public comment  
36 on this which exceeds what we would normally do, and really try  
37 to gather as much testimony as we can while continuing to avoid  
38 some of the risks of pandemic.

39  
40 Just briefly, what we have planned is to complete a direct mail  
41 to commercial and charter/headboat permit holders, and we've  
42 also worked with the folks at Fish Rules, and they have agreed  
43 to send a push notification to all reef fish regulation readers  
44 and to add an in-app message for Gulf regulation viewers. This  
45 will target the private angling component of the fishery  
46 directly. Then, just to sort of give you an idea, there's about  
47 25,000 views of Gulf federal regulations that occurred last May,  
48 and so we can expect that about 25,000 private anglers would get

1 a direct notification through that app.

2  
3 We'll also host webinars, and we will create social media  
4 content, as well as video content, and then, since we're  
5 planning a hybrid June meeting, this would give anglers the  
6 opportunity to provide public comment in-person before final  
7 action is taken. Thanks.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** Thanks, Emily.

10  
11 **REEF FISH AP RECOMMENDATIONS**  
12

13 **DR. FREEMAN:** Madam Chair, I will discuss the two Reef Fish AP  
14 motions related to the two actions. I will start with Action 2,  
15 and that one is a little bit easier to get through. The Reef  
16 Fish AP made a motion to consider the proposed Action 2,  
17 Alternative 3 the preferred. That motion carried with no  
18 opposition, and so that is also the council's current preferred  
19 alternative for Action 2.

20  
21 For Action 1, the Reef Fish AP did not select a preferred.  
22 However, they did make a motion to add another alternative to  
23 Action 1 that would set the commercial ACL at 3.00 million  
24 pounds gutted weight, and that motion carried with no  
25 opposition.

26  
27 While it's not in the summary, I do think it's relevant to note  
28 that this motion -- There was a motion to make it the preferred  
29 alternative. However, that motion failed for lack of a second,  
30 and there was also a motion to make Alternative 4 the preferred  
31 alternative. However, that also failed for lack of a second,  
32 and so, again, I just wanted to provide the council with some of  
33 the additional discussion that took place, and so I will stop  
34 there, Madam Chair, and let you help field questions.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN GUYAS:** All right. Thanks, Dr. Freeman, and thanks to  
37 everybody for pulling through that so quickly. The Chair was  
38 gracious enough to grant us this extra time this morning, and I  
39 think we've more or less pushed the limit of that, at this  
40 point, and so, at this point, I would suggest that we take  
41 questions, comments, et cetera, motions -- That we handle those  
42 things in Full Council.

43  
44 There's a couple other things on our Reef Fish agenda that I  
45 don't think we're going to be able to cover today. I am not  
46 sure if the DESCEND stuff is time sensitive, and I know, Leann,  
47 you had a discussion about historical captains under Other  
48 Business. I'm hoping, if those are time sensitive, we could

1 pick those up in Full Council. Otherwise, the other items, we  
2 can pick those up at a subsequent Reef Fish Committee meeting.  
3 Thanks, everybody, and thank you, Mr. Chair, for the extra time  
4 today.

5

6 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on April 14, 2021.)

7

8

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