

1 GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

2  
3 OUTREACH & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

4  
5 Renaissance New Orleans Pere Marquette New Orleans, Louisiana

6  
7 January 27, 2025

8  
9 **VOTING MEMBERS**

- 10 Anthony Overton.....Alabama
- 11 Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama
- 12 Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
- 13 Troy Frady.....Alabama
- 14 Michael McDermott.....Mississippi
- 15 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
- 16 C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida
- 17 Ed Walker.....Florida
- 18 Troy Williamson.....Texas

19  
20 **NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

- 21 Kesley Banks.....Texas
- 22 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
- 23 Jonathan Dugas.....Louisiana
- 24 Tom Frazer.....Florida
- 25 Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
- 26 LT Jackson Morton.....USCG
- 27 John Sanchez.....Florida
- 28 Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
- 29 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS

30  
31 **STAFF**

- 32 Max Birdsong.....Social Scientist
- 33 Assane Diagne.....Economist
- 34 Matt Freeman.....Economist
- 35 John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
- 36 Beth Hager.....Administrative Officer
- 37 Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
- 38 Sarah Gardiner.....Fishery Biologist
- 39 Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
- 40 Jessica Matos.....Administrative Document Editor & IT Coordinator
- 41 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
- 42 Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison
- 43 Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
- 44 Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director

45  
46 **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

- 47 Frank Helies.....NOAA
- 48 Tom Roller.....SAFMC
- 49 Brendan Turley.....NOAA

1 John Walter.....SEFSC

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1  
2  
3 Table of Contents.....3  
4  
5 Adoption of Agenda, Approval of Minutes, and Action Guide and  
6 Next Steps.....4  
7  
8 2024 Communications Improvement Plan Progress and 2024 Analytics.5  
9  
10 Domestic Shrimp and Seafood Education.....12  
11  
12 Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management Outreach Update: Red Tide  
13 EFI.....14  
14  
15 Management Areas and Boundary Outreach.....17  
16  
17 Public Comment Improvements: Improving Viability of Written  
18 Comments and Consideration of an Anonymous Voice Mail Box.....25  
19  
20 2025 Communications Improvement Plan.....31  
21  
22 Other Items from the O&E Technical Committee Summary.....34  
23  
24 Adjournment.....36  
25

26 - - -  
27  
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1 The Outreach & Education Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery  
2 Management Council convened at The Renaissance New Orleans Pere  
3 Marquette in New Orleans, Louisiana on Monday afternoon, January  
4 27, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman Anthony Overton.

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

10 **CHAIRMAN ANTHONY OVERTON:** I want to call to order the Outreach  
11 and Education Committee. You have the agenda that's put forth  
12 before you, Tab O, Number 1. Is there a motion to accept the  
13 agenda? Well, first, are there any amendments to the agenda  
14 from the committee members? None at all. Then I'll entertain a  
15 motion to accept the agenda as presented. So moved by -- Okay.  
16 Is there a second to the -- No second? Just raise your hand.  
17 There you go. A second. Yes. Thank you. Okay. If there's no  
18 -- Any opposition, just signify by saying aye. There's no  
19 opposition.

20  
21 I'm sorry. I skipped a step here. The members of the committee  
22 include myself, Broussard, Dugas, Geeslin, Gill, Spraggins,  
23 Strelcheck, and Walker. Okay. Next?

24  
25 **MR. J.D. DUGAS:** Dr. Overton.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Yes.

28  
29 **MR. DUGAS:** We think that's the old list. That's the old list,  
30 the old committee. The one on the screen is the new one.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Okay. The members are presented on the  
33 screen. Sorry, and I was reading from the old list. It's  
34 myself, Frady, Bannon, Broussard, McDermott, McCauley,  
35 Spraggins, Walker, and Williamson. Thank you for that. All  
36 right. The next item, Item III, the action guide, and I'm going  
37 to pass the floor to Emily.

38  
39 **MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN:** Did we approve the minutes? Did we just  
40 do that, or was it just the agenda? Sorry. I missed it.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Sorry, and maybe I'm getting hungry. Okay.  
43 The minutes have also been presented for the committee from our  
44 last meeting. Hopefully, you've had a chance to look over the  
45 minutes. Are there any changes, or additions, to the minutes?  
46 Hearing none, and seeing none, I'll take a motion to accept the  
47 minutes as presented.

1 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** So moved, Mr. Chair.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** So moved. Is there a second? All right.  
4 Any opposition? There is none, and now, Emily, the floor is  
5 yours.

6  
7 **2024 COMMUNICATIONS IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS AND 2024 ANALYTICS**

8  
9 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** All right, and so, if you don't mind, I think  
10 we'll go through the Action Guide and Next Steps agenda item-by-  
11 agenda-item, which would make the 2024 Communications  
12 Improvement plan Progress and 2024 Analytics our first item to  
13 think about, and so I will present you with an overview of our  
14 council communication analytics.

15  
16 You might recall that, each year, we try and set goals for  
17 ourselves through creating an annual communications improvement  
18 plan, and so the other thing that I'm going to do, along with  
19 those analytics, is show you the progress that we made on the  
20 plan in 2024.

21  
22 I would encourage the committee to provide feedback on our  
23 communications efforts and make any recommendations on how to  
24 further improve our communications efforts and broaden our  
25 audience, and so, with that, Bernie, if you can bring up our  
26 analytics presentation for me. There we go. Okay, and you can  
27 just jump right into the next slide.

28  
29 Okay, and so, in 2024, we committed to doing a couple of things  
30 with the website. We linked our final action press release to  
31 all of the appropriate council documents on our implemented  
32 pages. We host all of the implemented amendments for all of our  
33 species back in time, and so that was not a tiny feat, although  
34 it was pretty simple.

35  
36 We are currently using a web contractor to modernize the  
37 aesthetic and theme of our website, and so we expect that  
38 project to be completed about the end of March. What we're  
39 trying to do is really update the way that the website looks,  
40 without hugely modifying the way that people find the resources  
41 they're used to finding.

42  
43 Generally, I think most for-profit companies redo their website  
44 about every three years, as a general practice. We have not  
45 done ours in over five, and so that's why we're sort of  
46 undertaking that right now. We also tried to update and improve  
47 the calendar widget on our homepage. We made some sort of  
48 stopgap changes, but this new web contractor is going to further

1 improve that.  
2  
3 We removed -- I don't know if you all remember, and we had those  
4 species hot sheets that we sort of produce on a case-by-case  
5 basis, when we're sort of trying to do a discovery on a  
6 different species. Well, what we were noticing is that people  
7 were referencing those hot sheets, which are frozen in time,  
8 right, and it's a PDF that's created and frozen based on when it  
9 was created, and people were confused, because some of those  
10 PDFs would show old regulations.  
11  
12 We decided to dismantle those, take them off of our website, and  
13 actually put the live information on the species-specific pages  
14 on our website instead, so that we update them more regularly,  
15 and people aren't confused by that static information. Then, as  
16 you'll see in one of the agenda items from today, we are also  
17 working on improving the way that we host our regulations maps.  
18  
19 All right, and so we'll jump into our website analytics, and I'm  
20 going to sort of preface with this with, in 2024, the council  
21 did not take final action. I think that is a significant driver  
22 of what you're going to see. That sort of trend across a lot of  
23 the 2024 analytics is -- For some of our platforms, there's kind  
24 of a low usage trend, and I think that that is based on the fact  
25 that we did not take final action.  
26  
27 I think we didn't have a lot of people driven to us, like we  
28 have in previous years, and so what you'll see here, with our  
29 website analytics, is a little bit of a drop, especially in the  
30 last quarter. Our annual sessions are down as well as our  
31 annual page views.  
32  
33 Another piece of this though is I just want to let you guys  
34 know, and we talked about this last year, but, in 2024, there  
35 was some changes, or was it 2023? Dylan, I'm looking at you.  
36  
37 **MR. DYLAN HUBBARD:** 2023.  
38  
39 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** 2023. Google changed the way that it hosts the  
40 analytics, and so some of that decline is based on a change in  
41 the way that Google Analytics tracks and presents their  
42 analytics, and so all companies, and all websites, have seen  
43 about a 20 percent decline from that change in the Google  
44 Analytics platform, and so that's also part of what is to blame,  
45 and that's why there's an asterisk next to 2023 there.  
46  
47 This will show you our 2024 website use by page, and so you'll  
48 see our most popular page is our homepage, which is clearly

1 normal. Red snapper regulations, no surprise, come next.  
2 Federal fishing regulations come after that. That's sort of the  
3 landing page. We are aware that our regulations are the sort of  
4 biggest driver to our website of sort of new audiences, usually.

5  
6 Apparently, the 2024 council meeting was pretty popular, and  
7 then we've had a couple of blogs, the jack ID blog and the red  
8 snapper ID blog, which actually talks about the other red  
9 snappers, and not just the red snapper that we all think about  
10 immediately. Those were also some of the topmost popular pages  
11 on our site this year.

12  
13 You can see that we had 119,000 new users that trafficked our  
14 site, and 10,000 returning users, which, you know, think about  
15 all the folks that come back, meeting after meeting that, you  
16 know, and that breakdown makes a little bit of sense, and then  
17 we had almost 300,000 views to our website, or visits to our  
18 website, and then almost 600,000 events, and so an event is when  
19 you sort of interact with the website in some way once you're  
20 there.

21  
22 All right, and so we'll move on to Fish Rules, and I only have  
23 the recreational Fish Rules analytics for you right now. I  
24 don't have the commercial app. I can bring that to you as soon  
25 as I get it. We had 35,000 distinct users to the Gulf federal  
26 regulations.

27  
28 The number of regulation detail events, and so that's like  
29 clicking in and looking at those regulations was, you know, a  
30 little under 300,000. The average user uses the app three times  
31 in a year, and then the average session length for each use is  
32 241 seconds. Then what you can see here, in this table, is the  
33 top-most viewed species in the app. This is, again, for the  
34 just the federal Gulf zones.

35  
36 Okay, so let's talk about social media, and so we endeavor to  
37 post at least once a week, to really continue to stay relevant  
38 on social media, making regular helpful posts to join people --  
39 Or to nudge people to join our listserv, share meeting details,  
40 share helpful council resources. What we did not do is we  
41 endeavored to regularly post reels and shorts.

42  
43 For a while there, the algorithm that sort of drives who and how  
44 many people see your post was really focused on reels and  
45 shorts, but that has changed in the last year, and they're  
46 really putting more emphasis on multiple picture posts, and so  
47 it was sort of diminishing returns, and we so we didn't do that  
48 so much, especially in the second half of the year.

1  
2 We also wanted to expand the use of the Fishbrain platform, but  
3 were unable to get that accomplished, for a couple of reasons  
4 that, you know, if anybody's interested, we can definitely talk  
5 about.

6  
7 All right, and so what does Facebook look like? So this is our  
8 -- If you look at on the left, that's our engagements, and so an  
9 engagement is when somebody interacts with your page. It's they  
10 like you, they, you know, leave a nasty comment, whatever it is,  
11 and that's an engagement, and so you can see that quarterly  
12 starting in 2021.

13  
14 The next panel is our reach. Reach is the number of people that  
15 actually get to see the post that you put up, and what you'll  
16 notice is, you know, we've got a steady increase in our  
17 followers, year over year. What's really interesting is our  
18 engagements are really far down this year, compared to what they  
19 have been, but our reach is up, and so I'm not really sure what  
20 the what's going on there. Usually an engagement will drive  
21 reach, but it doesn't seem to be a linear relationship there,  
22 which is interesting.

23  
24 Okay, YouTube analytics, and so, again, we took zero final  
25 action items this year. We usually produce a YouTube video that  
26 corresponds with each final action item, and so you'll see that  
27 we had zero videos produced. Therefore, we had zero specific  
28 views of the videos that we published last year, because there  
29 were none, but people still did go to our YouTube channel, 3,000  
30 times, and watch videos that were already on the platform.

31  
32 Instagram continues to chug along, a slow but steady increase.  
33 Our followers are increasing, and our engagements, and our  
34 reach, are also increasing, but still a lot of room for growth  
35 there.

36  
37 Okay, and so our blog. You guys might be aware that we, you  
38 know, publish articles every once in a while that tend to answer  
39 questions that we hear a lot, that we get a lot through our  
40 outreach channels, and so we set a goal of publishing at least  
41 eight blog articles last year. We were able to do that.  
42 However, we had set goals to write a second installment of a  
43 "Get Engaged" blog, as well as accomplish the two new "Meet the  
44 Council" blogs for our members that were induced -- That's not  
45 the word. Inducted. Oh my goodness. In August of last year,  
46 but we haven't done that yet. It's coming though. It's  
47 happening.

48

1 We did rework the "Why Are Commercial and Recreational  
2 Regulations So Different" blog. That's been frequently one of  
3 the most popular blogs over time. We wrote it maybe twelve  
4 years ago, and so it was kind of time to modernize that a little  
5 bit, and so we did that.

6  
7 We did publish at least two -- We publish these blog digests,  
8 where we send them out to the listserv, and so we did that for  
9 our Regulations Rationale, but we didn't get to the Meet the  
10 Council, because I didn't write the new articles, and then we  
11 did highlight the new blogs on our homepage website slideshow.

12  
13 Okay, so here's our analytics. What you'll notice is there's a  
14 lot of question-marks when it comes to total blog reads. When  
15 we transitioned away from Blogger onto using our website to host  
16 our blog, we lost the ability to count the blog reads that we  
17 got, or the article reads that we got, for historical posts, and  
18 so we were only able to track those posts that we had published  
19 within the year, and those like views to those specific posts,  
20 and so we restored that ability.

21  
22 I will tell you that Camilla put a lot of effort into figuring  
23 out how to make that happen with our web developers, and so what  
24 you'll see is, in 2024, of all of the historical articles that  
25 we've written and published on our website, we did have 20,000  
26 reads, and so that's pretty good, I think.

27  
28 Okay, and onto our email listserv, and so we use Constant  
29 Contact. That's just sort of our press release email blast.  
30 What you'll notice is, you know, we don't have a huge increase  
31 in subscribership from 2023. You know, it's kind of a very  
32 slow, steady increase.

33  
34 We did publish eighty-three press releases. What is  
35 significant here is that the open rate for our emails is 47  
36 percent, which a regular sort of nonprofit averages between a 25  
37 and 28 percent open rate, depending on the source that you use  
38 to get that information, and so 47 percent is pretty high, and  
39 that shows that we have very avid readers, and so the people  
40 that are subscribed to our listserv are people that really want  
41 the information.

42  
43 Some of the extra things that we did is we did finally achieve  
44 Paperwork Reduction Act clearance for our Fisherman Feedback  
45 tool. That was a two-year endeavor, and so that's something to  
46 celebrate. We have started, but not made much progress on,  
47 drafting a scientific paper that outlines sort of the merits and  
48 process of that tool, because it's something I think that we

1 should all be really proud of.

2  
3 We sent press releases to promote public comment opportunities,  
4 or we were unable to do that, because we didn't take final  
5 action on anything. We were also hoping to audit improved  
6 public hearing guides, but we didn't have any public hearings,  
7 and so we also didn't do that.

8  
9 We did publish our history of management tool, but we have not  
10 yet expanded the tool by adding any species, but you'll see,  
11 when we talk about our next year's plan that we still aim to do  
12 that.

13  
14 We didn't do a huge amount of outreach events this year. One of  
15 the things that was particularly engaging was the FWC's fishery-  
16 dependent monitoring training. We got to give about an hour-  
17 long presentation to all of their fishery-dependent monitoring  
18 staff from both coasts on the council system and federal  
19 management in general. That was a real honor. It's one of  
20 those train-the-trainer events. Those people are riding on  
21 vessels with fishermen. They are meeting fishermen at the dock,  
22 and so they are people who are incredibly tuned into the fishing  
23 community.

24  
25 Then we got invited back to just specifically work with their  
26 fishery-dependent monitoring observers, and so those are the  
27 folks that ride on the headboats, and we had sort of a deep dive  
28 on stuff, because they're stuck out there for like days  
29 sometimes getting grilled about why regulations are the way they  
30 are.

31  
32 We also wanted to rewrite and design *Navigating the Council*  
33 *Process*. I don't know if you guys remember that sort of glossy  
34 booklet. We haven't gotten there yet.

35  
36 We did modernize our PowerPoint presentation template, as you  
37 can see here, and we are still continuously working on improving  
38 our repository of images that we can use for outreach purposes,  
39 and so that's the end of that presentation, and I would be happy  
40 to answer any questions, or hear any feedback, you have about  
41 what we're doing or what we can improve.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Any questions for Emily from the committee or  
44 council? No questions? I guess the recommendations is next?  
45 Okay. Emily, your floor is still yours. Recommendations I  
46 think was the next on the agenda.

47  
48 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Yes, but, if there aren't any, we can move on.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Okay. All right. We'll move on. Andy,  
3 sorry.

4  
5 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** First, I'm always impressed with the depth  
6 and breadth of the work you're doing, Emily. I've mentioned  
7 this before, and I'm just curious, kind of from a recommendation  
8 standpoint, and, obviously, some tools are better than others.  
9 Some tools can reach farther than others, and some tools may be  
10 more positive or negative than others, right, and so, given the  
11 amount of work you were able to accomplish, some of the work you  
12 weren't able to accomplish, I mean, thoughts, in terms of any  
13 recommendations narrowing the scope of your, you know, outreach  
14 efforts that maximize the bang for the buck?

15  
16 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** So a couple of things, and I think, at the sort  
17 of end of this committee, Dylan is going to talk about -- We did  
18 have a conversation with our Outreach and Education Technical  
19 Committee, in November, about sort of our general outreach  
20 strategy, right, and that was something that came up, both the  
21 sort of the variety as well as sort of some of the negative  
22 feedback we get.

23  
24 What I will sort of just tell you is that my instinct is to cast  
25 the wider net, right? I think, especially if we are trying to  
26 reach all audiences where they are, it's really hard to narrow  
27 down communications channels without eliminating certain users,  
28 right, and so that's why we've tried to be so broad and all-  
29 encompassing.

30  
31 I can't think of anything that I would sort of take away without  
32 feeling like we were then going to be missing a huge segment of  
33 our stakeholder population, and so I guess the simple answer is  
34 I don't know.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Andy.

37  
38 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, I think you've answered this question,  
39 but I guess the way I would look at it is you're casting this  
40 wide net, right, and, if you decided not to work on certain  
41 things, and take that time and effort, you know, and put it into  
42 other things, is there anything that would kind of rise to the  
43 top, where you feel like maybe we're gaining some momentum and  
44 this is the area we want to put more emphasis toward?

45  
46 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** I would say, generally speaking, you know, the  
47 regulations platforms are some of our most popular analytics  
48 drivers, and I also find them to be a gateway to getting

1 constituent engagement, and so, if I was to put more effort  
2 towards something, at the sort of the loss of something else, I  
3 would really like to tighten up the way that we host our  
4 regulations and promote and sort of communicate the regulations  
5 and how they're made. I don't know if that answers your  
6 question.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** All right. Thank you. Any other questions?  
9 None at all? Okay. Shrimp are up next.

10  
11 **DOMESTIC SHRIMP AND SEAFOOD EDUCATION**

12  
13 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Okay, and so, looking at the action schedule  
14 for our next item, which is Domestic Shrimp and Seafood  
15 Education, I'm going to just provide sort of a little bit of an  
16 overview of, you know, where this came from. I've got a little  
17 presentation of why we're talking about this today.

18  
19 The O&E did take a look at it, and so I'll also sort of talk a  
20 little bit about what the O&E helped us develop, as far as an  
21 outreach plan. and so I would like two things out of the  
22 committee today.

23  
24 The first thing is I'm going to show you a list of sort of  
25 things sources that we understand are focused around creating  
26 existing outreach materials that promote domestic shrimp and  
27 seafood education, and so, if you have any cool outlets, or  
28 things that do that, I would love to get that list developed a  
29 little bit more around the table today. The other thing is that  
30 I would like you to evaluate the communications plan that we  
31 have to discuss this.

32  
33 You know, just let me know if you think that it's appropriate  
34 and that we should move forward or if you have any changes or  
35 you just want to kill it entirely, and so, with that, Bernie, if  
36 you want to go ahead and bring up that presentation for me.  
37 Okey-dokey.

38  
39 So why are we here? We've had, over the last couple of years, a  
40 number of different requests, from a number of different places  
41 where industry participants are requesting that the council play  
42 a role in marketing domestic products. I'm not sure that  
43 marketing is where -- The space that we live in, and so we  
44 brought this to the Outreach and Education Committee, just  
45 because, you know, we've got the Shrimp Futures Project is going  
46 on.

47  
48 A number of shrimp advisory panel members have brought this up

1 year over year. We had a former council member who has, you  
2 know, pushed for it for a very long time, when she was sitting  
3 on the council. I talked to her. She knew I was going to call  
4 her out, and so I don't even have to say who she is.

5  
6 Then we've also had a number of communications with commercial  
7 advocacy organizations that are, you know, really concerned  
8 about imports and the value of domestic seafood, and so, you  
9 know, in knowing that that might not be our role, we decided to  
10 talk to the Outreach and Education Technical Committee and  
11 figure out maybe where we do fit in.

12  
13 Just a little bit of information on the landscape that we're  
14 sort of working in here. You know, NOAA has this National  
15 Seafood Strategy. There are state-specific regulatory efforts  
16 that are either already in existence or are like sort of  
17 growing. Mississippi, and I learned today that Texas is  
18 actually working on its own seafood labeling bill as well, and  
19 then there's a number of different seafood marketing boards, and  
20 advocacy organizations, that already exist that promote the  
21 consumption of domestic seafood.

22  
23 When we talked to the Outreach and Education Committee, you  
24 know, they sort of concurred that maybe marketing is not our  
25 role, but what we could do is develop a webpage that focused  
26 more on education and awareness for the consumer, right, and so,  
27 rather than really touting the value of domestic-caught seafood,  
28 more working on the role of educating our consumers about the  
29 choices they're making and the impact that they may have.

30  
31 What we propose is developing a clearinghouse of existing  
32 information from other organizations that includes state-  
33 specific laws and efforts. I think we can do this on a webpage  
34 pretty effectively.

35  
36 If you guys remember, we had that -- Before Return 'Em Right  
37 existed, we had that discard website, and we had a map, and you  
38 could click on each state, and it would talk to you about the  
39 different release and best practices information, and so we're  
40 kind of thinking something like that, if you had been at this  
41 table long enough to remember what that looked like.

42  
43 We also discussed developing a series of articles, or blog  
44 posts, that highlight the issues and tell stories through some  
45 of our local Gulf fishermen, highlighting those guys and sort of  
46 some of their challenges as domestic fishermen. Also, sharing  
47 statistics and economics on the volume of domestic seafood and  
48 imported seafood, as that is available, and so just sort of a

1 landings page on our website that sort of houses all of this  
2 information.

3  
4 I'm interested to see -- You know, this was kind of informed by  
5 the Outreach and Education Technical Committee. I'm interested  
6 to see what you all think about this idea and its relevance and  
7 its appropriateness at the council table.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** C.J.

10  
11 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good presentation, Emily.  
12 Yes, I'm fully supportive of what you're proposing there. I  
13 mean, I think our shrimping industry could use any help that  
14 they can get. I do agree with you that marketing is not our  
15 role, but I think a website along those lines, and interacting  
16 with some people trying to tell their own stories, I think that  
17 speaks volumes, and I think that would be a worthwhile effort.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Any additional feedback? I thought I saw a  
20 couple of hands. None at all? Okay. The next item is  
21 Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management.

22  
23 **ECOSYSTEM-BASED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT OUTREACH UPDATE: RED TIDE**  
24 **FEI**

25  
26 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Okay. Cruising right along, the action guide  
27 for this, and so, if you guys remember, you approved a fishery  
28 ecosystem plan and red tide fishery ecosystem issue  
29 communications plan outline, and that's a big, big thing, last  
30 January.

31  
32 The plan outlined a broad communication strategy and a strategy  
33 that was also specific to the red tide FEI, and so, knowing that  
34 the council is going to take up work on the red tide FEI at the  
35 April meeting, and so at our next council meeting, I just wanted  
36 to provide you with a quick update in advance of that work, and  
37 so I don't expect anything from the committee.

38  
39 You know, you can ask me questions, or you can give me feedback,  
40 but this is really just an informational update. Bernie, if you  
41 can pull up -- I developed a quick sort of historical document  
42 about where we've been with this red tide FEI communications  
43 plan, and I'll just walk you through it really quickly.

44  
45 As I said, in January 2024, the council discussed the red tide  
46 FEI. Essentially, what we pitched is that, in the absence of an  
47 effective council regulatory action, communications might be the  
48 most useful way to improve the sustainability of the fisheries,

1 right?

2

3 For red tide specifically, you know, regulating -- We kind of  
4 talked about, if we create regulations, they're probably going  
5 to be maybe punitive, or in the form of a buffer, and that might  
6 not be the most effective way to handle the red tide FEI, or  
7 whatever results from it, right, and so we pitched two things.

8

9 The first was hosting a symposium. The symposium would bring  
10 together a range of affected stakeholders, extra-jurisdictional  
11 agencies, and so other agencies that deal with red tide issues,  
12 the media, and other groups that have a stake in the impacts of  
13 red tide, and really collaboratively address the issue in kind  
14 of a holistic way, right, sort of trying to create a forum to  
15 discuss red tide.

16

17 Then we also talked about producing a federal fisheries red tide  
18 report, which would really be an annual report, maybe, or maybe  
19 biannual, that would summarize the social, biological, and  
20 economic impacts that red tide has on federal fisheries, and  
21 then we would share them with those existing groups that already  
22 address or consider red tide issues.

23

24 During council committee and the council meeting in 2024, we  
25 heard some sort of caution that a symposium could be a huge  
26 undertaking, and that staff would have to really carefully  
27 define the goals and manage expectations for that, but then we  
28 did hear pretty wholehearted support for this red tide fisheries  
29 report.

30

31 Fast-forward to June of 2024, and we sort of put in our IRA  
32 proposal for the second phase of funding. I think that's what  
33 it's called. The summit was not funded in that proposal. The  
34 reviewers for the IRA proposals said that they didn't see how  
35 the summit would result in council action to improve climate-  
36 ready fisheries, and so they did not give us the money for that  
37 proposal.

38

39 We brought this to the O&E, and we were talking to them about  
40 like we didn't get funded for this, and so what's the next step,  
41 and so I just was going to tell you the O&E was still very  
42 supportive of a symposium, despite the lack of IRA funding, and  
43 suggested that it would provide incredible exposure and  
44 credibility to that annual federal fisheries red tide report,  
45 and so I just wanted to preface -- You know, give you sort of  
46 that history and let you know that, when we are taking up the  
47 red tide FEI in April, we are probably going to have to decide  
48 if this symposium is something that we still want to consider,

1 and fund it out of our own regular general award, our admin  
2 award, or if we just move on and come up with something  
3 different, at which point we will have to sort of change what we  
4 had proposed in our communications plan, which, you know, is  
5 fine, but I will need some direction. I'm happy to take  
6 anything now, or we can just wait until April when we take up  
7 this issue.

8

9 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Ed.

10

11 **MR. ED WALKER:** I don't know if it's worth going all the way  
12 through without funding and the red tide symposium. I'm not  
13 really even sure how well attended that would be, based on some  
14 of our other attempts at things like this, and so I think it  
15 might be worth discussing just dropping this, or tabling it,  
16 myself.

17

18 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, Ed. C.J.

19

20 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I think I agree with Ed along the lines  
21 of the symposium. Obviously, the federal fisheries aspect is  
22 useful, and that would be highly relevant, but a symposium -- I  
23 feel like there's like ten-million people that are involved in  
24 red tide right now, and so that might get a little tricky.

25

26 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, C.J. Any further suggestions, or  
27 feedback?

28

29 **MR. HUBBARD:** One of the things that the O&E Technical Committee  
30 discussed, as far as the red tide symposium, is the fact that,  
31 currently, red tide is being evaluated in some of our SEDAR  
32 assessments, specifically for red grouper and gag grouper alone,  
33 but there's potential for that to expand, and so the  
34 implications on federal management is there from red tide.

35

36 The idea behind the symposium was trying to get some of those  
37 ten-million people to help identify some of these research gaps,  
38 as they relate to federal fisheries, because I agree, and I  
39 think there is ten-million people working on red tide, but not  
40 necessarily how it affects federal fisheries.

41

42 Things like mangrove snapper, for example, are a very affected  
43 species, that then swim into our federal waters, right, and so  
44 there's implications from red tide to our federal fisheries, and  
45 I think there's some research gaps there, and I think that was a  
46 conversation around the O&E table, was trying to connect those  
47 dots, and that was the idea behind the O&E support for the  
48 symposium. Thank you.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, Dylan. C.J.  
3

4 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So I'm not necessarily sure we need a symposium  
5 to get that kind of information though, Dylan. I guess my  
6 thought there is like the science that FWC, NOAA, all the people  
7 that do along those lines, can identify the species that are  
8 impacted, and I think we can move that forward without having to  
9 spend probably hundreds of thousands of dollars for a symposium,  
10 when we're just going to get that information anyway. At least  
11 that's my thought process.  
12

13 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you for sharing, C.J. Any others?  
14 Hearing none, I guess we'll wait until April. Okay. All right.  
15 Moving on, and, Emily, the floor is still yours for Management  
16 Area and Boundary Outreach.  
17

#### 18 **MANAGEMENT AREAS AND BOUNDARY OUTREACH** 19

20 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Okay, and so this is a three-parter, and so, on  
21 the action guide, the first thing that we're going to talk about  
22 is I am going to drive you through, in a minute, the new  
23 management area mapping tool that we are developing.  
24

25 If you remember, we used to host our management areas in like a  
26 long series of PDFs that you had to scroll through, and there  
27 was like very little rhyme or reason to how those were presented  
28 on the page, and it was very difficult, and so we've been  
29 working to develop a mapping tool that we can host as a part of  
30 our fishing regulations that users will be able to navigate.  
31 I'm going to show you the very beta version of that tool, and  
32 get some feedback from you on how we can make it better, before  
33 we sort of keep going down this road.  
34

35 The next thing is we would like to talk about the potential for  
36 getting our management areas and boundaries added to  
37 commercially available mapping tools. We got a little bit of  
38 advice from the O&E, but, generally, as you know, this is sort  
39 of an industry thing that I have not worked with before.  
40

41 I would love some guidance from you on where to start, and maybe  
42 how to start getting that taken care of, and then the third  
43 piece is we're going to talk about the twenty-fathom  
44 recreational shallow-water grouper closure, and sort of talk  
45 about maybe the appropriate communication strategies to improve  
46 compliance with that closure. So with that, Bernie, if you can  
47 give me the presenter status. Rock and roll. Okay, and let me  
48 see if I can make it bigger, so you guys can see better.

1  
2 This is what the management tool looks like right now. The  
3 reason it looks blank is because I haven't selected anything,  
4 and what you'll see is, over at the left, there's some  
5 instructions on how to use this tool. I'm going to pin that.  
6 If I pin it, you can see it. It exists.

7  
8 The first thing that we have to do, and this is one of the  
9 things that myself as well as the O&E both agree, is it asks you  
10 to check if you're looking for a fishery management area, a  
11 habitat area of particular concern, or a National Marine  
12 Sanctuary.

13  
14 That is not an intuitive way, really, to search, as a fisherman,  
15 and so one of the sort of main pieces of advice that we got from  
16 the O&E was to change the way that we're approaching that, by  
17 sorting it using sector, or potentially species complex, maybe  
18 even by regulation type, like whether it's a gear restriction,  
19 or a species restriction, or if it's a restriction on anchoring,  
20 and so trying to really change the way -- The logic of the tool,  
21 so that it's fisherman forward, so I think like, if I'm a  
22 fisherman, what do I want?

23  
24 Do I want to see things in my area, and I want to see  
25 everything, or am I just worried about reef fish, and so I want  
26 to change the logic of the tool, so it's not based on management  
27 area type, and I would be interested in hearing feedback from  
28 you all on maybe the best way to do that, but so let's just go  
29 through one.

30  
31 A fisheries management area, and let's start with one of those,  
32 and so the way that this works is I'll look at the -- Let's pull  
33 up the Texas closure, and so this is the Texas closure, and what  
34 you'll see is it sort of highlights it, and then it tells you  
35 what the gear restrictions are, right, and so this is the Texas  
36 shrimp closure, and so it will give you those gear restrictions.

37  
38 Sort of another example is -- Hold on, and let's turn on HAPCs.  
39 Let's look at Madison-Swanson. If you click on it, what it's  
40 going to show you is the bounding coordinates in this one box,  
41 right, and so that's all the coordinates. It's going to tell  
42 you what the gear restrictions are. It's going to tell you what  
43 your species-specific restrictions are, and then you'll see this  
44 box for anchoring allowed, and it's going to say yes or no, and  
45 it'll say type of fishery, right, and does this apply to  
46 commercial or recreational, and it's yes and yes for this one.

47  
48 What you'll see is, you know, I didn't like that it sort of just

1 goes straight to it, but, if you actually double-click on it, it  
2 will also show you where it exists in the Gulf of Mexico, and so  
3 you can look at it zoomed-in, and get the bounding coordinates,  
4 or you can look at it close up, and it'll give you the details.

5  
6 Generally, that's sort of how this tool works. We've got the  
7 National Marine Sanctuaries in here as well. You can turn them  
8 all on, or you can turn them all off, but just curious to see,  
9 you know, if this is my extreme beta version, what's working,  
10 and what's not working, and what would you really like to see,  
11 focusing on the logic structure of this tool?

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Ed.

14  
15 **MR. WALKER:** This is pretty neat, I think. I did have a  
16 question. Say I'm a person heading out to fish somewhere that  
17 I've never fished before, and I didn't know the name of Madison-  
18 Swanson, but I know I'm going to go fish right about there. Did  
19 you say that the map will have the zone identified, when you  
20 slide your cursor across, because, other than just scrolling  
21 through names of spots, if you didn't know the name --

22  
23 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Yes, and so that's definitely something that we  
24 can consider in the logic structure, is actually there's  
25 probably a way, on the tool, that you can draw a box on the Gulf  
26 of Mexico map. Hold on, and let's see if I can get back to it.  
27 Well, now I've really messed it all up, but you could draw a box  
28 on the Gulf of Mexico map itself, and then it can show you all  
29 of the areas within the box, if that's the logic structure that  
30 you think is going to be the most useful.

31  
32 That's sort of what I'm trying to understand is like is that how  
33 fishermen are going to be using it mostly, right, because, the  
34 more options for logic that we add in, the more complex it gets,  
35 and then the user gets overwhelmed. So like, if we had to  
36 prioritize, is a fisherman going to be checking his location, or  
37 is he going to be like reef fishing, and checking for reef fish  
38 regulations, or, you know, what's the hierarchy there?

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Ed.

41  
42 **MR. WALKER:** So, if I'm going -- I'm from out-of-town, or I just  
43 got my first boat, and I'm headed fifty miles off of St. Pete,  
44 and I just click right there, it will show me regulations in the  
45 area, or does it only show you the sanctuaries and things like  
46 that?

47  
48 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** It would only show you the sanctuaries and like

1 the management areas, and not all of the regulations, but you  
2 would be able to -- Like if you wanted to draw -- I think we can  
3 make it so that, if you wanted to draw a box, you know,  
4 offshore, it would then populate all of the management areas  
5 that were inside that box and then show you -- You know, then  
6 you could click on them and see which ones they were  
7 specifically and what the associated regulations were.

8

9 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** C.J.

10

11 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is really cool,  
12 Emily. I like -- I mean, my initial thoughts here, first of  
13 all, I think if we could have a way where we can actually --  
14 When we're looking at like area-type things like this, like  
15 Madison-Swanson, it would be nice if we can have the GPS  
16 coordinates on there, too. That would be nice. It does seem  
17 like the boundary just randomly goes away.

18

19 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Yes.

20

21 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I don't know if that's just a technical thing,  
22 but, also, I'm trying to think of, based on what your previous  
23 presentation was about kind of some of the most clicked on  
24 items, and what that would be most useful for in this kind of a  
25 framework, and clearly regulations seemed to be at the top of  
26 the list there.

27

28 I'm not exactly sure how to integrate it in this kind of  
29 template, but -- I'll have to think about that a little more,  
30 but I definitely think that having more of regulation stuff  
31 upfront, maybe species that are closed in a given month, or  
32 something along those lines, could be useful. I'll need to  
33 think about how to integrate it in this kind of a template  
34 there, but just broad scale strokes is kind of what I'm  
35 thinking.

36

37 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Kesley.

38

39 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** Thank you, Emily. This is awesome. Will you  
40 click on one of the -- Just any spatial zone, real fast? So the  
41 box blinks, but then it goes away. Is there a way to reverse  
42 that? Like, I don't mind the blinking, but like leave it for  
43 fishermen. I can just see someone like holding up the  
44 coordinates and like trying to match it.

45

46 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** You have to double-click it and then it. I  
47 mean, the functionality isn't great. This is like super beta,  
48 but yes. Yes, we can definitely fix that.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Kevin.

3  
4 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Similar to what C.J., was talking about, as far  
5 as organization for folks to be able to click on an area, or a  
6 species of interest, is the geographic state species, maybe, to  
7 include that, and then just a very minor point, but the king  
8 mackerel management areas, and "mackerel" is misspelled, and so  
9 just maybe update that. Thank you.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, Kevin. I think it was another  
12 layer that we were considering whether or not to move forward  
13 with -- I guess, working with industry, to move these layers  
14 into like your Garmin, or GPS, and I think that's something else  
15 that we need to discuss as a council committee.

16  
17 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Yes, and so that that is our sort of next  
18 pursuit of the three in this agenda item, would be -- You know,  
19 we talked to the Outreach and Education Technical Committee, and  
20 I think a lot of commercially-available mapping tools don't have  
21 our closed areas and things included in the tools.

22  
23 I recognize that closed areas probably don't sell GPS devices,  
24 but hoping that maybe the carrot of not getting in trouble,  
25 because, you know, you were fishing in an area you shouldn't,  
26 might help.

27  
28 We also recognized, sort of through the O&E conversations, that  
29 a lot of folks, or companies, are hesitant to host regulatory  
30 areas, because there could be liability for companies for doing  
31 so, and because there's a challenge with keeping up the  
32 regulations, right, and so we would really have to come up with  
33 a management structure, or a communication structure, that would  
34 make sure that those companies, when we updated an area  
35 restriction, or regulations within a specific area, that we  
36 communicated those really clearly and accurately to those  
37 companies.

38  
39 You know, I think the Outreach and Education Technical Committee  
40 thought it was a really good idea, to improve compliance, to get  
41 these areas on those tools. However, I will tell you that I  
42 have no experience with working with that industry.

43  
44 I know that there has already been a little bit of pushback,  
45 from like sort of initial discussions that other folks have had,  
46 but I think it was worth bringing up at this table and asking if  
47 you guys have any guidance. Is the juice worth the squeeze,  
48 right? Is this worth it to go down this road? Is it feasible,

1 and, if so, how and where do we start?  
2  
3 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, Emily. Any feedback on the  
4 feasibility, if it's something we need to move forward with?  
5 Ed.  
6  
7 **MR. WALKER:** Feasibility of the whole thing?  
8  
9 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** No, and just getting our closed areas included  
10 on commercially-available mapping tools, like getting it on  
11 your, you know, your Simrad.  
12  
13 **MR. WALKER:** Okay.  
14  
15 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** C.J.  
16  
17 **DR. SWEETMAN:** We've tried really hard, in the State of Florida,  
18 to do this, and we've been met with a resounding thud, every  
19 time we request from Garmin, or Simrad, or whatever. They --  
20 They're not doing it for us.  
21  
22 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, C.J., for that input. I think we  
23 had some similar concerns about that. Any others? Yes, Ed.  
24  
25 **MR. WALKER:** Well, I know that a lot of that stuff, that CMOR  
26 Maps sells was actually mapped by NOAA, and USF, and it's  
27 publicly available, I assume, right? They just they just  
28 package it, and sell it to people, even though it's not even  
29 their product, and so you could probably get the ones that the  
30 government mapped out, or, you know, government-funded agencies  
31 made the map for it, to be available, I'm sure.  
32  
33 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thanks, Ed. Anyone else? Emily.  
34  
35 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** So, C.J., based on sort of your previous  
36 experience, is this worth our time to even try?  
37  
38 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** C.J.  
39  
40 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I would say, if we can get it done, that would be  
41 amazing. I would have my expectations low, as to whether they  
42 would do it, but maybe the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management  
43 Council might have a better shot at it than FWC did, but maybe  
44 not.  
45  
46 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Carrie.  
47  
48 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so

1 you'll hear a little bit of this as well on Wednesday, when  
2 we're talking about the Law Enforcement Technical Committee and  
3 the twenty-fathom seasonal closure for the recreational sector.  
4 They had a similar recommendation as well, but, you know,  
5 getting there, the feasibility of it, the difficulty of it, but  
6 it certainly would help in enforcement as well.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you for sharing that. Any others?  
9 Kevin.

10  
11 **MR. ANSON:** Well, my two-cents is that it would be ideal to have  
12 that information available for, you know, up-to-the-minute, if  
13 you will, season closures, and then that potentially tie into  
14 size or bag limit changes and that type of thing, but, you know,  
15 it probably would have to originate maybe from the agency, NOAA,  
16 and then there would be the specific information that would be  
17 needed added to the regulations, and whatever that process is  
18 for, you know, once the regulation becomes in effect, as to how  
19 does that information then flow to you all, so that it's already  
20 seamless.

21  
22 It's just kind of like a download, and then it gets populated  
23 into the database, so it's immediately accessible. That would  
24 be, I think, how it should run, and then it's just automatic,  
25 and you don't have to worry about somebody getting sick, or out  
26 of the office, or, oops, I had to go home early, and I forgot to  
27 do it. So, you know, if you can't get it to that point, I would  
28 have some concerns about proceeding.

29  
30 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, Kevin. Anyone else? Emily, I  
31 think the floor is still yours. Are we at the twenty-fathom, or  
32 is that -- Okay.

33  
34 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Okay, and so let's talk about the twenty-fathom  
35 shallow-water grouper closure. So, last year, you all worked on  
36 a document that considered -- You know, started work on a  
37 document about the shallow-water grouper closure, and sort of  
38 have been having some conversations about whether or not that  
39 closure is effective, lots of conversations about potential non-  
40 compliance with that closure, whether that non-compliance was  
41 intentional or through a lack of education.

42  
43 We decided to bring this up and sort of talk to the Outreach and  
44 Education Technical Committee about the issue. They noted --  
45 They basically noted that, if we wanted to enhance compliance  
46 with the twenty-fathom closure, we should be doing it through a  
47 best fishing practices discussion, with talking about  
48 potentially saving spawning, you know, protecting spawning, and

1 discards, rather than sort of approach it from a compliance  
2 standpoint, right, and so sort of encourage people to do the  
3 right thing, because it's the right thing to do, and that it  
4 will benefit the stocks, and yourself maybe, in the long run,  
5 rather than focusing on the compliance issue.

6  
7 We also heard that people are broadly aware of the closure, and  
8 they likely won't solve the issue with education alone, and so I  
9 just sort of wanted to give you an update on that. I know that  
10 you guys, I think, are going to take up work on that document  
11 again in April. Is that right, and so just asking what -- You  
12 know, how much effort, or what we should be doing to communicate  
13 or, you know, approach the education around that closure.

14

15 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, Emily. Ed.

16

17 **MR. WALKER:** I think there is a lot of people that go offshore  
18 fishing that are unaware of this, and it's led to a lot of  
19 animosity between the honest people, people who knowingly cheat,  
20 and then people who just don't even realize that, hey, the  
21 calendar turned another day, and now I can't go fish for red  
22 groupers outside of twenty fathoms.

23

24 It wouldn't hurt to put something out, you know, the day that  
25 this goes into effect, or something like that, a little heads-up  
26 that, hey, folks, you're not supposed to catch red grouper  
27 outside of this.

28

29 As far as the changing the rule, I don't think that's going to  
30 happen. It's been talked with at the Reef AP, which we'll hear,  
31 and, around the room, that it's almost certainly going to -- If  
32 we were to eliminate it, then it's almost certainly going to  
33 shorten the season, and pretty much everybody I've talked to  
34 would rather have a longer season, and leave things the way they  
35 are, and so I don't think I'd make any plans with that change in  
36 that rule going forward, but I think it would be great to -- In  
37 the nicest, most beneficial way possible, to give a little  
38 heads-up to the fishing community that, hey, guys, by the way,  
39 it's closed on -- Is it February or March 1, and I forget.

40

41 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, Ed, for that. Anybody else? C.J.

42

43 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just one thing that we do at FWC, like when we've  
44 got closures for a species or whatever, and, you know, we just  
45 do an email blast for everyone that's on there, and we kind of  
46 do a little press release about when the fishery is closed, why  
47 it's closed, and when it's going to reopen, and so maybe  
48 something similar can be done for some of our species or the

1 twenty-fathom closure.

2

3 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thanks, C.J. Dylan.

4

5 **MR. HUBBARD:** I just wanted to add some extra conversation  
6 around some of the stuff that was discussed at the O&E. I  
7 understand your points, Ed and C.J., but the concern the O&E had  
8 was this is a problem that necessarily education alone can't  
9 fix. Emily has done that in the past. The, hey, it's the end of  
10 February, or the end of January, and the deepwater closure is  
11 about to start, and the comments tell the tale of, hey, we know,  
12 and we're still going to go do it.

13

14 That is the problem that I think the Outreach and Education  
15 Technical Committee struggled with, and one thing that I wanted  
16 to emphasize is the O&E noted that it's really hard to outreach  
17 on this subject without an understanding of whether or not the  
18 closure is even an effective means of protecting spawning fish,  
19 especially since the initial target species aren't even  
20 relevant, with gags closed, and also red grouper rebounding, and  
21 so that's another issue that was discussed around the table.  
22 Thank you.

23

24 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thanks for that info, Dylan. Anybody else?  
25 Any other questions or comments? Hearing or seeing none, Emily,  
26 the floor is still yours.

27

28 **PUBLIC COMMENT IMPROVEMENTS: IMPROVING VIABILITY OF WRITTEN**  
29 **COMMENTS AND CONSIDERATION OF AN ANONYMOUS VOICE MAILBOX**

30

31 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Okay, that moves us right along to our next  
32 item, which is discussing improvements to our public comment  
33 system, and so I'm going to do two things here. The first thing  
34 is I'm going to sort of just briefly go over what we do right  
35 now, focusing mostly on our written comment, and sort of the way  
36 that we do those, and then I'm going to ask you if there's  
37 anything that we can do in this system to make those written  
38 comments more viable and more useful and more obvious to you  
39 all.

40

41 Then the second thing that we are going to do is discuss an idea  
42 that we first touched on during our August meeting, during IFQ  
43 modification conversations, which is developing an anonymous  
44 voice mailbox, and I would like feedback on that and direction  
45 on that idea.

46

47 Without further ado, so written comments, and we'll just talk  
48 about we have public comment guidelines in our communications

1 guidelines. Right now, we take online -- We take written  
2 comment from our online comment forms, we take them through  
3 email, and then we take them through U.S. Post snail mail.

4  
5 We do ask folks who provide written comment to give us their  
6 name and association, but that's not mandatory, and so those who  
7 are giving us written comment through any of those formats can  
8 remain anonymous. You don't have to fill out those things on  
9 our online comment forms. If you are sending an email, and you  
10 request that it's an anonymous email, I won't forward that  
11 information, although it is FOIA-able. If it came from you, and  
12 somebody wants to see my emails, they could see them.

13  
14 Then the same with U.S. Post. Like if you request to be  
15 anonymous, and you write me an anonymous letter, you can provide  
16 written comment anonymously, and so what we do, when we get  
17 those comments, is, if it's a general comment, we have that  
18 general comment box that you can navigate to on our website.

19  
20 Each time, between each council meeting -- All of the general  
21 comment that we receive between like the next council meeting  
22 and the last council meeting, it does get linked on your  
23 meetings material page, and so you will see there is a button  
24 that says read general comments from, you know, the last two  
25 months, or whatever, from whenever it was, and so those are  
26 always available for you all to read.

27  
28 When we get a comment that is specific to council action, we put  
29 that -- We file that specifically into that comment box for that  
30 specific action. When we initiate a new action, and I don't  
31 know if you all know this, but, when the council initiates a new  
32 action, one of the things that we do is we comb the general  
33 comments from a year prior and take anything that we got that is  
34 relevant to that issue and we put it in that specific comment  
35 box.

36  
37 We make sure that we don't lose it, because, you know, a lot of  
38 times, public comment is what starts an issue for being  
39 addressed by the council, and so we take everything that we got  
40 from a year before, and we will put it into the appropriate box,  
41 so that we know this is where we started on this issue, as we  
42 start to work through it.

43  
44 Then we -- Before final action is taken on an issue that's  
45 specific, you'll notice that we have a cutoff date of the  
46 Tuesday before the council meets, and we will summarize all of  
47 the comments that we have received on that issue. We will  
48 present them to you before final action.

1  
2 That's sort of what we do internally with our public comment  
3 that we receive written, and so I just wonder, and is that  
4 working for you all? Is there anything that we can do to make  
5 that better, so that we make sure that those written comments  
6 that we receive don't sort of fall into the void, that that is  
7 something that is very clear, and very for the forefront, for  
8 you all to make sure that you are reading them, and paying  
9 attention to them, and considering them, just like you would  
10 somebody standing up at the podium.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, Emily. Ed, I see your hand up.

13  
14 **MR. WALKER:** Yes. Yes, I think it's a great idea to have a --  
15 To group things up for us by topic, for sure. You know, that  
16 way, we can -- If we know that, on the hot seat at the next  
17 meeting, is, you know, whatever specific issue, we can go right  
18 to that and read everybody's comments on that. I guess, I mean,  
19 you kind of can now, but that -- Continue working in that  
20 direction.

21  
22 I definitely think this anonymous submission, voice mailbox, or  
23 email, or something, is a good idea. You know, I -- There's  
24 certain groups out there that are afraid to speak, because of  
25 repercussions that may come their way. Leasers in the IFQ  
26 program are one, but I can think of many others, and I say this  
27 for sure, because somehow I've become the anonymous voice  
28 mailbox for a lot of these guys.

29  
30 I get calls from guys in the IFQ program that are -- They  
31 absolutely will not speak in public about it, and they  
32 practically cry on the phone with their situation sometimes, but  
33 they can't -- They'll never write a named letter, or they'll  
34 never come up here in public testimony, and so I think -- You  
35 know, I don't know how you do it, and I have some ideas, and,  
36 you know, maybe it could be corrupted, if we don't have some --  
37 A few things in place to kind of -- You know, you could ask them  
38 to include their status in the fishery, or some -- You know,  
39 what's the specific issue that's their problem, but, to the  
40 extent possible, I think this is a good idea.

41  
42 We may uncover a whole group of input that we're simply not  
43 getting around here right now, if this can be done, and I don't  
44 know about the legal ramifications.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, Ed, for that perspective. Emily,  
47 and then J.D.

48

1 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** So, before we get too deep into that  
2 conversation, let me just sort of talk to you -- Talk to you  
3 guys about sort of where we've been, and what the O&E has said,  
4 and sort of the research that we've done, and then let's jump  
5 even deeper.

6  
7 This anonymous voicemail conversation started in the August 2024  
8 council meeting, you know, with the idea that there are folks  
9 that are reluctant to provide comment publicly, and so that's  
10 why I sort of stress that written comment -- We are allowed, or  
11 you are allowed, to do that anonymously, and so there is a  
12 mechanism for providing comment, but not all fishermen, you  
13 know, want to go and type a paragraph about why they're mad,  
14 right, and so this was sort of the idea of sort of making the  
15 council process even more accessible and open to the public than  
16 it is.

17  
18 A couple of the concerns that we had -- the biggest one, is if  
19 we were to collect those voicemails, and hold onto them, they  
20 would be FOIA-able, and so, even if I only presented you a  
21 transcript, if somebody wanted to get those initial voicemails,  
22 they could get to them, but so what I've discovered, in doing a  
23 little bit of research, is there are services who can provide  
24 direct transcription of voicemails.

25  
26 We would not own the phone number, and we would not own the  
27 voice records, and we would simply be able to get the  
28 transcripts from the company that transcribes it, and we could  
29 also set parameters for the transcribers, and so we could say,  
30 if the guy accidentally calls and says like, hey, this is Billy  
31 Bob, I mean, shoot, and, you know, then it could remove any  
32 information that was going to be personally identifiable, right?

33  
34 That would get around the FOIA-bility of any sort of voice  
35 record that we would have, because, you know, you could listen  
36 to those, and you'll know who is giving that comment, in a lot  
37 of cases, right, and so we could avoid sort of having that  
38 public record by having a service.

39  
40 Now, the fee of those services is pretty nominal. It's not  
41 huge. You know, let's say on the order of around fifty-bucks a  
42 month, and so it's not a huge expense. When we sort of thought  
43 about the amount of workload, right, because we will then have  
44 to take them, and summarize them, and place them in the right  
45 place, and figure out what to do, you know, I think it might be  
46 a really good place for me to start using some AI to help me do  
47 that pretty efficiently.

1 We don't have the same sort of restrictions, I think, than some  
2 of our federal partners do, and so that might be a way to, you  
3 know, to minimize the workload there.

4  
5 We brought the idea to the O&E, because, ultimately, we wanted  
6 some recommendations from them. The O&E did recommend that we  
7 pilot this idea for a year, especially as we deal with the IFQ  
8 issues, but, just to make it clear, in that pilot, the idea is  
9 that it would apply to all council action, right, and so it  
10 would be like a general voicemail box.

11  
12 It wouldn't be specific to different issues, and so we wouldn't  
13 stop anybody from calling and putting in comment about anything,  
14 and, you know, after that year, we'll see if the workload issue  
15 is an issue or not.

16  
17 Sort of just to, you know, reinvigorate the conversation, should  
18 we move forward? If we do, how would you like the comments  
19 sorted and binned and reported out? I'm just looking for some  
20 guidance there.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Ed.

23  
24 **MR. WALKER:** I think we should move forward with it, and I was  
25 going to suggest that maybe it's a pilot, that we try it for a  
26 year, and maybe -- Because, if it ends up like the council  
27 comments page, it might just be a trainwreck of haters, and, you  
28 know, I've got enough of those already. You're probably going  
29 to have to have some time invested in just weeding out the you  
30 all suck, and you're all corrupt, and the typical comments you  
31 get on a council Facebook page, to get to the quality ones.

32  
33 It might become a blow-out there. If you say, hey, anonymous  
34 comments of the Gulf Council, and here's the link, I'm seeing 90  
35 percent not beneficial comments, if you will. That's just a  
36 guess, and so try it. If it doesn't work, then considered but  
37 rejected, I guess.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** J.D.

40  
41 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to echo what Ed  
42 said. I've received several phone calls as well, from different  
43 fishermen across the Gulf that do not want to come here and give  
44 public testimony. They're in fear of being blackballed, and so  
45 I think this is -- Maybe it could be a solution. I like the  
46 idea.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, Ed and J.D. for sharing. Andy.

1  
2 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I'm also supportive of the concept. I  
3 guess I have concerns, reservations, about how it may or may not  
4 be used by those that would want to maybe manipulate the process  
5 as well. You mentioned piloting for a year. I mean, could you  
6 pilot test it for a shorter period of time, and kind of report  
7 back on the results, and, if it's something that's working, then  
8 we could, obviously, extend it for a longer period of time.  
9  
10 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Yes, and, I mean, I will do what you tell me to  
11 do.  
12  
13 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I would like it to be pilot tested for thirty-  
14 six-and-a-half days.  
15  
16 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, Andy.  
17  
18 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Maybe try six months.  
19  
20 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Okay, and thank you for the recommendation.  
21 Kevin.  
22  
23 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, and I would agree a pilot period probably would  
24 suffice for now. You can then see how you can organize it, see  
25 how much time it takes, see what the value of the comments are.  
26 You know, just -- It may have already been mentioned, but, you  
27 know, part of having knowledge of the individual, and  
28 particularly the background, as we request that when people come  
29 and provide public testimony, is it gives an idea as to what the  
30 true background of that individual is, their experience, and  
31 gives you some additional insight.  
32  
33 Although I can certainly understand how people would be reticent  
34 to provide comments, and it is disconcerting that some feel like  
35 they can't, I just am also a little hesitant on how valuable  
36 this will turn out to be, considering the time that's put into  
37 it and all that stuff for organizing. Thank you.  
38  
39 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, Kevin. Any further questions, or  
40 comments? Kesley.  
41  
42 **DR. BANKS:** I understand the concern with people taking  
43 advantage of this, but people can game the system already. It  
44 doesn't cost anything to make a fake email account that you will  
45 use once. I bet we've all done it, not to have the spam come to  
46 our junk mail, and so I don't think that's something that should  
47 stop us from this, because someone could already be doing that,  
48 if that was the case, and they wanted to provide anonymous

1 comment.

2  
3 I think that the value of giving them that option is more  
4 important, especially if there's a company that can transcribe  
5 for you, than, you know, really worrying about people gaming the  
6 system because they could already be doing that.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Kesley, I certainly agree. Anyone else?  
9 Carrie.

10  
11 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I feel  
12 like -- You don't have to do it at the committee, but, maybe by  
13 Full Council, we could have a motion that kind of directs us to  
14 do this. It's not a significant cost, but it is a little bit  
15 contentious, and it gives the public a clear understanding of  
16 the direction we're going, and so I would maybe ask for that by  
17 Thursday, if we could consider it.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Okay. Thank you. All right. Seeing no  
20 further discussion, Emily, the floor is still yours. I guess  
21 the 2025 Communications Improvement Plan.

## 22 23 **2025 COMMUNICATIONS IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

24  
25 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Okey-dokey. So, wrapping this up, moving right  
26 along, as we sort of reviewed with the 2024 analytics each year,  
27 we try and commit to a series of things that we think we should  
28 be doing as an outreach strategy, and so I just wanted to sort  
29 of quickly review our 2025 communications improvement plan and  
30 hear any feedback that you all have regarding that plan, or our  
31 outreach endeavors in general, and so if you can bring that up  
32 for me, Bernie. I'm also going to bring it up.

33  
34 Okay, and so I'll just walk you through this. The first thing  
35 that we would like to do in 2025 is publish our new mapping  
36 tool, get it really tightened up and get it published. I do  
37 have on here that we maybe want to contact the American  
38 Sportfishing Association, and other relevant organizations and  
39 companies, to sort of figure out how to get our closed areas on  
40 commonly available charts and mapping pools.

41  
42 I do have a sub-bullet here that says consider leveraging  
43 fishermen ambassadors. One of the things that the O&E discussed  
44 was that, maybe if some of the fishermen ambassadors for some of  
45 these companies were really to say -- You know, to tell their  
46 companies that it would be a valuable thing, we might consider  
47 that. I wrote "consider", because I don't know if it's actually  
48 an appropriate thing to do or not.

1  
2 Next, we'll move on to marketing, and so the O&E had a number of  
3 different sort of feedback points on different marketing  
4 techniques that they would like us to use to sort of amplify our  
5 messages to broader audiences, and so actually looking into  
6 developing a marketing budget to do a couple of things.

7  
8 One of them is develop some short videos about the value and  
9 logistics of the council process, to boost select social media  
10 posts, and so all of our social media stuff is organic in growth  
11 and reach, but it's really easy to target specific areas, and  
12 specific demographics, through social media, and so thinking  
13 about whether or not we want to have a budget to enhance our  
14 messaging through that platform to -- Well, as it says, create  
15 geotargeted social media ads.

16  
17 Then, also, we've heard, a couple of times, that maybe the  
18 council should look into the feasibility of utilizing port  
19 ambassadors, or other influencers, and so I'm not saying  
20 actually doing that, but look into sort of the laws, and the  
21 logistics, of an organization like ours doing that, because it's  
22 kind of, you know, something that a lot of traditional marketing  
23 companies, and organizations, really successfully do. Maybe  
24 it's something that we can sort of, you know, get some YouTubers  
25 to talk about why the council is awesome.

26  
27 Also, look at -- We're going to complete our contract with Fish  
28 Rules and do a better job of utilizing push notifications  
29 through that app. We've already got a sort of a handshake  
30 agreement that we can message Fish Rules regulations users.  
31 Like, if you're looking up the gag grouper regulation, and it  
32 will pull up a push notification that says, hey, you like gag  
33 grouper, and the council is going to cut harvest, and come to  
34 the public hearing, right, and so really working on that. Then  
35 we are going to design and order a new outreach display, because  
36 ours is getting a little old and moldy.

37  
38 For public comment, assuming that you guys bless the idea, we  
39 will try and pilot this anonymous voice mailbox and bring you  
40 guys some analytics on how that works. We would also like to  
41 audit and improve the way written comment is reported, and if we  
42 can improve effectiveness of that.

43  
44 Moving to the recreational initiative, we -- Dylan will talk to  
45 you about this in a minute, but the O&E suggested that we  
46 develop a one page meeting summary for public dissemination. I  
47 think, since we're sort of through that effort mostly, what we  
48 can do is kind of change that, so that we have a very distilled

1 version of what the rec initiative did and what the outcomes  
2 were.

3  
4 Develop shareable media packages, and so, once we do sort of  
5 finalize our work on that rec initiative, work really, really  
6 hard to make shareable, accessible things, to really promote  
7 what we did and where we've been.

8  
9 Directly engage our non-selected applicants. We've already been  
10 doing that, and so the folks, the hundred folks, that applied  
11 that didn't make the working group, you know, we've been working  
12 with them, and continue to work with them.

13  
14 We were also suggesting that we contact Salt Strong and Florida  
15 Friendly Anglers. I know those are two very Florida-centric  
16 things, and so maybe there's some other organizations that you  
17 guys can suggest, but just have them amplify our messaging, and  
18 then also develop editorial content on outcomes, and so writing  
19 basically plug-and-play articles that we can share with fishing  
20 outlets, and they would just go ahead and publish them.

21  
22 Moving on to domestic seafood and shrimp education, we're going  
23 to go ahead and develop that website that we talked about  
24 earlier, and work through that, along with that series of  
25 articles, as well as housing the statistics.

26  
27 Through our website, we hope to finalize our contracted project  
28 to modernize the aesthetic. We also want to improve the  
29 integration of the Fish Rules API, and so we have Fish Rules  
30 automatically populates on our website, but there are some bugs,  
31 that we've been working out for about two years, but, now that  
32 we're redoing the website, we're really working to streamline  
33 all of that.

34  
35 Regarding constituent contact, we want to start asking  
36 historical graduates of MREP, the Marine Resource Education  
37 Program, to join our council mailing list, and so that's just  
38 me, you know, bugging them and saying, come on, and I know you  
39 care about this stuff, and, also, asking those rec initiative  
40 applicants to do the same. That's a very simple one.

41  
42 As far as outreach products are concerned, we're hoping to  
43 expand the History of Management tool. We would also like to  
44 develop storyboards for each species we complete on the History  
45 of Management tool, and so it would be really cool if you had  
46 this history of management for gag grouper, and, alongside that,  
47 you had this really cool interactive article that talked you  
48 through it in a narrative, like sort of really accessible way.

1  
2 We would like to rewrite the *Navigating the Council Process*  
3 booklet, and we would also like to audit and improve our public  
4 hearing guides. We still want to work on that paper that we  
5 would like to develop and publish for Fishermen Feedback.

6  
7 We know that we're going to have to start working on our fishery  
8 ecosystem plan outreach, and then we also know that it is about  
9 time for us to think about for-hire reporting outreach, and so,  
10 once the council takes final action on for-hire reporting, we  
11 want to jump right in, and start really quickly, not only  
12 working with the agency, through implementation, but also  
13 working with our stakeholders, to make sure that that program is  
14 developed in a way that is really accessible and accepted by the  
15 fishing fleet, as much as possible.

16  
17 I know that's a lot to digest, but that's what we're hoping to  
18 do. If we don't catch all of these things, don't blame me.  
19 It's a lot, but, you know, we like to aim high, and we'll see  
20 how it goes, and so, if you guys have any feedback on what to  
21 prioritize, what to take out, now is the time.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, Emily. A pretty impressive  
24 improvement plan, and I'll be impressed if you get through half  
25 of this. This is a lot, but it's certainly the forward face of  
26 the council. Any other feedback questions at all? Any other  
27 business from the committee? Dylan.

28  
29 **OTHER ITEMS FROM THE O&E TECHNICAL COMMITTEE SUMMARY**

30  
31 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** So I think our next item is Dylan is going to  
32 talk us through three things from the Outreach and Education  
33 technical Committee that we meeting that we held in November  
34 that I did not cover.

35  
36 **MR. HUBBARD:** Well, initially you didn't cover, but you just  
37 kind of breezed through some of them, and so I realize I'm  
38 standing between you and the bar, and so I will make this quick.

39  
40 The rec initiative, Emily pretty much covered that thoroughly.  
41 The big thing was some sort of outcome needs to be synthesized  
42 into something succinct that we can outreach and educate about,  
43 but Emily hit those points pretty hard already, and so I won't  
44 belabor that.

45  
46 The for-hire outreach, essentially, the O&E was praising the  
47 outreach efforts in the original SEFHIER effort, and I think we  
48 could follow the same lines, maybe improving it, with

1 potentially a port ambassador program, and the discussion, in  
2 the O&E, was much of the issues in the outreach and buy-in with  
3 the original SEFHIER was caused from the implementation process  
4 and some of the things that changed from the initial discussions  
5 around this table to what the product actually was that we  
6 received in the end.

7  
8 If we can try to stay more on top of that, a thumb on the pulse  
9 a little bit more, and try to anticipate some of that, and I  
10 think we can already do a better job, since we've been through  
11 that program implementation once already.

12  
13 Council outreach strategy, on that topic, there was a lot of  
14 praise around the O&E for that anonymous voice mailbox, and, in  
15 the discussion around the table, you guys obviously support it.  
16 One thing that I wanted to add, on that note, was I'm glad to  
17 hear, Andy, when you brought up just piloting it for a short  
18 time.

19  
20 I was a little concerned when you said thirty-six days, but I  
21 think six months gives it enough time to populate, because my  
22 concern would be, if we piloted too short, you just wouldn't  
23 have enough time to get the word out there well.

24  
25 Then, also, to the quality of it, if Emily does a post, an email  
26 blast, saying, hey, you can now send anonymous comments to the  
27 Gulf Council, I'm sure some of that quality won't be there in  
28 that initial push, because people see that as an opportunity,  
29 right, but, in a case like Ed talked about, in a case like J.D.  
30 talked about, now you have a place to point those calls to, and  
31 so I think that's where the quality comes from, and so I think  
32 that will be an interesting pilot project, and the O&E was very  
33 excited about it.

34  
35 The other thing discussed around the O&E on outreach was the  
36 concerns of the comments being lost in translation, the written  
37 comments, and so, if you're not able to be here, you can't show  
38 up and do comment personally, and you can't stand at this  
39 podium, you write in a written comment, and a big concern was  
40 those written comments being lost in translation.

41  
42 That's why Emily was asking you guys how the O&E could help, and  
43 how Emily and staff could help, you guys make sure that no  
44 comments fall through the cracks, and so I was happy to hear  
45 that conversation.

46  
47 The twenty-fathom closure, we talked about it already, and so I  
48 won't belabor that anymore as well, and then, finally, Andy

1 asked a question earlier about do we ever get rid of things, or  
2 narrow things down, and I just wanted to add to what Emily said,  
3 is Emily is a little too modest.

4  
5 We do cast a wide net, and throw a lot of spaghetti at the wall,  
6 but, also, at the same time, you don't know what isn't working  
7 until you try it, right, and then, once you try it, if it works,  
8 you stick with it. If it doesn't work, you phase it back, and  
9 then, also, trends change.

10  
11 Like, most recently, the O&E -- Since I've been a part of it,  
12 Emily decided to -- The O&E voted, with Emily's leadership, to  
13 do away with the newsletter. The email newsletter wasn't really  
14 working, wasn't really getting the open rate, and so it was  
15 something that we did away with, and put those efforts to  
16 something that's more efficient, and so I think overall,  
17 everyone was really pleased with the efforts and continuing down  
18 the path. Thank you guys.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN OVERTON:** Thank you, Dylan. Any other business? Thank  
21 you, Emily, Dylan, and the committee. That concludes our  
22 report, and presentation, and, J.D., the floor is yours.

23  
24 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Overton and Emily and Dylan. Thank  
25 you. All right. That will wrap up today, and we will begin  
26 tomorrow, at 8:30, with a litigation update from Ms. Levy,  
27 followed by Reef Fish and Dr. Frazier. See you tomorrow at  
28 8:30.

29  
30 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on January 27, 2025.)

31  
32 - - -  
33