

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

MACKEREL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Renaissance New Orleans Pere Marquette New Orleans, Louisiana

January 27, 2025

**VOTING MEMBERS**

- 10 Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
- 11 Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama
- 12 Kesley Banks.....Texas
- 13 Michael McDermott.....Mississippi
- 14 Anthony Overton.....Alabama
- 15 John Sanchez.....Florida
- 16 Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
- 17 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
- 18 C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida
- 19 Ed Walker.....Florida
- 20 Troy Williamson.....Texas

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- 24 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
- 25 Jonathan Dugas.....Louisiana
- 26 Troy Frady.....Alabama
- 27 Tom Frazer.....Florida
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**OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

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- 49 Brendan Turley.....NOAA

1 John Walter.....SEFSC  
2  
3 - - -  
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1 The Mackerel Management 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 Dakus Geeslin.

5  
6 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**  
7 **APPROVAL OF JUNE 2024 MINUTES**  
8 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**  
9

10 **CHAIRMAN DAKUS GEESLIN:** I would like to call the Mackerel  
11 Committee session to order. Those serving on the committee are  
12 myself, Captain Walker, Dr. Banks, Mr. Anson, Dr. Sweetman, Mr.  
13 Schieble, Mr. Overton, Mr. Sanchez, Mr. Strelcheck, and Mr.  
14 Williamson.

15  
16 The first item of business is the Adoption of the Agenda, Tab C,  
17 Number 1. Any changes? It looks like we do got one. Mr.  
18 Sanchez.

19  
20 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, and I had sent  
21 staff, earlier in the week, a couple of slides to present during  
22 Amendment 15 discussions, and I just wanted to make sure that  
23 that's noted, since it's kind of changing from the agenda a  
24 little bit.

25  
26 Also, I think, and I'm not sure, that we're going to have some  
27 kind of a presentation regarding start dates in terms of  
28 reference. If that does come up, in fact, during this this  
29 committee meeting, I would like to make a few comments, and  
30 maybe even a motion. Thank you.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Okay, and we can certainly accommodate that,  
33 Mr. Sanchez. Any other changes to the agenda, as written? I'm  
34 seeking a motion to approve. Dr. Banks. A second? Anybody?  
35 Dr. Sweetman seconds. Any opposition to the motion? Seeing  
36 none, the motion passes.

37  
38 Next, we're looking for the Approval of the June 2024 Minutes,  
39 back in Houston. Any changes to the minutes, as provided in Tab  
40 C, Number 2? Any changes? Not seeing any, I'm looking for a  
41 motion to approve.

42  
43 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** So moved, Mr. Chair.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Sweetman.

46  
47 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** Second.  
48

1 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Banks. Any opposition to approval of the  
2 minutes? Not seeing any, the motion passes. All right. Our  
3 next item on the agenda is the Action Guide and Next Steps, and  
4 I understand that Ms. Muehlstein will be giving that. Thank  
5 you.

6

7 **PRESENTATION: GULF STAKEHOLDER CMP ENGAGEMENT MEETINGS SUMMARY**

8

9 **MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN:** If you don't mind, I think what we'll do  
10 is we'll do the action guide item-by-item, and so I can start  
11 with the presentation about the stakeholder coastal migratory  
12 pelagic engagements.

13

14 What we are about to do is, if you guys remember, is we sort of  
15 did a special engagement effort in 2024 to gather input from a  
16 broad variety of stakeholders on king mackerel, Spanish  
17 mackerel, and cobia.

18

19 You know, recent sort of stock assessments, for both king and  
20 Spanish, indicated that the stocks are not overfished or  
21 overfishing. However, landings have declined in recent years,  
22 and then, for cobia, we've had a number of management changes,  
23 following a stock assessment that did show that the status of  
24 cobia was not in great shape, and so just sort of a check-up on  
25 that and how those management changes are going.

26

27 What we did for this special engagement strategy is we asked a  
28 series of eight questions that aimed to gather information on  
29 changes in things like the stock condition, fishing behavior,  
30 economics, and the environment. We also asked about the  
31 appropriateness of current regulations for each three of the  
32 species, and we asked these eight questions through a series of  
33 three public webinars, through a public comment form that sort  
34 of had a big prescriptive start to it, and we also asked these  
35 eight questions of both the CMP Advisory Panel and the Reef Fish  
36 Advisory Panel.

37

38 What we ask today is that you guys review the report, listen to  
39 my summary, and consider the comments as you discuss the Spanish  
40 and king mackerel agenda items for today and also future  
41 management for all three species.

42

43 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** All right. Thank you, Ms. Muehlstein.

44

45 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Okay, and so, with that, we can go straight  
46 into the comment summary report from our coastal migratory  
47 pelagic special engagement summary, and, Bernie, if you can  
48 scroll down to the bottom of page 1, please.

1  
2 What I plan to do right now is we pulled out sort of themes that  
3 we got from each one of these engagements, and so I'm just going  
4 to read through the themes, but I do want to encourage you to  
5 look at the full report, and it's a reasonably long report,  
6 because we tried to sort of file the answers that we got into  
7 the questions that we were asking, to make some logical sense.

8  
9 However, there were some overarching themes that emerged from  
10 all of the different meetings we had, and so, today, I'll touch  
11 on the themes, but please do dig deep into this, because you'll  
12 see variations by species and by the different groups.

13  
14 The first thing that we did, on February 13, is we hosted one of  
15 these sessions with our Coastal Migratory Pelagic Advisory  
16 panel, right, and this is our core group of CMP fishermen that  
17 advises you all, the themes that emerged during that discussion  
18 included that all three species are experiencing some decline in  
19 abundance and/or size of available fish.

20  
21 We also heard that king mackerel and cobia seem to be found  
22 further offshore than usual. We heard that changes in migratory  
23 patterns seem to be occurring in relation to timing, area, and  
24 the size of the schools. We heard that, recreationally, none of  
25 the three species are a primary target species, because they're  
26 not as readily available, and that this is a departure from  
27 historical behavior.

28  
29 We heard that removal of rig structure is disrupting fish  
30 movement and the fishermen's ability to target those species.  
31 We heard that bait that used to attract fish has nearly  
32 disappeared in the inshore environments, and that has changed  
33 both the location of the three target species as well as their  
34 availability.

35  
36 We heard that shark depredation is driving increased release  
37 mortality and that, commercially, there is increased competition  
38 for the fish in the southern zone and a decline in pressure in  
39 the western zones.

40  
41 We also heard that the king mackerel fishery remains  
42 economically viable, because there's an increase in ex-vessel  
43 price, due to the decrease of supply, and so that has kept pace  
44 with increasing costs that are associated with targeting fish,  
45 which are harder to find.

46  
47 We also heard, from the CMP AP, that fishing regulations are not  
48 the thing that is limiting harvest, right? That's not what's

1 constraining harvest. Instead, it's ecological challenges and  
2 decreased availability of each species.

3  
4 We also heard that changes in salinity, water temperature,  
5 habitat degradation, harmful algal blooms, and areas of low DO  
6 are driving population decline and impacting those migratory  
7 behaviors.

8  
9 Bernie, if you want to move on to page 5, I will provide a  
10 summary of what we heard from the Reef Fish AP, and so we  
11 decided to host this session with the Reef Fish AP,  
12 understanding that, you know, a lot of reef fish fishermen also  
13 target those CMP species. What we heard from them was that bait  
14 is not as available as it used to be, and so king and Spanish  
15 are not showing up like they used to.

16  
17 We heard that there is a lack of structure off the northern  
18 coast of the Gulf, and it has made king and Spanish mackerel  
19 less available. We heard that the Spanish mackerel population  
20 seems pretty unchanged in most regions. We also heard that the  
21 people that fish for both king mackerel and cobia are doing so  
22 less than ever, because their fish aren't there, right, that  
23 there's not a lot of reason to fish, because there's no fish  
24 available.

25  
26 We also heard that the fall cobia run in the northern Gulf is  
27 better than the spring run, which is a departure from sort of  
28 historical behavior, and it's because that spring run is  
29 literally non-existent, in their perception, and then, finally,  
30 we heard from, the Reef Fish AP, that charter vessels are no  
31 longer selling targeted trips for either king mackerel or cobia.

32  
33 Bernie, if you'll hop to page 10, and so I did note that we also  
34 did three public webinars, and so, when I went through the  
35 public webinars, and tried to pull out some themes, here's what  
36 we heard.

37  
38 We heard that the king mackerel stock has been in decline for a  
39 number of years, but some folks did indicate that, the last  
40 year, and so 2023 was what they were talking about, was a bit  
41 better than it has been, and so there was some optimism there.

42  
43 We heard that the Spanish mackerel stocks are stable. We heard  
44 that cobia have disappeared in the northern Gulf, with the  
45 exception of some spots off Louisiana, and that cobia  
46 populations are healthy in south Florida. We heard that the  
47 fall cobia run has been improving in recent years and that you  
48 have to run further, and spend more time and money, to find

1 keeper king mackerel, and cobia.  
2  
3 We also heard that cobia tournaments are all but gone, and that  
4 participation in king mackerel tournaments is in decline in the  
5 northern Gulf. We heard that charters can't sell targeted king  
6 mackerel or cobia trips in the northern Gulf like they used to,  
7 and that cobia fishing is nearly non-existent in the Panhandle  
8 of Florida, where, formerly, it was kind of a way of life. We  
9 heard that king mackerel migration has steadily moved north into  
10 the Keys, meaning that the fish cross over the Keys at more  
11 northern latitudes than they used to.  
12  
13 We heard that rig removal has impacted king mackerel and cobia  
14 migration in the northern Gulf. Some folks sort of speculated  
15 that they're kind of skipping the corner, and just taking a left  
16 turn a little bit earlier, rather than rounding the whole Gulf.  
17  
18 We heard that current catch limits are appropriate for all  
19 species. However, some regulatory changes were suggested by  
20 these participants in the public workshops, and then, finally,  
21 we heard that loss of bait, poor water quality, and the removal  
22 of structure are thought to contribute to the decline in the  
23 king mackerel populations.  
24  
25 Next, Bernie, if you want to jump to the summary of written  
26 comments, which is on page 17, at the bottom, we did receive  
27 forty-five written comments, and, as I mentioned sort of in the  
28 introduction, we asked the eight questions, but, because of PRA  
29 constraints, we weren't able to sort of ask the questions and  
30 let people bin their answers.  
31  
32 Instead, sort of in the preamble to the open public comment  
33 form, we added the eight questions and said here's the type of  
34 information we're looking for, as a prompt, and so what you'll  
35 notice is I didn't -- In this summary document, I didn't pull  
36 out the themes, because what I did instead was bin them into the  
37 appropriate questions, so that they sort of fit the format of  
38 the rest of them. However, I did go through them, and I'll sort  
39 of share some of the themes that I noticed with you.  
40  
41 Across all regions that we heard from, and across all three  
42 species, we heard two very clear themes. The first is that  
43 sharks, and shark depredation, is a huge issue, and the second  
44 was that lack of bait is an incredible issue, and so we heard  
45 that from everywhere, from everyone, for all three species.  
46  
47 Then I'll go sort of through each species, and I'll try and sort  
48 of bin them that way, and so, for king mackerel, there was some

1 sort of conflicting information about the perception of how the  
2 stock is doing that we received through this public comment  
3 form.

4  
5 We heard that there's less fish, and that the fish are smaller,  
6 that there's no trophy king mackerel. We heard that the western  
7 Gulf fishery is actually improving, and we heard that the stocks  
8 are maybe moving further offshore. We also heard, from a number  
9 of different people, in a number of different regions, that the  
10 stocks are healthy, and we heard that landings declined in the  
11 western Gulf, in the commercial sector, specifically because  
12 fishing infrastructure and working waterfronts are in decline.

13  
14 We also heard about the regulations. When we asked about the  
15 appropriateness of the regulations, we heard that king mackerel  
16 bag limits are too high, that catch limits should be reduced for  
17 king mackerel.

18  
19 Now, moving on to Spanish mackerel, and so all of those forty-  
20 five comments from across the Gulf, we generally heard that  
21 Spanish mackerel are healthy off of Louisiana, south Alabama,  
22 the Florida Panhandle, and central Florida, and also central  
23 Texas.

24  
25 Now, the converse of that, we heard that there is decline in  
26 Spanish mackerel off Alabama, Mississippi, and the Florida  
27 Panhandle, and so, again, there was conflicting information  
28 about perceptions of stock health.

29  
30 We did hear support for a bag limit decrease for Spanish  
31 mackerel. A couple of people floated the idea that five might  
32 be an appropriate way to go. We also heard that there is a  
33 desire to eliminate Spanish mackerel gillnet, which is a state  
34 fishery.

35  
36 Moving to cobia, we heard that they are healthy off of central  
37 and south Florida. We heard that they are in decline, or  
38 essentially gone, off of Louisiana, Alabama and Texas. We heard  
39 that the fish are smaller and that the schools of them are also  
40 smaller.

41  
42 We heard that the cobia fishery should close completely or that  
43 catch limits should be drastically reduced. We also heard that  
44 a slot limit should be considered, or the minimum size should  
45 increase even further, and we heard that regulations should stay  
46 the same, right, and so, again, we're hearing a broad variety of  
47 folks with conflicting opinions on what to do. That's no  
48 surprise. It's kind of what happens at the council table.

1  
2 Then, finally, we heard that the loss of rigs and the oil spill  
3 were at fault for the decline in the cobia stock, and that, I  
4 think, concludes my summary of what we heard through our CMP  
5 special engagement sessions.  
6

7 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Ms. Muehlstein. Questions from  
8 council members? Mr. Anson.  
9

10 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** I didn't see it, Emily, but how many people  
11 responded, totally, or for each session, on average?  
12

13 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** So, the public comment, we had forty-five. The  
14 virtual engagement sessions were not super well attended. One  
15 of them had two people speak, one of them had no people speak,  
16 and one of them had, let's see, six people speak, and so those  
17 engagement sessions -- There weren't a ton, but they did take a  
18 long time, and people did give, you know, lots of feedback, and  
19 so, even though it was few people, it was very deep dive into  
20 their perceptions of the stock.  
21

22 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** To that point, Kevin, and Ms. Muehlstein, I  
23 had the pleasure of attending two of those engagement sessions,  
24 and I know Dr. Banks attended one, and, while the quantity  
25 wasn't just probably what we would have liked, the quality of  
26 the comments, and, you know, the perspective shared, was  
27 certainly valuable. I know I valued that. As we move forward,  
28 I think those are probably worth continuing, just from my  
29 thoughts.  
30

31 A question, Emily, and you mentioned that you approached the  
32 Reef Fish AP, and I'm just suspecting that we haven't approached  
33 the CMP AP, simply because we haven't met in over a year.  
34

35 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** We did, and so that was the first one I  
36 started. I started with the CMP AP. We did that in the spring,  
37 and then the Reef Fish AP was more recently, and so those are  
38 the two. We did it with both APs.  
39

40 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Okay. Thank you. I must have missed that.  
41 Any other questions for Ms. Muehlstein? Okay. I'm sorry. Yes,  
42 sir. Do mind introducing yourself?  
43

44 **MR. TOM ROLLER:** Absolutely. My name is Tom Roller. I'm the  
45 South Atlantic liaison for this meeting, and I'm the chair of  
46 the South Atlantic Mackerel Cobia Committee. I just wanted to  
47 offer the feedback regarding some of our port meeting effort to  
48 engage fishermen.

1  
2 You know, we have our last webinar actually on Wednesday of this  
3 week, but what I wanted to add is, you know, we had amazing  
4 attendance, from the Mid-Atlantic all the way through Florida  
5 and in-person meetings. We really struggled with the webinars.  
6 Some of them even had only one, or I believe we had one last  
7 week where we had a couple of people call in, but no attendance,  
8 but, when we got people in a room, we had some meetings with  
9 sixty-plus people.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thanks. Thanks for sharing that insight.  
12 Any other questions, before we move on to the Spanish Mackerel  
13 Framework Action and Next Steps? Not seeing any, I will call to  
14 the mic Dr. Birdsong to walk us through the Spanish Mackerel  
15 Framework action and Next Steps. We'll give him just a second  
16 to set up.

17  
18 **DISCUSSION: SPANISH MACKEREL FRAMEWORK ACTION AND NEXT STEPS**  
19

20 **DR. MAX BIRDSONG:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Agenda  
21 Item IV, during the June 2024 council meeting, the committee  
22 reviewed a framework action that considered modifying catch  
23 levels, accountability measures, and recreational bag limits for  
24 Spanish mackerel.

25  
26 Preferred alternatives have been selected for Actions 1 and 2,  
27 which are the catch limits and accountability measures, but the  
28 council passed a motion to delay action on Action 3 until after  
29 the completion of the Gulf CMP stakeholder engagements before  
30 developing a final draft of the document.

31  
32 I will bring this document back up to you all for the first time  
33 since the June 2024 council meeting, and I would like some  
34 discussion, in light of the CMP special engagement. Bernie,  
35 could you hold the document? Okay, and then, Mr. Chair, would  
36 you like to start with the overview of the document, or would it  
37 be helpful to go directly to Action 3, the bag limit reduction?

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Sorry, and I'm looking around the room. It's  
40 been a while, Dr. Birdsong. So let's -- Just for the sake of  
41 recollection, it might help to start high and then drill down.  
42 Does that work?

43  
44 **DR. BIRDSONG:** Absolutely. Sounds great. This document has  
45 three actions. Action 1 is a reduction in the catch limits, and  
46 the committee selected Alternative 2. Bernie, if you could  
47 scroll down to Action 1.

1 The committee selected the preferred as Alternative 2, which is  
2 a reduction in catch limits, and this is in which the ABC equals  
3 the ACL, and so this was the more modest reduction in catch  
4 limits.

5  
6 Then, sorry, Bernie, and if you could go to Action 2. The  
7 committee selected Alternative 2 as the preferred here, and so  
8 this is moving from an in-season accountability measure for  
9 Spanish to a post-season accountability measure in which, if the  
10 stock ACL is exceeded in a fishing year, then, in the following  
11 fishing year, the Regional Administrator will close the fishing  
12 season for Gulf Spanish mackerel for the commercial and  
13 recreational fishing sectors if the stock ACL is reached or  
14 projected to be reached.

15  
16 Then, Bernie, if you could go to Action 3, Section 2.3, please.  
17 Okay, and so this is where we left off last time in June. This  
18 Action 3 is looking to modify Gulf Spanish mackerel bag limits.  
19 The current bag limits are at fifteen fish per person.

20  
21 We explored a range all the way down to reducing down to three  
22 fish per person, and then, Bernie, if you could scroll down a  
23 bit, and we actually had a bag limit analysis done to show the  
24 potential effects of reducing the bag limits. That figure would  
25 be good to look at.

26  
27 This figure is showing the harvest per person of Spanish  
28 mackerel in the Gulf, and, as you can see, the majority of  
29 trips, people are harvesting one, or maybe two, Spanish  
30 mackerel, and, Bernie, if you could scroll down to Table 2.3.1.

31  
32 This is just a table showing the percent decrease in landings  
33 for the different bag limits, and so you would have to reduce  
34 the bag limit pretty drastically to get a decrease in landings,  
35 and so this bag limit analysis was done for us, and I presented  
36 this in June.

37  
38 The Mackerel Committee motioned to have this action considered  
39 but rejected, and then, at Full Council, it was decided to delay  
40 action on this until the CMP special engagement, and I think  
41 that brings us to the present.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** I believe it does, Dr. Birdsong. Thank you  
44 for that. We've got two actions out there, or we've got two  
45 preferred alternatives, and, really, the big one is the Action  
46 3, which Dr. Birdsong just shared was considered and rejected.  
47 Further discussion on that from the committee? Captain Walker.

48

1 **MR. ED WALKER:** I think one of the more important factors here  
2 is what the difference will be if we change the bag limit, and,  
3 really, there's virtually no noticeable difference, unless you  
4 cut it way down to just three fish, which seems pretty extreme,  
5 since it's not -- I don't believe it's regarded as overfished.

6  
7 To me, probably the primary factor would be trying to keep the  
8 season open all year. You know, several of these alternatives  
9 in Action 2, I think, would close sometime in December, and I  
10 don't think we're there yet on Spanish mackerel, but that's my  
11 input.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Birdsong, would you scroll up to the  
14 landings? I believe it's Table 1.1.1, or Bernie? I believe  
15 that's on page 12, and I believe it goes through 2022. Okay.  
16 Captain Walker.

17  
18 **MR. WALKER:** So, in my little corner of the Gulf, I would say  
19 there's been an uptick in Spanish mackerel, particularly over  
20 the last year. You know, it's not where it was ten years ago,  
21 but, from what I've seen, there has been an uptick, and I've  
22 heard that from some of our folks up here in Alabama and stuff  
23 as well.

24  
25 Maybe some of them could chime-in what they've seen in their  
26 town, but it almost seems, to me, that -- You know, maybe it's a  
27 cycle, and it's turning back around. I don't know, but our  
28 Spanish have been better. I would like to see the landings for  
29 another year or two after this chart, if I could. That might  
30 help verify what I'm saying.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Other thoughts for discussion here? I see  
33 the same thing you're seeing, Ed. In the last ten years,  
34 landings have not even approached -- Well, we've got one that  
35 exceeded 33 percent, but a third of the ACL is not being caught,  
36 from the entire fishery as a whole. Captain Walker.

37  
38 **MR. WALKER:** Also, I had a report, from some of our guys in  
39 Tarpon Springs, and there's a federal waters Spanish mackerel  
40 gillnet fishery. Specifically off the area where I live,  
41 there's a high spot out there, where they can see them from a  
42 plane. I don't think they use the planes anymore, but they come  
43 across an area that's about ten miles offshore, and it's only  
44 eight feet of water out there.

45  
46 Historically, there's been some pretty large-scale commercial  
47 net landings for mackerel there, and there were virtually none,  
48 for four or five years, until this year. They had a run of them

1 out there again, and the guys caught a reasonable amount of  
2 fish, for the first time in several years, which it's possible  
3 that could be an indication of an uptick in the fishery.

4

5 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Sweetman.

6

7 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm struggling on  
8 this one, to see what management action we can take that would  
9 actually make some sort of a positive impact here, and, hearing  
10 what we heard from some in the stakeholder engagement campaign,  
11 it was interesting to hear less concern. We barely heard  
12 anything about Spanish mackerel.

13

14 Even just looking at the catch limit recommendations here, like  
15 relative to the landings, I'm not sure how that constrains  
16 harvest, and, quite frankly, I don't think the bag limit  
17 reduction, unless -- I agree with Ed. Unless we went extreme  
18 here, to three, that's not going to do anything.

19

20 I guess, Mr. Chair, I'm just struggling to see what we would  
21 actually do here that would impact this. I recognize that we've  
22 got an SSC catch level recommendation here, but it's not  
23 overfished, and not undergoing overfishing, and so no timeline  
24 associated with that,, and so it gives me a little bit of cause  
25 for concern just to implement regulations for the sake of  
26 implementing regulations at the time.

27

28 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thanks for that, Dr. Sweetman. I think  
29 several of us are struggling with the same concern here. We  
30 want to make meaningful management recommendations, and I'm not  
31 sure I see a lot of meaningful action here. Dr. Froeschke.

32

33 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** I mean, the way that I guess I would  
34 interpret it is Action 1 is sort of obligatory, because your ABC  
35 is below the current, and so I feel like you're obligated to do  
36 something there. Actions 2 and 3, I don't think you're under  
37 any obligations to consider.

38

39 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Do you want to scroll through those, Dr.  
40 Birdsong, and look at that Action 1 again? We've already --  
41 Based on our previous committee meetings, we selected  
42 Alternative 2.

43

44 **DR. BIRDSONG:** Bernie, maybe you could -- Could you zoom out a  
45 bit, possibly?

46

47 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Birdsong, or Dr. Froeschke, you want to  
48 walk us through that particular action?

1  
2 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes, and so a couple things to notice here. The  
3 current ACL is 11.3 million pounds, but that's in the CHTS, and  
4 we've kind of been all through that before, and so that second  
5 row in the table, under Alternative 1, corresponds to the  
6 estimated equivalent in FES, had that been on the books, and so  
7 we're using the 14.9-million-pound ACL as sort of as a reference  
8 to Alternatives 2 and 3, and so there is a fairly, you know,  
9 substantial reduction in the catch limits, and that's based on  
10 the stock assessment advice, in which it wasn't overfished, but  
11 it wasn't -- It was below MSY, and so you're sort of in that  
12 middle spot, where there's a reduction in harvest, and you  
13 expect the stock to grow. I'll stop there.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Sweetman.

16  
17 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, and I hear everything  
18 you're saying, Dr. Froeschke, but can you confirm that we don't  
19 have a timeline that's associated with this, because it's not  
20 overfished and not undergoing overfishing? I recognize we have  
21 an obligation to deal with the SSC recommendation, but that  
22 doesn't mean we have to do it now.

23  
24 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Correct.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Simmons.

27  
28 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I  
29 don't think you have to do anything now, but just recognize,  
30 again, the science is getting old on this, because we've set it  
31 aside for six months, at least.

32  
33 The AP did review this, and provided some recommendations,  
34 including the preferred alternative that you have selected, and  
35 they also asked that we explore options to reduce harvest, which  
36 I think was what we were trying to get at with the bag limit,  
37 and so I think that's why you're seeing that action and  
38 concerns, and if you don't want to take action, but that's why  
39 we're looking at those things, and I know it was some time ago.  
40 I'm just trying to put it all in one picture there.

41  
42 **MR. WALKER:** Is Spanish open in January, is the season? I'm  
43 seeing that it's a potential closure February 18, if we go to  
44 five fish, and that makes me wonder when the year starts for  
45 Spanish.

46  
47 **DR. BIRDSONG:** I believe it starts April 1.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Froeschke, you had a hand up?  
2

3 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes, and I was just going to provide a little  
4 bit more information, if you want, if you're so inclined, on  
5 this one.  
6

7 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Always open for more information, Dr.  
8 Froeschke.  
9

10 **DR. FROESCHKE:** So the other point on this is the numbers. If  
11 you looked at that table, the percent of the ACL that we've  
12 historically harvested is low, but, if you look at the number,  
13 the 9.63-million-pound ACL recommendation, and you look at the  
14 numbers in FES, it's a much closer harvest, or the ACL is much  
15 more fully used. We would expect that going forward.  
16

17 That doesn't obligate you to do anything, but just that's for  
18 your information, and then one -- Before we go back to C.J., the  
19 Alternative 2, the accountability measure action, you're not --  
20 Again, you're not obligated to do anything. It does provide  
21 you, I would say, more flexibility as a council to manage the  
22 fishery than the way that we're currently doing it.  
23

24 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** I would agree with that. Dr. Sweetman.  
25

26 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Dr. Froeschke, you hit  
27 on something there, relative to the catch limits and what has  
28 been recommended relative to our landings, and you highlighted  
29 FES there. That's part of my concern, quite frankly, is that  
30 what we're seeing there might not actually be reflective of what  
31 it actually is.  
32

33 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Also a fair point, Dr. Sweetman. Captain  
34 Walker.  
35

36 **MR. WALKER:** Just looking at the math, or the dates here, if the  
37 season opens in September, those alternatives -- Our preferred  
38 alternative, at seven, ten, and fifteen fish, give us a three-  
39 month closure on mackerel, if I'm reading this right, and one of  
40 those would be March, which is pretty much mackerel season for a  
41 lot of people around the Gulf, and so that can make a big  
42 difference in a lot of people's interests around the Gulf.  
43

44 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Okay. Mr. Strelcheck.  
45

46 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** I was confused with what Ed was saying.  
47 Looking at the table that he was referencing, it does indicate  
48 that's based on 2019 through 2020 landings data, and so it's not

1 necessarily reflective of more recent years of landings data,  
2 and so I would expect, again based on current landings and  
3 trends, that we would probably not be triggering closures, but,  
4 if the fishery starts bouncing back, then, yes, this could  
5 probably be more realistic.

6

7 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Sanchez.

8

9 **MR. SANCHEZ:** That brings up, I guess, a concept that, as we're  
10 doing measures here to address the concern that's in front of  
11 us, but, you know, there's a problem on the back side, in that,  
12 if we decide to do something, and then the fish start to show  
13 back up, again for reasons unbeknownst to us, then we're kind of  
14 stuck until we fix this again, and, unless there's an easy way  
15 to undo whatever we may do here, it's kind of problematic for  
16 me.

17

18 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Captain Walker.

19

20 **MR. WALKER:** I would agree with that, and our lengthy research  
21 on the king mackerel is kind of the same thing. It sounded like  
22 there was a lot of interest across-the-board in king mackerel,  
23 people that -- We kind of recognize the problem, and we would  
24 like to do our part and help, but we would rather not sign up  
25 for a five-year reduction, in what can be a highly cyclical  
26 stock, and tie ourselves to a really low ACL, or OFL, and, the  
27 next year, they bounce back, and so I understand what John is  
28 saying there.

29

30 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Strelcheck.

31

32 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So what I'm hearing around the table is we're  
33 definitely not interested, I think, in reducing the bag limit,  
34 and the data, and information, kind of supports that, unless we  
35 really reduce the bag limit, it's not going to have a  
36 significant reduction in harvest.

37

38 Then it comes back to with Actions 1 and 2, and I think -- I'll  
39 start with Action 2. That, I think, adds a little bit more  
40 flexibility, in terms of our accountability measures. That's a  
41 good thing.

42

43 Action 1, you know, we have scientific advice, right, and we  
44 would base it off of the scientific advice, at this point, and  
45 specify the catch limit based on the ABC advice we've gotten  
46 from the SSC, and it may or may not be constraining to the  
47 fishery at this point, right, but, to me, it's problematic, in  
48 my view, to have scientific advice and we're just going to kind

1 of ignore it, and continue to move down the road and not  
2 implement that scientific advice, right, and we were provided an  
3 assessment, and we were provided that information for a reason,  
4 and we should move forward with implementing that scientific  
5 advice.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Birdsong, will you remind us what we're  
8 looking for here today? We're looking for some recommendations  
9 to move into the final draft?

10  
11 **DR. BIRDSONG:** Yes, that's correct. The schedule, as of now, is  
12 to go final in June, and, so with this iteration, yes, we're  
13 just looking for discussion after the CMP special engagements.  
14 We had preferreds selected for Action 1 and 2, but, in light of  
15 new discussions, it's open.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Walter.

18  
19 **DR. JOHN WALTER:** Thanks, and I just wanted to respond to a  
20 couple comments about oftentimes, when the council is given ABC  
21 advice from the SSC, there's a time delay between when it goes  
22 into action.

23  
24 Yes, and that's unfortunately the fact of the matter, but then  
25 debating that, certainly for a long time, and delaying any  
26 action, means that ABC advice never gets acted upon, and then  
27 things come up that may be good, or may be bad, but the fact of  
28 the matter is, when the council is given ABC advice from the SSC  
29 to set a catch limit, then, barring other factors, that's what  
30 the science says, and that's what the council is supposed to do.

31  
32 While other things could say, yes, the stock could rebound, the  
33 stock could also decline, but the process is the science gives  
34 advice, the SSC rules on what the ABC is, and then this council  
35 should, in a timely manner, implement that, or that advice  
36 doesn't actually hit the streets and do its job.

37  
38 I think what we're headed down is a path that, by using some of  
39 the arguments that, well, the stock could come out, and we could  
40 increase, and we would be restraining, and going up against  
41 limits, if the stock rebounded, and, yes, that would happen in  
42 every single stock we have.

43  
44 Actually, that's what we would want to see, and we would want to  
45 see it come back, and then we would say, okay, now we do  
46 something like an interim approach, to say can we raise those  
47 limits, given what the indicators are seeing, and we did that  
48 with the lane snapper. I think there's certainly the path, and

1 the process, for being able to do that, if indeed it turns out  
2 that those anticipated rebounds from actually taking action  
3 happen.

4  
5 The problem is that, when a stock is down, the main tool in the  
6 fishery management arsenal is to reduce the catch limits to  
7 allow the fish to rebound, and so I think we have to be careful  
8 here with talking into a path of inaction when there's clearly  
9 advice from the SSC. Thanks.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Frazer.

12  
13 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm not on the  
14 committee, but, John, I just think that, when I'm listening  
15 here, and I'm not arguing with you, and I'm, obviously, a  
16 proponent for using the best scientific information available,  
17 right, and I think that the advice that was provided in this  
18 particular case was prior to all of the recognition that we have  
19 some real problems with the MRIP-FES.

20  
21 I think that's what you're hearing around the table, is some  
22 hesitation there, because the pilot study has not been  
23 completed, and we don't know how to adjust those numbers, and so  
24 I think I'm not saying -- I'm not on the committee, right, but  
25 I'm just saying I totally appreciate using the best scientific  
26 information available. What they're saying is, is that the best  
27 scientific information available right now? That's what you're  
28 hearing.

29  
30 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** To that point, Dr. Walter.

31  
32 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and I think that -- Fair enough, and I think  
33 that's why we're doing the scientific evaluation, where Spanish  
34 mackerel is actually the first desk MSE to evaluate can we give  
35 robust management advice even when the absolute units may be  
36 uncertain.

37  
38 We should be able to present that to the SSC. The sort of  
39 initial indications I'm seeing are actually, yes, we can. It  
40 kind of works all right. It's the thirteen-inch ruler. If you  
41 measure with a thirteen-inch ruler, assess with a thirteen-inch  
42 ruler, and then determine whether you're within your catch  
43 limits that were set with that thirteen-inch ruler, yes, you can  
44 stay within the requirements to not overfish, et cetera, but  
45 we'll get that as it works its way through the SSC and the  
46 scientific advice.

47  
48 My concern was mostly addressing what I had not heard here

1 before, that it was an MRIP-FES concern, about not acting on  
2 these because of that, in which case, well, we have a different  
3 scenario. Thanks.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Sanchez.

6  
7 **MR. SANCHEZ:** While we're on Spanish right now, we're about to  
8 get into king mackerel, and I just wanted to make the  
9 observation that, here, I guess I'm -- It's being suggested that  
10 we have scientific advice, and we should act on it before it  
11 goes stale.

12  
13 Conversely, in king mackerel, that we're about to get into,  
14 we're about to get scientific advice, yet we're being pushed,  
15 for all the same reasons discussed, to have to maybe do some  
16 drastic things, and so I just wanted to make that observation  
17 loud and clear.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** I think that's a great observation. Dr.  
20 Simmons.

21  
22 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so two  
23 different issues, I think, that are getting conflated here. We  
24 have a stock assessment for Spanish mackerel. It went through  
25 the process. The SSC reviewed it, and they made  
26 recommendations. The AP made recommendations.

27  
28 We got a stock assessment for king mackerel a couple of years  
29 ago. Recently, we've had the public, and fishermen, and  
30 everyone come to the table saying there's a real problem with  
31 king mackerel, and you guys aren't doing anything about it.  
32 Well, we knew we had a stock assessment on the books coming in  
33 the future, but the question was do we take action before then  
34 or not?

35  
36 Staff developed a document, a framework action, for you to  
37 consider, which we set aside until we had the CMP engagements,  
38 and so I think there's kind of two different issues going on  
39 there. Now we know when we're going to get the stock assessment  
40 for king mackerel. The question is do you act upon this  
41 framework action now or wait to the stock assessment? We also  
42 had an interim analysis we tried for king mackerel that was  
43 unsuccessful.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Strelcheck.

46  
47 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, I wanted to go back to the FES issue,  
48 and, you know, it's certainly frustrating. We're dealing with

1 MRIP-CHTS, and we have the APAIS changes back in 2013, and we  
2 have state surveys. I mean, we have four or five different sets  
3 of potential units that we're working on, depending on the  
4 fishery we're talking about.

5  
6 The pilot study calibration, I think the final report won't be  
7 ready until end of this year, from what I recall. I think maybe  
8 some preliminary results will be available mid-year.

9  
10 The analyses I've seen, and this is just more like sensitivity  
11 runs and things that have been done for other species, which  
12 just kind of assume like a blanket 20 or 40 percent reduction in  
13 the landings estimates, result in stock status for the species  
14 that have done these sensitivity runs remaining very consistent,  
15 and it becomes a scaling factor, right, and so your landings  
16 come down, but then also your yields, and your biomasses, and  
17 everything else in the assessment model comes down.

18  
19 I hear the concerns about not wanting to move forward with the  
20 uncertainty around FES, but I feel like it's something that we  
21 could address going forward, once we actually have the pilot  
22 study and future results, and kind of plug into the next, you  
23 know, update of the assessment, or any sort of interim analyses.

24  
25 You know, I'm just concerned we continue to push things down the  
26 road, and aren't taking action, given the science information  
27 before us. I just want to acknowledge that there is at least a  
28 body of science out there that has looked at some of the  
29 outcomes of the FES, if in fact it is lower, and it's not  
30 necessarily producing different outcomes for the species, or  
31 stock assessment, but it is, obviously, a scaling factor for the  
32 landings estimates.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Sweetman.

35  
36 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, to that point, Andy, I  
37 recognize that it's a scaling issue, but we also did get a  
38 presentation from the SSC about Spanish mackerel, in this  
39 particular issue as it relates to FES, and, basically, the  
40 advice from the SSC was you can proceed, but with extreme  
41 caution here, and that's my concern, basically, in a nutshell.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Okay. We're an hour in. We've still got  
44 king mackerel. Let's try to land this plane, or hear from the  
45 public on Wednesday, and take this to the final, and maybe make  
46 some decisions then. Anyone opposed to that? Okay. All right.

47  
48 That's the path we'll follow. Again, we'll hear from the

1 public. I would like to hear some additional input, and I  
2 encourage committee members to maybe go back and refresh on some  
3 of the engagement input that Ms. Muehlstein compiled in that  
4 summary document specific to Spanish, and we will bring this  
5 back up in Full Council. Okay. Mr. Strelcheck.

6  
7 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I'm not making a motion now, but I think it  
8 would be worth hearing, obviously, public input on Wednesday.  
9 If there isn't the stomach for changing the bag limit, then I  
10 would recommend we move it to Consider but Rejected.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** That's a very valid point.

13  
14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I make those every once in a while.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** We will move on to the king mackerel document  
17 and next steps. Dr. Hollensead.

18  
19 **DISCUSSION: KING MACKEREL DOCUMENT AND NEXT STEPS**

20  
21 **DR. LISA HOLLENSEAD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Along with these  
22 discussions, going back to June of 2024, the council had  
23 received a document, a framework action, to start to look at  
24 addressing some issues that had been heard from folks in the  
25 public about concern about the health of the stock.

26  
27 In doing so, there was a lot of discussion about is there  
28 anything potentially novel that may be happening here that, you  
29 know, the scope of our management, what we have in our toolbox,  
30 something else that maybe we can look at when addressing king  
31 mackerel.

32  
33 A request went out from the council to task some of the folks in  
34 the Science Center to look at data sources, or any other avenues  
35 of data, or thoughts on what might be going on with king  
36 mackerel and present them to the council, as a way to provide  
37 some context on what might be next step for management measures  
38 for king mackerel.

39  
40 That group was convened, and they've been working on it all  
41 fall. Dr. Brendan Turley is here representing that group, and  
42 he is going to provide the committee a presentation that  
43 addresses that data request that the committee had back in June.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Hollensead. Is Dr.  
46 Turley here with us? All right. Thanks for coming.

47  
48 **DR. BRENDAN TURLEY:** Hello. Thanks for inviting me to come. My

1 name is Dr. Turley, or Brendan. I am a Cooperative Institute of  
2 Marine Atmospheric Studies employee at the University of Miami,  
3 but I represent the Southeast Fisheries Science Center in this.

4  
5 We were tasked with trying to compile all the different data  
6 sources that we had at-hand, primarily focused on commercial  
7 aspect of the king mackerel fishery, and I'm going to present  
8 just a sliver of what we got into.

9  
10 We didn't have time to present everything, but, if there's more  
11 information that you want from that, or if you have any sort of  
12 comments, please, and we're open ears, because this is an  
13 opening salvo into a deeper dive into the species, and coastal  
14 migratory logics in general.

15  
16 The overall need for this was kind of explained, you know,  
17 previous to this, that it's come up in public comment that  
18 there's an issue with this species. The last stock assessment  
19 was a terminal year of 2017, and there was no real issues. You  
20 know, it wasn't determined to be overfished, and it's not  
21 undergoing overfishing, but then there was an update that didn't  
22 really result -- It resulted in a lower catch limit, but that's  
23 because the spawning stock biomass was above the minimum stock  
24 threshold, but below maximum sustainable yield.

25  
26 Then there was an interim assessment, relatively recently, that  
27 didn't really go anywhere, because the indices used in that  
28 assessment -- They're not designed really to capture king  
29 mackerel, and that's one of the limitations of using an interim  
30 assessment, for this species in particular, and so just keep  
31 that in mind.

32  
33 This overall data request came from the council staff, and we're  
34 trying to provide the best sort of information we have outside  
35 of a stock assessment, which is coming up here soon, and so just  
36 keep that in mind.

37  
38 The independent indices primarily come from the fall groundfish  
39 survey and the fall plankton survey, the SEAMAP surveys, and the  
40 overall trends and status is shown here. The juveniles have  
41 seen a more recent decline in this index, and also the plankton.  
42 You know, it doesn't capture it well, but it is one of the best  
43 -- These are the best surveys we have to capture it.

44  
45 Just keep in mind that the groundfish survey uses a bottom  
46 trawl, and this is a pelagic species, and so it's not really  
47 designed to capture this species in particular, and so, you  
48 know, there's some limitations here. A

1  
2 The larval abundances also -- They tend to occur -- The SEAMAP  
3 survey tends to occur on the tail-end of the spawning season,  
4 and so it may not accurately capture the spawning, or the  
5 recruitment, that comes from that, also.

6  
7 Looking at the recreational landings, and this is the only time  
8 I'm really going to talk about recreational landings, and we  
9 didn't really go into it, but, as you can see, there's been an  
10 overall decline, for definitely the past twenty years, of nearly  
11 65 percent, and they haven't reached their ACL in the past  
12 twenty-two years, and so that's -- You know, that's an  
13 indication that something's going on.

14  
15 When we look at the commercial landings versus the ACL, you  
16 know, it kind of kept pace for a while, but there's been a  
17 pretty significant decline since 2015, or 2016, and, you know,  
18 the commercial sector has not reached the ACL since that time  
19 period either, and so in decline, and something is going on.

20  
21 When you look at the overall commercial landings by zone, and so  
22 we have four plots. The top left-hand is the western handline.  
23 The top-right is the northern handline. The bottom-left is the  
24 southern handline, and that bottom-right is the southern gillnet  
25 fishery. The ACL is the dotted line, and all the red triangles  
26 are when there's an overage.

27  
28 You can see that the western handline has seen significant  
29 decreases since -- Those are kind of small, but 2018 or so, I  
30 believe is what it is, and, also, the southern handline also has  
31 been in decline, but not nearly at the same scale.

32  
33 Something that we looked into also was we talked to all of our  
34 port agents and kind of gave an overview of what they were  
35 seeing with this species, and they found that, potentially in  
36 the western region, particularly Louisiana here, maybe offshore  
37 trips, and so not like traditionally offshore, but maybe not  
38 inshore, and they're just not as economically viable, and that  
39 might be part of the reason that we see this decrease.

40  
41 Again, this is kind of a thirty-thousand-foot overview of what  
42 we found, and so I encourage people that have information, that  
43 can kind of shed light on what's going on here, to reach out to  
44 me, or anyone at the Science Center, John Walter, and so on and  
45 so forth.

46  
47 If we drill down a little bit further into the commercial  
48 landings by state, we see that that drop that we saw previously

1 is primarily in Louisiana. It's near a 75 percent decrease.  
2 Mississippi is not shown, because of confidentiality reasons,  
3 and there's some data that aren't also available here, but,  
4 overall, you can see that, from state-by-state, Louisiana has  
5 seen the -- You know, that's the primary source of the decrease,  
6 as far as the commercial landings are concerned.

7  
8 We also looked at the coastal logbook data, and so this is trip  
9 tickets. Every commercial vessel has to submit them, and so, in  
10 2013, which is when we started this analysis, is when the one-  
11 by-one-degree reporting occurred, and it really allowed us to  
12 look at the highly spatially resolved, relatively highly  
13 spatially resolved, catch and effort landings.

14  
15 The catch per unit effort was relatively stable. It didn't  
16 really show much. What kind of jumped out at us, and not really  
17 attributing it to some sort of necessary cause, was -- This plot  
18 that we're looking at is the number of areas fished, on the Y-  
19 axis, over time, and, the past couple years, there's been a drop  
20 in the number of areas fished, and so that map on the bottom-  
21 left-hand side -- These are all the different grid cells that  
22 had mackerel fishing in the total time period of the dataset,  
23 and the gold period is essentially -- The gold squares are like  
24 the core fishing areas from the coastal logbook data.

25  
26 The light gray is when there has been absolutely no landings, or  
27 effort, in those last two years, and the blue is, you know,  
28 there's at least one year of data, and so it gives you kind of a  
29 spatial sense of where this decrease might be coming from, and  
30 it seems to be Texas and Louisiana is the primary source of  
31 these decreases.

32  
33 Like I said, it's only two years of data, and it's hard to  
34 attribute a real, you know, cause, or if this is something  
35 that's contributing to what's going on, but it is something that  
36 was notable for us to point out.

37  
38 We also looked at the southern gillnet daily landing, which is a  
39 unique fishery that's -- There's daily landings, which is not  
40 very common, and we wanted to see if there was some sort of, you  
41 know, trend that might show that there's an issue with this  
42 fishery, and so there's four plots. T

43  
44 here's number of days open, and so that's the number of days the  
45 actual fishery is open, on the top-left-hand side, and the top-  
46 right-hand side is just the number of vessels that are actively  
47 participating each year. The bottom-left-hand side is number of  
48 days fished, and so this is actually the number of days where

1 landings were made, and the bottom-right-hand side is landings  
2 per vessel over each year.

3  
4 The dotted red lines are when there was a trip limit increase  
5 from 25,000 pounds to 45,000 pounds, and so that was 2016, and,  
6 in particular, I want you to look at the number of days fished  
7 has been increasing in the past four or five -- Or four years,  
8 and the landings per trip were relatively stable, and, in the  
9 past couple four or five years, there's been a decrease in  
10 landings per vessel per trip, and so showing something going on.

11  
12 The port agents also told us that the decrease, or sorry, the  
13 king mackerel schools themselves, that they're not necessarily  
14 decreasing, but the size of the schools have been decreasing in  
15 size, and so they're still abundant. It's just the size of the  
16 schools are decreasing, and so I think that's affecting their  
17 ability to fish them.

18  
19 We also looked at Gulf king mackerel lengths at age, and so this  
20 is lengths per age group, and so there's age-two through eight,  
21 over time, and it stops at 2017, because that's when the last  
22 stock assessment occurred. We didn't have the updated data,  
23 because the age and growth group in Panama City are still going  
24 through the data. They like to have the full dataset to apply  
25 the growth models before they can actually produce that, and so,  
26 you know, unfortunately, we couldn't have updated results on  
27 that.

28  
29 However, if you do look at this thirty-plus year time series  
30 from 1985, there has been an overall decline in lengths at age,  
31 particularly on the older age classes. There's a slight rebound  
32 in 2009, but, overall, there's a reduction from the beginning of  
33 the time series to the end of the time series in those older age  
34 classes.

35  
36 That's a potentially important piece of information, because  
37 these older fish tend to be smaller, which means they're less  
38 fecund, and probably can't produce as many eggs. This also  
39 primarily occurs in the females. It's not as pronounced in the  
40 males, and so potentially there's a growth or food issue, and  
41 that 10 percent reduction in length can be about a 30 percent  
42 reduction in weight and more than a 30 percent reduction in  
43 total reproductive output, and so potentially warning signs  
44 flagging on something is going on with this stock.

45  
46 We wanted to look at the little bit of information we had on  
47 bait species, and we looked at the recent stock assessment for  
48 menhaden and these indices of abundance for the Louisiana

1 inshore seine surveys.  
2  
3 We didn't really see that there's much that these could tell us.  
4 It seems like bait, at least for this, is not an issue.  
5 Granted, it's relatively restricted in spatial extent. You  
6 know, the species obviously is all over the Gulf, but these  
7 menhaden surveys are relatively restricted, and so this doesn't  
8 seem to be pointing towards a bait issue, and just to let you  
9 know that there's, you know, not a similar index of abundance of  
10 other bait species, pelagic bait species, and so we did what we  
11 could with a limited amount of data.  
12  
13 We also looked at sea surface temperatures, and so the top plot  
14 is the daily sea surface temperature from January through  
15 December for over thirty years of data, or forty years of data.  
16 Sorry.  
17  
18 The blue lines are the older data, and the red thick line is the  
19 last couple of years, and the dotted lines are the spawning  
20 season, in the vertical, and then the horizontal are the  
21 thresholds that has been defined in previous literature of the  
22 optimal temperature for king mackerel larvae.  
23  
24 As you can see on the bottom plot, the average temperature of  
25 the Gulf recently has been quite high, and this also points to a  
26 very concerning issue, because mackerel, or king mackerel,  
27 they're simply a marathon runner. They have a very thin  
28 environmental window that they can survive in, and any sort of  
29 change in that can have a huge impact on the biology of the  
30 fish, and so potentially this is pointing to some very  
31 concerning things that we're going to follow-up on.  
32  
33 This is spatial plots of the same temperature data, just over  
34 time, and what I want to point out to you in particular is that  
35 red contour in the last couple of years. That's temperatures  
36 over thirty-one degrees Celsius, and sorry, and it doesn't  
37 really matter if it's Fahrenheit or Celsius. It's just a  
38 threshold that larval -- Beyond which you don't typically ever  
39 see mackerel larvae, and so this is pointing to a potential  
40 issue on a spawning survivability issue.  
41  
42 You know, larval metabolism increases with temperature, and so  
43 they may be facing starvation above this threshold, and adults  
44 too suffer, as I mentioned earlier.  
45  
46 That was a whirlwind tour of some of the stuff we did. We  
47 looked at much more data than that, but several anomalous  
48 patterns have stuck out to us, the reduced commercial and

1 recreational landings, and decreases in handline landings in the  
2 western zone, particularly in Louisiana. There's a decrease in  
3 total area fish, based upon the coastal logbook data.

4  
5 The southern gill net landings per chip has decreased. There's  
6 been an increasing number of days fished in that same fishery to  
7 reach the quota, which, you know, that's a complicated  
8 multivariate sort of like equation that goes into the number of  
9 days fished, and so it's not necessarily an indication that  
10 something is wrong, but it is an anomaly that stuck out to us.

11  
12 We also saw a 10 percent reduction in mean length at age, which  
13 is really concerning, I think, particularly in the females, and  
14 standardized rates, standardized catch rates, for the two  
15 indices we have for them, have been decreasing, and, you know,  
16 the last part, we've seen increasing sea surface temperatures in  
17 an important environmental window temporally and spatially for  
18 these species, and so it's concerning.

19  
20 Taken all together, there's a lot going on, and still a lot of  
21 questions. Potentially, there's some species decline in  
22 abundance, potentially due to fishing effort, and potentially  
23 due to changes in environment. I would say that the information  
24 we presented, I think, is leaning more towards the environmental  
25 side of things.

26  
27 There's also the possibility that the populations -- We're  
28 seeing a distribution of the population overall, whether it's  
29 further offshore, as some of the stakeholder engagement has  
30 suggested, and, you know, maybe there's also a shift to the U.S.  
31 Atlantic, which would be interesting to talk to the folks at the  
32 South Atlantic, to see if they have information on that, or some  
33 combination of above. I mean, there's a lot going on.

34  
35 So, I mean, in all cases, doing something to protect the  
36 spawning stock biomass probably facilitates stock resilience.  
37 Granted, there's a lot of uncertainty here too,, and so, with  
38 that, I appreciate your time, and I'm happy to take any  
39 questions.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Sanchez.

42  
43 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I guess I have a few questions, and a few  
44 observations. I'm probably going to have to run through the  
45 slides, because I guess, in the interest of allowing you to run  
46 through the whole presentation, it might have been too  
47 disruptive if I was asking a question at every slide, and so,  
48 that said, we're going to go to page 2.

1  
2 I just wanted to ask you this, and, you know, you can give me  
3 the short answer. I'm fine with that. It says they requested  
4 additional data on commercial sector from SEFSC to address king  
5 mackerel stock for use in management actions.

6  
7 There seems to be a lot in the document of a focus on commercial  
8 data, commercial data. I understand we have some challenges  
9 with FES and king mackerel landings, but I just wanted to make  
10 that observation, that a lot of the studies in the document are  
11 focused on commercial landings.

12  
13 Now, we get into the next page, and then come out the fishery  
14 independent indices, and, you know, I will note that it's  
15 conceded here that juvenile abundance data from SEAMAP uses a  
16 bottom trawl that doesn't consistently do well with a pelagic  
17 environment, and that, also, the larval abundance that we do  
18 with a plankton survey -- We're only sampling, you know,  
19 September, in a spawning season that basically peaks in June and  
20 July and August.

21  
22 Then we get to the following slide, the king mackerel  
23 recreational landings versus ACL. I'm curious why we don't have  
24 any zone-type insight into this. It's just kind of across-the-  
25 board, and, to me, if there's a problem, as other slides  
26 suggest, that it's more pronounced in the western zone, I would  
27 have kind of liked to have seen that, recreationally speaking  
28 too, with some zone analysis.

29  
30 The same thing for king mackerel in the slide following up.  
31 There's really no breakdown by zones, to see who's dropping,  
32 although I think, through other information, we've kind of got a  
33 sense for that, but, when we're looking at post-Amendment 26  
34 commercial landings by zone, it highlights, you know, a big  
35 decrease in southern handline.

36  
37 It says down 50 percent, but, really, if you break it down,  
38 that's only because you're comparing it to the highest point in  
39 the slide, and so it kind of makes it seem a little worse than I  
40 think intuitively it is in the southern zone.

41  
42 Then we get into commercial landings by state, and, you know,  
43 Louisiana is way down, way down. I don't think we can forget  
44 that Louisiana got rocked by four hurricanes since 2020, two of  
45 which were Category 4s. I'm going to go out on a limb and say  
46 that had some kind of an impact to people wanting to go to  
47 Louisiana to fish or not fish.

48

1 The point being a lot of these things, the landings estimates  
2 and decreases, without catch per unit of effort information  
3 married to them, it suggests a lot of things, some which may be  
4 right on point, but they are speculations, you know, because  
5 there could be many a plausible explanation for why people are  
6 not catching the king mackerel.

7  
8 Water temperature, they're not there. Look at Naples right now.  
9 They're having a hell of a red tide, and I don't think they're  
10 fishing, and so, I mean, there's definitely a lot going on in  
11 the environment.

12  
13 We get into the coastal logbook data, and we're showing this big  
14 decline there in the western zone too, but I'm thinking 2023 was  
15 preliminary data, and I don't know that we should be using  
16 preliminary data and suggesting management decisions be made on  
17 them.

18  
19 The same thing here with -- We look at the landings here for  
20 southern gillnet, and we see how, in 2016, you know, they  
21 increased it to 45,000, but then you're going to hear from some  
22 of the guys, who are going to be here during public testimony,  
23 and they'll tell you they're aware that they want to improve the  
24 price for their fish, and that includes improving the quality.

25  
26 They're trying to work intentionally, with different gears and  
27 playing with it, to lower the size of their strikes. That might  
28 be some of the explanation for some of these smaller strikes  
29 illustrated in this graph over time, and then it's no lie, and  
30 the fish were not showing up like they used to, nor in the  
31 school sizes that they used to, but it seems like, if nobody is  
32 catching them, it's really not that the fishing pressure is the  
33 cause of it.

34  
35 It seems to be something very, very environmental, that I think  
36 we need to understand what we're dealing with before we try to  
37 manage successfully to correct it. Otherwise, I'm starting to  
38 feel like, you know, the Australians, when they had their big  
39 fire, and somebody is holding a singed-up koala bear. This is  
40 our koala bear, but damn if we know why it's happening.

41  
42 We need to address the environment, and I'm really hopeful that,  
43 at some point, even though it's not in our wheelhouse, that this  
44 council will develop some kind of a flex of muscles, to where we  
45 get some interagency cooperation to address the water quality  
46 issues that are absolutely tearing up not just this migratory  
47 fishery, but all of them. We need to really do something. I  
48 will shut up now.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Captain Walker, and then I have a question.  
3

4 **MR. WALKER:** All right. A couple of rebuttals to my esteemed  
5 colleague here, who I've had extensive discussions with in-  
6 person. A couple of things. The southern zone handline, the  
7 Keys handline, meaning the guys who cast jigs and live baits,  
8 how they've done it down there for years, they've almost always  
9 caught their quota in a couple of months.

10  
11 It was pretty much a derby. Those guys would run out and catch  
12 1,250 pounds in a half a day, which is their limit, and run  
13 back, and so they've nearly always caught their limit in short  
14 order, and they didn't catch 60 percent of it in the whole year  
15 last year, and so I would suggest caution at saying that that 59  
16 percent catch by that group isn't really a big factor.

17  
18 I think it clearly should, and I know some of those guys, and  
19 they were the last ones to admit to me that there's a problem.  
20 They didn't want to hear about any reductions, and our fishery  
21 is fine, you know, and things are looking good down here, and,  
22 in the last couple of years, they're like, man, you guys are  
23 onto something here, and our fish ain't here. For those guys  
24 that only catch 59 percent in a year, when they used to catch  
25 100 percent in two months, you can't discount that as not  
26 significant.

27  
28 I have come around on this at this meeting, where I'm going --  
29 When we get there, I am going to support -- Because there's such  
30 a discrepancy here between what people think and what people  
31 see, that I think it would be prudent for us to wait until the  
32 stock assessment, that's already going, and is done at the end  
33 of this year, and it's not like we have to wait three years for  
34 a stock assessment, like we sometimes do.

35  
36 There's already one in the works, and it's maybe twelve months  
37 out or so, according to Dr. Sweetman here, and so, you know,  
38 considering that it's going to take a pretty significant change  
39 - If these trends are apparent in the assessment, the size of  
40 the modification we might have to make is going to be  
41 significant, and so I think it would be prudent for us to wait  
42 until we have some concrete, or as concrete as we get, evidence  
43 to base those decisions on, and I'll leave it at that for now,  
44 Mr. Chair.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** I actually have a question for you, Dr.  
47 Turley. I appreciate the presentation. There's lot of great  
48 graphs in here, and they're easily interpretable, except for the

1 age one. We could have used some data labels over there. There  
2 lots of colors there, but, all in all, A-plus on the graphs.

3  
4 Just for the record, on Slide 7, Bernie, the third bullet down,  
5 we've got Alabama and Texas landings confidential. Why are  
6 those confidential? I know the answer, but I want the committee  
7 to hear that.

8  
9 **DR. TURLEY:** I mean, it's the policy when the data could  
10 potentially affect a business, whether -- You know, how someone  
11 is doing something could affect their business. I mean, I'm not  
12 saying this correctly, but it's essentially designed to protect  
13 people's businesses.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** John Walter.

16  
17 **DR. WALTER:** Less than three dealers.

18  
19 **DR. TURLEY:** There we go.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Okay, and so just to point that out, that  
22 there's so few commercial fishermen within those states, right,  
23 and that's a federal policy, correct?

24  
25 **DR. TURLEY:** Yes.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Sweetman.

28  
29 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is a very interesting  
30 presentation, Dr. Turley. A lot of good information in there,  
31 and, basically, I look at this, and I'm just like we don't  
32 really know, and so I guess one question I had for you, and  
33 maybe this could also be for John Walter, and it's relative to  
34 the dynamics of how this stock is structured.

35  
36 There's clearly been something that has happened. It seems to  
37 be thought highly sensitive to environmental pressures, and I'm  
38 starting to just -- We've always thought of this as -- I'm going  
39 to go to you, Tom Roller, too, as well for South Atlantic here,  
40 but, you know, the southern mixing zone that we have -- They're  
41 not genetically distinct stocks between the South Atlantic and  
42 the Gulf. Is that correct? It's all just one, and they're  
43 separate populations, but they're not genetically distinct.

44  
45 If the dynamics in the environment have changed, is that  
46 something that we need to re-look at, as to whether they're  
47 still mixing there between the South Atlantic and the Gulf? Are  
48 they just moving to the South Atlantic, because we've seen South

1 Atlantic catch levels the exact opposite of what we're seeing  
2 here, and so that's why I'm going to ping over to Mr. Roller, if  
3 you would, Mr. Chair. I'm curious of the South Atlantic's  
4 perspective for what they're seeing in the king mackerel  
5 fishery.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** You've got the mic.

8  
9 **MR. ROLLER:** Thank you, and so it's rapidly changing. You know,  
10 we just went through our port meetings, and one thing I can tell  
11 you is our catches are down as well, particularly with king  
12 mackerel. They're not down like the Gulf, and what we're seeing  
13 here is -- I hate to use the word "catastrophic", but it's  
14 pretty extensive, what you're seeing in the Gulf.

15  
16 We haven't seen that, but what we did hear, and I found it was  
17 interesting, seeing the presentation of your outreach meetings,  
18 is the fishermen were saying they would still enjoy catching  
19 them, because the price was up, but their catches were down.

20  
21 We're hearing exactly the same thing, but, particularly when it  
22 comes to kings, I'm not hearing any fishermen tell me it's good,  
23 whether they're in south Florida, north Florida, or North  
24 Carolina for that matter, which is an extremely important fish  
25 to my state of North Carolina.

26  
27 Now, Spanish Mackerel is a little bit different of a story. I  
28 know we're not talking about that here, but I wish I could tell  
29 you something more distinct, but what I will say is that we're  
30 definitely hearing some pretty downward trends in the near-term.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Great. Thanks for sharing that. Dr. Frazer,  
33 and then I've got my two colleagues from --

34  
35 **DR. FRAZER:** Tom, I appreciate those comments. I'm looking at  
36 the South Atlantic data right here, right, and I've been  
37 thinking about this for a couple weeks, and so one of the things  
38 that's interesting to me, when I look at the data, is there's no  
39 evidence, in the recreational fishery anyways, that the catch  
40 has gone down.

41  
42 In the commercial fishery, the way that it's structured, there's  
43 a northern zone, and there's a southern zone, with Seasons 1 and  
44 2, right, and only the southern zone, and I think it was Season  
45 2 is the one that's -- Which is kind of down in that mixing  
46 area, that suggests that there's a change.

47  
48 My bigger question, for the South Atlantic, is when -- In this

1 particular document, when you're looking at those zones through  
2 the South Atlantic, right, and so there's a southern zone and a  
3 northern zone, and the northern zone actually goes all the way  
4 up to New York, and so -- You know, what are you -- How are  
5 those data, those landings, north of North Carolina captured as  
6 part of this quota?

7  
8 Is that truly -- Or are you just getting landings through North  
9 Carolina, and, if that's the case, do you have landings data  
10 from the Mid-Atlantic, right, and the New England Council that  
11 would give some bearing, or provide some indication, that  
12 there's a change in the migratory patterns, all right, or the  
13 distribution of these fish?

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Yes, sir, to that point.

16  
17 **MR. ROLLER:** To that point, I mean, I would -- I'm seeing if I  
18 can get my staff member to get me some information there, but  
19 what I can tell you is, north of North Carolina, we're fairly *de*  
20 *minimis*, right, and we're seeing an increase of fish being  
21 caught say off of New Jersey, off of Long Island, and we do see  
22 some summers where they're catching them off Cape Cod now, but  
23 they aren't in huge numbers.

24  
25 There doesn't seem to be much of a commercial fishery for them  
26 in those states, and mostly like more recreational encounters,  
27 but, to the other point too, that maybe recreational landings  
28 have not gone down on paper, that's not what we're hearing from  
29 our fishermen, right? We're hearing there's less availability.

30  
31 We're hearing that they're showing up in December, instead of  
32 October, and so we're still seeing those rapid changes, which  
33 don't seem to correspond with the last fifty years of  
34 conventional wisdom, right?

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** We'll go to Captain Walker. Have you still  
37 got a question? Then I'll go to Mr. Sanchez.

38  
39 **MR. WALKER:** So I had some people, that I've spoken with, that  
40 said tournament kingfish guys, and they've had some really good  
41 tournaments on the east coast of Florida this year, tournament  
42 fish being one large is all you need on that particular day.

43  
44 They had one tournament, and they had two fish over sixty  
45 pounds, and like seven of them over fifty pounds, which is  
46 unbelievable great fishing, and so these guys speculated that,  
47 hey, our kingfish disappeared, like Dr. Sweetman was saying, and  
48 maybe they switched sides, in the mixing zone, and went up the

1 other side.

2  
3 I talked to some commercial guys I know that fish over there,  
4 like full-time commercial kingfish guys, and, according to them,  
5 no, that the tournament landings are not consistent with bulk  
6 schooling weight of commercial king fishing style, and so that's  
7 what I've heard there. It seemed to kind of throw a monkey  
8 wrench in the theory that maybe they switched sides.

9  
10 Also, I did some looking into the -- I think there is some  
11 evidence that those fish might be genetically different. The  
12 very first study that it was done on that was essentially  
13 tossed, and discredited, and then there was two or three since  
14 then, and Will Patterson was on one of them, but I think it kind  
15 of backed up that they weren't mixing much. Maybe our resident  
16 expert over there on kingfish genetics could -- Do you have any  
17 knowledge of the mixing zone off of Florida down there?

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** We'll go to Dr. Banks, and then Mr. Sanchez.

20  
21 **DR. BANKS:** So, if I remember correctly, there's not a lot of  
22 genetic mix. I mean, there is a lot of genetic mixing. It's  
23 the same stock. Most of what they were trying to do, what  
24 Patterson was trying to do, was look at the shape of the  
25 otoliths and determine if you could see Atlantic or Gulf.

26  
27 Just because of the way the Gulf is set up, we can't determine  
28 natal grounds, and so they were looking to see if they could  
29 figure out, between the different -- "Stocks" isn't the right  
30 word, but different migratory groups.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. Mr. Sanchez.

33  
34 **MR. SANCHEZ:** If there's any insight we can gather somehow as to  
35 if these fish on the south side -- If they're going further  
36 north than maybe they traditionally have, I would like to know  
37 that, because clearly there's something different going on with  
38 their migratory patterns in the Gulf.

39  
40 Of course in the Gulf, they can't go no more north, and so I  
41 don't know if maybe, on the east coast, where they can, that  
42 might help me to get my arms around that something is different  
43 in the migratory patterns.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Overton.

46  
47 **DR. ANTHONY OVERTON:** Brendan, a quick question. Has anybody  
48 looked at the size at maturity, because I imagine, with

1 increasing sea surface temperatures, and decreasing size at age,  
2 I imagine age at maturity is probably decreasing. Is anybody  
3 looking at that?

4  
5 **DR. TURLEY:** As far as I know, not specifically, but we -- Like  
6 I said, this is kind of like an opening salvo to a much larger  
7 research project that we're looking into it, and, you know,  
8 given the fact that the terminal year is 2017 for those age  
9 data, it's -- We really want to see what comes out of this next  
10 assessment, because it'll be updated, be a lot more data, but  
11 that's -- That's a great comment.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Okay, and we've got three more questions to  
14 this, and so Dr. Banks, Dr. Walter, and Mr. Strelcheck. Then  
15 we'll move on.

16  
17 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think my question is  
18 actually for Tom. You threw out some South Atlantic data. You  
19 said there was a Zone 1 and Zone 2, and a Season 1 and Season 2.  
20 Can you tell me the dates of the Season 2?

21  
22 **DR. FRAZER:** Yes, and so the Season 2 is October 1 through  
23 February 28. Season 1 is March 1 through September 30, and  
24 those are both for the southern zone, and so the northern zone  
25 is March 1 through February 28.

26  
27 **DR. BANKS:** Okay, and then one more point, to just something Mr.  
28 Sanchez was saying. With the migratory patterns, one thing that  
29 is kind of hard, with king mackerel, is they don't take tagging  
30 very well. Dart tagging, or conventional tagging, is pretty  
31 quick. You can dart tag and send them back. We did a test  
32 study with acoustic tags on king mackerel, and they do not  
33 survive the surgery very well.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Walter.

36  
37 **DR. WALTER:** So I just -- I want to thank Dr. Turley and the  
38 staff who worked on that presentation. I thought that it hit  
39 many of the key things that this body needs to look at, and,  
40 while maybe there isn't a smoking gun, I think the barrel is  
41 warm here.

42  
43 You've got situations that, nearly every indicator that we could  
44 provide, that there's a problem. One, this is a fishery that's  
45 got an ACL, and it's nowhere near coming close to any of that.  
46 The only fisheries that are are the ones that operate in  
47 situations that are likely to concentrate the fish in the  
48 southern mixing zone, in the southern gillnet, using gillnets

1 and spotter planes to find the fish.  
2  
3 That has all the classic signs of a fishery that could exhibit  
4 hyperstability, which means that it would stay constant under  
5 declining abundance, while the fishery in the western zone is  
6 not catching it, and it's several hundred thousand pounds off,  
7 which could be because there aren't places to fish for them.  
8  
9 Presumably those fish should be somewhere else at other times,  
10 leading to increased availability, increased catches. We're not  
11 hearing that from any of the stakeholders either, from any of  
12 the stakeholder participation, and so there's very few signs of  
13 positives here.  
14  
15 I think we've also now, around the table, heard some really good  
16 scientific hypotheses. Ideally, a lot of this should go before  
17 the SSC, to also weigh into them, but a lot of that seems to be  
18 -- To suggest that there's something environmental going on, and  
19 I'll reiterate that, even if the environment is not giving us  
20 fish, we're not allowing them to reproduce, there's really only  
21 one management tool in the arsenal, and that's to reduce fishing  
22 mortality.  
23  
24 In this case, that would be to protect the spawners that are out  
25 there, and I want to go to the one slide on the mean size,  
26 because, if that wasn't evident -- If we could go to that.  
27  
28 I don't think we've seen something as dramatic in any of the  
29 fish we've looked at. Then it's the -- Right here, this is the  
30 mean size of a fish of a given age is 10 percent smaller than it  
31 was back in 1985. That means any given fish is 10 percent  
32 smaller at the same age, which, because of the length-weight  
33 relationship is about a factor of three, and that's a 30 percent  
34 reduction in the weight at age.  
35  
36 Those fish are smaller, and probably the gillnet mesh size is  
37 being reduced, to be able to capture them, because they're no  
38 longer -- They're going to squeeze through gillnets that they  
39 would have otherwise been caught in, because they're skinnier.  
40 That then the response is it's going to require more fish to  
41 produce the same number of recruits, which might be one of the  
42 reasons we're seeing fewer fish.  
43  
44 Again, what's the management action? Unfortunately, it is to  
45 reduce fishing mortality. Now, this may work its way through  
46 the stock assessment. The stock assessment presumably would say  
47 something similar, and that's -- If the council chooses to wait  
48 for that, that is your prerogative, but I don't want it lost on

1 what our options are when the environment doesn't give us fish.  
2 We have to allow the fish to make more of them. We do that by  
3 reducing fishing pressure. Thanks.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Okay. Mr. Strelcheck, and then Mr. Sanchez.

6  
7 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I mean, I'll just add, you know, there's  
8 questions, and discussion, about are they pushing farther north  
9 on the east coast, and certainly there's been plenty of  
10 anecdotal information to say that, but, just looking at landings  
11 in the northern and southern zones for the last few years, I  
12 mean, we're not even coming close to catching the catch limits  
13 for the northern zone right now, and so, even if they're pushing  
14 north, they're not pushing north in large numbers of abundance,  
15 right, because we're not catching them in our data and  
16 statistics, and so I just wanted to acknowledge that.

17  
18 I then wanted to thank Dr. Turley and the Science Center. I  
19 think it's been close to a year, maybe, or maybe a little less  
20 than that, since I had, you know, thrown out this motion, and  
21 it's essentially telling the story that we've been hearing  
22 around this table, and we've been getting from the public now  
23 for several years, right, and so I think we need to really have  
24 a solid, substantive discussion about do we wait for the stock  
25 assessment, which means we're punting for two or three more  
26 years to take action, or we do something in the interim, and  
27 then the stock assessment, obviously, further informs future  
28 management, but I think it's an important discussion, and, given  
29 everything in the presentation, it's a very compelling reason  
30 that we should be acting sooner rather than later.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Sanchez.

33  
34 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Can we go back to page 9, the previous page,  
35 please? Thank you.

36  
37 I just wanted to point out, because, you know, we're hearing  
38 things over time, and, again, please don't misunderstand me.  
39 I'm not suggesting there isn't something strange going on with  
40 the migratory patterns of these fish, and perhaps their  
41 availability to the different user groups, but I do want some  
42 assessment review of these things, because this is a great  
43 presentation, and it hints at a lot of things that make perfect  
44 and intuitive sense, but like let's look at the bottom-left  
45 table on the corner. There, the bottom-left.

46  
47 We look at say 2014 through 2016, and I'll be damned if that  
48 doesn't look a lot like 2021 to 2022, and so, you know, things

1 happen in fishing. You know, things change in patterns, and  
2 they certainly mimic each other there a little bit.

3  
4 Again, I'm not suggesting there isn't something we need to do a  
5 deeper dive into, and I'm all for it, but I would like the  
6 appropriate, in my opinion, panel, or our stock assessment  
7 group, and the SSC, to do that deeper dive for us. Then, if we  
8 need to do something, I will swallow hard and do it with you.  
9 We'll share in this pain for everybody, and we can share in the  
10 gain.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Any more questions for Dr. Turley? He's been  
13 up there a long time. Great presentation, by the way. We  
14 appreciate that. All right. We're going to move on.

15  
16 There's been a lot of talk about this stock assessment. Dr.  
17 Hollensead, you want to walk us through the SEDAR 99 draft  
18 schedule, and then take us through that, and it was mentioned  
19 earlier, I believe, the SEDAR 99 terms of reference.

20  
21 **DR. LISA HOLLENSEAD:** Mr. Chair, would you also be interested in  
22 reviewing the document, quickly, or do you want to do the SEDAR  
23 components first?

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** That's why you're a good team member, Lisa.  
26 Please move forward with reviewing the document.

27  
28 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Okay. Bernie, if you wouldn't mind pulling up  
29 the document, real quick, please. Thank you. So, in thinking  
30 about this document, as I said, when this document -- We were  
31 asked to sort of look through this. There was, you know, sort  
32 of a call to action of what could we maybe think about doing  
33 that would be an interim, that would be fairly quick, and so  
34 just a real quick review of the purpose and need.

35  
36 The purpose of this framework action is to modify the Gulf king  
37 mackerel catch limits and recreational bag limit, based on  
38 management uncertainty for the stock. The need for this  
39 framework is to reduce hardness to address concerns with stock-  
40 based declines and fishery landings and stakeholder concern.  
41 From public comments, stakeholders have indicated a decline in  
42 abundance, and additional management measures are needed to  
43 address this observation.

44  
45 So, again, it was thought of what could we get done within a  
46 framework action, and so that's something that could move  
47 through fairly quickly, and something could be put on the books  
48 fairly quickly, and so that was the thought process initially,

1 when this was proposed by -- When the council sort of requested  
2 looking through this.

3  
4 Bernie, if you wouldn't mind going to Table 1.13, and so this is  
5 just a table indicating, you know, a summary of annual  
6 recreational landings versus the percent ACL, the quotas, and so  
7 you can see where that stands.

8  
9 As has been mentioned in the presentation, and by several  
10 committee members around the table, the ACL is not being  
11 realized in the recreational fishery, and so that's just to sort  
12 of hammer that home, what we're seeing here.

13  
14 Then, Bernie can go to the next table, 1.14? Similarly, we've  
15 had discussions about the commercial landings, and so this is  
16 commercial landings for about the past twenty years or so,  
17 recognizing that, in the past, that ACL had been realized, or  
18 harvested, and, in recent years, especially the last two, and so  
19 those bottom two rows, the bottom-right two cells in that table,  
20 you're sort of seeing the substantial decline.

21  
22 Then, Bernie, if you wouldn't mind going to Table 2.12, and so,  
23 jumping ahead a little bit, because I know we just looked at --  
24 That was like the total commercial, but sometimes it's  
25 interesting to see it by zones here, and so this is a breakdown  
26 of that.

27  
28 The cells in gray indicate years when a commercial quota  
29 percentage, you know, went over, or was harvested, and so you  
30 can see, especially for some of these, that hasn't happened in  
31 the past few years, and so that's just what this table is  
32 illustrating, and so, again, just sort of painting this picture.

33  
34 Then, Bernie, if you wouldn't mind scrolling down, just to the  
35 next table, so we can see the southern gillnet annual landings  
36 as well, and so that's Table 2.13. Table 2.13, please, Bernie.  
37 Again, going back to the southern gillnet, it seems to be  
38 harvesting its quota here pretty closely, and so, again, just  
39 reiterating with the discussions that have been going on.  
40 Obviously, this fishery is prosecuted much differently than the  
41 handline, and so we're seeing those sorts of things.

42  
43 Then, okay, so what could we do in a framework action? Well, we  
44 can change some catch limits. We could also look at a  
45 recreational bag limit, and so that's what this framework  
46 attempts to consider.

47  
48 So Bernie, if you wouldn't mind going to Action 1, please, and

1 so, to inform Action 1, as Dr. Simmons had mentioned before,  
2 there was an interim analysis that was done for king mackerel.  
3 That did not realize any catch advice. Nothing came from that.

4  
5 With that, staff had to sort of come up with, okay, how do we  
6 perhaps reduce catch limits, and so it was looking at the most  
7 recent years of landings, three or five-year averages, and then  
8 potentially putting an extra 20 percent buffer on that, if the  
9 council thought that it might be desirable to be a little more  
10 conservative than that, that that was an option, and so these  
11 were some of the draft options that could be put forth.

12  
13 Now, because this was a framework action, the council staff --  
14 We did not touch anything to do with allocation between the  
15 recreational or commercial fishing at this point, just so that  
16 it would fit the stipulations of a framework action that could  
17 be moved through quickly, should that be the desire of the  
18 committee. That's something that could be done, and so that's  
19 it for Action 1.

20  
21 Bernie, if you wouldn't mind going to Action 2, please, and then  
22 so Action 2 would consider modifying the recreational bag limit.  
23 Alternative 1 would be to no action, and so retain the three  
24 fish per person. Alternative 2 would be a two-per-person bag  
25 limit, and then Alternative 3 would be a daily bag limit of one  
26 fish per person.

27  
28 Bernie, if you wouldn't mind going to Figure 2.2.1, and so this  
29 is just an analysis of recreational angler -- It's kind of hard  
30 to see, but, basically, the figure here just goes to show that  
31 most recreational anglers are harvesting one fish, and so, any  
32 reduction, you would have to get down to about one fish to  
33 realize any sort of modification, but, Mr. Chair, that's just  
34 sort of a run-through of the document, for everybody's  
35 recollection.

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thank you, Dr. Hollensead. Questions  
38 related to the framework? Captain Walker.

39  
40 **MR. WALKER:** I don't know about this Action 2. Neither  
41 Alternative 1 or 2 is going to show any meaningful impact, if  
42 we're only catching one anyway across-the-board. Do we even  
43 need this action? You know, you could change it, and, according  
44 to the data, it's going to have virtually no -- I don't see us  
45 even needing to do that, right now anyways.

46  
47 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I don't know if now is a good time, but I had sent  
48 staff, and during the adoption of the agenda mentioned some

1 tables that I had sent, that I would like to share with  
2 everyone. If now would be an appropriate time, I would like for  
3 you all to put them up, so we can run through them real quick.  
4

5 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** There we go. I think that's an appropriate  
6 request, Mr. Sanchez, and we're happy to do that. You may want  
7 to orient them. There we go. Thank you. Mr. Sanchez, you want  
8 to walk us through these?  
9

10 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and it's just a little deeper dive into the  
11 action items, because, when you really started to look at them,  
12 it dawned on me that we're starting off by looking at recent  
13 landings, and declines in recent landings. but then, when we  
14 marry those recent landings to the old allocations of 68/32, you  
15 end up reallocating fish from commercial to recreational.  
16

17 I don't think that was the intent here. We're trying to address  
18 a problem. I certainly don't want to get into an allocation  
19 squabble, but that is what happens when we go through these  
20 action items, as we're looking at them.  
21

22 Not only is there a reallocation by sector, but there's also a  
23 reallocation -- I have another slide that I created that will  
24 show you by zone, and I don't know that that was the intent of  
25 this, in trying to address all this, and so, if we were to  
26 suggest, you know, this need, as we're discussing, to do  
27 something right now, and not wait on the assessment, I think  
28 everything tells me we need some science behind what we're  
29 getting ready to do, because we may have to live with it for a  
30 minute.  
31

32 That aside, had we had some action items in this document that  
33 said, all right, let's everybody man up and get the same  
34 haircut, and let's cap landings at where they're at, and, okay,  
35 that does nothing, and fine. Let's take recent landings and  
36 just 10 percent, and everybody -- Boom, and we all get the same  
37 haircut, and we go on and we wait for the assessment. That's  
38 not an action item in this document.  
39

40 So I'm certainly not for something that disproportionately  
41 affects one sector over the other, and disproportionately  
42 affects zones, particularly the zone that's my home state. We  
43 take a big haircut, in some of the other slides that I sent, and  
44 I just find that to be unfair and disproportionate. Thank you.  
45

46 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Sanchez, anything else related to this  
47 particular table you have?  
48

1 **MR. SANCHEZ:** You can see, in the next table that's up now, how  
2 it impacts the different gear types and the different zones, in  
3 terms of depending on which preferred option that you choose,  
4 and then it gets even a little more drastic, once you pepper  
5 them with the 20 percent reductions on top of that that are  
6 further action items.

7

8 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Captain Walker.

9

10 **MR. WALKER:** All right, and you dragged me into this. I don't  
11 see a reallocation. Reallocation is typically, to my knowledge,  
12 not set on landings. It is allocated based on the allocation,  
13 and, if you're trying to have an impact on lowering the harvest,  
14 then the largest user group is going to have to chip in on that,  
15 or you're not going anywhere.

16

17 Also, if you were to put 10 percent across-the-board on the  
18 landings, which I think I understand is what you were saying, to  
19 take 10 percent off everybody's landings, the gillnet fleet  
20 would be the biggest fleet left in the Gulf, while everybody  
21 else is shut down, or severely limited, and I am absolutely  
22 positively not going to support that concept at all.

23

24 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Sanchez.

25

26 **MR. SANCHEZ:** But you're clearly okay with cutting them,  
27 depending on which option, 50 percent. You're good with that.  
28 That's fair.

29

30 **MR. WALKER:** I didn't say that either, and that's what I mean.  
31 We would have to get into that, but you're talking about giving  
32 a 600,000-pound landings group a 60 percent reduction,  
33 essentially leaving over a half a million pounds, while say the  
34 State of Louisiana takes a 70 percent haircut.

35

36 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Can we back up? If you see, on the top there,  
37 when those 600,000 pounds leave the commercial, they go to the  
38 recreational, and, conversely, if you go with the five-year  
39 option, it's 577,000 pounds, and so roughly 600,000 pounds.  
40 Pick your poison, either action item.

41

42 You take it from commercial, and you give it to rec. I don't  
43 know that that's our intent, and I understand what you're  
44 saying, that, if you're trying to get a reduction, you've got to  
45 get it from where it's happening, but I just don't see this as a  
46 fair way to go about this, where one sector bears the burden of  
47 resource conservation, while our MRIP-FES numbers are all  
48 screwed up, and here we are doing allocation, when we said we

1 weren't going to do it.

2  
3 **MR. WALKER:** I would argue that this is not an allocation shift.  
4 We're basing this on landings, not allocation, and allocation  
5 always falls on the percentage that it's originally based on, in  
6 every species, and that will be my final statement on it.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Strelcheck, and then Mr. Sanchez.

9  
10 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so the alternatives in the amendment  
11 don't change the allocation. I think what, John, you're  
12 suggesting is kind of if everyone takes an equal cut, whatever  
13 that percentage is from their recent landings, that that would  
14 be more fair and equitable, and that's certainly one option we  
15 could consider, but that proposal, in and of itself, is a  
16 reallocation shift, because it would change the numbers to  
17 whatever the percentages of recent average landings in the time  
18 series that we are using to base it off of.

19  
20 It doesn't mean we can't do that. That certainly could be a  
21 kind of interim consideration, but I'm hearing different things,  
22 and I just want to acknowledge that, right now, the proposals in  
23 the amendment still keep the 68/32 percent allocation. What  
24 you're arguing, obviously, is that's not necessarily consistent,  
25 and relevant, to the current landings percentages that are being  
26 landed by each sector.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Sanchez.

29  
30 **MR. SANCHEZ:** That would be correct. When you're looking at  
31 other tables in the document, that, if you add them up since  
32 2000, it would suggest there's a big balance left on the  
33 recreational ACL. Roughly added up, maybe they're catching 37  
34 percent over the last twenty-some years.

35  
36 Conversely, the commercial guys are more fully utilizing theirs,  
37 in the higher nineties, and even, as of recent, high mid-  
38 eighties. I don't want to get into an allocation squabble, but,  
39 I mean, to use recent landings, and then, because we were  
40 catching our quota, and then we convert them to 68/32, when  
41 really the landings history would suggest we shouldn't be using  
42 68/32, because that's not the ratio that's been in play for the  
43 last twenty years.

44  
45 The last time I tried to play that game, I got, John, we're  
46 going to raise our bag limit to three fish, and thank you for  
47 playing. I don't want to go down that road again. I just want  
48 to kick this to the stock assessment group, and let's have them

1 come up with what is clearly an environmental issue plaguing  
2 both our sectors, rather than get into this, because, like I  
3 said, this is an environmental problem, and here we are  
4 basically managing the scraps, and maybe getting ready to fight  
5 over them. That's not palatable to me. Let's find the  
6 scientific path forward here.

7

8 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Strelcheck.

9

10 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, and John Walter talked about this, right,  
11 and we have very limited controls, in terms of how we affect  
12 fishing mortality, right, and the biggest stick we have is  
13 setting catch limits and other controls on the fishery.

14

15 If we're going to sit around this table, and, every time we have  
16 an issue that's related to climate, or some other factor, and  
17 just write it off and say, okay, well, we're just not going to  
18 deal with it, then what's that leave, in terms of the stocks  
19 going forward in their future, right?

20

21 We at least, I think, owe it to the species, and stocks, and the  
22 fishermen that are, you know, out there trying to catch these  
23 species to try to do something and see if it's responsive to  
24 that action, and, if it's not responsive, well, we say we tried,  
25 and we have the science, and we have the information to base it  
26 off of, but to just ignore it, or to wait until we get  
27 potentially additional science, that I have to believe is going  
28 to be supportive of a lot of the preliminary information that  
29 we're getting right now, is concerning to me.

30

31 I really feel like this is where we need to be more proactive,  
32 with regard to some of our management actions, and I don't  
33 disagree that the scientists, and others, need to advise us on a  
34 lot of this stuff, but it doesn't mean we can't move forward and  
35 make some decisions based on the information we have and work  
36 alongside them in parallel as that process works.

37

38 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Sanchez.

39

40 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Then I'm letting it go. I don't know, but, to me -  
41 - I'm a very simple person, but, to me, when you take something,  
42 when you take fish from one group and give it to another, I call  
43 that a reallocation. I don't see what else it can be called,  
44 but, if there's some other terminology, then I'm hoping to hear  
45 it, but, to me, it's pretty clear. I'm not opposed to doing  
46 something fair. This doesn't seem fair to me.

47

48 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Strelcheck.

1  
2 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so you and I've talked, just like you  
3 and Ed and others have been talking, and so you don't view it as  
4 fair, right, and this is the opportunity we have, around this  
5 table, as to then what else would we want to consider? Are  
6 there other ideas on the table?

7  
8 Do you want to look at a percent reduction from recent landings  
9 for every subsector as an option, and look at some interim  
10 reallocations, right, and you've suggested that. I would  
11 certainly think that that's a reasonable alternative that we  
12 could look at, but I want to just be thoughtful, in terms of  
13 what you're saying, right, and you don't like what's in here,  
14 but there's other options potentially you would want to propose.

15  
16 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I'm open to suggestions, and, by the way, earlier,  
17 I had staff walk by and unplug Ed's mic. Just saying.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Okay, and so clearly a lot going on here. I  
20 think Dr. Walter made a good point of, you know, the fishing  
21 mortality, but, when we think about making meaningful  
22 recommendations, you know, I can't get past going back to Dr.  
23 Turley's graphs here showing the rec sector, and then the  
24 various sectors in the zones, and we've got one that is  
25 incredibly -- This is like the analogy used earlier of the  
26 apples versus pineapples.

27  
28 You've got one sector here that is incredibly efficient, and  
29 naturally so, and it's just the way they prosecute the fishery,  
30 and the gillnets, and the spotting planes, are incredibly  
31 efficient at catching these fish, and so I just want to leave  
32 that there for thought and consideration, unless we get to Dr.  
33 Sweetman with a thought.

34  
35 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just a real quick question. Dr. Hollensead, when  
36 is the next stock assessment for king mackerel supposed to be  
37 completed?

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Great transition.

40  
41 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Yes, and so it looks like if -- Bernie, can you  
42 send out what was recently sent here? Scroll down, please.  
43 This is the schedule for SEDAR 99, and you can see that bottom  
44 line, the complete assessment report submitted to the council,  
45 and they're looking at June 2026.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Frazer.  
48

1 **DR. FRAZER:** Sorry, Mr. Chair, and I just want to go back. I  
2 really, you know, appreciated John Walter's comment about  
3 hyperstability, and I'm just trying to see if I can wrap my head  
4 around some other data that might be available. You know, so  
5 there's observations of smaller school size, perhaps. I would  
6 like to know, for the southern gillnet fishery, you know, what  
7 the trend has been in the mesh size of the gillnets.

8  
9 I would like to know the size of -- The change in size of the  
10 nets over time, right, and so all of those things would lead me  
11 to believe that there's more effort. I don't see any effort in  
12 any of these data graphs, right, and so all of those equate to a  
13 reduction in catch per unit effort, which would promote this  
14 idea of hyperstability, and that's something that I think we do  
15 have to pay attention to.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Captain Walker.

18  
19 **MR. WALKER:** So, to that question, you're right. The net  
20 landings are not as stable as they look, because they just keep  
21 catching it all, but it took them far longer last year, and they  
22 used to catch that in two or three weeks, and I don't know, and  
23 it took them months to catch it.

24  
25 I'm not sure how many, but an interesting thing I found in the  
26 observer data is the nets have gone -- In 2022, the minimum net  
27 length was 1,200 feet, and that was in 2020. In 2022, the  
28 minimum net length was 1,500 feet, and, in 2023, the minimum net  
29 length was 1,650, with a max length of 2,400 feet, and so three  
30 times these have gotten longer in the last four years, and so  
31 don't think that, since they're filling the quota every year,  
32 they're just -- That there's not more effort involved in filling  
33 that quota. There is, for certain.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Mr. Sanchez.

36  
37 **MR. SANCHEZ:** There's going to be a few members from the gillnet  
38 fleet here this meeting for public testimony. I think it would  
39 be a good idea to ask them all of these poignant questions, and  
40 you'll get it straight from some of the people in the fleet, and  
41 some of them were longtime members of our advisory panel.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** It's a good idea. I always appreciate that  
44 perspective.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Captain Walker.

47  
48 **MR. WALKER:** While we're on the topic, I think I saw, in the

1 data, that we're only talking about twelve guys last year that  
2 fished, right, or maybe fourteen. That's who we're talking  
3 about here, is twelve guys.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Hollensead, do we want to move to the  
6 SEDAR terms of reference?

7  
8 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Thank you. Sure thing, Mr. Chair. Bernie, if  
9 you wouldn't mind pulling up the other SEDAR 99 document, the  
10 terms of reference, and, at this point, I would suppose, if  
11 anybody on the committee had any questions about that, or had  
12 any comments, we'll happily record those at this time.

13  
14 Mr. Chair, I would add this has already been reviewed by the  
15 SSC, and given the thumbs-up and everything like that, and so  
16 this is just a reminder for anybody, if they had any clarifying  
17 questions or anything, and they could ask them now.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Great. Thank you, Dr. Hollensead. Any  
20 questions? I see one from Mr. Sanchez related to the terms of  
21 reference.

22  
23 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I'm sorry beating today on the mackerel, but I did  
24 have something that I've been curious to see. I, for the life  
25 of me, don't know why we have the start date on king mackerel as  
26 a term of reference to be 1929, and so, being that that is, I  
27 guess, the way it has traditionally been done, by all means  
28 proceed with that, but I would also like to see us make a  
29 similar run using a start date of 1986, which we did -- Our  
30 assessment group did do for Spanish mackerel, and these two swim  
31 together, and so I'm curious as to what they would look like in  
32 looking at them both side-by-side.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Sweetman.

35  
36 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so there's one  
37 component of the TORS I just want to clarify, just based on  
38 discussion that we've had today. So, under 2, explore any  
39 possible changes in age structure, including time-varying  
40 growth, and, if stock structure has changed, substantially  
41 describe how this will be addressed.

42  
43 What we were talking about, about potentially the southern  
44 mixing zone interaction with the Atlantic, would that cover what  
45 we have written in the TORS there? Would that cover what we've  
46 talked about here in committee?

47  
48 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** That's a good question that I might kick over

1 to the Science Center.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** It certainly seems like it would, but I'll  
4 defer to Dr. Walther there.

5  
6 **DR. WALTER:** The challenge with doing a stock assessment that's  
7 only the Gulf right now is, to really adequately address the  
8 mixing, it means you would have to bring in all of the data  
9 from the South Atlantic, and pull in data providers from up and  
10 down the Atlantic coast, to do it comprehensively to answer some  
11 of those questions.

12  
13 I don't think that, absent that combined assessment, we're going  
14 to get a satisfactory answer on the questions that were raised  
15 here about what's going on in the Atlantic, and this comes from  
16 having worked on both Gulf and South Atlantic stock assessments  
17 years ago in SEDAR 38, where the only way we were able to alter  
18 the mixing zone is by looking at data from both sides, and so,  
19 unfortunately, I think it's going to be a fairly light view of  
20 those dynamics, absent some specific request to expand the scope  
21 to South Atlantic data.

22  
23 While you're thinking about that, I'll bring some other news  
24 into it that might not be great, in terms of what was talked  
25 about with reproduction and the impacts on reproduction. We've  
26 largely had to stop investing in reproductive work, from the  
27 center perspective, because it's extremely costly to collect the  
28 data, and it's extremely costly to process the data.

29  
30 We have almost ended our reproductive work, as a routine  
31 standard part of our stock assessments, and I say that with some  
32 trepidation, and disappointment, having wanting to have that  
33 data, but then realized that, quite often, when we have had that  
34 data, it's actually often been insufficient to really inform our  
35 stock assessments, because it's either partial, or it's somewhat  
36 limited, and because it's so difficult and costly to collect,  
37 and so we've found that it didn't have the bang for the buck,  
38 because we weren't collecting enough of it, and processing  
39 enough of it, I think.

40  
41 Mean size at age wound up being at least a decent enough proxy  
42 for changes in reproductive output, and changes in productivity,  
43 and which, in this case, I think it's clear that our assessment  
44 team, and the assessment panel, would want to consider the  
45 changes we saw in that figure and the potential impacts on the  
46 population, which could be done with mean weighted age. Thanks.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Simmons, I saw a hand.

1  
2 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I  
3 guess, along those lines, Dr. Walter, in the request, and maybe  
4 this is a question for Dr. Turley, but we asked for the age-  
5 length related comps, you know, to be updated, as part of the  
6 request, and I know that's ongoing with the assessment, but,  
7 based on the schedule, it seems like it's a really important  
8 piece of information, because it looks like that terminal year  
9 of information that you guys showed was 2017, the last  
10 assessment.

11  
12 It was sex-specific, I believe, when we did the last assessment,  
13 males and females, right, for king mackerel, and so do you have  
14 an idea, or general timeline, where we could get that  
15 information, as far as the age-length comps to 2023, just to  
16 have it maybe, and look at it with the SSC?

17  
18 **DR. WALTER:** Do you mean in advance of the stock assessment?  
19 What decision would that inform? We've already heard that  
20 there's been not a strong desire to proceed with anything before  
21 the assessment, and so I don't know that that would motivate any  
22 decision prior to the assessment anyway, and it would be a lot  
23 of work for it to simply be thanks, and we'll wait for the  
24 assessment, because that's what I'm hearing today, and so I  
25 don't see that as being useful, unless there's a decision point  
26 that that would inform that I'm not aware of.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Banks.

29  
30 **DR. BANKS:** Okay, and I have two questions. First, just  
31 clarifying, since we're on the stock assessment, and this says  
32 that we will have a completed stock assessment report in  
33 December 2025, and so we will have that here for the January --

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Hollensead, do you want to clarify that,  
36 because I'm seeing that also in our meeting materials.

37  
38 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Yes, and sorry, Dr. Banks. That was an old  
39 version that was put up, and so what Bernie just had, and what  
40 we'll send around, is actually going to be June of 2026. My  
41 apologies.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** No, and thank you for clarifying that. Yes,  
44 and it's good to have that on the record right now. Dr. Banks.

45  
46 **DR. BANKS:** Okay, and the second question, and pardon my  
47 ignorance, but, if I'm looking at this correct, Ed, you said  
48 there are twelve guys in the gillnet fishery, but they have 21

1 percent of the quota? That's a --

2  
3 **MR. WALKER:** They're non-transferable permits, and have been for  
4 a long time and I think there's like sixteen that could be  
5 fished, and I think twelve participated last year, but, yes,  
6 they get 600,000 pounds for themselves, and everybody else, all  
7 the hook-and-line guys in that zone, split another 600,000  
8 pounds, just a whole bunch of guys, and so they split that zone  
9 in half between hook-and-line guys and sixteen gillnet guys.

10  
11 **DR. BANKS:** Do you roughly know about how many hook-and-line  
12 guys there are in that zone?

13  
14 **MR. WALKER:** Well, there used to be enough to fill the quota in  
15 a month, casting, but I don't have an accurate number. I bet  
16 you there's -- I mean, I know a lot of them. There's maybe  
17 sixty, or a hundred. I don't know though for sure.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** It looks like Dr. Sweetman may have  
20 information.

21  
22 **DR. SWEETMAN:** No, but, just to be clear, when we're talking  
23 about X percentage of the quota, it's X percentage of the  
24 southern zone quota, and not the entire Gulf quota.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Sweetman, do you want to clarify that,  
27 for the record? Mr. Chair.

28  
29 **MR. J.D. DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Geeslin. I missed some of the  
30 question earlier, and I don't know if there was an answer  
31 provided, but Mr. Sanchez made a comment that some of the data  
32 being used was a hundred years old. Did I understand that  
33 correctly?

34  
35 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes. The term of reference start date for king  
36 mackerel is -- That's currently used is I believe 1929, and so  
37 maybe not quite a hundred, but getting there.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Dr. Froeschke.

40  
41 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Just for your information though, by moving the  
42 start year to 1986, for example, it isn't ignoring that. You're  
43 saying -- You're essentially implying that, prior to 1986, no  
44 measurable fishing occurred on the stock, and so, you know, it's  
45 not an assumption-free thing. It certainly seems plausible as a  
46 way to examine how the model performs, but that also is a pretty  
47 strong assumption.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Thanks for that. Mr. Sanchez.

2  
3 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I bring that up just because 1929 is  
4 1929, and, also, I mean, there's a yellowtail SEDAR 64 that they  
5 decided that, hey, we need to bump it up, and the reason was the  
6 reliability and accuracy of the data for the 1980s was maybe not  
7 the best.

8  
9 The red grouper assessment, SEDAR 42, the panel said what are we  
10 going to do, and are we going to start in 1880, or 1986, and  
11 they decided to recommend a start date of 1986. The Spanish  
12 mackerel SEDAR went ahead and said, for SEDAR 81, let's go ahead  
13 and not do 1886, and go to 1986, and so, I mean, there seems to  
14 be some rationale here, and a track record for doing this, and I  
15 don't see why king mackerel should be any different, and I'm not  
16 saying don't do both.

17  
18 Just let -- It seemed to fit the bill there that there were some  
19 data gaps in the 1920s, and let me go on a limb and guess, and I  
20 don't see why we can't do it for king mackerel. We did it for  
21 others.

22  
23 **DR. WALTER:** Dr. Walter, and then we're going to land this  
24 point.

25  
26 **DR. WALKER:** Sure, and John has a good point, and I think that's  
27 not something that -- It's usually something that's explored in  
28 the stock assessment as a sensitivity to the starting assumption  
29 of the starting conditions.

30  
31 General practice has been to try to start the assessment at a  
32 time where you can assume that the population is virgin, of  
33 which you go back far enough in time when you can say it's  
34 basically unfished, and that allows you to not have to estimate  
35 initial fishing conditions.

36  
37 Starting in 1986 means you've got to estimate those parameters,  
38 and I liken it to, basically, you're trying to drive the race  
39 car on the back of the semi-van that's moving. It's a lot  
40 easier to drive it on when it's stopped than to have to be  
41 moving eighty miles an hour and drive it on moving eighty miles  
42 an hour. You have to know how fast it's going, which is really  
43 you have to know how much the stock is being fished at in 1986,  
44 which is the reason for modeling conventions.

45  
46 We often start as far back in time. However, the other point  
47 that John and I talked about is that we're probably dealing with  
48 things that are being non-stationary since the 1920s, where the

1 environment has changed, and the productivity of the animal may  
2 have changed, and I think that's something we're going to be  
3 increasingly confronting in our management advice, and so we may  
4 be wanting to look at have the benchmarks changed, and do we use  
5 dynamic reference points and things like that, which could  
6 probably be something to start thinking about as a standard  
7 practice for our stock assessments as well, is evaluating those  
8 assumptions of stationarity, to use another, sorry, jargon term.

9  
10 It's not a bad idea to look at it, but there may be reasons that  
11 a modeling team may decide to start at a particular time.  
12 Anyway, thanks for pointing that out. I think that's something  
13 that can be accommodated in the process.

14  
15 **MR. WALKER:** I've just got to say that John Walter has the best  
16 analogies, a thirteen-inch ruler, a truck that's moving with the  
17 car on top of it. They're all perfect. They're spot-on, and so  
18 keep it up.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** All right. I'm looking at Dr. Hollensead. I  
21 believe we've covered everything on the agenda. Mr. Sanchez, to  
22 your request earlier for Other Business, I believe we've covered  
23 those items that you wanted to discuss. Am I correct in  
24 assuming that?

25  
26 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I would say ad nauseum, yes.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN GEESLIN:** Perfect. All right. Without hearing any  
29 other thoughts, or any movement to make any recommendations or  
30 motions at this point, I would suggest we also hear from those  
31 individuals that you alluded are coming, John, for the public  
32 testimony and take this one up in Full Council, also. I'm just  
33 reading the room. Okay. Mr. Chair, that concludes the CMP  
34 Committee.

35  
36 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on January 27, 2025.)

37  
38 - - -