

GULF COUNCIL

304TH MEETING

FULL COUNCIL SESSION

The Lodge

Gulf Shores, Alabama

April 9-10, 2025

VOTING MEMBERS

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

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

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

STAFF

- Assane Diagne.....Economist
- Matt Freeman.....Economist
- John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
- Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
- Sarah Gardiner.....Fishery Biologist
- Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
- Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
- Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison
- Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
- Camilla Shireman.....Administrative & Communications Assistant
- Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

- Billy Archer.....Panama City, FL

1 Kathryn Birren.....FL
2 Susan Boggs.....Orange Beach, AL
3 Leann Bosarge.....MS
4 Erik Brazer.....Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance
5 Rick Burris.....MS
6 Anthony Colletti.....
7 Jason Delacruz.....FL
8 Glenn Delaney.....
9 Major Jason Downey.....AL
10 Josh Ellender.....
11 Richard Fischer.....LA
12 Jim Green.....Destin, FL
13 Marshall Gross.....
14 Buddy Guindon.....Galveston, TX
15 Ken Haddad.....ASA, FL
16 Frank Helies.....NOAA
17 Scott Hickman.....Galveston, TX
18 Bob Hilliard.....FL
19 Rachal Hisler.....Double Bayou, TX
20 Chris Horton.....Congressional Sportsmen's Association
21 Dylan Hubbard.....FL
22 Lawrence Marino.....LA
23 Chris Niquet.....FL
24 Charlie Phillips.....SAFMC
25 Clay Porch.....SEFSC
26 Charlie Renier.....FL
27 Mark Tryon.....Gulf Breeze, FL
28 Matt Walia.....NOAA OLE
29 John Walter.....SEFSC
30 Johnny Williams.....Galveston, TX
31 Dale Woodruff.....AL
32 Bob Zales.....Panama City, FL
33 Jim Zurbrick.....Steinhatchee, FL
34
35

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TABLE OF MOTIONS

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3 [PAGE 71](#): Motion to move forward with finalizing the Memorandum of
4 Agreement between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, NMFS,
5 Florida FWC, and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary
6 (FKNMS). [The motion carried on page 71.](#)
7

8 [PAGE 87](#): Motion to request NMFS continue with the Texas federal
9 closure in the coming year in conjunction with the State of Texas
10 closure in 2025. [The motion carried on page 87.](#)
11

12 [PAGE 90](#): Motion to recommend the council approve Framework Action:
13 Modification of the Vessel Position Data Collection Program for
14 the Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Fishery and that it be forwarded to the
15 Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation and deem the
16 codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial
17 license to make the necessary changes in the document. The Council
18 Chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified
19 text as necessary and appropriate. [The motion carried on page](#)
20 [100.](#)
21

22 [PAGE 100](#): Motion to direct staff to begin development of a shrimp
23 amendment to extend the moratorium of federal Gulf shrimp permits.
24 [The motion carried on page 100.](#)
25

26 [PAGE 102](#): Motion to request the SEFSC and council staff provide
27 an analysis and summary about the impacts of losing the Southeast
28 Regional Headboat Survey to the fisheries management process. This
29 analysis should explore if the loss of the program would impact
30 catch estimates due to different effort estimates or size of fish
31 landed, what species information would be most impacted and what
32 those differences could mean for stock status estimates and quotas.
33 Contingent upon the review, the council requests that NOAA
34 Fisheries consider and seek all available means for continued
35 funding of the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey as an important
36 time series for data collection. [The motion carried on page 105.](#)
37

38 [PAGE 106](#): Motion in Actions 1 and 2 to make Alternative 2 the
39 preferred. [The motion carried on page 107.](#)
40

41 [PAGE 107](#): Motion in Action 3 to include for-hire in Alternatives
42 2 and 3. [The motion carried on page 107.](#)
43

44 [PAGE 108](#): Motion in Action 3 to make the modified Alternative 3,
45 to include Options a and b, the preferred. [The motion carried on](#)
46 [page 108.](#)
47

48 [PAGE 109](#): Motion in Action 4 to make Alternative 3 the preferred.

1 [The motion carried on page 109.](#)
2
3 [PAGE 112:](#) Motion to select Alternative 2 in Action 1 as the
4 preferred Alternative. [The motion carried on page 112.](#)
5
6 [PAGE 114:](#) Motion in Action 3 to move Alternative 4 to Considered
7 but Rejected. [The motion carried on page 114.](#)
8
9 [PAGE 114:](#) Motion in Action 3 to make Alternative 5 the preferred.
10 [The motion carried on page 114.](#)
11
12 [PAGE 117:](#) Motion in Action 3 to modify the language in Alternative
13 5 to read as follows: Alternative 5: For the recreational sector,
14 if the average deepwater grouper landings exceed the ACL and total
15 ACL over a three-year moving period, the Regional Administrator
16 would reduce the duration of the recreational season by the amount
17 necessary to ensure that the recreational ACL is not exceeded
18 during the following fishing year unless the best scientific
19 information available suggests no adjustment to the recreational
20 fishing season is necessary. [The motion carried on page 118.](#)
21
22 [PAGE 124:](#) Motion to form a working group comprised of members of
23 the Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs to collectively address the best
24 practices for estimating steepness (and thus estimate MSY) for
25 management advice, as well as a discussion of SPR proxy values
26 given a range of life history values among fish species. [The](#)
27 [motion carried on page 124.](#)
28
29 [PAGE 125:](#) Motion to direct staff to develop a document that
30 updates catch advice and jurisdictional apportionments for mutton
31 snapper and yellowtail snapper in the Gulf and South Atlantic in
32 cooperation with the South Atlantic Council. [The motion carried](#)
33 [on page 126.](#)
34
35 [PAGE 128:](#) Motion to direct staff to develop a document that
36 provides management advice for red grouper. [The motion carried on](#)
37 [page 128.](#)
38
39 [PAGE 131:](#) Motion to request NMFS develop an emergency rule for
40 2025 for red grouper based on the results of the SEDAR 88 stock
41 assessment and pending SSC approval of updated catch projections
42 in May 2025. Additionally, to set the ACL at 90 percent of the
43 ABC. [The motion carried on page 134.](#)
44
45 [PAGE 136:](#) Motion in Action 2 to make Alternative 3 the preferred.
46 [The motion carried on page 136.](#)
47
48 [PAGE 136:](#) Motion in Action 2 to move Alternative 4 to Considered

1 but Rejected. [The motion carried on page 137.](#)

2
3 [PAGE 138](#): Motion to approve Framework Action: Modifications to
4 Lane Snapper Minimum Size Limits and that it be forwarded to the
5 Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation, and deem the
6 codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial
7 license to make the necessary changes in the document. The Council
8 Chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified
9 text as necessary and appropriate. [The motion carried on page](#)
10 [140.](#)

11
12 [PAGE 143](#): Motion to direct staff develop a document that replaces
13 and enhances the DESCEND Act. [The motion carried on page 144.](#)

14
15 [PAGE 145](#): Motion to draft a letter to the Open Ocean Trustees,
16 Fish and Water Column Invertebrates Restoration Coordinator, and
17 Return 'Em Right project management team emphasizing the
18 importance of focusing the fourth phase of the draft restoration
19 plan on restoring the Gulf's living marine resources and their
20 services that were injured by the spill, particularly HMS and
21 deepwater species. [The motion carried on page 149.](#)

22
23 [PAGE 151](#): Motion to direct staff to begin work on a presentation
24 to the council to modify recreational management of red snapper by
25 delegating management authority for the federal for-hire component
26 of the recreational sector to the respective five Gulf states.
27 Proposed management measures should include an option for
28 individual states to opt-out of delegation of federal for-hire
29 management authority. The federal for-hire component in those
30 states that opt-out would continue to be managed under the federal
31 status quo. [The motion carried on page 163.](#)

32
33 [PAGE 164](#): Motion that the council requests NMFS implement an
34 emergency rule establishing a one-fish recreational bag limit for
35 gag grouper for the 2025 season only. [The motion carried on page](#)
36 [171.](#)

37
38 - - -
39

1 The Full Council of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2 convened at The Lodge in Gulf Shores, Alabama on Wednesday
3 afternoon, April 9, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman J.D.
4 Dugas.

5
6 **CALL TO ORDER, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND INTRODUCTIONS**
7

8 **CHAIRMAN J.D. DUGAS:** Welcome to the 304th meeting of the Gulf
9 Council. My name is J.D. Dugas, chair of the council. Please
10 place your cell phone, or similar device, on silent or vibrating
11 mode. For the benefit of all, we ask that private conversations
12 take place outside the meeting room. Additionally, alcoholic
13 beverages are not permitted in the meeting room.
14

15 The Gulf Council is one of eight regional established in 1976 by
16 the Fishery Conservation and Management Act, known as the Magnuson-
17 Stevens Act. Our purpose is to serve as a deliberative body to
18 advise the Secretary of Commerce on fishery management measures in
19 federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico, ensuring sustainable fishery
20 resources that benefit the nation.
21

22 The council consists of seventeen voting members, eleven appointed
23 by the Secretary of Commerce from various Gulf regions with diverse
24 fisheries experience, plus the five state fishery managers from
25 each Gulf state and the Regional Administrator from NOAA's
26 Southeast Fisheries Service. Several non-voting members also
27 participate.
28

29 Public input is essential to our deliberative process. We welcome
30 both oral and written comments throughout the process. Virtual
31 attendees wishing to speak through public comment must register
32 online. In-person participants should sign in at the registration
33 kiosk at the back of the room.
34

35 Only one registration per person is allowed. Public comment may
36 conclude before the scheduled time if all registered participants
37 have spoken. This meeting is being digitally recorded for the
38 public record. As a courtesy, I kindly ask that all participants
39 seated at the table introduce themselves, beginning on my left.
40

41 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** Kesley Banks, Texas.
42

43 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** Dakus Geeslin, Texas.
44

45 **MR. TROY WILLIAMSON:** Troy Williamson, Texas.
46

47 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** Tom Frazer, Florida.
48

1 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** C.J. Sweetman, Florida.
2
3 **MR. ED WALKER:** Ed Walker, Florida.
4
5 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** John Sanchez, Florida.
6
7 **MR. TROY FRADY:** Troy Frady, Alabama.
8
9 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Kevin Anson, Alabama.
10
11 **DR. ANTHONY OVERTON:** Anthony Overton, Alabama.
12
13 **MR. CHARLIE PHILLIPS:** Charlie Phillips, South Atlantic liaison.
14
15 **LT. JACKSON MORTON:** Lieutenant Jackson Morton, U.S. Coast Guard.
16
17 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Mara Levy, NOAA Office of General Counsel.
18
19 **MR. FRANK HELIES:** Frank Helies, NOAA Fisheries.
20
21 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries.
22
23 **MR. DAVE DONALDSON:** Dave Donaldson, Gulf States Marine Fisheries
24 Commission.
25
26 **MR. JASON OSBORNE:** Jason Osborne, Mississippi.
27
28 **MR. MICHAEL MCDERMOTT:** Michael McDermott, Mississippi.
29
30 **MR. RICK BURRIS:** Rick Burris, Mississippi.
31
32 **MR. BILLY BROUSSARD:** Billy Broussard, Louisiana.
33
34 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** Chris Schieble, Louisiana.
35
36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Carrie Simmons, council staff.
37

38 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
39

40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, all. Moving on, next up is the
41 Adoption of the Agenda, and I believe we have some additions to
42 add to the agenda. Dr. Simmons.
43

44 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so we have
45 several things we would like to add to the agenda for discussion.
46 The first one is a discussion of the Gulf Council rebranding. The
47 second is announcement of a new website launch. Third is just a
48 briefing on the anonymous voice mailbox, where we are with that,

1 and then discussion of the June 2025 council meeting format, and
2 then you're going to add that other item, the regulatory -- Before
3 I get to Mr. Strelcheck, we also need to amend, under the closed
4 session report, that we'll not only announce the 2024 Law
5 Enforcement Officer or Team of the Year Award, but we'll also
6 announce the Spiny Lobster AP members that were appointed in closed
7 session. Thank you.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Mr. Strelcheck.

10
11 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I would like to add two items to the
12 agenda. One is just a discussion of some of the recent executive
13 orders, and then the second item is an update from both Clay and
14 I with regard to some of the staffing losses as well as impacts
15 related to fishery council work that we would expect in the near-
16 term.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. I'm looking at
19 Mr. Schieble, and do you want to add what we could not accomplish
20 in Reef Fish, at least the charter and federal for-hire red
21 snapper?

22
23 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and it's listed under Other Business, and
24 there's an attachment already in the agenda for that, but you're
25 talking right now?

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I know it was on Reef Fish, but --

28
29 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** We can do right now if you want, and I don't know
30 if there's enough time.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We could put it in Full Council.

33
34 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, for sure.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We'll add it Other Business in Full Council.
37 Thank you. Are there any other additions to the agenda? Dr.
38 Sweetman.

39
40 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just follow up on the gag grouper discussion that
41 I brought up there, just to make sure we talk about it in Full
42 Council again.

43
44 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Mr. Chair, I included that at the end of the
45 Reef Fish Committee report.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Ryan. Okay. Anything else?
48 Not seeing any, can I have a motion to adopt the agenda?

1
2 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So moved.

3
4 **DR. BANKS:** Second.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Banks and Dr. Sweetman. Next is the Approval
7 of the Minutes. Is there any edits to the minutes? Not seeing
8 any, can I have a motion to adopt the minutes as written?
9

10 **DR. BANKS:** So moved.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Banks, and Dr. Sweetman seconded. Thank you.
13 Okay. Next on the agenda is going to be Dr. Simmons to give us a
14 brief discussion on the Gulf Council rebranding. Dr. Simmons.

15
16 **DISCUSSION OF GULF COUNCIL REBRANDING**

17
18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, as many
19 of you know, in January of 2025, the Gulf of Mexico was renamed
20 the Gulf of America, pursuant to Executive Order 14172 and the
21 Secretary of the Interior Order Number 3423 as well.
22

23 However, the name of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council,
24 Gulf Council, as established by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery
25 Conservation and Management Act, was not amended, and so, based on
26 this EO, we are updating all geographic references to the Gulf of
27 America, or just changing it to the Gulf, in ongoing and in new
28 council documents, with reference to the same body of water
29 formerly known as the Gulf of Mexico.
30

31 The fact that we cannot legally change the Gulf of Mexico Fishery
32 Management Council's name until the act is reauthorized is leading
33 to negative interactions with stakeholders and many constituents
34 that have strong opinions about the optics of our name, even though
35 it was not mentioned in the executive order.
36

37 In an effort to facilitate more positive interactions, we look to
38 the verbiage already written in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, where we
39 are referenced throughout as the Gulf Council after our formal
40 name is mentioned. The fact that our website and our email
41 addresses have been registered using the domain of
42 www.gulfcouncil.org for years is helpful in this effort.
43

44 As such, it seemed to be the logical choice for our public-facing
45 name, at least in the short term, and so what we have done is we're
46 planning to move forward with registering the name of Gulf Council
47 with the state of Florida Division of Corporations, as doing
48 business as, and this will allow us to operate as the Gulf Council,

1 at least in the short term, without affecting our legal and
2 federally-recognized identity and not conflicting with the
3 executive order.

4
5 NOAA Fisheries leadership has indicated that this is an acceptable
6 approach if the council's award documents still use the full name,
7 as provided in the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Then there won't be an
8 issue, and an added benefit to doing this is it also helps us
9 administratively, because many vendors have already shortened our
10 name to Gulf Council as well, and so, Mr. Chair, I'll take
11 questions on that, but Emily has some additional information as
12 well.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Is there any questions
15 for Dr. Simmons? No? Not seeing any, we're going to pass it to
16 Ms. Muehlstein.

17
18 **MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN:** Okay, and so I just had Bernie pull up our
19 old logo, which clearly says the Gulf of Mexico, and so we decided,
20 internally, that this was a really good opportunity for us to sort
21 of modernize the aesthetic of our logo, and, if we were going to
22 go ahead and rename, we might as well rebrand entirely, and so we
23 hired a company to do two things for us.

24
25 One is to help us with this rebranding and creation of a new logo.
26 Also, it was very timely. Last year, in the fall of 2024, we
27 published an RFP, a request for proposals, to modernize the
28 aesthetic of our website, and so they -- We have been working with
29 them since last December, and their delivery date was March 30,
30 and they have completely redone our website for us.

31
32 It just happened to coincide with this rebranding change of our
33 logo, and change of our name, and so, in a moment, I'm going to
34 show you the new logo, and I'm also going to quickly drive you
35 through the new website.

36
37 We did not decide to launch the new website like the week before
38 the council meeting. I know a lot of you are used to our current
39 website, and finding all of our briefing materials, and we just
40 thought it would be too much to launch it at the end of March.
41 Instead, we plan to launch the new site and all of the rebranding
42 next week.

43
44 We're going to systematically replace our name and our logo across
45 all of our council resources and officially notify all of our
46 partners of our change. We will also roll out this new website,
47 which I'm about to show you in a minute, and, as that happens, I
48 just ask that you guys are -- That you do two things for us.

1
2 The first is that you are patient with yourselves, and with us, as
3 we all sort of learn the new site. The navigation remains
4 primarily the same, but there are some tweaks, and then, second,
5 if you see anything, or you start using it and it is bothersome to
6 you, and it is not -- It's cumbersome, and it's not working, then
7 please do not hesitate to reach out to me, or any of our staff,
8 and let us know sort of what you're seeing, what's not going right,
9 so that we can really optimize these changes.

10
11 So, with that, I'm going to show you our new logo first, and then
12 we're going to go ahead and just take a very quick Look at our new
13 site, and so, Bernie, if you can bring up our new logo, and so
14 there are two versions of this logo. There's going to be a
15 horizontal version, and that's this one, right, and this one kind
16 of works on banners, and then there's also a stacked version, and
17 I think you have that one in the email as well.

18
19 That reflects our new name, and we asked them to not only sort of
20 use the region, and you can see that they've done that sort of in
21 a nice design, as well as feature some of our most popular finfish,
22 and a variety of them, in the fish silhouettes, and so there we
23 are. That's our new look, guys, and so stay tuned for shirts and
24 swag and whatever, maybe.

25
26 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** If funding is available.

27
28 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Pending available funding, and, Bernie, if you
29 can pull up our staged website, and so this website is not yet up
30 and running for the public. Like I said, we will do us a launch,
31 and a systematic rebrand, next week, along with press release
32 announcements and emails to our partners, but I wanted to show you
33 what the new site is going to look like.

34
35 As I mentioned, the navigation is going to remain primarily the
36 same here. It's loading. Sorry, and we have a big site, it turns
37 out, and this is -- The anticipation is building. There we go,
38 and so we really worked hard to make sure that we modernized the
39 aesthetic of our website.

40
41 You know, typically, companies redo their website every sort of
42 five years or so, three to five years, and we're kind of behind
43 the curve on that one. What you will notice is that the
44 navigational components remain pretty much the same as they used
45 to, and we did an analytics-driven review of what was the most
46 important and most accessed parts of our site, and so, as you can
47 see, there's sort of these -- At the top-right, you'll see there's
48 like that little button with the thing, and so that's going to

1 bring you to the navigational menu for the entire site.

2
3 We also have this call to action that will bring folks to the
4 public comment area, and, then as you move down the site, you've
5 got these three big buttons that really, you know, draw people to
6 the things that they're using the most, the fishing regulations,
7 information on fisheries management, and the information about the
8 council itself.

9
10 Then the next sort of phase of the website, as you scroll down on
11 this homepage, is a call-out for our meetings, and what you'll see
12 is you can click for more details, and we also have a calendar.
13 We've also added this feature where you can add it to your own
14 calendar, and so you can hit that button, and it will populate
15 your own calendar with that.

16
17 As you slide down a little further, Bernie, our news will be
18 featured here, and so just like we have our press releases, and
19 this is going to include our press releases and our blogs, and
20 then we can take you to a page that has it all, if you want that.
21 We are really trying to focus on providing more visual content,
22 and so we'll be, you know, anchoring all of these things in photos
23 as much as we can.

24
25 If we keep going down, this is our seeking public comment section,
26 that you probably recognize from our homepage, and so we will be
27 able to highlight all of the current issues that we're looking for
28 public hearing phase comments on, and you can also submit general
29 comment, and then, if you go on down even further, Bernie, a little
30 bit of information about what the council is, and what they do,
31 and then the very bottom of our webpage -- There's our subscribe
32 to our newsletter, but then, at the very bottom of the page, what
33 you'll see is not only that sort of one color of our logo in the
34 stacked version, but the primary places that users are navigating
35 is going to always be anchored in the footer of our site.

36
37 Then one thing -- Bernie, if you can click right in that footer,
38 on the federal fishing regulations button, and so the federal
39 fishing regulations are consistently the highest driver of traffic
40 to our site. We port in the API from Fish Rules, and so we
41 basically manage all of our regulations in the Fish Rules
42 interface, and that sort of code comes from the Fish Rules
43 interface and populates our website.

44
45 One of the problems that we've had, even though this has really
46 streamlined our workflow, is that, because Fish Rules regulations
47 logic is based on location, our former site did not account for
48 that, and so I had to choose sort of a default location for the

1 regulations to all come into.

2
3 That didn't work, because, like during the shallow-water grouper
4 closure, if you would have clicked in closer to the --You know,
5 inside the twenty-fathom line, it would have shown you that they
6 were open, and there was no indication that that was location
7 based, and so now our regulations have changed throughout this,
8 you know, through this new redo, that the first thing that you're
9 prompted to do is point to where you're fishing.

10
11 Bernie, if you can kind of point to like off Tampa Bay, maybe in
12 the shallow-water. Right there. Perfect. So you would select
13 your own location, and then it's going to populate the regulations
14 based on the location you select, and so what you'll see is black
15 grouper is part of that shallow-water grouper closure, and it does
16 reflect that it's -- That that area is closed during that time,
17 and so that's a way that we've really modernized the way that the
18 regulations are pulled in. It should make them much more accurate.

19
20 Again though, as you look at this nice new site, and get used to
21 it, if you see something that is hard for you to understand, or
22 something that's inaccurate, please let us know, because we're
23 going to go through some growing pains. I think that's just part
24 of what happens when you, you know, trade over such a large
25 resource, and so, with that, I'll stop talking, and, if you guys
26 have any questions, or thoughts, or concerns, we're happy to take
27 those.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Emily. Do we have any questions
30 for Emily regarding the new website? Mr. Schieble.

31
32 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and so I noticed, when you were showing the
33 calendar upload, where you can put it to your own personal
34 calendar, I think that's great. You know how, when a meeting comes
35 up, we're able to register, once the registration is open, to be
36 able to get on the webinar, for like an AP meeting or whatever,
37 and would it be possible where a little button could pop up there
38 also, to where you can register all at the same time, instead of
39 having to wait for the email to come out? I don't know if that's
40 handy or not, but I was just thinking off the cuff.

41
42 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Since you mentioned it, I think it might also be
43 helpful to consider a button that brings you straight to the
44 meeting materials as well.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank You, Chris. Mr. Strelcheck.

47
48 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Not a comment for Emily or Carrie, and I think

1 this is fantastic, and I appreciate the work that has gone into
2 this. One, I want to thank Carrie and the team for their patience,
3 right, and so she's -- Her and I have talked several times about
4 the name change, and some of the challenges dealing with the name
5 change, and the Fisheries Service internally is working through
6 this same process, like the Gulf Council is now.

7
8 You are going to see some similar changes with the NOAA Fisheries
9 website, with regard to us renaming to Gulf of America. There are
10 going to be places, at least, that are going to remain Gulf of
11 Mexico, if it's specific to statute, but we are working on a
12 regulatory solution to also make those changes, where it's
13 appropriate, and so I just wanted to emphasize that.

14
15 There will be more communication coming. I have a staff person
16 that has been designated to make sure that we're working closely
17 with the Gulf Council team, and so I just appreciate the patience
18 and work that goes into this, and we'll continue to, obviously,
19 make updates as we get more information. Thanks.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Emily, you
22 have one more item?

23
24 **UPDATE ON ANONYMOUS VOICE MAILBOX**

25
26 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** I do. I just wanted to provide a quick update.
27 If you remember, during the January council meeting, you all
28 directed us to pilot an anonymous voicemail comment box, and so
29 that service is ready to roll.

30
31 Some of the cool details of that service is, because we have
32 contracted an outside service, we receive zero call log
33 information, and so I don't get any caller ID information. There
34 is also a live transcriptionist that transcribes the anonymous
35 voicemails that we receive, and, if the caller accidentally reveals
36 any personally-identifying information, the transcriptionists are
37 instructed to not pass that along.

38
39 The way that this is going to work is a caller will call in, and
40 there's sort of a welcome voicemail, and they are given three
41 minutes to record their anonymous voicemail, and then the service
42 emails me just the text of the voicemail, with no personally-
43 identifying information, and so we retain no records that would
44 reveal the source of the comment.

45
46 That voice mailbox is ready to go. You know, we are rolling out
47 a new site, and a new branding, and we will roll out this new voice
48 mailbox immediately following the successful rollout of those

1 other things, and so I would expect that the June council meeting,
2 or August council meeting -- We're going to roll it out within the
3 month, but we will have some anonymous voicemails to review and
4 consider how we want to kind of go through that, and so I just
5 wanted to give that an update, to both you the council and the
6 public, that that is coming soon.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Emily. Any questions or comments?
9 Not seeing any, one more item before we get into public comment,
10 and I'll hand it over to Dr. Simmons for the discussion of the
11 June 2025 council meeting.

12
13 **DISCUSSION OF JUNE 2025 COUNCIL MEETING FORMAT**

14
15 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so we've
16 getting a lot of questions about this, and so I thought maybe we'll
17 just go ahead and make an announcement here, while a lot of folks
18 are still around.

19
20 So, unfortunately, due to the timing of the release of the regional
21 management councils' funds, and funding, the June council meeting
22 would be our third meeting of the year, and we've only received
23 about what we think is 46.4 percent of our funding, which we think
24 will be level funded, but, just based on the release of those
25 funds, we are not in the position to hold the June council meeting
26 in-person.

27
28 We are suggesting a two-day virtual meeting, and what I would like
29 to do, at the end of our meeting on Thursday, is perhaps go through
30 that draft agenda, once staff has a better understanding of where
31 the chips fall and what the priorities are, by the end, but I
32 wanted to make that announcement while more folks were in the room.

33
34 I was assured that we will not pay penalties by moving the meeting
35 to 2026. I think the dates are slightly different, but it's the
36 first week in June, and we will not be charged any penalties for
37 canceling the meeting, and so I'll take a few questions, but we
38 probably ought to get to public comment and revisit this at Full
39 Council, or at the end of the day Thursday.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank You, Dr. Simmons. I'm not seeing any
42 questions. We'll move into public comment. Good afternoon,
43 everyone. Public input is a vital part of the council's
44 deliberative process, and comments, both oral and written, are
45 accepted and considered by the council throughout the process.

46
47 The Sustainable Fisheries Act requires that all statements include
48 a brief description of the background and interest of the person

1 in the subject of the statement. All written information shall
2 include a statement of the source and date of such information.

3
4 Oral or written communications provided to the council, its
5 members, or its staff that relate to matters within the council's
6 purview are public in nature. Please give any written comments to
7 the staff, as all written comments will be posted on the council's
8 website for viewing by council members and the public and will be
9 maintained by the council as part of the permanent record.
10 Knowingly and willfully submitting false information to the
11 council is a violation of federal law.

12
13 We will welcome public comment from in-person and virtual
14 attendees. Anyone joining us personally that wishes to speak
15 during public comment should have already registered online.
16 Virtual participants that are registered to comment should ensure
17 that they are registered for the webinar under the same name they
18 use to register to speak. In-person attendees wishing to speak
19 their public comment should sign in at the registration kiosk
20 located in the back of the meeting room.

21
22 We accept only one registration per person. Each speaker is
23 allowed three minutes for their testimony. Please note the timer
24 lights on the podium or on the webinar. They will be green for
25 the first two minutes and will blink yellow for the final minute
26 of testimony. At three minutes, the red light will appear, and a
27 buzzer may be enacted.

28
29 Time allowed to dignitaries providing testimony is extended at the
30 discretion of the chair. If you have a cell phone or similar
31 device, we ask that you keep them on silent or vibrating mode
32 during the meeting. Also, for all to be able to hear the
33 proceedings, we ask that you have any private conversations outside
34 the meeting room. Please note public comment may end before the
35 published agenda time if all registered in-person and virtual
36 participants have completed their comment.

37
38 Okay, and Bernie has the list up. We are going to start in the
39 room, with Dylan and Lawrence, and then go online. Mr. Hubbard,
40 you're first up.

41
42 **PUBLIC COMMENT**

43
44 **MR. DYLAN HUBBARD:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak.
45 Captain Dylan Hubbard out of central west Florida, multi-passenger
46 partyboats and charter boats. First, I wanted to start off in
47 ultimate support of anything we can do on a red grouper emergency
48 rule to try to save access to our recreational season this year,

1 in 2025.

2
3 The stock assessment shows such a healthy fishery, with the
4 terminal year of data 2022. Being as though it's 2025 already,
5 it's really important, I think, for recreational buy-in and faith
6 in the system, if you will, to try to do the best we can to preserve
7 access this year.

8
9 As far as the red grouper document that would follow, increasing
10 catch levels, based on that stock assessment, I think it's really
11 important if there's any methodology that we could utilize to leave
12 any allocation discussion out of it. In my experience, any
13 allocation conversations slow the process down, and, if this
14 emergency rule is able to be put in place, and does save access in
15 2025, it's only got twelve months until it expires again, and, if
16 this document -- If raising the catch level isn't in place in time,
17 we're going to have a huge problem.

18
19 We get to the end of that emergency rule, and then, all of a
20 sudden, we revert back to these super small quotas, on 2019 data,
21 it's -- It would be a huge detriment to the fishery, and a big
22 black eye to this system and process, and so, if we can leave
23 allocation reviews out of any red grouper document behind this
24 this assessment of review and catch level increase, I think it
25 would help move the document along faster, a streamlined
26 rulemaking, and hopefully help get that catch level permanently
27 increased.

28
29 Also, I want to really speak in support of removal of the twenty-
30 fathom closure. I've gone around and around about it, and so I
31 won't belabor the point too much, but it's inequitable, and it
32 really is difficult to enforce these lines off far from shore.
33 They're not straight lines. It's not a geometric shape. It's
34 very, very tricky, and it has to be at-sea enforcement, which is
35 even more tricky, especially with assets in the Gulf of Mexico
36 being moved to the border, and there's even less enforcement on
37 the water than there once was.

38
39 Also, removing this twenty-fathom closure, in my opinion, will
40 lower total removals, lowering the Bls, because we're not going to
41 be discarding as many fish. It helps us fish more effectively,
42 and efficiently, and it's better for the overall biomass.

43
44 Some questions have come out from other areas of the Gulf of, well,
45 I'm worried about this in my area, and you have to remember we've
46 heard, countless times around this table, that, in February and
47 March, other parts of the Gulf aren't fishing. A lot of these
48 areas don't fish until later March, or until the weather is better,

1 and so, really, the main area that has directed fishery effort is
2 off of central-west Florida, and so my comments, for my area, I
3 think reflect the overall fishery in a really big way, more so
4 than other topics that we discuss around this table.

5
6 Also, there is no data to evaluate, in discussing it with staff
7 and NOAA and other folks around this table. There's no data to
8 evaluate, and so waiting to see what happens with this stock
9 assessment and catch level increase is -- There's no reason for
10 it, because there's nothing to analyze. I think we really need to
11 take this opportunity to move forward and remove this outdated
12 rule.

13
14 Lane snapper, I support the document as proposed. Thank you for
15 moving forward and getting that finalized. The messaging I think
16 needs to be a little tempered from the council, and from council
17 staff, because I think the public comment that Emily brought up,
18 and that Captain Walker questioned, and this is a band-aid
19 solution, and the root cause is still there.

20
21 It's a super healthy fishery. The fishery is going to continue to
22 grow, and this only reduces landings by about 3 percent, as we saw
23 in that presentation earlier today, and so we're still going to
24 have closures, and this rule won't be in place in time to really
25 affect catch levels this year, and so we're going to have a closure
26 on lane snapper this year, and so think about the optics to the
27 recreational fishermen.

28
29 It comes out that, hey, we're increasing lane snappers size limits,
30 to try to give you a longer season, and two months later, lane
31 snapper are going to close early this year. It's not going to
32 look good, and so I think we need to think about the messaging
33 around that.

34
35 Data collection, we need SEFHIER back on the water as soon as
36 possible. It really needs to move forward at this meeting.
37 Preferreds have been picked, and discussions have happened, and
38 I'm hoping we can continue on through that process as quickly as
39 possible.

40
41 As far as -- Also on data collection, disrupting the Southeast
42 Regional Headboat data stream I think is something that this
43 council should hopefully take some action on, whether it's a letter
44 or encouragement or whatever we can do to try to preserve this
45 recreational data stream. It's the only longest running data
46 stream that's used in all these different assessments.

47
48 There's a lot of other great recreational data streams that have

1 come online in the last ten years, with LA Creel and all the state
2 surveys, but those are good systems, and they great data
3 collections, but they have short histories. This has been on the
4 water since 1986, and we need to work to save and preserve that
5 data stream.

6
7 For federal for-hire red snapper, we need the longest possible
8 season to ensure we can more fully utilize our quota. For
9 amberjack, I would encourage the council -- I was encouraged by
10 the council, especially Mr. Schieble's inquiries about, at the
11 next meeting, more fully analyzing the regionality of that large
12 landings, being so high above our ACT, at a time when a large
13 portion of Florida's fleet was out of business, or recovering from
14 a hurricane, and it seems superiorly unreasonable. I just -- I
15 can't fathom how that happened, and so hopefully getting to the
16 root cause of that -- I realize there's still preliminary numbers,
17 and stuff is being worked on, but it would be cool, at the June
18 council meeting, if there was a more in-depth look at those
19 numbers, and I support Mr. Schieble's idea.

20
21 The DESCEND Act ending, I would like the council to move forward
22 with the motion that was raised in that review. I think that's a
23 really good idea to continue forward down that road and stand up
24 something on the council side that reflects what the DESCEND Act
25 already has.

26
27 For shallow-water grouper, I would like to continue support for
28 Alternative 5, with the April and May spring component and then
29 September through the end of the year. Thank you for your time.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank You, Mr. Hubbard. We have a question from
32 Dr. Sweetman.

33
34 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I would be curious your thoughts about Gulf gag.

35
36 **MR. HUBBARD:** I was scared to go first, because I knew I was going
37 to get asked that. I mean, we talked about it at the Reef Fish
38 AP, and there was -- No one was really willing to put their name
39 on that, right, and it's hard to stand up here at this podium and
40 say, hey, I'm happy to take one gag grouper, but I completely agree
41 with your sentiment.

42
43 I completely agree with the reasoning that you have for presenting
44 the idea, and I don't think I could sit here and say, hey, I think
45 I support going to one fish, but I would say that I like the idea
46 of doing anything and everything possible to prevent a South
47 Atlantic red snapper situation, and, if that means it has to be a
48 one-fish bag limit for the remainder of this year, with some really

1 clear, solid wording that this is temporary, and is going to go
2 away, I think we could live with that, to prevent any sort of
3 overage and make sure we get back to a more fully-utilized quota
4 next year.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, C.J.

7
8 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and, just to be clear on that point, yes, it
9 is entirely meant to be temporary. If an emergency action is done
10 there, those are only good for 180 days, and so done.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Any other questions? Not seeing any, thank
13 you, Dylan. Next up is Lawrence Marino, and he will be followed
14 by Glenn Delaney online.

15
16 **MR. LAWRENCE MARINO:** Good afternoon. My name is Larry Marino,
17 and I'm here on behalf of Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill.
18 Regarding Amendment 58B, under Action 2, no action seems
19 inappropriate, because both sector allocations should be stated,
20 and not just one of them, but Alternative 2 is obviously
21 inequitable, because it would burden only the recreational sector.

22
23 Rec would be sharply reduced, from the 10 percent or so that they
24 have been harvesting to three-and-a-half percent, a two-thirds
25 reduction. That would be a drastic reallocation, for all intents
26 and purposes, and it's contrary to the current catch data. In
27 fact, it wouldn't take recreational landings into account at all,
28 and only the commercial landings from over twenty years ago.

29
30 This isn't merely recognizing the leftover from the current
31 commercial allocation. It's doing what this council refused to do
32 years ago when the quota was imposed. Alternative 3 may be seen
33 as inequitable, as doing the exact opposite and imposing the burden
34 solely on the commercial sector. This could be alleviated by
35 removing the 4 percent commercial buffer, which should be done
36 regardless, since it no longer serves a purpose, and the commercial
37 allocation is based on this twenty to twenty-five-year-old data,
38 whereas we have current data for rec, and so it's really not a
39 fair comparison.

40
41 Under Alternative 4, the two sectors would bear the burden equally.
42 Alternative 3 still seems more appropriate, given the non-
43 comparability of the data for the two sectors, and the high
44 uncertainty in the data, and especially if the 4 percent commercial
45 buffer is removed, but Alternative 4 is clearly also reasonable.

46
47 Under Action 3, it does seem appropriate to have rec-specific
48 accountability measures to enforce the rec allocation, but, with

1 the highly uncertain data in this particular fishery, using a
2 moving average over two or three years is appropriate. The
3 National standard 1 regulations allow a multi-year approach to
4 determining overfishing status, including when there is high
5 uncertainty in the fishing mortality estimates. That's the case
6 here, and Alternative 5 seems to best address this concept.

7
8 Alternative 4 seems to be more objectionable, in that it states
9 the trigger requiring exceedance in two years, instead of phrasing
10 the exceedance itself in terms of an average, but the two
11 alternatives are trying to do the same thing, and so either seems
12 appropriate, and you might as well pick the one that the lawyers
13 don't object to.

14
15 I would say that the one-year period for determining overfishing
16 isn't stated in Magnuson. It's in the regulations implementing
17 it. Since this amendment will also be in the regulations, enacting
18 it with an exception to the one-year limitation would enact that
19 exception, if one is needed.

20
21 Regarding the rec initiative, it sounds like the council will be
22 requesting staff to start work on amendments, or an amendment, to
23 implement their recommendations. Several of them seem very
24 promising, and I would like to touch on a few.

25
26 The harvest control rule approach has already been implemented in
27 the Mid-Atlantic Council, and it seems both workable and beneficial
28 to balancing stability and flexibility. The DESCEND Act is a very
29 good program, and, with its sun setting next year, beginning an
30 action now to replace and enhance it is a very good idea.

31
32 Carryover is needed, along with payback, in order to level out the
33 boom and bust cycles. It needs to be done in a way so that you
34 avoid overfishing, but it's fair, and it makes sense that, if the
35 stock could bear a certain amount of fishing in one year, they can
36 also bear the remainder of that amount being fished in the next
37 year. We heard yesterday from three states that fell well short
38 of their quotas last year, which points up the need for carryover.

39
40 Permits of some sort, whatever you call them, should be required
41 Gulf-wide, as Louisiana has been doing, so the universe of actual
42 offshore fishermen can be identified and more accurately targeted
43 in the fishing surveys. The states, and not NMFS, can and should
44 be allowed to do this, with standardization to the data as
45 necessary.

46
47 Finally, state or regional management is essential to enable the
48 flexibility needed for a workable and fair system of management.

1 One size simply does not fit all, as we have heard repeatedly.
2 Thank you.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Marino. Do we have any questions?
5 Not seeing any, thank you, Larry. Next up is online, Mr. Glenn
6 Delaney, followed by Mr. Bob Zales.

7
8 **MR. GLENN DELANEY:** Thank you, Chair. Glenn Delaney, Southern
9 Shrimp Alliance, and I have served on your Shrimp Advisory Panel
10 for many years. I am addressing the shrimp framework action that
11 the Shrimp Committee considered on Monday and again adopted
12 Alternative 3 as its preferred alternative for submission to the
13 Secretary for review and approval.

14
15 As I did at your January meeting, I want to thank the Shrimp
16 Committee for once again taking the time and effort to understand
17 this complex issue and why the shrimp industry developed
18 Alternative 3 and has so strongly urged the council to adopt it.

19
20 As an industry currently under extreme economic duress, we deeply
21 appreciate the committee's and Full Council's support. As you
22 recall the Regional Office's immediate response to the Shrimp
23 Committee's vote back in January was to threaten to disapprove
24 Alternative 3, asserting its inconsistency with National Standard
25 7, which states that conservation and management measures shall,
26 where practicable, minimize costs and avoid unnecessary
27 duplication. I assume they will do it the same in Full Council
28 tomorrow.

29
30 Therefore, my message to you today is simply that I do not believe
31 the Regional Office's assertion of inconsistency with the National
32 Standard has merit. I do not believe the Regional Office's
33 assertion will be upheld when subject to secretarial review at
34 NOAA Headquarters. Instead, I believe Alternative 3 will be
35 approved.

36
37 Why do I believe that? The shrimp ELB scientific data collection
38 program has necessarily existed side-by-side with the agency's
39 very different VMS monitoring and enforcement program for other
40 fisheries for more than twenty years, and I have been engaged with
41 the program's development, funding, and implementation the entire
42 time. I can attest firsthand that this program has always been
43 for the purpose of collecting scientific data for a range of
44 scientific monitoring purposes. It was never for the purposes of
45 the VMS program contemplated by the agency under Alternative 2.

46
47 Consistent with the framework's statement of purpose and need, the
48 industry's fundamental purpose and need, reflected in Alternative

1 3, is to preserve this program as the very basic scientific data
2 collection program it has always been and to do so by simply
3 upgrading what became obsolete 3G cellular technology and by
4 upgrading data delivery to a cloud-based server. That's it.

5
6 I also ask you to please consider why suddenly does the agency now
7 claim that the shrimp ELB program is duplicative and inconsistent
8 with National Standard 7, when, for more than twenty years, it
9 never did before. In fact, what we have learned through this more
10 than four-year exercise is the exact opposite. It is instead
11 Alternative 2 that would create a new and duplicative program that
12 is far more complex than what is necessary.

13
14 Finally, I note that National Standard 7 also states, in part,
15 conservation and management measures shall, where practicable,
16 minimize costs. Our Shrimp AP chair's highly credible cost
17 analyses, presented to the Shrimp Committee in January and again
18 on Monday, have revealed substantial disparities with the agency's
19 cost estimates for both Alternatives 2 and 3.

20
21 The bottom line is that those disparities remain unresolved by the
22 agency or council today, and so the agency's cost estimates simply
23 cannot be relied upon to draw a legal conclusion as to the
24 consistency of Alternative 3 with National Standard 7.

25
26 To conclude, I do not see a credible argument, based on duplication
27 or cost, that Alternative 3 is inconsistent with National Standard
28 7. As the Shrimp Committee has recommended, I urge you to adopt
29 Alternative 3 and send it to the Secretary for review and approval.
30 Thank you very much for your consideration.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank You, Mr. Delaney. Do we have any questions
33 for Mr. Delaney? I'm not seeing any. Thank you, sir. Next up is
34 Mr. Zales.

35
36 **MR. BOB ZALES:** Good afternoon. Bob Zales, II, Executive Director
37 of Southeastern Fisheries. We support everything that Glenn just
38 said about the shrimp amendment and defer the rest of our comments
39 to the expert behind me, Ms. Bosarge.

40
41 The lane snapper, on the final action of lane snapper, we support
42 the increase to ten inches on the size limit. On the emergency
43 rule for request for the recreational red grouper increase, we
44 support that if it can be done. Over time, when we've asked for
45 emergency actions on issues like this, the Fisheries Services
46 always told us that they couldn't do an emergency action for an
47 increase. You can do them for overages and impacts, but you can't
48 do that, and so hopefully they'll find a way to do that, to add a

1 few more fish to the guys for the end of this year.

2
3 We also support the stock assessment on red grouper. We support
4 the proposed increase on the commercial side to be implemented
5 next year. We would like for the council to request that the stock
6 assessment panel review the MSY proxy of 40 percent for red
7 grouper.

8
9 The red grouper fishery, unlike the other transgender groupers,
10 has a different life history. It doesn't live as long, and it
11 reproduces apparently quicker, and so we think that there's clear
12 evidence that you can play with a smaller proxy than 40 percent.

13
14 We also have issues with, on every of these fisheries, every time
15 we look at increases, you're looking at increases of 10 percent,
16 rather than going and looking at a 1 percent, or 2, 3, 4, or 5,
17 whatever percentage is there, because what happens, as an example
18 in the deepwater grouper fishery, is, when you shift to a higher
19 MSY, you arbitrarily shift the impact of the regulatory atmosphere
20 on these species, simply because of a computer model. It has
21 nothing to do with real-world activity, and so we would like to
22 see a look at that.

23
24 On the deepwater grouper, we would like to see the commercial quota
25 remain as-is. On all of these fisheries, we do not want to see
26 any kind of an allocation shift in anything until we get the whole
27 allocation issue resolved through the FES review, and also until
28 we get some kind of status on Amendment 53, that we're still
29 waiting to hear from the Fisheries Service from the request from
30 the court, to see where that goes, because shifting allocations -
31 - The way it is now, you're just adding more problems to the whole
32 allocation issue, and so, until we can get to a final decision on
33 allocations, we would like to see that left alone, and that's
34 pretty much all I've got, unless you've got a question.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Zales. Do we have any questions?
37 I'm not seeing any.

38
39 **MR. ZALES:** All right. Thank you.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Next up is Mr. Buddy Guindon, followed
42 by Mr. Scott Hickman.

43
44 **MR. BUDDY GUINDON:** Buddy Glendon, and I'm a commercial fisherman
45 out of Galveston, Texas and Executive Director of the Gulf of
46 America Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance, our new name.

47
48 Troy, I want to thank you. We've had an interesting relationship,

1 but I've grown to admire it, and so thanks for your service on the
2 council. Tom, I'm going to miss you like a brother. Hopefully
3 you'll hang out and help us with advice.
4

5 I've come here many times asking to fully implement the IFQ in the
6 reef fish fishery, adding the rest of the species and getting us
7 to a full-retention fishery, where we can stop wasting fish and
8 make our fishery more conservation-oriented, and so I hope you
9 give that some consideration.

10
11 I've also been coming here talking about young fishermen who want
12 to keep the system just the way it is, and I think today you might
13 hear some folks come up here and tell you their story about how
14 they have gone out into the industry, and maybe worked for a
15 captain, and they're buying that business, or they're working on
16 buying it. It's expensive, and so it takes a long time.

17
18 When we move forward with having a permit requirement, and moving
19 on out of the fishery in a couple years, you need to consider long-
20 term arrangements, that have been built over decades, where
21 fishermen passed their business down to their deckhands, and their
22 mates, that have helped them make a living their whole life and
23 that --

24
25 In this day and age, it takes many years to pay that debt, and so,
26 as we move forward, maybe consider some ability to honor contracts
27 that have been established that, when you have IFQ, you can't
28 transfer the asset, because that's the only collateral you have,
29 and so you hold that asset as it gets transferred, and so there's
30 a lot to this, and I hope you consider all the caveats that might
31 come up in the near future, and thank you for your time.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Guindon. Do we have any questions?
34 I'm not seeing any. Next is Mr. Hickman, followed by Mr. Ken
35 Haddad.

36
37 **MR. SCOTT HICKMAN:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen of the
38 Gulf Council, and this may be the last in-person. I drove all the
39 way over here to tell Tom congratulations for the great job he's
40 done, and, Troy, you as well. I had a great time last night, and
41 I think I'll take myself back to Texas today.

42
43 I like the idea of using study fleets to maximize efficiency for
44 our data collection in the Gulf. They're doing it in the
45 Northeast, and I works really good. With the upcoming budget
46 constraints we're probably looking at, the council should be
47 looking into doing that.

1 As far as SEFHIER, I appreciate you all getting that going.
2 There's a lot of incredible -- I know you've heard me say this a
3 few times, but great technology available. You know, we've got
4 Starlink cellular coming onboard, and a lot of us have Starlink on
5 our boats already, and we can use a simple app to be able to stream
6 that catch data off our charter boats and straight to the Southeast
7 Science Center.

8
9 I support moving forward with a fisheries ecosystem plan. The
10 importance of making management decisions that look at ecosystem
11 and environmental factors are very important to me. I'm glad to
12 see that the red grouper for stock assessment accounted for
13 environmental variables, and that's an example how an FEP can work
14 and be in an action.

15
16 We need more support in doing that for our future stock
17 assessments, with the FEP work, and I support a lot of what Dylan
18 said. He's one of our best board members on getting on record and
19 saying things. I also support the removal of the twenty-fathom
20 closure, and you all have a great day. I hope we see you sometime
21 next year in-person, and be careful going home.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Hickman. Do we have any questions?
24 Not seeing any, Mr. Ken Haddad, follow by Mr. Chris Horton.

25
26 **MR. KEN HADDAD:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and council members. My
27 name is Ken Haddad, with the American Sport Fishing Association,
28 a trade organization for the sportfishing industry.

29
30 We support the council to begin the process to replace and/or
31 enhance the DESCEND Act provisions that expire in January 2026,
32 and it's one of the priority recommendations of the rec initiative.
33 With few, if any, exceptions, studies have shown that descending
34 devices and venting tools, when properly used, are effective.

35
36 As you've heard with Return 'Em Right, the presentations, momentum
37 on the use of these tools is increasing. We're getting buy-in
38 from the anglers, and there's a momentum here that we would like
39 to see continued, and we think requirements for these tools is an
40 important part of moving forward, and reducing fishing mortality
41 is one of our biggest issues in our sector, and we believe
42 proceeding is extremely important.

43
44 Just a little history, and I came to the council, at least seven
45 years ago, asking to add descending devices to the current -- Or
46 the then current venting tool rule, and the decision was to rescind
47 everything, and so that's why we went to Congress and got the
48 DESCEND Act, a five-year sunset, with the assumption the council

1 would take it up and take ownership in it, and we hope you will
2 move forward with the committee recommendation to proceed.

3
4 Twenty fathoms, we -- If there are opportunities such as this to
5 give us more access, with acceptable impacts to season and bag
6 limits, we think we should proceed. 58B, we are good with Action
7 1, Alternative 2, Action 2, Alternative 3, or maybe 4. In Action
8 3, Alternative 5, and possibly 4. On red grouper, we welcome more
9 fish, as always.

10
11 Dr. Sweetman, on gag, as you know, we're typically pretty adamant
12 against a one-fish bag limit, but, under dire circumstances, and
13 seeing where we're headed with gag, we would be supportive of a
14 one-fish, on a very temporary basis.

15
16 Then, on the rec initiative, I just wanted to say it was -- As a
17 participant in it, I thought it was -- It went beyond my
18 expectations, and we hope you'll look at all of the
19 recommendations, and follow through where you can, and then,
20 finally, I didn't know I was going to talk to Troy and Tom, but
21 you all have become great friends, and we'll miss you, and too bad
22 we won't see you in June. Thank you.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Haddad. We have a question Mr.
25 Osborne.

26
27 **MS. OSBORNE:** I'm just curious. With Garrett Graves gone, who
28 would you think would take up the mantle for the DESCEND Act?

29
30 **MR. HADDAD:** In Congress, we're hoping we don't have to even think
31 about that, and so we have -- I don't know if -- We haven't lined
32 anybody up at this point, but we'll come to you if we need to, if
33 that's possible, but I -- You know, our belief is the council will
34 move forward, and that's not a necessary follow-through.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** One more. Dr. Sweetman.

37
38 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just a quick comment, and I just wanted to say thank
39 you for participating in the recreational initiative. That was,
40 obviously, a big endeavor, and I know it took a lot of time, and
41 so just thank you, Ken.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions? Not seeing any, thanks,
44 Ken. I will echo what Dr. Sweetman said. Thank you for your
45 participation. Mr. Chris Horton, followed by Mr. Chris Niquet.

46
47 **MR. CHRIS HORTON:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the
48 council. Thank you all for the opportunity to speak today. My

1 name is Chris Horton. I'm the Senior Director of Fisheries Policy
2 for the Congressional Sportsman's Foundation, and, to answer your
3 question, Mr. Ezell would probably be the likely candidate there,
4 but hopefully the council can continue down this road with the
5 DESCEND Act.

6
7 You know, we've often countered with some of the comments that
8 have been made over the years at this council about recreational
9 anglers are unaccountable. Well, we're accountable. You give us
10 a season, and you give us a bag limit, and we fish to it.

11
12 We're also accountable, and we went to Congress, because we wanted
13 to do something about reef fish mortality, and they passed the
14 DESCEND Act, and so we're fully supportive of doing that, but, as
15 far as Amendment 58B, obviously, we support Alternative 2 in Action
16 1. We also support Alternative 3 in Action 2.

17
18 Maybe a decade, or certainly two decades ago, recreational anglers
19 didn't have the technology, or the ability, to go out and harvest
20 deepwater -- Or target deepwater groupers, but that has all changed
21 now, and the public -- An aspect of the public does have an
22 opportunity to go harvest a public trust resource, and so I think
23 that it is time to establish an ACL for the recreational sector,
24 and, again, hold us accountable to that.

25
26 Also, I want to thank everybody for their work on the rec
27 initiative. We're very supportive of where we landed. You know,
28 one of the things that we were hoping to see come out of that was
29 encouraging some additional state or regional management, and
30 we're certainly excited to see the council start talking again
31 about going in that direction with amberjack, and so I encourage
32 you to continue to push, and push faster than normal, would be
33 great, if we could we get that fishery under state or regional
34 management, and the sooner the better.

35
36 Then, finally, relative to the amberjack, you know, when I was in
37 grad school, in fisheries management -- The first thing you were
38 taught is, you know, there's three legs to a fisheries management
39 school. There's the people, the fish, and the habitat, and, here
40 in federal fisheries management, we focus almost exclusively on
41 constraining the people, to try to influence the fish, and we do
42 very, very little for the habitat, yet greater amberjack could
43 potentially be suffering from what we're concerned with in the
44 Gulf of Mexico, and that's the loss of offshore oil and gas
45 platforms.

46
47 A Gallaway study, A Benny Gallaway study, in 2020, and it was
48 published for BOEM, estimated that somewhere between 45 and 48

1 percent of the biomass in the Gulf of Mexico of greater amberjack
2 is associated with oil and gas platforms, and we had 7,000
3 platforms in the Gulf of Mexico at one point. Today, we're down
4 to 1,074, as of today.

5
6 We've actually lost seven in the last two weeks, but these things
7 are rapidly coming out. In 2010, the council thought about
8 establishing, or designating, offshore oil and gas platforms as
9 essential fish habitat.

10
11 I don't know why we stopped going that direction, but I would argue
12 that, if we continue to lose biomass that it's important to
13 amberjack, it's going to be very difficult to ever get them back
14 to a rebuilding target, and so I would encourage the council to
15 think about designating offshore oil and gas platforms, again, as
16 essential fish habitat, and so thank you for your time.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Horton. Do we have any questions?
19 Mr. Osborne.

20
21 **MR. OSBORNE:** I'm curious, and, when you bring up the platform
22 issue, have you guys looked at the wind turbines?

23
24 **MR. HORTON:** We're actually working with some members of Congress.
25 We worked with Mr. Graves in the last Congress, and we'll be
26 hopefully, pretty soon, introducing another round of legislation
27 for Rigs to Reef. It's specifically, at this point, targeted
28 towards oil and gas, but we see it as this has precedence for any
29 offshore wind, because anybody in the Gulf knows, if you put hard
30 structure in the water, stuff is going to grow on it, and you're
31 going to have fisheries around it.

32
33 It's been really interesting to see that dynamic the folks in the
34 Northeast with wind, and the angling community is really kind of
35 concerned, of what that's going to mean for them, and I certainly
36 can see that from an access perspective.

37
38 As long as they can continue to access it, but that first
39 presentation on a wind lease sale here in the Gulf last year, or
40 the year before last, or whenever that was, you know, I think
41 everybody in this room really recognized the value of additional
42 hard structure going in the water. It's going to be more fish for
43 us, and so we're good with it, but, yes, down the road, we want to
44 be able to roll that into any administrative rule or legislation
45 that we can get through.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Horton. Next up is Mr. Chris
48 Niquet, followed by Mr. Charlie Renier.

1
2 **MR. CHRIS NIQUET:** Hello. Chris Niquet. Every state has got a
3 copy of this amortization schedule. This is a main for red
4 snapper, and I've got four options that I would like to present to
5 the council members today.

6
7 Number one is leave this program as it is. It's working pretty
8 good. You've got three-hundred-and-something boats that are
9 involved in the taking of red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico.
10 You've got ten or twelve people who don't like the way it's going.
11 Therefore, you've got a 95 percent success rate. The other 95
12 percent of them are out there catching red snapper right now and
13 making money at it. I don't know why the other ten or twelve
14 aren't.

15
16 The next thing is the current program to loan new entries, or
17 people who want to increase their quota, isn't working. They can't
18 qualify to get a loan. This last AP meeting, there was a fellow
19 had an 802 score, and he can't qualify to get a loan for these
20 quota. He can go down the street, and he can get an \$850,000
21 center console to go offshore and go recreational fishing, but he
22 can't qualify to get this quota.

23
24 This amortization schedule is based upon this, 10,000 pounds at
25 \$50 a pound, a twenty-year loan term, at 2 percent. The yearly
26 payments are \$30,353.04. If you're leasing the quota at \$4.50 a
27 pound, which a lot of them are paying more, that's \$45,000 a year.
28 You're making \$15,000 immediately. If you get more than 10,000
29 pounds, you make more. If you're paying more than \$4.50, you're
30 getting more than \$4.50 a pound for it, you make more than that.

31
32 The next is to have the government come in and buy out all the
33 policy -- Excuse me. The quota holders, like myself and others,
34 who want to get out of the program. Fair market value, and
35 distribute them as they wish, to whomever they wish, under whatever
36 circumstance they wish.

37
38 Another one is to take the current quota holders and put them in
39 a program to where the new entries go to the quota holder and say
40 this, that I want to purchase your fish, your quota, and the
41 government says we'll put up the money, under these circumstances,
42 and we'll hold the quota. You fish the allocation and pay us back,
43 but under these circumstances.

44
45 If you don't catch the allocation every year, you lose that much,
46 and why do -- You say why do you say you do that, and it's so that
47 they don't hold the quota and refuse to fish and just lease the
48 quota out. They don't become an investor. They remain a

1 fisherman.

2
3 Another thing I'm against is the twenty-fathom rule on the black
4 grouper. I think you ought to do away with it. I think it creates
5 more dead discards than it does help the grouper situation, and
6 I'm against a one-fish limit for recreational fishermen, unless
7 you just have to institute it. I sure am against the no-fish
8 limit. That's detrimental to millions of fishermen. Thank you
9 very much for your time, and I hope you consider this plan. Thank
10 you very much for your time.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Niquet. Do we have any questions?
13 Not seeing any, thank you. Next up is Mr. Charlie Renier, followed
14 by Mr. Johnny Williams.

15
16 **MR. CHARLIE RENIER:** Hello. My name is Charlie Renier. I've been
17 here quite a bit speaking in front of you all. I was born and
18 raised in the seafood business, and I plan on dying in the seafood
19 business.

20
21 My dad, his biggest thing in life was to make sure every single
22 person in this country who wanted to eat a piece of seafood could
23 get it. He always told me that some people can't afford boats,
24 but they can afford to go out and eat. He made it a lifetime to
25 feeding people. I'm making it a lifetime to feeding people. My
26 daughter is making a lifetime to feeding people.

27
28 Ten years ago, I moved up here from the Keys, and I decided to buy
29 longline boats and quota, because I wanted to make sure I could
30 stay in business. I've bought numerous boats, numerous fish
31 houses, and lots and lots of quota. I lease lots of quota.

32
33 I think it's a fantastic thing that you all did with this quota.
34 I hear people complaining all the time about it, but, you know
35 what, I've borrowed, and I've begged, and I went out and I've
36 worked my ass off to buy my quota, and get my quota, and it's a
37 wonderful thing to know I've got my quota.

38
39 You all have taken a lot of quota from us, and this is the first
40 time I've heard of us getting some grouper quota back, and I want
41 to see it work. I hope it works.

42
43 This emergency meeting about the red grouper, I think it's
44 fantastic. You all are moving forward on counting these fish and
45 figuring it out. Times change, and we want to be with you. If
46 these sports can get these fish this year, and we get our quota
47 next year, that's fine.

48

1 This twenty-fathom curve, to get rid of that and help these sports
2 out, that's fine. Everybody is entitled to these fish. We all
3 want to catch them. We all want to eat them, and it's a great
4 thing that you all have done.

5
6 Now, there are a few problems here and there, and, Dr. Sweetman,
7 I agree with you a hundred percent. We have a terrible problem
8 with gags. We have so many gags that we don't even know what to
9 do with them. We haven't seen the amount of gags since the last
10 two hurricanes. We thought it was bad before, and we were catching
11 gags everywhere. Now we're catching gags where we never caught
12 gags.

13
14 My inshore boats, in 120 or 130 feet of water, are throwing twenty
15 and thirty gags a day back. We're catching them from the Panhandle
16 all the way to the Tortugas. I don't know what we need to do to
17 get you all on our boats, get you out there, and our boats cover
18 the entire Gulf out here. The amount of gags that we have -- Where
19 they came from, I don't know my opinion.

20
21 In my opinion, I think they came from the deep water, and they
22 came in. For years, they pushed out. I think them hurricanes
23 brought them in. I've got people in twenty, thirty, forty feet of
24 water catching twenty-pound gags. That's unheard of. We've got
25 them everywhere. We need to open the gags up and let us catch
26 them. We don't need an emergency closure on them. We need you
27 all to see what's going on.

28
29 We know why we got cut down. We know the girls didn't pick up the
30 big fish. We know what happened, and we've been catching them all
31 along, but now, I mean, there's plenty of them there. Hopefully
32 you all can figure that out.

33
34 Anything that I can do, my fish house, my boats, to help any of
35 you all to keep this industry going, we're there for you. We don't
36 want to catch all the gags. We don't want to catch all the
37 snappers. We just want to feed people.

38
39 We're trying to put in a restaurant to feed people. I want the
40 people to come down and look at the boats, like Buddy has, and
41 Karen has, and look at the commercial boats, and see what happens.
42 Educate people. We're the only ones that can feed them.

43
44 90 percent of our seafood is imported. Look at all the tariffs
45 we're going through now. What's wrong with catching more seafood
46 here? Let's feed them good seafood. We've got the best seafood
47 in the world. All we need is a little help from you all to keep
48 it going.

1
2 I mean it's -- Dr. Simmons talking about no meeting in Key West.
3 You all have a beautiful office in St. Pete. I mean, I've been
4 there numerous times. If you can't go to Key West, can't go
5 anywhere, then let's have a meeting in you all's office. At least
6 let the people that want to come be able to come and talk, and be
7 able to see you all, because a lot of us feel the only way we get
8 anything done is in-person.

9
10 All this stuff over the phone and TV, it's nothing like being in-
11 person, and we all want to contribute. You all are doing a great
12 job. We want to keep it going.

13
14 These two are running off leaving us again. I mean, every time I
15 get to know you all, you're gone, but I appreciate everything, and
16 we're here for all of you, and anything we can do to help, and all
17 we want to do is catch fish, and let everybody catch fish. We've
18 got a lot of fish. I appreciate it. Thank you.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Renier. Do we have any questions?
21 Not seeing any, next up is Mr. Johnny Williams, followed by Mr.
22 Jim Zurbrick.

23
24 **MR. JOHNNY WILLIAMS:** Johnny Williams, Williams Partyboats
25 Incorporated, Galveston, Texas, third-generation partyboat
26 operator out of Galveston.

27
28 Last year, I argued against an increase in quota, but we got it
29 anyway, and it really benefited a lot of people. Unfortunately,
30 it didn't benefit the for-hire sector. We only caught about 70
31 percent of our quota last year. We were penalized because the
32 time that it takes to accumulate the data in a timely fashion, to
33 have the second season open, when it would have been really
34 beneficial to us.

35
36 What I'm suggesting is that we change the fishing season from
37 January 1 and December 31 to March 1 and -- I'm sorry. To April 1
38 and concluding on March 31, and the purpose of this is that we can
39 still open the red snapper fishing season June 1, like we have
40 currently, and then, after we get the data in, at the end of
41 whenever it is, October or November or whatever, and we're short
42 on fish again, like we were last year, we could extend the season
43 long enough into the new year to where we can accomplish our quota,
44 because everybody is getting benefit from it but the for-hire
45 sector.

46
47 We got penalized, because of the way the system set up, and so
48 it's not something that's unprecedented. I mean, like, for

1 instance, king mackerel, the fishing year for king mackerel is
2 July 1 to June 30, and so what I'm suggesting is that we go ahead
3 and we move it.

4
5 Last year, when it opened in November, we didn't have much time to
6 get the word out, and it would be nice to, maybe if we come to
7 that point, say, hey, you didn't catch all your fish, you know,
8 and let us know a couple of weeks ahead of time, and give us a
9 heads-up, so we can get the word out to our people, because that
10 time of the year really isn't that busy for us anyway.

11
12 People are thinking about Christmas shopping, thinking about
13 Thanksgiving, and the weather is not nice off of Texas that time
14 of the year, and I would suspect the same in the other states, and
15 so if you could please just change -- It doesn't take much. I
16 talked to Andy, and he said that we could do it for the recreational
17 sector and not the commercial sector, and it shouldn't be a
18 problem.

19
20 Just change the starting date of the year from the current January
21 1 to April 1 and give us a chance to harvest fish that we're
22 entitled to as well, and, also, I want to ask that you all dismiss
23 the twenty-fathom rule.

24
25 Council members, thank you so much for your time. I appreciate
26 it. We don't -- We haven't always seen eye-to-eye on everything,
27 but we've always had good relationships with everyone, and so
28 thanks again for your service.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Williams. We have a question, or
31 we have a couple of questions. Mr. Frady.

32
33 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you so much for being here. We spoke yesterday,
34 and I understand what you're talking about, about, you know,
35 adjusting the season, kind of like we did the amberjack, as far as
36 like setting the annual allocation to be distributed in the spring,
37 rather than January 1.

38
39 I get that, but, if we can't do that -- You know, we all -- Like
40 you said, we missed the fall season. We missed the Thanksgiving,
41 because of the late, but, if we could ever get to the point to
42 where we could have a standard charter-for-hire red snapper season,
43 whether it be the Friday before Memorial Day, and take it say to
44 the middle of August, to where we could set up and we can have a
45 fixed opening season for red snapper, and we could say October 1,
46 so we something you can plan on, and would that make you happy?
47 Would that be feasible, do you think?

48

1 I mean, that the waves keep us from getting the data, or the agency
2 can make the decision to open or not, but, even though we're
3 catching 74 percent of our quota, I think there should be a little
4 leeway, and have you got any ideas about what we should do to
5 change something around to where can have a fixed fall season for
6 red snapper for the charter-for-hire industry?
7

8 **MR. WILLIAMS:** Well, I think, the way the system is set up right
9 now, Troy, that would be very difficult to do, because you wouldn't
10 know if we were going to catch our quota during the June through
11 August season or not, and the data comes in so slowly that, by
12 October, I don't think we would know.
13

14 One year we did open up in October, and that was great, because
15 the weather is better then, and we didn't have, you know, the bad
16 weather, like we have in November and December, and we didn't
17 everybody thinking about Christmas shopping, and stuff like that,
18 and so, yes, that that worked, but, this this last year, we didn't
19 get the data in a timely fashion, and we didn't open up -- I think
20 it was the 18th, or something like that, of November, and it was
21 just really too late in the year really for us to harvest our fish.
22

23 So, if we change the data, and sure -- I mean, I loved it when we
24 had a fishing season that was fixed every year, but I think we
25 were overshooting our quota quite a bit in those years, and, once
26 again, the reason that it's really detrimental to us is what
27 occurred was that we don't -- You know, if we go over our quota,
28 we lose fish next year, but, if we go under our quota, we're not
29 given additional fish next year, and so we just -- They're just
30 fish lost to us, and so those 30 percent, or whatever it was that
31 we didn't harvest this last year in the for-hire sector, was just
32 lost to us.
33

34 If we changed it, like I say, or suggested, it would give us time
35 to adjust, and, yes, I would rather have a fixed season, rather
36 than anything, but I don't know how that would how that would work
37 if we caught our fish in the summertime, and then if we opened up
38 automatically in October, and then, the next year, we would have
39 to get our season cut quite a bit shorter.
40

41 **MR. FRADY:** Knowing in the past we have not caught our quota on
42 the red snapper for charter-for-hire, would you be willing to
43 sacrifice a little bit in the summer if we could get with the
44 agency to where they could set a set-aside of ACL, and they could
45 figure it out, and they can do anything else, but I'm wondering,
46 and would you be excited if you were able to give up a little bit
47 in order to get a little bit?
48

1 If we could work our way -- Because, I mean, the states seem to
2 have flexibility to set their season when they want to, but, the
3 charter-for-hire, we get hammered in the corner, and we get told
4 the data collection is not available in time so we can set our
5 season, so we could plan.

6
7 I too took a hit last year, because I was -- It was too late, by
8 the time November rolled around, to catch a red snapper, but would
9 you be willing to take a little tradeoff for the summer and give
10 -- Not take as many fish, in order to get a little bit in the fall,
11 because, right now, in the current system, we're not going to get
12 anything done unless we're willing to at least negotiate, I would
13 say, before they at least told us no.

14
15 **MR. WILLIAMS:** Well, toward the end of the summer, our business
16 kind of tails off, because school seems like it's starting sooner
17 and sooner every year, and, when school starts, our business really
18 takes off, or, I mean, tails off during the week, but, to your
19 point there about the flexibility and everything, we had a perfect
20 instrument to do that with 42, and it didn't go anywhere here, and
21 so -- Or at least it hasn't yet, but hopefully one day people of
22 the council will see that's the best way, because I can run my
23 business better than the federal government can, and you can, and
24 everybody in this room can run their businesses better than the
25 federal government can run it for them.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Williams, we have two more questions. Mr.
28 Strelcheck.

29
30 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Johnny, I appreciate being here, and I appreciate
31 the conversation last night. One thing I didn't ask you, and I'm
32 interested in is, you know, we've done a really good job of
33 predicting the fleet season length, and not busting the quota, for
34 quite some time, and, obviously, last year was an anomaly, or at
35 least a surprise, with regard to not hitting the quota.

36
37 I'm curious, from your fishing experience last season, and did you
38 see any sort of downturn, in terms of your business, or fish
39 abundance, that would equate to also not catching the quota?

40
41 **MR. WILLIAMS:** Yes, we did. You know, the weather is a factor
42 that comes into play every year. There's days in Texas where, you
43 know, we can't go fishing, but I think probably people are
44 concerned about the economy. It was an election year, and I'm
45 really pleased with the outcome of the election. Some people
46 aren't, but I think that people kind of -- Were kind of in a down
47 mood, and stuff like that, and they were kind of watching their
48 money a little more closely last year than they have other years,

1 because they -- You know, people seem like they've been working
2 harder, but, with the inflation rate that we had, I think that
3 probably affected our business. Our business was definitely down
4 last year from what it had been several years before that.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Williams. One more from Mr.
7 Walker.

8
9 **MR. WALKER:** So we've been talking about this twenty-fathom
10 closure, and most of us, or a lot of us, talking about it are from
11 Florida, and it's a red grouper discussion. I would like to know
12 how it impacts people on your side of the Gulf. Obviously, it's
13 not a red grouper issue, but I'm assuming it's a scamp issue, and,
14 you know, how are you affected by that? You said you supported
15 getting rid of it.

16
17 **MR. WILLIAMS:** We really don't -- I remember one day my daughter
18 came to me, before she was a captain, when she was only a deckhand,
19 and she goes, Dad, what kind of fish is this, and I said that's a
20 red grouper, and I said the only reason I know that is I saw it in
21 Madeira Beach.

22
23 Bob had some fish that came in from one of his commercial boats,
24 and they were red grouper, and that's where I saw them. We're
25 really not affected by them that much over there, where I'm at.
26 We catch one occasionally. We've actually caught the state record
27 red grouper on our boat, but we don't -- That's not a big part of
28 our harvest.

29
30 **MR. WALKER:** But my question was so it's a scamp issue for you,
31 right, the twenty-fathom closure, or does it impact you at all in
32 Texas?

33
34 **MR. WILLIAMS:** Will it affect me at all in Texas? No, and it won't
35 affect me, the red grouper won't.

36
37 **MR. WALKER:** No, and I know the red grouper, but it also involves
38 scamp, and other shallow-water grouper, and so I assume that's
39 where you have the more impact.

40
41 **MR. WILLIAMS:** We catch a few grouper nowadays, and not nearly as
42 many as we used to. Most of our grouper that we catch now are
43 caught on our thirty-six-hour trips out in very deep water.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Williams.

46
47 **MR. WILLIAMS:** Thank you so much, and thanks again, council
48 members. We appreciate your help.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Next up is Mr. Jim Zurbrick, followed
3 by Mr. Bob Hilliard.
4

5 **MR. JIM ZURBRICK:** Thank you, council, for allowing me to speak.
6 Jim Zurbrick, from Steinhatchee, Florida, a fish dealer, and I
7 commercial fish. Tom and Troy, I'm going to miss you. I guess
8 I'm going to be around here a little longer than you guys, you
9 know, but we appreciate everything you've done, seriously.

10
11 Last night, when we had that recreational initiative get together,
12 I was sitting there thinking about all the things that the
13 recreational guys had come up with, and I really didn't see
14 anything how I feel, which is that hardcore electronic reporting.
15 You know, you get on your phone, and you're going fishing, and
16 they know when you come back, and you've got to declare what you
17 got.

18
19 When I got up here, I didn't want to give them -- I didn't feel
20 like I wanted to give up anything, and so I spoke against the
21 twenty-fathom. I wanted to keep it going, but, now that I'm
22 talking to more people about it, especially the charter guys, and,
23 you know, the federal charter guys are really tied down. They
24 can't do that, because they have a chance to lose their license
25 and all that.

26
27 You know, the fines for a rec guy, and they do violate. My wife
28 Patty and I, before this last storm, we had, you know -- Well,
29 going back a year, but we've had numerous people -- We're fifty or
30 sixty miles offshore, and we're fishing in 130 to 140, and we've
31 got rec guys, you know, out there fishing, and so it is a -- People
32 do violate it, and there is very little enforcement, so something
33 to think about.

34
35 By the way, let's see what happens once you do the analysis. If
36 you really did think about opening it up, what does that do to the
37 length of the rec season? I don't know, and so that's all data
38 and analysis that has to be done.

39
40 The red grouper assessment, I was a little scared of it, because
41 I remember, some years back, and it hasn't been that long ago, we
42 -- The commercial guys said, no, we can't raise the red grouper.
43 We are catching them now, and we're not in those kind of straits,
44 dire straits, but I know that we don't want to see a big dump of
45 red grouper commercially, although I will say this, to be perfectly
46 honest.

47
48 The folks who have been complaining about the price of releasing

1 red grouper, or buying shares, it's getting ready to be split in
2 half, and it makes it very affordable. I mean, think about it.
3 If you could buy a red grouper share, and pay for it in one year,
4 and then you own it, and so that's getting ready to happen with
5 this red grouper increase.

6
7 Discards, we've got to continue to work on discards, and so that's
8 -- That was one of my concerns about the twenty-fathom, but let's
9 see how this shakes out, but I am supporting it now, and I didn't
10 bring my discard report from Mote Laboratory, because I have the
11 cameras on my boat, because I haven't fished since Helene, and so
12 I'm six months, and so I'm like a guy up here who really isn't
13 fishing, and telling you how it is, right, but the other thing is
14 the SEFHIER is so important.

15
16 Think about what we'll getting back once we have a charter fleet
17 and a commercial fleet giving you really good data, supported by
18 groundtruthing, you know, and, also, the gag. Listen, I know,
19 commercially, we're only a small number, and so we see a lot of
20 gags, right, but I -- In Steinhatchee, I'm at kind of the heartland
21 there, and we don't have the quite the pileup that they're seeing
22 in deeper water, or maybe down south a little bit, all right, and
23 so I'm worried for the rec guys, but it's sheer numbers.

24
25 When you've got thousands and thousands and thousands of people
26 going, you need so many more fish than we need commercially, okay,
27 and so I'm wishing you good luck, but I am encouraged that the
28 State of Florida, who I have doubted some of the data collecting,
29 because I was -- You know, but has come forward, and they're
30 concerned, and so it's very encouraging for me, sitting on the
31 sideline, and so thank you.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Zurbrick. We have a question from
34 Mr. Anson.

35
36 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Zurbrick, for providing your testimony.
37 Following up on your comment related to the price of the red
38 grouper share, your opinion is that they'll go down by half, and
39 can you explain that? Did I hear that correctly?

40
41 **MR. ZURBRICK:** You're going to end up where -- We've got history
42 here. Back five or six years ago, when we raised the quota, and
43 remember that was a very controversial -- We raised it, and then
44 we about collapsed the fishery, and we had to rebuild it back, but
45 people were at twenty-five cents, or giving it away, and it was
46 free. The guys that fish for me, they didn't -- Of the quota I
47 had, I just gave it to them.

48

1 It didn't have the -- Because it was an excess, and so what's going
2 to happen is we are going to get -- We're only catching -- Look at
3 what we're catching, and we're going to almost double that. Now,
4 we want it, and what we'll do is we'll gear up, and we'll start,
5 but it's not going to happen like overnight.

6
7 So, when you do give us that quota increase, it doesn't do any
8 good to give it to somebody in October, or November, except for
9 the fact that the guys that still are struggling to find some are
10 going to -- It's going to be much more affordable.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Zurbrick. Not seeing any other
13 questions, next up is Mr. Bob Hilliard, followed by Mr. Billy
14 Archer.

15
16 **MR. BOB HILLIARD:** Good afternoon. Thank you for hearing me. I
17 want to talk about gag grouper and some private recreational
18 fishermen at Clearwater, Florida. That's been my go-to species
19 for fifty years, fishing from high school on.

20
21 We had two major hurricanes this last year in west Florida.
22 People's homes, docks, boat ramps are still in disrepair. It's
23 still a mess, and so that may create, you know, a dip in fishing
24 pressure, and we really don't know that, for this coming year.

25
26 We keep hearing that, you know, the spawning ratios off, that
27 there's not enough males, and they've got to be out deep to spawn,
28 and so, if it's going to be -- If the season is going to be shorter
29 than it was last year, and it was fifteen days, and that was tough,
30 since we've got all the rebuilding going on, why don't we take the
31 hit this one year and shut it down for one year, just this -- Just
32 for 2025.

33
34 If that's too drastic, which it probably is, I support the one
35 fish per person thing, and maybe a slot limit, like twenty-four to
36 like thirty inches, and maybe over thirty per boat, just to give
37 people an opportunity to take some fish home.

38
39 Since they do spawn deep water, maybe a deepwater closure, more
40 closed areas, to let them spawn, and let those females transition
41 to males. There's an opportunity to do something different.

42
43 The nearshore population seems very, very healthy. I went out a
44 couple times, a couple weeks ago, to fish for mangroves, and I
45 probably caught forty to fifty gags between fifteen and thirty
46 inches, at less than fifty feet of water, each day, and so that's
47 all I've got on that one.

1 I also support removal of the twenty-fathom rule. That's an old
2 rule set up when the seasons were real long, or not closed at all,
3 and now they're short, and so that's always been overcome, and
4 it's real hard to enforce too, and so that's all I've got. Thank
5 you, guys.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Hilliard. Do we have any
8 questions? Dr. Sweetman.

9
10 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Hilliard. I appreciate your
11 perspective. I was particularly curious about your thoughts on
12 the bag gag limit reduction, because I know that's kind of your
13 bread and butter, and I've heard you speaking up on the
14 recreational initiative working group here.

15
16 First of all, thank you for your participation. You've attended
17 meetings here at the council itself, to provide your own
18 perspective, and I greatly appreciate that. Just to comment on
19 what you said about a total closure for gag, I think that has --
20 The reason why I'm opposed to that is because it has some
21 unintended consequences, and it makes it really, really hard to
22 reopen it again, once you start losing those data streams, and so
23 that's why I was trying to do something less drastic than that,
24 and I agree with you.

25
26 I think the fishery is healthy. It's improving, and I think that
27 is part of my concern, based on the overages that we're seeing
28 right now, and we're having to manage to this small quota, and
29 we've tried, numerous times, to get an interim assessment, to try
30 and maybe do something in the interim, but we're kind of up against
31 the wall here, and so I appreciate your perspective. Thank you,
32 Bob.

33
34 **MR. HILLIARD:** We don't want to be like the red snapper on the
35 east coast, and so we've got to do something.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Hilliard. Not seen any other
38 questions, and thank you for your participation on the initiative
39 group. Next up is Mr. Billy Archer, followed by Mr. Joshua
40 Ellender.

41
42 **MR. BILLY ARCHER:** Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and council
43 members. Thank you for this opportunity. My name is Billy Archer,
44 and I'm a third-generation fisherman from Panama City, Florida.
45 I'm a dual permit owner, and I also own reef commercial IFQ.

46
47 I brought along my grandson, Avery. He's the oldest, and he turned
48 fifteen this year, to introduce you to the fourth-generation

1 fisherman in the Archer family. I was thirteen when I went to
2 work for my grandfather and father, on a brand-new Harkers-Island-
3 built charter boat, The Captain Buck. Avery started with me last
4 year, at fourteen, working red snapper season, and he intends to
5 work with me this year as well. He's now fifteen, as I mentioned.

6
7 He has the skills and the mindset that he wants to become a
8 professional fisherman. My goal is to help him become successful
9 in whatever he decides to do. I won't be able to attend the Key
10 West meeting in June, but I do want to mention a couple of thoughts
11 about Amendment 59A, 59B, and 60.

12
13 I was able to listen to the recent IFQ AP meeting and was struck
14 by how divided the panel members were. It was obvious to me that
15 rushing to get all three of these amendments done in close
16 succession will be a big mistake. A lot of decent discussion, but
17 very little consensus on how to address the issues of who should
18 qualify to be in this program.

19
20 It appeared to me that people that don't like the IFQ program now
21 don't really have any interest in making it better, and just tear
22 it down so they can get something for free. I hope that doesn't
23 happen. I hope the council taps the brakes on Amendment 59 until
24 you have time to see what the unintended consequences are for its
25 impact on the program's participants. As a matter of a fact, a
26 motion was introduced, but failed by split vote, just to do that.

27
28 Harvest requirements by shareholders should be really thought out
29 as well. Supply and demand will certainly play a big role in the
30 future of this program, and it could be detrimental to those who
31 depend on leasing quota for their businesses. Reclamation of
32 shares, redistribution, hardship cases, situations like with me
33 and my grandson, and how do I pass that quota to him? He's fifteen,
34 and I'm seventy. There's a lot of a lot of things to consider,
35 all a potential Pandora's Box that has never been opened before,
36 and, unfortunately, I do not believe this is the right path
37 forward.

38
39 Also, I would like to mention that I support Dylan Hubbard's
40 concept of the twenty-fathom closure, Dr. Sweetman's concept of,
41 or rationale, for the gag grouper reduction. That's an excellent
42 idea. You know, as long as it's not permanent, I'm good with that,
43 and then thank you for your time.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Archer. We have a question from
46 Mr. Strelcheck.

47
48 **MR. STRELCHECK:** It's good to see you, Billy.

1
2 **MR. ARCHER:** Thank you, sir.
3
4 **MR. STRELCHECK:** A similar question to what I asked Johnny
5 Williams, and so surprised, obviously, that we didn't catch the
6 for-hire red snapper quota last year, and I'm just curious in terms
7 of your perspective about not catching it last year, and what are
8 you seeing, in terms of bookings, and is there a difference from
9 last year to this year?
10
11 **MR. ARCHER:** So, this year, my business is already down. I've
12 seen a big reduction, and I don't know if it's the election or
13 whatever, but, last year, to answer your question, Mr. Strelcheck,
14 it was -- You know, Jim Green has got his pulse on everything over
15 in Destin west, and I think he sent you a survey, and a personal
16 email, with his concern, which we all are seeing. If we're honest,
17 we're all seeing this in the Gulf, from Panama City to Texas, and
18 so the fish are getting smaller, and I have to go further and
19 further offshore.
20
21 I would hope that the council taps the brakes on any increases. I
22 understand that Alabama now has gone to a little longer season,
23 and not raising the bag limit, which is -- Anything that's where
24 you are preserving the catch, you know, protecting the fish, which
25 is what you all are sworn to do, but so it's -- I don't know what's
26 going to happen this year. My June is good, and July not so much,
27 and I always whatever, but I hope it gets better, and I'm sorry
28 that -- You know, I'm thankful to be here with you all, and thank
29 you for asking the question.
30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Mr. Archer. We have one more, one
32 more question, from Dr. Frazer.
33
34 **DR. FRAZER:** It's not really a question, but it's just a welcome
35 to Avery. Welcome to the fishery management process.
36
37 **MR. ARCHER:** Thank you. Anyhow, yes, he's in.
38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, sir. Next up is Mr. Joshua Ellender,
40 followed by Mr. Dale Woodruff.
41
42 **MR. JOSHUA ELLENDER:** Good afternoon. Joshua Ellender, and I'm a
43 fisherman out of Louisiana, chairman of the Louisiana Charter Boat
44 Association, and I'm on various APs as well. Thank you for
45 allowing me to speak today, and I appreciate all you all's service.
46
47 First, I'll start off with shallow-water grouper. I support Action
48 1, Preferred Alternative 2. In Action 2, I support Alternative 2

1 as well in there. Our season In Louisiana is summertime months.
2 Any time before and after that, it gets really rough, with weather
3 and school and whatnot.

4
5 As far as Mr. Hubbard, I support getting rid of the twenty-fathom
6 closure, and, for us, to answer your question earlier, it actually
7 affects scamp and yellowmouth for us, and so like we see it all
8 the time. We've got to release all the time out there when we're
9 more fishing. Deepwater grouper, 58B, I support Action 2,
10 Alternative 3, and, for Action 3, I support Alternative 5.

11
12 Going through the amberjack presentation, as far as sector
13 separation, I'm not for or against sector separation. I just think
14 it should be left up to the states, and so, if that state, or
15 region, however it ends up splitting apart, if they decide they
16 want to do it, then by all means let them do it, but it shouldn't
17 be forced upon everybody across the Gulf of Mexico, because what's
18 that's doing is just -- It's destroying what you're trying to do,
19 as far as getting regional management, or state management, out
20 there, by removing the charter-for-hire captains in that process.

21
22 I would prefer -- For Number 2, on that note, I would prefer state
23 management over regional, but I am not opposed to regional
24 management.

25
26 As far as allocation, that's a tough one, but it could be simple.
27 If we do a regional management set-up, just draw lines right down
28 the middle, 50-50, and it's that easy, right? We'll see if that
29 goes that way.

30
31 Then, as far as the states having the power to decide I think that
32 the Gulf Council and the feds should have an oversight over
33 everything going on, but let the states decide how they catch their
34 allocation, right? You all decide what they get, or what they can
35 catch, and then let them do it however they want to do it, whatever
36 season, whatever fishing, catch limits, yada, yada, yada, all that
37 stuff.

38
39 Obviously, for Number 5, we definitely need accountability
40 measures for state and regional management. That way, you know,
41 if somebody is doing something wrong, we can hold them accountable
42 for that.

43
44 One last thing I would like to say, and I would like to be able to
45 visit, revisit, 50A, when it comes to sector separation, about
46 letting the states decide if we want to be a part of that or not,
47 and so, for instance, for our state, it's kind of had a negative
48 effect between the state capture captains and the federal charter

1 captains.

2
3 There's a lot of disconnect between the two, and a lot of fights,
4 if you will, between the industry, and so it's causing a big
5 headache for everybody. In the State of Louisiana it is, and
6 that's it, if you've got any questions.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Mr. Ellender. Do we have any
9 questions? Mr. Schieble.

10
11 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So I'm not sure, because the schedule changed, and
12 we're going to discuss some of what you just talked about at the
13 end, as the additional Other Business item that was pushed to
14 tomorrow, and so I don't know if you're going to be here tomorrow
15 or not, but it is also an attachment that's in the current agenda.

16
17 **MR. ELLENDER:** Thank you.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any other questions for Mr. Ellender?
20 Not seeing any, thank you, Joshua, for being here. Next up is Mr.
21 Dale Woodruff, followed by Mr. Mark Tryon.

22
23 **MR. DALE WOODRUFF:** Good afternoon. I would like to thank
24 everybody that came out last night to our ACFA social. It looked
25 like everybody had a good time, from the beginning to the end.
26 I'm President of the Alabama Charter Fishing Association, and,
27 also, I have a six-pack boat and a multi-passenger that I own
28 myself.

29
30 I'll continue on with the for-hire data. Let's get SEFHIER going.
31 It looks like that can be an answer to a lot of questions, as far
32 as our catch data, and eventually, hopefully one day, we could
33 call it catch history again, because, right now, I don't know, and
34 catch history is what it is, I guess.

35
36 Pertaining to the groupers and what Captain Dylan had talked about
37 in his testimony, I'm -- We're all for that. Let's do away with
38 the twenty-fathom closure. Hopefully that will give us more
39 access, especially for the scamp.

40
41 Let's work on that red grouper. Let's get an increase there. That
42 way, everybody can have a little bit of a piece of the pie, even
43 though we don't catch very many red groupers in the northern Gulf,
44 where we're at, but, if we do have the opportunity to catch one in
45 200 foot of water, it would be nice to be able to keep it,
46 especially when it's out of season.

47
48 Then we do support the lane snapper, on the final action and the

1 preferred, selected preferred, alternative, on that, also, and
2 then the greater amberjack, and we have a good showing of greater
3 amberjack out here right now. It's kind of -- It's like they just
4 showed up. We went for a couple of years where I would fish a
5 twelve-hour trip and not bring one to the dock, and now I can catch
6 them ten miles out of our pass, with no problem, thirty-four-inch
7 fish, up to fifty-pound jacks, if you can get one to the boat
8 without it getting broke off.

9
10 I fished the other morning, and kept trying to catch vermilion
11 snapper. We didn't have a shark problem, and a couple spots we
12 didn't have a dolphin problem. We had an amberjack depredation
13 problem. We couldn't keep a beeliner, or a vermilion snapper,
14 because of an amberjack breaking us off.

15
16 Luckily, we were using light tackle to catch the vermilion snapper,
17 and so we didn't have to worry about the mortality. They may have
18 swam off with a twelve-ounce high-dollar lead weight and a hook,
19 and that was about it, but, other than that again, thank you all
20 for coming the other night, and I don't know when we're to see you
21 all again. All right. Any questions?

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Woodruff. Do we have any
24 questions? Mr. Anson.

25
26 **MR. ANSON:** I just wanted to thank you, Dale, and the Alabama
27 Charter Fishermen's Association, for hosting the social last
28 night. It was a very good event, and I do appreciate it.

29
30 **MR. WOODRUFF:** Thank you, and I would like to say one thing, that
31 the ACFA is very, very blessed, because we have our Gulf Council,
32 Kevin and Troy, and we have the opportunity to always get to share
33 information, and they share with us, and I know a lot of people
34 Gulf-wide don't have that opportunity, where a Gulf Council member
35 goes to their association, the local association, and I would
36 encourage that, if you're not, because, when you get to see
37 fishermen in rare form, sometimes they're a little bit more okay,
38 because they've got to get up here and share three minutes of
39 whatever they can, but thank you again, Kevin.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, and thank you for the event
42 last night. Next up is Mr. Mark Tryon, followed by Kathryn Birren.

43
44 **MR. MARK TRYON:** Gulf Breeze, Florida, rod-and-reel fisherman, for
45 over thirty years, primarily red snapper. I used to run blue crab
46 traps, for ten years, and I ran charters for ten years, and now I
47 just concentrate on commercial fishing, and I'm going fishing
48 tomorrow. The boat is all iced up and ready to go, and we leave

1 out of here, and then, you know, tomorrow morning, off we go for
2 another twelve to fourteen-hour day trip.

3
4 First of all, with the red grouper, there are more red -- I'm kind
5 of on the outer periphery of where you would find lots of red
6 grouper, and so, when the stock is in good shape, they start
7 filtering into our area, and it's the first time in a few years
8 that I'm catching some, and we're not getting a lot, but, you know,
9 we're getting like one to four keepers a trip, and then some
10 discards, and so that's a good news on that.

11
12 Gag grouper, last year, we got a few. This year, none, and so I
13 don't know what to make of it. I'm not an expert on gag grouper.
14 I think just it's a good idea, with any fishery management, to err
15 on the side of caution, and so I know C.J. is concerned about the
16 stock, and I guess it's good to see that, you know, we're -- At
17 least in that regard, we're concerned about where we're at and
18 protecting the resource.

19
20 My big concern this year is the what are we going to do with the
21 2025 recreational red snapper seasons, and I think I've given you
22 guys data over the years. Since the implementation of state
23 management, my landings have been in decline every year, and they
24 continue to do so, and, you know, it's -- There is definitely an
25 inverse relationship between my landings and the length of the red
26 snapper season, and it just keeps getting longer and longer and
27 longer, and so what are we looking at with the seasons and, you
28 know, what is the council doing, as far as oversight to making
29 sure that the data is good from the states and there is no
30 overfishing?

31
32 The last thing is, on this business of recreational carry forwards,
33 I kind of question that, because, you know, you could have -- Not
34 catching a quota could be a warning sign, and then you're going to
35 carry forward that quota into the next year, and I don't think
36 that's necessarily conservative fishery management, and, on the
37 IFQ side, we're certainly -- We don't do that, nor do I advocate
38 doing that, and so, if we don't catch the quota, that's it. We
39 start at zero again, or not zero, but we start with our normal
40 quota again the next year, and so I would just cautiously look
41 into that, and that's about all I have to say today. Thank you.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Mr. Tryon. Do we have any questions?
44 Not seeing any, next is Ms. Kathryn Birren, followed by Rachal
45 Hisler.

46
47 **MS. KATHRYN BIRREN:** Good afternoon, Chair, Vice Chair, and council
48 members. I am Kathryn Birren, and I am proud to be representing

1 the Florida king mackerel gillnet fleet that came before you here
2 in January, and today I'm here for an update.

3
4 The 2025 season was a great success. Though we faced challenges
5 with a large area of red tide off of the Florida coast, we were
6 able to locate the large schools of king mackerel. This year, we
7 had eleven commercial gillnet boats participate. The first day
8 they caught fish was February 24, due to -- Mostly due to weather
9 conditions. The last day was March 4. That was an eight-day span.
10 Of the actual eight days, seven days were commercially fished.

11
12 The quota for 2025 was 671,328 pounds. We landed 672,523 pounds.
13 We had an overage of 0.2 percent, or 1,195 pounds. That we consider
14 a very successful season. I want to thank you all for allowing
15 the fleet to prove we could successfully harvest our quota.

16
17 The fish this season were located in an area we call No Man's Land.
18 It is approximately fifty miles west of Key West. This is an area
19 that has historically had large amounts of king mackerel. The
20 fleet caught fish in this area during the 1970s and 1980s, but,
21 due to heavy shark infestation in more recent years, we have had
22 to avoid this area.

23
24 This year, with unusually cold weather and water temperatures, the
25 sharks were not as big of an issue during those dates, and we were
26 able to catch the fish. We also felt that those lower temperatures
27 for the water actually encouraged the fish further south.

28
29 On the last day of fishing, all pilots reported seeing very large
30 groups, and tons of groups, of fish bunching, more than we have
31 seen in a very long time, and, obviously, that is good news. With
32 up to 85 percent of seafood consumed in America being imported
33 from the top five countries of Vietnam, Indonesia, India, Chile
34 and Canada, and their unhealthy seafood practices affecting the
35 health and the safety of American consumers, we must take action
36 to do whatever we can to support our American seafood industry.

37
38 Maybe, just maybe, I ask you today to put a little bit of trust in
39 the knowledge of the very hardworking commercial fishermen who are
40 actually out there, who are actually seeing with their own eyes
41 what is happening in our fisheries in the Gulf of America, that we
42 all want to work together to protect. Thank you very much, and
43 I'm here for any questions.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Birren. We have a question from
46 Mr. Sanchez.

47
48 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Hi, and thank you. Thank you for coming.

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MS. BIRREN: Thank you.

MR. SANCHEZ: I wanted to ask you, and I was speaking with George during the season, and he was telling me something that to me I find encouraging, that you all were encountering fish of all sizes, even some nice big forty pounders. Now, the question is I don't know, given the budgetary crisis the government finds itself in, and was the port sampler -- Was he going to the dock and intercepting some of the boats, to get some record of these fish varying, you know, in great sizes, from fifteen pounds all the way to forty? Did that happen, or was it just one of those things that didn't get reported?

MS. BIRREN: I don't have knowledge of whether or not, you know, people were put on the boats, but I know, typically, multiple vessels have someone on the boat that is actually going with them, for the entire time that they're fishing, and so that three or four days, but, yes, we did see a lot of very large fish this year, a lot of fish, and we're hearing, all the way up and down the coast, of people that are catching, and, even as of this morning, I'm hearing about king mackerel that they're seeing off of Panama City, which they said they haven't seen in a long time, and so we were excited.

We were nervous at the beginning, knowing that we had the red tide issue going on, you know, and what were we -- Where were we going to find them, and what were we going to do, and I think -- You know, we have a lot of knowledge between those eleven licenses, and so everybody worked together.

We worked with the pilots, and they located them in an area that they haven't fished in in a while, but the fish were plentiful, and, like I said, I know that each one of you that are sitting here have a specialty of what you are here for, and why you are put on the council, and why you're here today, to put all your knowledge together to come up with the best scenario for the Gulf of Mexico, the Gulf of America, you know, to make sure that our fisheries are sustainable.

I'm going to ask you today to maybe work on some kind of a program where maybe you're working with some of the top of the top of these commercial fisheries, to get the boots-on-the-ground approach and to be able to see what's really unseen by people that are on the outside, that are trying to look in, and I really believe that that would help out a lot in everything you all are doing, and so thank you very much for your time. Is there any other questions?

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Birren.

2
3 **MS. BIRREN:** All right. Thank you so much, and I hope to see you
4 soon, and I'll be in St. Pete, if you do that there. Thank you.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Next up is Ms., Rachel Hisler,
7 followed by Marshall Gross.

8
9 **MS. RACHEL HISLER:** Good afternoon, council. Rachel Hisler, Double
10 Bayou, and I'm representing multiple generations of my family's
11 commercial seafood harvesting business, the oldest of which right
12 now is in the process of divesting, and my husband and I are taking
13 up that mantle, and I was really encouraged to see young Avery
14 here today with his grandfather, because we don't get to see a lot
15 of younger people at these kinds of meetings.

16
17 It got me to thinking about what are the terms that we use to
18 measure success in our society, and I see this a lot with the
19 agricultural families, that also live in the same area that I do
20 of Texas, where there's a perception that you can't be successful
21 without going to college, and getting a degree, and then going out
22 into the world and using that, but I would say that a lot of the
23 people in this room have negotiated success on their own terms,
24 whether that includes a degree or not, but, a lot of times, you
25 send a child off to college, and then they see that they can go
26 another route that doesn't require the, honestly, back-breaking,
27 and sometimes grueling, endless work that is being in the
28 harvesting of food for our country, for our nation.

29
30 We're losing entire generations of people who are not going to be
31 in this business, who are not going to be harvesting food for our
32 nation, and I think that's something that's been in the media quite
33 a bit lately, where we're talking about it's an issue of national
34 security, that we need people harvesting food for the citizens of
35 this country, that comes from this country, and so, in saying that,
36 I would just like you to be very thoughtful, when we come up to
37 considering Amendment 59 and 60 and some of the unintended
38 consequences that we might have on families like mine, but also
39 people who don't have a next generation to pass it down to, because
40 their child has gone on, and they're not going to remain in the
41 industry, because it's just become too hard to be in this industry.

42
43 They just can't -- It's not conceivable to them to remain in this
44 industry, and so just some things to think about, and then I would
45 also like to say, if we're not able to continue to meet in-person
46 for the rest of this year going forward, please think about us as
47 people and not numbers. Remember our faces, and that we are
48 representing entire families, and multiple families at that,

1 because, you know, it's not just my family.

2
3 It's the family of the men who work with us on our boats, and work
4 with us in these fish houses. You know, there's so many people
5 that you can take into consideration for this, and thank you for
6 your service, Troy and Tom. I know I haven't been here long, and
7 so I don't know you as well as some of the other people in this
8 room, but it's been good to know you while you've been here, and,
9 if I am successful in someday being a commercial representative on
10 this council, I would love to have your advice, and insight, and
11 just listen to what you have to say about your time of service
12 here. Thank you.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Miss Hisler. Do we have any questions?
15 Not seeing any, thank you. Next up is Mr. Gross, followed by Mr.
16 Anthony Colletti.

17
18 **MR. MARSHALL GROSS:** Hello. My name is Marshall Gross. I'm Wayne
19 Werner's nephew, and I've been slowly trying to buy quota from
20 him, or, well, from his wife, and buying the boat, and bought --
21 I managed to buy 10,000 pounds in the last three to four years,
22 and now they're trying to change it, where I've got to have a
23 permit to own the fish, but I work on a boat that I'm buying, and
24 I'm slowly like trying to buy the boat, and the permit comes with
25 the boat, and so like I would almost have to go and buy another
26 permit to keep my fish, and it's just like -- It bothers me to
27 have to think about that.

28
29 Like when you all do make these rules and stuff, I just hope you
30 consider like some stuff and the predicament that I'm in, and
31 there's more people too, and I just -- It's hard to buy quota, and
32 you know you've got to start somewhere, and I give -- I saved every
33 dollar I made last year and bought fish with it from her, and so
34 I make her all this money, and then I give up my money for some
35 quota, and I just -- You know, I hope I don't got to lose it
36 because of a rule change in the middle of all of it, you know, and
37 it's been this way, and now they want to change it, and it's just
38 hard.

39
40 I do have the -- I will be able to get the permit from her one
41 day, but, right now, like the rule you all are making, how is she
42 going to sell me her permit when she owns fish, and so it's like
43 I can't win if that passes. Like I've almost got to buy a different
44 boat or something, and it's just been bothering me, and I wanted
45 to express that. That's all I've got to say.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank You, Mr. Gross. We have a couple of
48 questions. Mr. Walker, followed by Mr. Sanchez.

1
2 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, sir, for coming here, and I appreciate
3 that input and, you know, vision into your particular situation,
4 and you're definitely -- You know your situation is not something
5 that we're looking to impact in the way that it might, and so it
6 -- You know, it warrants consideration, and I appreciate you
7 bringing that here.

8
9 **MR. GROSS:** Thank you.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

12
13 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you. I'm going to say the same thing, that -
14 - Thank you for bringing to light some of the unintended
15 consequences that happen when you're doing rulemaking, and you
16 don't see all the potential things that happen, and here you are
17 trying to get into the fishery.

18
19 **MR. GROSS:** I've been on the boat for twenty-three years too, and
20 like the last thirteen I've been the captain, and so, you know, I
21 don't want to go nowhere else. I don't -- You know, that's my
22 boat. I know -- You know, it just -- It's hard to think about.
23 It is.

24
25 **MR. SANCHEZ:** No, and I sympathize, and I appreciate you coming
26 here to share that with us, because we've got to think about a way
27 for these folks, who are going to probably over time buy these
28 shares, or possibly a vessel, and, I mean, these are things that
29 -- Say a mate, and he's going to buy that from the from the captain,
30 and he's probably going to make an arrangement, because they're
31 not made of money, to do it over a good amount of time, and then
32 there is the retirement income for the captain that is exiting,
33 and then this is their entry, and, without these folks, who are
34 the knowledgeable fishermen, that can really, really catch fish in
35 quantity, and promote stability of pricing in the fishery, we're
36 going to lose something that we're not going to be able to get
37 back, and so I appreciate you coming.

38
39 **MR. GROSS:** Thank you.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** One more from Mr. Frady.

42
43 **MR. FRADY:** It's so good to see you here again. I remember meeting
44 you with the Uncle Wayne.

45
46 **MR. GROSS:** Yes, and it's getting hard, man, and I ain't going to
47 lie.

1 **MR. FRADY:** I share what you're feeling. You know, coming from a
2 different world, in transportation, and before that the banking
3 world, we used to do what was called a contract for deed, and I
4 don't know if it's been used in this, and I'm speaking now off the
5 hip right here, but we used to be able to sell property, or real
6 estate, by -- When someone didn't have credit, or didn't have the
7 ability to get the financing from a financial institution, we used
8 to be able to do what's called a contract for deed.

9
10 I don't know why any attorney in this world could not draw up the
11 paperwork between you and your uncle's widow and have something
12 legally, that you can go to a bank and assign that contract for
13 deed, and, when you've made all your payments, according to the
14 amortization schedule, and then she has to sell you -- She has to
15 deed those -- Or transfer those permits over to you, or transfer
16 the quota over to you, and so there's got to be something out
17 there.

18
19 I just don't know what it is yet, and I'm not versed in the
20 commercial industry as much, but I do know, in the real estate
21 world, there are things that exist that banking or financial
22 institutions will honor to serve as collateral, so the investor,
23 or the depositors the bank, will not be exposed to any liability.

24
25 **MR. GROSS:** There's not a lot of federal fishing funds. Like, I
26 mean I've talked at my bank, and I've got collateral, and they
27 still like won't loan me money, because they're like, well, how do
28 you know you're going to catch the fish, you know, and it's
29 different when it's fish. It's different with a bank. It ain't
30 like a house that's sitting there that is worth something, you
31 know, and it's fish you've got to catch, and so the bank ain't --
32 They ain't sounding like you sound, you know, and it's a little
33 different.

34
35 **MR. FRADY:** Well, I understand that all, but all I'm saying is
36 that, if there's a will, there's a way.

37
38 **MR. GROSS:** Yes, and that's why --

39
40 **MR. FRADY:** All the banks care about is making sure they're
41 collateralized, and there ought to be some information somewhere,
42 through the federal government, through SBA, or somewhere that can
43 help people like you, and people in your predicament, to where you
44 can't get the loan. That's all I'm saying, is keep asking
45 questions, because there ought to be a way for future generations,
46 or the next generation of fishermen, to be able to go to a bank
47 say here's a contract, and the bank holds that contract, and holds
48 those shares as collateral, and so I just -- I hope you the best.

1 I wish you the --

2

3 **MR. GROSS:** I mean, that's why I've been trying to buy them straight
4 up, and like I only make so much money a year. I made \$120,000
5 last year, and I gave her every penny of it for 3,000 pounds, and
6 so I got a little break on it. I did, but, you know, that's every
7 dollar I made, and, you know, it's hard to do that. I've got two
8 kids that's about to go to college, and it's just -- It's hard.

9

10 **MR. FRADY:** I applaud you. Don't ever give up.

11

12 **MR. GROSS:** I ain't giving up. You ain't got to worry about that,
13 and you all will see me more, because I need to come to these
14 meetings, and I need to talk.

15

16 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you for coming. Thank you, sir.

17

18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Gross.

19

20 **MR. GROSS:** Thank you.

21

22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up is Mr. Anthony Colletti, followed by Mr.
23 Eric Brazer.

24

25 **MR. ANTHONY COLLETTI:** Good afternoon, council. Anthony Coletti,
26 owner-operator, commercial fishermen for seventeen years. When I
27 bought my boat, I bought my permit, and I knew the program. I
28 knew what I was getting into. I knew it wouldn't be easy, and you
29 have to keep going.

30

31 To make changes, when a lot of people have several different
32 complications, especially with funding, and it's a scary thought
33 for all of us. We work hard, and we respect the industry. Every
34 pound of our fish is accounted for, and we want to keep going.

35

36 In my personal experience, I've made purchases of shares, another
37 boat, and I bought red grouper shares to fish the eastern Gulf,
38 and, right now, I'm fishing out of Louisiana, mainly red snapper
39 fishing, and so, if there's going to be a catch requirement in the
40 future, that may jeopardize a part of my business that I bought to
41 have diversity through my business.

42

43 I don't want to see that happen. As a fulltime commercial
44 fisherman, we have enough, you know, that we deal with on a daily
45 basis just to get through. The Fisheries Funding Program is
46 impossible to navigate through. I've tried, and I perfect credit.
47 I work hard, and I cannot get funding.

48

1 As far as the amberjacks go, they're doing great, and I would like
2 to see some of the amberjacks transferred back to the commercial
3 sector. King mackerel, we had a great run this winter up in the
4 western Gulf. The fish are healthy, all different sizes. I know
5 the red tide affected the boats down south. I have a lot of
6 friends down there. All the way around, I just want to keep
7 fishing, but, with certain rules that may be put into place -- If
8 you don't like the program, don't enter it. That's all I have for
9 today.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Colletti. We have a question
12 from Mr. Sanchez.

13
14 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Not so much a question, but I just want to encourage
15 you to hang in there, to keep coming, because this process is slow.
16 It's difficult, but, if you work it, you can make a difference,
17 and, for sure, if you're not at -- If you don't have a seat at the
18 table, you're going to be on the menu, and so keep coming.

19
20 **MR. COLLETTI:** Well, thank you for that. You know, again, if we
21 don't have the meeting down in the Keys, I hope we get to gather
22 somewhere and continue, you know, communicating and make the best
23 choices for everybody involved. You know, there's a lot of people
24 who really just want to work hard, and I couldn't get to the last
25 couple of meetings, and I was offshore, you know, but thank you
26 for your time, and I hope you take everybody's personal, you know,
27 reasoning and everything into consideration. Thank you.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Colletti, we have another question from Mr.
30 Strelcheck.

31
32 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Anthony, thanks for being here. I'm encouraged,
33 obviously, what you said about western Gulf of Mexico king
34 mackerel, and can you just talk a little bit more about your winter
35 fishing and what you were seeing?

36
37 **MR. COLLETTI:** Absolutely. For the time I was able to get offshore,
38 with the weather, I had limit after limit. The fish were healthy.
39 The sharks are an issue. That's Gulf-wide, east-coast-wide, and
40 that's -- You know, I know we can't really do anything about it
41 with this agency, but, if it wasn't for the sharks, the whole
42 fishery would be different, in my opinion.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Colletti. I have a question for
45 you. You mentioned you were fishing off the Louisiana coast, and
46 you touched on amberjack, and I just wanted to clarify, and you
47 mentioned the amberjack were healthy. Are you talking about off
48 of the coast of Louisiana?

1
2 **MR. COLLETTI:** Yes, I am. On the seven-fish head count, I had a
3 fifty-seven-pound average. You can't ask for anything better than
4 that. You know, I fished the amberjacks, and it was 2,000 pounds
5 a trip. We went to 1,500 pounds a trip, and we went to a thousand
6 pounds a trip. I used to rely on the amberjacks quite -- You know,
7 that was a good part of my business, and I would really like to
8 see us get some of them back.

9
10 The rebuilding -- You know, they're there. You know, a lot of --
11 You know, the oil rigs and structure have been removed, and the
12 fish have relocated, and, you know, some people are not willing to
13 go the extra distance to locate them, but they're there.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you. I appreciate it.

16
17 **MR. COLLETTI:** Thank you.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up, we have Mr. Eric Brazer, followed by Mr.
20 Jason Delacruz.

21
22 **MR. ERIC BRAZER:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Eric Brazer,
23 Deputy Director of Gulf of America Shareholders Alliance. First
24 and foremost, Dr. Frazer and Troy, we really appreciate working
25 with you guys. We really appreciate the time that you put in. We
26 may not have agreed on everything all the time, but it's been a
27 hell of a ride, and I sincerely want to thank you both for your
28 support.

29
30 On deepwater, you know, we continue to support the council applying
31 what you guys did with shallow-water and doing the same thing here.
32 Prioritize the catch limits now, and then provide a more holistic
33 management response, including allocations, in a follow-on
34 amendment.

35
36 Doing this is going to allow you to efficiently address necessary
37 management modifications while ensuring you have time to take a
38 more holistic approach to measures that aren't legally required to
39 be addressed right now. Also, we're really hoping that taking
40 this approach is going to give you the chance to take a little bit
41 more time to address the data uncertainty issue.

42
43 I want to point out, on page 21, something that I think is worth
44 reiterating here, that the PSE about annual recreational landings
45 regularly exceeds 50 percent, and so think about this for a minute.
46 What does this mean? This means, for instance, if you're
47 estimating that landings are 100,000, the real number could be
48 less than 50,000, or it could be greater than 150,000, and that's

1 a lot of uncertainty, and it just doesn't seem right to base
2 allocation decisions on that much uncertainty at this time.

3
4 Regarding the red grouper emergency action, we support using an
5 emergency action to increase the red grouper quota this year. It
6 seems like a great opportunity to shorten the gap of when the
7 science is available and when management measures are implemented,
8 which, as we know is a chronic problem we wrestle with here.

9
10 Also, if you do this right, you can get the recreational sector a
11 longer season, while providing some increased access to the
12 commercial sector. Now, to be clear, if you double the quota on
13 December 15th, we may have a little problem with that, but, if you
14 can move quickly, and get this done as quick as possible, with a
15 reasonable and measured increase, and maybe not 100 percent of
16 what you could do, but something a little more precautionary, then
17 I don't see why we can't make this the win-win that we're looking
18 for.

19
20 Quickly, I just want to say that the recreational initiative really
21 -- I was really impressed, and it looks like it produced some
22 positive results. We appreciate all the work that was put into
23 it, and I really wanted to flag what Emily put up there for
24 discussion earlier about starting the process for turning these
25 recommendations into reality.

26
27 For the twenty-fathom closure, at this time, we support eliminating
28 the closure. Normally this is a bit outside our box, or our
29 wheelhouse, excuse me, but it's, frankly, creating a bit of
30 contention. It's kind of driving a wedge between the different
31 sectors in the industry, and we don't need any more of that, and
32 so, at this time, we support eliminating it. It sounds like this
33 is really important to the charter fleet, and we want to respect
34 that and support them on this.

35
36 A real quick rapid succession, and we support the council's
37 preferred action on lane snapper. We're supportive of moving
38 forward with an action to pick up where the DESCEND Act leaves
39 off, and then our standard plug for more electronic monitoring
40 data opportunities and those elusive commercial electronic
41 logbooks. Thank you.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Brazer. We have a question from
44 Mr. Sanchez.

45
46 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Eric, thanks, first, for reaching across lines and
47 trying to, you know, make this work and being understanding of
48 issues in other sectors that -- Hey, let's all make this work.

1
2 Now on to the question. You were mentioning about economies and,
3 you know, don't go overboard, perhaps, and I don't know if that's
4 the right word, on additional fish, and this and that, and I would
5 want you to further explain your concern. I'm getting the
6 impression that it's a marketing situation, come December, or maybe
7 a price situation or something, and could you elaborate on that a
8 little bit, so that it's very, very clear?

9
10 **MR. BRAZER:** Yes, and, I mean, I think that we just -- We want to
11 be sensitive to the fact that, when you put a lot of new fish, new
12 quota, on the market at the end of the year, it's going to have
13 some market impacts, right, and some of those may be positive, and
14 some of those may be negative, and I would just say that --

15
16 You know, I think Jim Zurbrick talked about some of the potentially
17 positive implications of doing something like that, but I would
18 just say, in a sector that really prioritizes stability and
19 predictability, the more of a runway that we can have on this, and
20 the less of kind of this whipsaw big quota increases, big quota
21 decreases, dumping fish on the market at the end of the year, and
22 it just -- It creates instability, where we frankly don't need it
23 or want it, and so, you know, let's look to the data, and let's
24 look to the analysis, and let's find something that works for the
25 recreational sector, but doesn't, you know, blow the commercial
26 quota out of the water.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Not seeing any further questions, next up is Mr.
29 Jason Delacruz, followed by Mr. Jim Green.

30
31 **MR. JASON DELACRUZ:** How is everybody doing? Tom and Troy, thank
32 you very much. Troy, me and you have been sitting across from
33 each other in APs for a long time, and so I'm going to miss you,
34 and, Tom, you have been an incredible council member. I really,
35 really appreciate all your work. I'm sorry to see you go.
36 Hopefully you'll be back on the next cycle.

37
38 The only thing I'm here to talk about is lane snapper. Just
39 kidding. On the red grouper issue, let's get that done and give
40 some relief to the charter boat guys. They need it, and it's just
41 a bad look for us. Let's not get too carried away. Let's get it
42 done quick. The faster the better.

43
44 There will be a little market uncertainty that happens in the quota
45 side of it, but that's not the end of the world. We can manage
46 that. The way we catch our fish in grouper is different, and so
47 it's not going to be as bad as it was if it was a big snapper dump.

48

1 Wow, and usually I don't draw a blank, and I'm kind of drawing a
2 blank right now. The other side of kind of what I was thinking
3 was so you met two guys that I think are great fishermen, and are
4 great guys, and so Marshall and Anthony are good fishermen.
5 They're really good guys, and I think they gave you guys a prime
6 example of what the real world looks like for us, and, Troy, I
7 appreciate what you're saying, but you can't do that.

8
9 You would be amazed at the amount of uncertainty that this 17 puts
10 out in the universe. It scares these shit out of a bank. A bank
11 won't touch us. It never happens, and they are right. The fishery
12 finance is a challenge-and-a-half, and very few people have managed
13 to make it through, and so that's almost not a viable option. I
14 hope you guys can really look in your heart and see that these
15 examples are realities, and these things are happening all over
16 the place.

17
18 I have two of the guys that fish for me that want to buy the boats
19 for me, and I don't know how this plays out and whether I can even
20 sell them the boats in the future, depending on how all this goes,
21 and so there's a factor with that too, and so I just -- I just
22 really hope you guys reflect on that, and, whatever the thing that
23 I forgot is, I guess I just forgot it. Thanks.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Jason. Not seeing any questions, next
26 up is Mr. Jim Green, followed by Ms. Susan Boggs.

27
28 **MR. JIM GREEN:** Hello, council. Captain Jim Green. President of
29 DCBA and CFA. Concerning groupers, both associations defer to
30 captain Dylan Hubbard's testimony, but it is important to emphasize
31 the Captain Hubbard initiative with removing the inequity, the
32 inequitable and unenforceable twenty-fathom closure.

33
34 We support an emergency rule for extending the 2025 red grouper
35 season, from the findings within the stock assessment, as well as
36 a streamlined document for the implementation of catch levels and
37 address the allocation distribution, once these catch levels have
38 been implemented.

39
40 Concerning the loss of the headboat survey dockside sampling funds,
41 we greatly urge the Gulf Council, the Southeast Regional Office,
42 and the Science Center to do all within its power to preserve the
43 longest-running data collection program in the Southeast.

44
45 There was discussion in the committee about the process of
46 prioritization, and how that some of the budget items might
47 essentially suffer, but there was also a question that was asked
48 about how many species besides lane snapper does the lack of

1 validation effect from the headboat survey, and the answer was
2 essentially all of them. I think that's a pretty clear and
3 unmistakable marker for how important it is to preserve this
4 program.

5
6 This is not just for a subset of the for-hire industry. It is
7 utilized in some way or another for most all the catch advice for
8 all sectors in the Gulf, and so please make it the priority when
9 it comes to appropriating funds.

10
11 When it comes to the new for-hire data collection program, please
12 continue to push forward. We have had two AP meetings, with all
13 motions passing unanimously. This is from the most diverse group
14 of for-hire fishing company owners, captains, and representatives,
15 and not just in perspective, but in geographic areas from all
16 across the Gulf.

17
18 I'm proud of everyone on that AP that participated in the meetings.
19 There has been a willingness -- There was a willingness to
20 understand, engage, and figure out a solution, and I believe that
21 it is a testament to how important this program is to our industry.
22 I know there's a lot of uncertainty, and a lot of government -- A
23 lot of government scrutiny on how funding is, more so than for
24 others, but it's important to note that we should continue to work
25 and get it across the finish line.

26
27 We support the lane snapper on the final action to be taken.
28 Concerning the amberjack presentation that we saw today, we fully
29 support the Gulf States fleshing out state or regional management
30 for private anglers, but the federal for-hire industry would be
31 more in support of fleshing out what sector separation would look
32 like for us, and so there's a lot to unpack in that document.
33 There's a lot of analysis. I'm not saying that that's the way it
34 is, that we're, you know, going in there blindsided by it, but we
35 definitely want to see what sector separation does for our
36 industry.

37
38 I also wanted -- I could have a little leeway, Mr. Chairman, I
39 also wanted to comment on Captain Johnny Williams' idea about
40 moving the snapper season. I almost -- I want to elaborate a
41 little further. I think a May 1 start would be better. I think
42 it would allow us to be really more nimble, and we could utilize
43 those fish that were left on the table last year. We could have
44 had a spring season, and so it's nice to have that ability, and
45 so, if that gets explored, I think that we could find a lot of
46 support for that in our industry.

47
48 Troy, it's been a pleasure getting to know you. I appreciate your

1 time on the council. Dr. Frazer, I've learned a lot from you, and
2 I've enjoyed getting to know you as well, and so thank you all
3 very much.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Green. We have a question from
6 Dr. Sweetman.

7
8 **DR. SWEETMAN:** You know what I'm going to ask.

9
10 **MR. GREEN:** Yes, I support the twenty-fathom closure.

11
12 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I know you said you deferred to Dylan on groupers,
13 but I'm going to put your feet to the fire about gag.

14
15 **MR. GREEN:** I think it's a very innovative way that you've thought
16 about it. I would -- I'll be honest with you that I really hesitate
17 at the idea of it. I think it would be hard for a lot of people
18 to wrap their head around on it, on why we would do that exactly,
19 and maybe not so much the people in this room, but the general
20 public, but, you know, we're at a point where we really just need
21 a stock assessment so bad, and it's like a band-aid or something,
22 and I'm not going to fight you on it.

23
24 I won't die on that hill, but I really think that, if we get a
25 very short window, people are probably going to expect their two
26 fish. They're going to -- You know, they're going to be like we
27 gave up a fish for exactly what, you know, and I think that would
28 be a hard sell with a lot of the public person, per se, in my
29 opinion, but I still support you C.J. Keep trying, buddy. Thank
30 you so much.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Green. Next up is Ms. Susan Boggs,
33 followed by Ms. Leann Bosarge.

34
35 **MS. SUSAN BOGGS:** Good afternoon, and Jason Delacruz supports
36 removal of the twenty-fathom rule, just so you know. Good
37 afternoon. First of all, on behalf of the Gulf Shores and Orange
38 Beach Tourism Board, we would like to welcome you all to the
39 Alabama beaches. I serve on the board, and they wanted me to
40 welcome you all here. My name is Susan Boggs, with Reel Surprise
41 Charters and Marina, and I made some bullet points, because there
42 is so much to cover in so little time.

43
44 First, Dr. Frazer, I can't tell you how much I have learned from
45 you over the years. Troy, it's been a pleasure knowing you as
46 well. Good luck in your future outside of the Gulf Council.

47
48 My husband and I own Reel Surprise Charters and Marina here, or in

1 Orange Beach, because you're in Gulf Shores. In Orange Beach, and
2 we have a sixty-five-foot headboat that he captains, and we have
3 -- It's federally permitted, and then we have a thirty-six-foot
4 six-passenger boat, that is also federally-permitted, and that is
5 operated by our daughter, who is a hundred-ton licensed captain,
6 and so, needless to say, the issue with the headboat data
7 collection is very near and dear to our heart.

8
9 We've been participating in it since we bought the Reel Surprise
10 almost twenty-three years ago, and so we've been through the paper
11 logbooks, the electronic logbooks, the changes with reporting the
12 data collection, and so I think you all can tell how I feel about
13 data collection, and I shouldn't say data collection, but, the
14 economic questions that go along with the reporting, we have no
15 issue with that.

16
17 I had no issue with it was SEFHIER, but the main thing I'm here to
18 say today is that is the longest-running data collection system in
19 the Southeast and the Atlantic, and to lose that dataset, and, in
20 documents that you all have to prepare and look at to make your
21 decisions, it would be a huge loss.

22
23 You don't want to start over, and you can't start from square one.
24 That information is vital and very important to continue on. I
25 don't know if it's a possibility, and I'm looking over at NMFS, to
26 look for some cooperative research programming funding from the
27 Southeast Fisheries Science Center to possibly carry this program
28 through until some permanent funding can be found.

29
30 I do encourage the Science Center, as the council works on SEFHIER
31 2.0, that, when looking for funding for SEFHIER 2.0, they find the
32 funding for the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey plan to move
33 forward with it. I don't think you can roll the headboats into
34 SEFHIER 2.0, because you lose that dataset, and, as they said
35 yesterday, how many species? All of them, and you can't, again,
36 start from square one and try to manage this fishery.

37
38 We hear it all the time with data collection, that even with the
39 first SEFHIER program -- Yes, we're going to get it on the water,
40 and, well, how many years until we can use the data, and two,
41 three, five years. You don't need that gap in data. You've got
42 to have the data from the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey. I'm
43 out of time. Thank you, and I'll submit written comments. Have
44 a good day.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Boggs. We have a question from
47 Mr. Strelcheck.

1 **MR. STRELCHECK:** A question and then a comment. What else would
2 you like to tell us today?

3
4 **MS. BOGGS:** Very briefly, the twenty-fathom line, I think it's
5 very hard to enforce. I've said, for years, and my husband has
6 said for years, if you can't enforce it, don't make it a rule, a
7 law, a regulation, and just don't do it.

8
9 The red snapper season, I know there's a lot of angst, and, when
10 I say this, if the Gulf Council would just humor the idea of
11 pushing the start date back to January 1, to allow the flexibility
12 as the seasons continue to get longer, and a lot of people say,
13 well, Ms. Susan, that's because you want red snapper in January
14 and February, and I'm not going to disagree, but that's not the
15 reason why.

16
17 As these seasons continue to get longer, it seems a shame that
18 this council has to go through the process of some kind of an
19 amendment, or rule change, or not a rule change, but to say, okay,
20 well, now it's going to be June 1, or it's going to be the Friday
21 before Memorial Day, and then, the next year, it's going to be May
22 1, and then the next -- Just keep it simple.

23
24 Give the agency some flexibility to be able to open the season
25 when it allows. At the very least, I think back to when our
26 seasons used to be April 21 to October 31, and so look at an April
27 21 start date. Just give some leeway to the agency.

28
29 The rec initiative, I gave my comments last night about that, but
30 I heard, today, something about trust. The fishermen have to put
31 trust into this council, just as much as this council has to put
32 trust in the fishermen. It works both ways.

33
34 The lane snapper, just real quickly, I would suggest a twelve-inch
35 size limit, to give those fish two spawning cycles before you catch
36 them and kill them and take them out of the water. That's just a
37 thought, but I think you all have made up your minds, and so I'm
38 not going to dig my heels in on that.

39
40 Amberjack sector separation has been discussed for years, along
41 with the other species of red grouper, gag grouper, triggerfish,
42 and, I mean, we have this conversation over and over again, and
43 then I'm going to save my last comment, and I'll put it in writing
44 to those that need to hear it.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Boggs. Mr. Strelcheck.

47
48 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so my comment is so I really appreciate

1 Billy Archer bringing up his grandson Avery, and so I know your
2 daughter can't be here tonight, because she's in school, but I
3 just wanted to say thank you to her for inviting me and Carrie and
4 our teams to come talk to her and a number of young captains on
5 Monday night. Thank you.

6
7 **MS. BOGGS:** Well, I have to say she's not in school. She's actually
8 fishing today.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Boggs. Next up is Ms. Leann
11 Bosarge, followed by Mr. Richard Fischer.

12
13 **MS. LEANN BOSARGE:** Thanks. So today I'm not going to speak to
14 you as your Shrimp AP chair. I'm just going to speak to you as
15 Leann Bosarge, and, for those of you that maybe don't know me so
16 well, I guess I'll give a little introduction. Most of you do.

17
18 I've worked at our family business since about the time I could
19 walk, Bosarge Boats. We have six offshore shrimp boats that we
20 own and operate in both the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic.
21 I made my first shrimping trip with my daddy when I was about nine
22 years old. I'm on land now, but that's only because I have to be.
23 If it was up to me, I would be on the boats, but Daddy said I've
24 got four kids, and he's too old and worn out to raise them for me,
25 and so I've got to stay on land.

26
27 First, I want to thank the council for retaining your preferred
28 alternative in the shrimp framework document, Alternative 3, the
29 scientific ELB program. I also want to thank Andy and Clay for
30 putting up with me. I've got a lot of respect for both of you
31 all. Seriously, I do. You all are some of the most intelligent,
32 hard-working men that I know, and I absolutely cannot stand to
33 have to do battle with you. It nauseates me, and so I'm looking
34 forward to tomorrow, when hopefully that's over and behind us.

35
36 So, when I speak to you as the AP chair, a lot of times we have to
37 get down in the weeds, and we're deep into the into the details.
38 I wanted to just kind of step back today and kind of paint a
39 picture for you all of how I see the shrimp ELB program and the
40 decision that you've got to make tomorrow.

41
42 First off, I want the council to realize we already have a shrimp
43 ELB program, right? It's up, and it's running, and it's doing its
44 job. It's collecting basic shrimp effort data. It's been doing
45 that for twenty years.

46
47 For about the first ten years or so, we had an outside contractor,
48 LGL, that was running it, with Dr. Benny Gallaway, and then the

1 Science Center took it over around 2013 or 2014. This is not the
2 first time that we've been through a transition where we had to
3 upgrade the technology, right, and so, right now, the system is
4 operating.

5
6 There's two things that we've got to give some attention to. We
7 need new boxes on the boat, to get us to 4G technology, so that it
8 will transmit, and we needed a new server at the Science Center,
9 a cloud-based server, to receive that data, and so the server is
10 in place.

11
12 We've already got about a hundred boxes on the boats. NMFS has
13 some more funding that they're going to use to ramp that up to
14 about 300 boxes, that they're going to pay for for the fishermen,
15 right, with that alternative. It's not purring like a cat, but it
16 will be once you get those boxes up to about 500, and I hope that
17 NMFS will use some of the money that they have left, that the
18 industry went and got for them, to get us up to that 500-box level,
19 to pay for those boxes for the fishermen. Then we're meeting that
20 requirement of doing as well -- Of doing as good, or better, as
21 what we've done for the last ten years.

22
23 I'll shift gears for just a second, if you'll allow me, Mr.
24 Chairman, and let's talk about funding, and so, to talk about
25 funding, we've actually got to talk about tariffs, and I think
26 it's something that a lot of people don't realize, and not these
27 new tariffs that just went into place last week, and not that, but
28 the tariffs that the industry went to the Federal Trade Commission,
29 and we paid attorneys, and we had to plead our case and show that
30 we were being harmed by illegal trade, right, and those tariffs
31 that go in place on imported shrimp.

32
33 At first, those tariffs, a long time ago, were coming to the
34 fishermen. It didn't take long for the government to figure out
35 they would rather have that money, and so that changed. The money
36 now goes to the government, okay? However, 30 percent of the
37 tariffs on imported seafood gets set aside at USDA, and there was
38 a law that was put in place that required that 30 percent to be
39 transferred from USDA to NOAA Fisheries.

40
41 That's how much those transfers are in the last couple years. In
42 2023, seafood tariffs -- NOAA Fisheries received \$362 million in
43 2023. In 2024, they received \$377 million. That's approximately
44 one-third of their annual budget. When I brought this up in the
45 past, I was told, well, yes, but that goes to Headquarters, and we
46 don't have any discretion over how that's spent.

47
48 I can go with that argument if it's a little bit of money, okay,

1 if it's a couple million. When it's a third of your budget, I
2 don't think we're at a spot where you need to look at the largest
3 fishery in the Southeast and tell us that you don't have the
4 funding to put 500 boxes on boats and collect the most basic
5 scientific shrimp data, effort data, effort and landings. That's
6 what we use for everything. We're not asking for the moon.

7
8 However, you told us you didn't have the money, and so the industry
9 went to Congress, and we pleaded with Congress and said, look, we
10 want to continue this scientific program, and please send the
11 Science Center some money to help us continue this program.

12
13 We managed to get \$1.7 million specifically for continuing the
14 shrimp ELB program, and here we are again being told we just don't
15 have the money, and you'll have to pay for your own boxes, and
16 we're just going to have to move you over into law enforcement or
17 something, if you don't want to do that.

18
19 No, and the money is there. It is a question of priorities, and
20 it's time that we again became a priority for the Science Center
21 and the agency. The way I see it, you still have a little bit of
22 that last \$850,000 left. Use it wisely. Get 500 boats total on
23 these boxes, and let's keep rocking and rolling, the way we always
24 have. Thank you.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Bosarge. Do we have any questions?
27 Not seeing any, thanks, Leann, and next up is Mr. Richard Fischer.

28
29 **MR. RICHARD FISCHER:** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the
30 council. Thank you all so much for having me this afternoon. I'll
31 start out on electronic reporting. First of all, I want to thank
32 you all as a body for putting me on the AP, my first AP experience,
33 and it was a great experience. I also want to thank staff for
34 allowing me to participate remotely at the last meeting. It was
35 kind of one of those days where I had to be in two places at once,
36 and you all helped me do that, and so thank you very much.

37
38 I'm not an economist, but I think I support the compromise that
39 was discussed today on the estimated trip fee. There was a lot of
40 work, and discussion, that was put into all of the intended and
41 unintended consequences of making sure that the agency, and the
42 economists, get what they want, as well as protecting the captains
43 from some liability, and I think that gets us there.

44
45 Also, speaking of the AP, I really have to commend Captain Green
46 for doing such a great job as the chairman, and really guiding the
47 conversation in a fair, productive way throughout not only this
48 meeting, but the first meeting as well.

1
2 Still with electronic reporting, but talking about the document
3 that you all saw yesterday, and we talked about some of the costs
4 that are associated with it. I would really -- I appreciate some
5 of the questions that were asked. I would really like the council
6 to explore some other questions as it pertained to why would doing
7 it separately cost about eight-times as much.

8
9 Look, I get that it would cost at least twice as much, if you're
10 doing this communication and then that communication, but eight-
11 times as much sounds like a lot, and, with all of the itemized
12 stuff that was on there to contribute it to being eight-times as
13 much, wouldn't a lot of that, if not all of that, stuff have to be
14 done anyway, if you're doing it in conjunction with electronic
15 reporting, and, if it doesn't, then why not? Like is that going
16 to be as effective as an economic study, and so I just would like
17 to see the council ask some of those questions moving forward.

18
19 On grouper, ditto what Josh said, as well as getting rid of the
20 twenty-fathom closure. On the grouper season opening, I think, in
21 Louisiana, we would prefer alternative -- Amendment 2, but we could
22 live with Amendment 3 on the months that the season gets open, and
23 I want to thank Billy for your comments yesterday as it pertains
24 to how regional or state management could really kind of give
25 everybody all they want here.

26
27 Thank you all so much for the amberjack regional management state
28 management discussion that happened earlier. It was two-and-a-
29 half years coming, but it was a great conversation, and it was a
30 great first conversation, of what is going to be many, and I look
31 forward to participating in the process with you all.

32
33 I know there are constraints, and other factors, but it was a bit
34 of a gut punch to hear that, hey, thanks for waiting two-and-a-
35 half months, but now you're going to have to wait seven more
36 months, but that's kind of the way things go, and, real quick, I
37 do want to address one comment that I heard earlier during the
38 presentation, where it was stated that commonsense dictates that
39 the fish are where the fishermen are.

40
41 I would just like to say that, from a biomass standpoint, I
42 completely disagree with that statement. When we're talking about
43 depleted stocks, and localized depletion in different areas, to
44 me, commonsense would dictate that the fish are where the fishermen
45 aren't, and I think, as we continue to look at biomass, and
46 hopefully we consider biomass as a bigger portion of how allocation
47 gets decided in state or regional management, or really just
48 allocation in general, I just kind of wanted to make that

1 statement, because I heard that earlier, and was like, yes, I've
2 got to say something on that, and so thank you all so much for the
3 time, and I'm happy to address any questions.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Fischer. Do we have any questions
6 for Richard? Not seeing any, thank you, Richard.

7
8 **MR. FISCHER:** Thank you.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. That will conclude our public comment
11 session today. Dr. Frazer.

12
13 **DR. FRAZER:** I just wanted to say a couple things, if I could.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Sure.

16
17 **DR. FRAZER:** I'm planning on this being my last meeting in-person.
18 A lot of good friends, and I probably didn't say thank you enough.
19 You guys spent a lot of time talking to me on the phone, sharing
20 with me what you do, and I really appreciate it. You know, I hope
21 I've worked hard for you. I really do, but the thing that is most
22 important is you invited me in your houses, on your boats, and you
23 shared with me information, and I learned a lot. I learned more
24 from you probably than you ever learned from me, but I'm most happy
25 that I'm going to walk away with a lot, a lot of friends, and so
26 I appreciate all the kind words.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Very well said, Dr. Frazer. That concludes our
29 public comment today, and we're going to take a fifteen-minute
30 break, and I would like to knock out a report or two before we
31 break. Mr. Osborne, and then we're breaking.

32
33 **MR. OSBORNE:** Troy and Tom, I really appreciate getting to know
34 you as well over the last, you know, year that I've been on, or,
35 well, not even quite a year yet, but I also want to acknowledge
36 Camilla too, and this is her last meeting here, and she was going
37 to sing earlier, but they didn't have the soundtrack. Without her
38 and the folks back there, we wouldn't be able to get this done,
39 and so thank you, Camilla, as well for all that you do for us.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Osborne for those words. Let's
42 take a fifteen-minute break. Thank you.

43
44 **COMMITTEE REPORTS**
45 **CORAL COMMITTEE REPORT**

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. We'll get started. Okay. We're going
48 to knock out some committee reports this afternoon. We are

1 scheduled to work until 5:30. I'm not saying we will, but I would
2 like to knock out a few reports, and we're going to start with the
3 Coral Committee report. Dr. Sweetman.

4
5 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Coral Committee, the
6 committee adopted the agenda, Tab N, Number 1, and approved the
7 minutes, Tab N, Number 2, from the January 2023 meeting as written.

8
9 Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Restoration Blueprint Final
10 Management Plan and Draft Memorandum of Agreement between the Gulf
11 and South Atlantic Councils, NMFS, FWC, and the Florida Keys
12 National Marine Sanctuary, Tab N, Number 4, Ms. Beth Dieveny,
13 Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, presented on the Florida
14 Keys National Marine Sanctuary restoration blueprint final rule
15 and final management plan, summarizing the work completed to-date
16 and highlighting that the Governor of Florida has vetoed the final
17 rule proposed for state waters.

18
19 As such, staff at ONMS are coordinating with NMFS to implement
20 regulations of the blueprint final rule in federal waters. Further
21 efforts with the blueprint and coordination between state and
22 federal orders are ongoing, and staff will coordinate with the
23 council to keep them informed. Ms. Dieveney also provided a high-
24 level review of the draft memorandum of agreement, or MOA, between
25 the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, NMFS, FWC, and the Florida
26 Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

27
28 Dr. Sweetman summarized the comments from the South Atlantic
29 Council and opened the floor for committee discussions and
30 comments. A council member inquired on the rationale behind the
31 South Atlantic requesting inclusion of a definition of habitat
32 support structure, or artificial reef, in the MOA. A committee
33 member replied that this language is likely a result of ongoing
34 allocated funds to the state to investigate the use of artificial
35 reef structures to enhance reef structure and ecosystem dynamics.

36
37 Another committee member inquired about the permitting process for
38 the use of artificial reefs within the Florida Keys National Marine
39 Sanctuary and plans for ongoing monitoring efforts with future
40 planning of use of artificial reef structures.

41
42 A committee member replied that the permitting process between
43 coordinating agencies may involve both state and federal agencies
44 and that the funded project to incorporate habitat support
45 structures includes continued and ongoing monitoring to assess the
46 impact of habitat support or artificial reef structures in
47 improving marine resources within the sanctuary.

1 A council member noted that the MOA outlines the procedure for
2 agencies to coordinate fishing regulations. Currently, artificial
3 reefs are not included in fishing regulations and inquired if this
4 language is better suited for the blueprint rather than the MOA.
5 Ms. Dieveney noted that, at this time, staff are collecting
6 feedback and comments on the MOA for consideration from both the
7 South Atlantic Council and Gulf Council to update the MOA, with
8 the intent being focused on coordinating fishing regulations.

9
10 NOAA General Counsel stated that the suggestions by the South
11 Atlantic Council are not substantive, noting that the MOA does not
12 address any authority changes, nor does it affect the regulatory
13 structure within the sanctuary or the permitting process. The
14 agencies will continue to coordinate on permitting processes and
15 other regulatory issues.

16
17 Council staff inquired about the timing of the blueprint and the
18 draft MOA for the council to provide input. Ms. Dieveney noted
19 that staff will keep the council informed of ongoing blueprint
20 regulatory implementation in federal waters and that staff will
21 coordinate to bring back a final version of the MOA to the council
22 with any suggested edits.

23
24 The committee chair summarized the discussion and highlighted that
25 there are no substantive additions or recommended changes to the
26 current MOA, but further discussion and recommendations may take
27 place at Full Council, and I believe, just to try and wrap this
28 one up, there might be a motion on the table here.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Dr. Frazer.

31
32 **DR. FRAZER:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and so I do have a motion,
33 if we can pull that up, Bernie. So, just based on the discussion
34 that we had in the committee, particularly as it relates to the
35 relationship between the various entities involved, and we'll see
36 that motion here real quick.

37
38 **I just think it's imperative that we continue to move forward, and**
39 **so the motion reads: The Gulf Council recommends moving forward**
40 **with finalizing the memorandum of agreement, or MOA, between the**
41 **Gulf and South Atlantic Councils, National Marine Fisheries**
42 **Service, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission,**
43 **and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.**

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you. Dr. Frazer. We have a motion
46 on the board. Do we have a second? Mr. Walker. Is there any
47 discussion on the motion? Not seeing any, is there any opposition
48 to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries. Dr. Sweetman.

1
2 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.
3

4 **CLOSED SESSION REPORT**
5

6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Next, we will
7 move into the closed session committee report, and I'll read that.
8 The committee met on April 7. The Selection of Spiny Lobster
9 Advisory Panel members were chosen. The council made the following
10 appointments to the Spiny Lobster Advisory Panel: Casey Butler,
11 Joshua Nicklaus, George Niles, Daniel Padron, Jerome Young. Are
12 there any questions on that those selections? Okay.
13

14 Moving on, selection of the 2024 Law Enforcement Officer or Team
15 of the Year, the council reviewed the nomination information and
16 recommendations received from the Law Enforcement Technical
17 Committee. The council selected FWC's Offshore Patrol Vessel, or
18 OPV, Trident team for the 2024 Law Enforcement Officer of the Year.
19 The team will be honored at the next council meeting held in
20 Florida, and that concludes my report. Are there any questions?
21 Not seeing any, okay, and let's move on to Mr. Donaldson. Dr.
22 Simmons.
23

24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think
25 the staff's thought process is we would just wait until we meet
26 next year in June in-person to give this award, and so unless we
27 figure out something else in the interim, but that's our thought
28 right now.
29

30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any questions or comments or concerns? No? Okay.
31 Thank you. Okay, and let's move to Mr. Donaldson's report from
32 the Gulf States, and then we'll -- It will be followed by the South
33 Atlantic report.
34

35 **GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION REPORT**
36

37 **MR. DONALDSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Bernie, if you can pull up
38 my presentation, and I'm just going to update the committee, or
39 the council, on the Inflation Reduction Act funding that we
40 received. You can go to next slide.
41

42 As a reminder, there was three main tasks for the agreement that
43 the Commission got. It's to improve the state and commission data
44 management system, centralize the state recreational data at the
45 commission, and convene three workshops validating fishing
46 efforts, improving released catch data, and then improving the
47 data standards and warehouse.
48

1 We have completed all three workshops. All the workshop reports
2 are available for me as well as on our or -- Excuse me. The effort
3 and the release workshop reports are available for me, or they're
4 available on our website. They're finalizing the recreational
5 standards and warehousing work report, and it should be available
6 shortly.

7
8 From the first two workshops, the effort in and the discards
9 workshops, we developed an RFP, which was published last November,
10 I believe, and full proposals were due last February. We received
11 eleven proposals, which equated to about \$14 million dollars in
12 research. We did we did receive \$7.5 million to cover that
13 research, and so the review team is currently looking at the --
14 Looking at the proposals, and the first round is due later this
15 week. We may go out for a second round of review, depending on
16 the situation, but the final decisions will be made by Mr.
17 Strelcheck and Dr. Porch, and we're hopeful to start research in
18 summer of summer of this year, and so it's good news that we're
19 actually moving forward on something.

20
21 As I mentioned, one of the things that we're looking at is
22 improving our state and commission data management systems,
23 getting them up-to-date and utilizing the most up-to-date
24 technology and then centralizing -- Creating a centralized
25 warehouse for all the state recreational data that would be
26 available to the commission and the NMFS and state folks that were
27 interested in it, but we created a new priority, which we've talked
28 about throughout the week, and Louisiana -- Excuse me. Alabama
29 and Mississippi are utilizing the LA Creel methodology, and we've
30 developed the transition plan.

31
32 We re-budgeted some of the work to improve our data management
33 systems to support this. Unfortunately, we're still waiting on
34 the NOAA Grants Management Division to approve that the change of
35 scope. It's a little frustrating, because it doesn't require a
36 change in budget or any of that, but it's just it's a matter of
37 we're approving new money, because we have the money, but we're
38 still waiting on them. Hopefully that will occur sooner than
39 later, so we can continue with that work next.

40
41 Charlie mentioned the expansion of the at-sea observer program to
42 Louisiana and Texas, and he went over what's going on in Florida
43 and Alabama and Mississippi. We're expanding that by about a
44 million dollars in new money to support that work in the western
45 Gulf.

46
47 We're hoping to target seventy-five offshore trips per year per
48 state, using the same model, or methodology, and technology, in

1 the eastern Gulf, and we're targeting this year and next year for
2 doing field sampling.

3
4 We're doing some training next week, over here in Alabama, and
5 then we'll -- Hopefully we'll begin actual data collection in in
6 the Western Gulf for next month, and so I've got a couple of other
7 issues that I just want to make folks aware of.

8
9 As we know, the funding for FY 25 is on hold, and that has a
10 potential problem for SEAMAP. Florida has been -- For the last
11 several years, has been doing some trawling work off of Florida
12 that's important, that's collecting important information about
13 red snapper, as part of the summer shrimp groundfish cruise, but,
14 because the commission doesn't have FY funds for SEAMAP, nor the
15 State of Florida, there's a potential that that's not going to
16 happen.

17
18 The survey is scheduled for June, and so we're hopeful that that
19 that can -- We can get something in place before then, and we'll
20 be able to collect that information, but it's kind of a -- It's
21 kind of a double-whammy, because, even if we got the money, Florida
22 -- If Florida doesn't have the money, they won't -- They wouldn't
23 have the people to put on the boat, and so it's -- Again, it's not
24 a unique problem, but it's no less frustrating, and so -- Then, on
25 a more positive note, because I always want to end on a positive
26 note, Gregg Bray was named the new Assistant Director for the Gulf
27 States Marine Fisheries Commission, starting this month, and I
28 look forward to continue working with him, and he may be -- He was
29 actually planning on coming to this meeting, but, because we don't
30 have any money, or an agreement, he decided that it was probably
31 more prudent to stay home, but that concludes my report, and I'll
32 answer any questions.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Donaldson. Do we have any
35 questions for Dave? I'm not seeing any. Okay. We'll move on to
36 the next report, Mr. Phillips with the South Atlantic.

37
38 **SOUTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL LAISION REPORT**

39
40 **MR. PHILLIPS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'll preface my comments
41 with I've really enjoyed being here this week. I've enjoyed
42 meeting some old friends, and meeting a few new friends now, and
43 so I've learned a lot, and it's been a really good week for me.
44 The total report is in your briefing book, but I'm going to just
45 kind of abbreviate it.

46
47 We've got our advisory panels all set for the spring and summer,
48 Snapper Grouper, Mackerel Cobia, and our Habitat and Ecosystem.

1 We approved submitting a letter to NMFS detailing the proposed
2 modifications to essential fish habitat for our five-year review.

3
4 As far as committee membership goes, we decided to take Mid-
5 Atlantic and a New England voting representation off of some of
6 our voting councils, and we're going to get our input through the
7 liaisons and the membership that they do have on the advisory
8 panels.

9
10 We have climate readiness projects, and NOAA has provided funding
11 to support the council efforts to develop and advance climate-
12 ready fishery management, and, as you well know, things are
13 changing. They're not like they used to be, and so that's a really
14 good thing.

15
16 Our for-hire reporting improvement amendment, that's a work in
17 progress. We've spent a lot of time talking about that, reporting
18 frequency and trip declaration requirements and did-not-fish
19 reports, and so we're still working on that. That will come back
20 up in June.

21
22 Mackerel cobia, we had some port meetings, which were quite
23 informative. I went to the one in Georgia, and shark deprecation
24 was high on the list of issues with mackerel, like it is everywhere
25 else. The SEDAR Committee, we changed the name, and we've added
26 some data collection charges to that committee's work, but
27 everything seems to be going along okay.

28
29 The council, on snapper grouper amendments, we're looking again at
30 our fifty-five species in our FMU, and we would like to try to
31 lower that number, if possible, but we tried it the last time I
32 was on council, about ten years ago, and it didn't work so well,
33 and I'm hoping it will work a little bit better this time, but,
34 when you start moving things around, it invariably affects other
35 things, and so you have the unintended consequences, but we will
36 be looking at that.

37
38 We had a commercial fishery management subcommittee meet, and they
39 have advised -- Asked the council to revise the two-for-one permits
40 that we've had on the South Atlantic for quite a while now, and so
41 we want to just go one for one, and we believe that will increase
42 trip efficiency and just make it a lot cleaner. We don't feel
43 like we need to do keep doing two-for-one.

44
45 Red snapper, I was going to just say red snapper, and not worry
46 about the rest, but I was told I couldn't do that. We're waiting
47 to find out, you know, where NOAA is going to -- Andy and his team
48 are going to finish up there. There was a lot of comment, public

1 comment, about the negative effects off of Florida for businesses,
2 and it's just going to be a -- It's hard. There's no good answers
3 for this, but we will see what -- I guess we'll see what happened
4 by June.

5
6 Black sea bass, Amendment 56, they are in really bad trouble. I
7 think they're probably still catching some fish off North Carolina,
8 and the fishermen off of northern Florida say they're pretty much
9 gone. They are not a lot of fish off of Georgia, and so we're
10 going to be -- There's a lot of stuff going on there, but we're
11 going to have to revise catch levels, and we're looking at reducing
12 the size limit, and a lot of other things, and so I guess that
13 will be coming back up in June, too.

14
15 Last, but not least, private recreational permit and education,
16 Amendment 46, and we're looking at that, and we've had a lot of
17 discussion, and we're going to keep having a lot of discussion, so
18 we can kind of get an idea on what the universe is, and last,
19 actually last, golden tile. We had a SEDAR 89 stock assessment.
20 It came back with catch levels really close to what we've got right
21 now, and so all we've got to do is update our catch levels and
22 keep going, and that, Mr. Chair, concludes my report.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Phillips. Do we have any
25 questions? Dr. Frazer.

26
27 **DR. FRAZER:** Thanks for that report, Charlie. With regard to the
28 sea bass, is that -- I mean, have you been in communication with
29 the Mid-Atlantic, and are they seeing more sea bass up in their
30 part of the world? Is it a range, or, you know, just simply a
31 redistribution of fishes, or what's happening there?

32
33 **MR. PHILLIPS:** I don't know if it's a redistribution, but they
34 have been catching a lot of fish. Obviously, after being off of
35 the council for six years, I come back, and the first thing, or
36 term, I hear is "regime change". I had no idea what a regime
37 change was, and so I had to be enlightened, which, basically, to
38 me, is still all of the stuff we just don't understand, and so, as
39 far as I know, that's pretty much what's going on with sea bass.

40
41 It could be water temperature, or it could be recruitment failure,
42 or it could be red snapper eating the recruits, which some of the
43 -- A lot of people think has a lot to do with it. We just don't
44 know, but they are moving north. Water temperatures are warming
45 up, and so that kind of makes sense, but there -- We've heard
46 there's a lot of fish up in the Mid-Atlantic, and so prices aren't
47 that good on black sea bass, and so, even with our limited amount
48 of catch, it's not really something we're going to go target.

1
2 **DR. FRAZER:** A follow-up, real quick, and so I guess what I'm
3 trying to get at is a bigger issue, and so, when you do a stock
4 assessment for black sea bass, right, there's a kind of coordinated
5 effort between the South Atlantic and the Mid-Atlantic, you know,
6 and what does the stock structure look like, and, I mean, is this
7 a situation where you have to comanage a stock among, you know,
8 those two fishery management councils?
9

10 **MR. PHILLIPS:** I think they're drawing the line around Hatteras,
11 and they're kind of like acting like it's two different stocks.
12 Now, if there's some mixing or something that goes on, or maybe we
13 get a really cold winter, and some of those fish move south, which
14 we've had some of the North Carolina boats, you know, or fishermen
15 say the fish look a little different. They might be darker, and
16 so they think they may move north and south some, according to the
17 weather patterns, but, no, our stock assessment, I think, is
18 stopping at Hatteras, as far as I know.
19

20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Phillips. Mr. Strelcheck
21 has a question. it's stopping at average as far as I know Okay.
22 Thank you. Mr. Phillips.
23

24 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Not a question, just adding to the conversation,
25 and so sea bass is doing very well off New England, two-and-a-half
26 times spawning stock biomass, I think, at MSY. There was a study,
27 or actually a presentation, this week by South Carolina DNR looking
28 at the genetics, and so that's one of the things I'm interested in
29 learning a little bit more about, in terms of the homogeneity, or
30 not, of black sea bass along the eastern coast of the United
31 States, but we've certainly seen a huge shift and change in sea
32 bass abundance and distribution, as well as, obviously,
33 availability.
34

35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Any other comments,
36 or questions, for the South Atlantic? Not seeing any, thank you,
37 Mr. Phillips. Mr. Morton, we'll move on to your report of the
38 Coast Guard, and We'll try to squeeze in Mr. Downey after.
39

40 **U.S. COAST GUARD REPORT**

41
42 **LT. MORTON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Lt. Jackson Morton, Eighth
43 District, located in New Orleans, Louisiana. The first I want to
44 talk about are our efforts on the Exclusive Economic Zone
45 enforcement.
46

47 So far this year, we've interdicted thirty-one lanchas and seized
48 a little bit over 11,000 pounds of red snapper. With the Lent

1 period right around this time of the year, historically we've seen
2 a lot of the activity with the lanchas, and, also, with the
3 priorities of the new administration, we've seen a lot more asset
4 hours of support with Coast Guard cutters.

5
6 Of course, Station South Padre Island is always there, but we've
7 seen a little bit more resources come our way, for this mission
8 particularly, in terms of Coast Guard cutters, and so that's always
9 nice to see.

10
11 A couple of mission highlights, some good cases, good days we've
12 had out there, back in February, on the 6th, we had Station South
13 Padre Island was able to interdict three total lanchas, and they
14 detained eleven lancha fishermen and seized approximately 3,000
15 pounds of red snapper onboard those lanchas.

16
17 Then, just a couple of weeks ago, on the 12th of March, Coast Guard
18 Cutter Daniel Tarr and Station South Padre Island were able to
19 interdict two lanchas each, four total, sixteen lancha fishermen,
20 and approximately 2,500 pounds of red snapper.

21
22 These are some photos from those cases. On the top-left, you can
23 see a typical lancha vessel, low profile to the water, a lot of
24 deck space, and it can hold a lot of fish. On the top-right is a
25 cooler that they were able to take off of one of these lanchas,
26 and you can see it's filled with some ice, some red snapper, and
27 then, when they run out of space in that cooler, on the bottom-
28 left, you can see they'll just load up that boat as much as they
29 can get, and then, on the bottom-right, there's some sharks there,
30 and it might be a little bit washed out, but you can see some
31 sharks that were also seized as well.

32
33 Not included in these slides, but kind of an emerging update, I
34 would say, is that, on Monday actually, the State Department was
35 able to make notifications, diplomatic notifications, to Mexico
36 that says that we're intending to start prosecuting some of these
37 lancha fishermen under the Lacey Act.

38
39 Not a ton of information for you right now, as this is fairly brand
40 new, but hopefully that can curb some of the issues we have with
41 recidivism. A lot of these guys we catch over and over again. I
42 think, last year, our top offender, we got him eight times, in
43 fact, and so hopefully this will help a little bit.

44
45 Domestic fisheries enforcement, thus far this year, we're at 184
46 total boardings, and where we were at last year. It's a double-
47 edged sword with resources going to the border. You can see some
48 of them falling off for domestic fisheries enforcement, and we

1 have not -- We have yet to refer a case with significant violations
2 to OLE, and so that's what we've got for domestic fisheries
3 enforcement.

4
5 Then marine protected resources, and the cold snap turtle stun in
6 January was the last and only request for assistance we've had
7 thus far. We are, however, tracking the pair of North Atlantic
8 right whales that have been -- That made their way into the Gulf,
9 and I believe the last sighting was off of Destin, Florida, and so
10 we've got some broadcasts of notice to mariners going out. If you
11 have been on the water recently, you may have heard those, but
12 we're still tracking them, and we're ready to assist, if we're
13 able to, and I think that concludes my presentation, if anybody
14 has any questions.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Lt. Morton, for that report. Do we
17 have any questions? Not seeing any, thank you again. Next, we'll
18 move on to the Alabama Law Enforcement Efforts report with Major
19 Downey.

20 21 **ALABAMA LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS**

22
23 **MAJOR JASON DOWNEY:** Good afternoon. Jason Downey with Marine
24 Resources here in Alabama. I will talk to you briefly about our
25 joint enforcement agreement and some of our enforcement
26 activities.

27
28 This year, our agreement runs from August 24 to August 23, and we
29 received \$423,089. We spent \$170,577 on direct purchases, which
30 bought us a couple of law enforcement vehicles with emergency
31 lighting and a couple of outboard motors for our offshore vessel.

32
33 We spent \$67,000 on training and indirect costs. The rest of the
34 money was spent on patrolling our priorities. Turtle excluder
35 devices, we have 745 patrol hours. Recreational reef fish, we
36 have 300 patrol hours. IFQ, 300 patrol hours. IUU, twenty-five
37 patrol hours. Marine mammals, 235 patrol hours, and general CMP
38 and HMS at 298 patrol hours, and we have 300 outreach hours.

39
40 So far this year, officers have 513 boat patrol hours and 551 shore
41 patrol hours worked. Total hours, including the outreach so far
42 this year, has been 1,284 hours. They've inspected 304 commercial
43 anglers, 632 recreational anglers, and 372 vessel inspections.

44
45 This year, we had our first annual kids fishing day with Alabama
46 Marine Resources. The officers were really excited about this
47 event. We had thirty participants from the local area Boys and
48 Girls club. Every angler that participated received a rod-and-

1 reel that they could take home with them. The biggest catch award
2 was a lifetime saltwater fishing license for Alabama. All the
3 prizes, food, and bait were provided by sponsors, the CCA, the
4 ACEOA, the Mobile County Commission, and a couple of local
5 commercial fishermen. MRD Enforcement officers baited hooks,
6 untangled lines, cooked and served food, and educated about
7 saltwater fishing.

8
9 Here's a few photos of some of the anglers, an officer helping
10 fish. As you can see, a lot of small croaker and white trout.
11 All kinds of fish were caught, and here's our big winner. He was
12 super excited. The biggest catch was a stingray, actually, but he
13 got him a lifetime saltwater fishing license out of the deal, and
14 so he's super excited.

15
16 Here's a picture of our outreach setup at a boat show. Officers
17 participate at over a dozen outreach events throughout the state
18 each year. They reach out to thousands of people at these events,
19 and it's a great opportunity for us to get information out to the
20 public about saltwater fisheries.

21
22 This is pretty cool. It happened here recently, and the SS United
23 States was actually towed from Philadelphia to the Port of Mobile.
24 This photo was captured by one of our remote cameras that's on top
25 of the Middle Bay Lighthouse, which is pictured below.

26
27 The United States is actually a hundred foot longer than the
28 Titanic, and I think it may still hold the record for the fastest
29 crossing of the Atlantic Ocean. It's being brought here to Mobile
30 to be prepared for a reef to be sunk off the coast of Destin.

31
32 Our officers were tasked -- Once it once it got into the Mobile
33 ship channel, we were tasked with escorting it all the way up the
34 ship channel, and so it was an all-day affair, but the officers
35 enjoyed it. It's pretty cool historic site.

36
37 All right, and I'll leave you all with some pictures from the
38 blizzard of 2025. This is our office on Dauphin Island. We don't
39 see snow a whole lot down there, but that's about six to eight
40 inches of snow on our front lawn at the Dauphin Island office. It
41 was pretty, but we were glad it didn't stay but a couple days, and
42 so that's all I have. Thank you.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Major Downey. Do we have any
45 questions? Not seeing any.

46
47 **MAJOR DOWNEY:** I appreciate it.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you again, sir. Okay, and we that will
2 wrap us up for today, and we will reconvene in the morning at 8:30.
3 Thank you.

4
5 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed on April 9, 2025.)
6

7 - - -

8
9 April 10, 2025

10
11 THURSDAY MORNING SESSION
12

13 - - -

14
15 The Full Council of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
16 reconvened at The Lodge in Gulf Shores, Alabama on Thursday
17 morning, April 10, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman J.D.
18 Dugas.

19
20 **COMMITTEE REPORTS (CONTINUED)**
21 **SEDAR COMMITTEE REPORT**
22

23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Good morning everyone. Welcome back. We're going
24 to get into committee reports, and we'll have to jump around a
25 little bit. The first committee report we'll do will be the SEDAR
26 Committee report and then, from there, we'll move to the Shrimp
27 report.

28
29 The SEDAR committee report, let's see, April 7th, 2025, and I'm
30 the chair. The committee adopted the agenda, Tab I, Number 1, and
31 the minutes, Tab I, Number 2, from the August 2024 meeting were
32 approved as written.

33
34 SEDAR Steering Committee Summary Report 2025, Tab I, Number 4, the
35 committee heard a brief overview from council staff of the major
36 agenda items discussed during the February 4 and 5, 2025 SEDAR
37 Steering Committee meeting held in Charleston, South Carolina.

38
39 Briefly, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center proposed taking
40 administrative lead for the assessment process, which is usually
41 conducted via webinar. SEDAR would still coordinate the data and
42 review workshops. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center assured
43 SEDAR cooperators transparency would be maintained, along with
44 updates provided to the cooperator's SSC, as applicable.

45
46 The Science Center asked cooperators to expect funding and staffing
47 reductions and indicated a likely need to revisit the stock
48 assessment process once more is known on that front. The SEDAR

1 Steering Committee also discussed a key stocks approach for
2 assessing priority species by region and using simpler models when
3 or where appropriate.
4

5 Council staff then reviewed the assessment progress to date and
6 finalized assessment scheduling through the end of 2026. A
7 committee member was concerned about loss of federal resources and
8 their potential effects on the stock assessment process. Council
9 staff said they would coordinate with the Science Center and the
10 Southeast Regional Office to get a better understanding of staffing
11 changes and impacts. SERO added that losses to the stock
12 assessment branch of the Gulf would be expected to have a negative
13 effect on assessment output, which could be better quantified once
14 all reductions are finalized.
15

16 Another committee member noted the involvement of the Center for
17 Independent Experts in reviewing stock assessments and asked if
18 CIE involvement would be in jeopardy in the expected funding
19 reductions. Council staff said that review workshops planned for
20 2025 were expected to have CIE reviewers, but their involvement
21 beyond that point is unknown.
22

23 The Science Center went into further detail about staffing losses
24 and reductions and said that it is still premature to report on
25 total staffing reductions. The Science Center thought a more
26 thorough stock assessment of effects would be available by the
27 June 2025 council meeting.
28

29 Review and Discussion of Gulf of Mexico SEDAR Schedule, Tab I,
30 Number 5, council staff will provide an updated draft of the SEDAR
31 schedule, which has been finalized by the Southeast Fisheries
32 Science Center through 2026.
33

34 A committee member recalled that, in June of 2022, the planned
35 assessment of greater amberjack was expected to be completed in
36 2026, and now it is not expected to be completed until 2028. The
37 committee member also noted a council request for an update on the
38 greater amberjack count, which will be a key new source of data
39 for the planned greater amberjack assessment.
40

41 Council staff replied that the lead principal investigator of the
42 greater amberjack count had informed staff that they were not yet
43 prepared to present preliminary results, but expected to be able
44 to provide those at the June 2025 meeting.
45

46 Council staff assured the committee that the planning for the
47 greater amberjack assessment was locked in on the SEDAR schedule
48 at this point and that the assessment would be completed as

1 efficiently as possible, while ensuring key new data like the G-
2 FISHER composite video index and the greater amberjack count can
3 be considered. There was no other business brought before the
4 committee. This concludes my report. Mr. Schieble.

5
6 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so we talked about this
7 committee prior to Dr. Simmons letting us know about the change to
8 the June council meeting to a two-day potential webinar, or
9 virtual, meeting, I guess.

10
11 So, based on that, would we still be able to accommodate, in the
12 schedule, an update from Dr. Powers on the amberjack count, or is
13 that something that we need to consider moving to the August
14 meeting in-person?

15
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you Mr. Chair, and so we have
17 a rough draft to talk about at the end of the meeting, and, right
18 now I do not have that on the agenda. I suspect there's going to
19 be quite a bit of public interest, and so I guess we need to think
20 about that as well, and timing of that, and so can we wait until
21 the end to make a decision on that?

22
23 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and I wasn't aware we were going to talk about
24 a priority list, and so that's fine. Let's do that.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any other questions regarding the SEDAR
27 report? Not seeing any, I would like to make a comment regarding
28 this item. I think we all realize with the funding cuts that are
29 before us, and the challenges that lie ahead, you know, before the
30 Science Center and NMFS, and I think I've been saying this for
31 quite some time, that I think it's an appropriate time that we
32 venture out into other avenues of getting these stock assessments
33 done, whether it's universities, third-party consultants, and I
34 think that would help speed the process up.

35
36 It's something I would at least like to see if it's even possible,
37 which I think it's possible, because I think there's universities
38 that do work now, and so I'm not looking to make a motion or
39 anything like that, but I just wanted to bring that up in
40 conversation. If there's no other comments, we'll move on. Mr.
41 Schieble.

42
43 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Well, just in support of your comment, I agree with
44 what you're saying. I think, when we get this update on the
45 potential schedule changes from the Southeast Fisheries Science
46 Center at the June meeting, that says what would be coming there,
47 I think, at that point, maybe we need to make some decisions on
48 should we request staff to solicit various universities, to come

1 up with which ones -- A list of which ones would have the
2 capabilities and ability to even do that type of assessment at
3 that scale, or not, or what sources of alternative assessments
4 could be done outside of the Science Center, if needed, something
5 like that, but, at this point, I think let's see what they come
6 back to us with in June, as far as, you know, where the schedule
7 changes and what they're able to do based on their staffing at
8 that point, that they know.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

11
12 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So I'm open to, obviously, exploring the idea. I
13 think, when we've talked about this in the past, a couple of the
14 main challenges with the stock assessment process is that it's not
15 just the analyst where a lot of the time is spent. It's the data,
16 the data procurement, the data processing, all of the data streams
17 that go into a stock assessment, one. Then, if we're facing budget
18 cuts as an agency, right, you still have to have funding to
19 contract out those stock assessments, right, and so what does that
20 look like in the future, and how would we make that happen.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you Mr. Strelcheck. Dr. Simmons.

23
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so we have
25 talked about this in the past. I guess it depends on where the
26 funding is coming from. If it's council funding, under our
27 administrative award, we have to be a little bit careful about
28 that, because the Science Center and Regional Office are our
29 partners.

30
31 You know, they typically do stock assessments, where the
32 administrative side of the house, those dollars, are kind of more
33 administrative. We have funded, in the past, projects to try to
34 fill data gaps that we need to improve stock assessments, but
35 taking on paying for that process would be something we haven't
36 endeavored in the past, and we would have to think about that quite
37 a bit, after we have some stability in funding, and figure out how
38 other councils have gone about doing that, which I think they have.
39 I think the Mid-Atlantic and New England Council have done that,
40 and so we just need to think about that administratively a little
41 bit more.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Dr. Sweetman.

44
45 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I kind of agree with your
46 thought process. I think, given the challenges that we're up
47 against right now, and our colleagues are up against in the federal
48 government here, we might have to think long and hard about what

1 we're actually expecting to get out of a stock assessment here in
2 the future, right, and like these age-based stock assessments --
3 Obviously, they're super informative, but they're very data
4 intensive, and take a lot of time.

5
6 We've been kind of talking about how the data that we're using --
7 You know, we're making management actions on data that's five years
8 old, right, and so it's not entirely reflective, and so, you know,
9 there could be an opportunity here to make lemonade out of these
10 lemons, right, where we can maybe have a more timely assessment
11 process, with less intensive data scrutiny.

12
13 Now, that comes with -- There's pros and cons associated with that,
14 right, and so I think, as we kind of get some clarity for what is
15 actually going to be feasible in the future, from an actual
16 assessment capacity perspective, I think we're just going to have
17 to think about maybe looking at the assessment process a little
18 bit differently here. Thank you, sir.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Strelcheck.

21
22 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Clay has his hand up.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Andy. Dr. Porch.

25
26 **DR. PORCH:** Thank you. I just wanted to reiterate what C.J. just
27 said. We're actually doing some internal planning, and we're not
28 at a point where we can release it, but the basic planning is
29 looking at what happens if our budget is cut in half, or say a 25
30 percent reduction, and what we can actually accomplish, and so
31 basically how we would reinvent, you know, our participation in
32 the whole enterprise, including from data collection all the way
33 through stock assessments.

34
35 Depending on the extent of the cut -- Yes, we would not be able to
36 support the complex age-structured models that we're doing now, at
37 least not for all the species that we're doing, and so I completely
38 agree that, once the dust settles, and we see what we have to work
39 with, we'll have to talk about the extent to which we need to
40 reimagine the process.

41
42 One of those items could be, you know, going back to simpler
43 approaches, like production models and simple index-based
44 adjustments vetted through management strategy evaluations,
45 basically simulation frameworks, and just to see if we can develop
46 some kind of robust harvest strategies with less information.

47
48 I think it's something we definitely want to think very hard about,

1 and maybe prepare that that's going to happen at some level, no
2 matter what at this point, in particular, you know, focusing on
3 things like having an indicator species for a complex, and then
4 you might have to work with aggregate bag limits and things like
5 that. I don't want to pontificate too long on it, but we've
6 certainly been thinking a lot here about how we would provide
7 scientific advice with under reduced staffing and budget
8 scenarios.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Porch. Mr. Rindone.

11
12 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Dr. Porch, and
13 council staff, and the composition of the council's representation
14 on the SEDAR Steering Committee, has been asking for exactly that
15 approach for the better part of a decade now, and, you know, there
16 are some species that we've often questioned whether we're, you
17 know -- Forgive my use of words, but trying to drive a space
18 shuttle to the grocery store, when, you know, the van would have
19 done just fine.

20
21 We certainly would endorse trying to spend more time looking at
22 those sorts of scaled-back approaches, and seek efficiencies in
23 modeling, because, in a lot of cases, it really is only one or two
24 indices, in addition to the landings, if any indices at all, that
25 are actually driving the signal in the stock assessment, and so -
26 -

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Any other comments or
29 business to come before the SEDAR Committee? Not seeing any, okay,
30 and we'll move on to the Shrimp Committee Report. Mr. Schieble.

31
32 **SHRIMP COMMITTEE REPORT**

33
34 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Shrimp Management
35 Committee Report, the committee adopted the agenda, Tab D, Number
36 1, and the committee then approved the January 2025 meeting
37 minutes, Tab D, Number 2, with the removal of the word "of" on
38 page 7, line 2.

39
40 Review of the Texas Closure, Tab D, Numbers 4(a) through (b), Dr.
41 Liese from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center presented on the
42 economics of the federally-permitted Gulf shrimp fleet. The
43 inflation-adjusted average prices for imported shrimp and for Gulf
44 shrimp trend downward from 1984 to 2023.

45
46 A council member commented that it appears shrimpers are only
47 getting two dollars per pound, on average, for their product, but
48 that the final cost to consumers is about two to three-times that

1 initial price. Dr. Liese responded that he could only speculate
2 as to what happens with markup, along the supply chain, noting
3 that it appears to get higher as the product gets closer to
4 retailers, but that we would not expect any participant to extract
5 excessive value in very competitive markets.

6
7 Another council member noted that, in the presentation, the Gulf
8 shrimp price is the ex-vessel price, but the imported shrimp price
9 is a final cost, which includes transportation and processing
10 costs, and would therefore be higher. Ms. Bosarge, the Shrimp AP
11 chair, reinforced that expenses have increased over time, but that
12 ex-vessel shrimp prices are lower in recent years than received in
13 the 1980s and 1990s.

14
15 Dr. Lowther, from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center,
16 presented a review of the 2024 Texas closure. He noted a lot of
17 variability in landings of Texas offshore brown and white shrimp
18 from 2016 through 2024. He added that landings of excess offshore
19 white shrimp in July and August 2024 were primarily in larger size
20 categories.

21
22 A committee members stated that there is a biological purpose for
23 the Texas closure, in allowing shrimp to grow to a larger size,
24 and encouraged Dr. Liese to work with Texas state agency folks on
25 economic data for future presentations.

26
27 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to request that National**
28 **Marine Fisheries Service continue with the Texas federal closure**
29 **in the coming year in conjunction with the State of Texas closure**
30 **in 2025.** That motion carried unanimously. Mr. Chair, we have a
31 committee motion on the board.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. We have a motion on the
34 board. is there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is**
35 **there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion**
36 **carries.** Mr. Schieble.

37
38 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Final Action, Framework
39 Action Modification of the Vessel Position Data Collection Program
40 for the Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Fishery, Tab D, Numbers 5(a) through
41 (e), council staff reviewed the summary of written and virtual
42 public comments, noting that a direct mail-out was sent to Gulf
43 shrimp moratorium permit holders and that a virtual public hearing
44 webinar was held on March 31, 2025.

45
46 A council member inquired if there was any industry feedback in
47 support of Alternative 2. Council staff responded that there were
48 there were no direct comments favoring Alternative 2, but that

1 there were comments indicating an inability of the fleet to take
2 on any additional costs.

3
4 Council staff reviewed the alternatives in the shrimp framework
5 action and noted that, while the devices for Alternative 1 and
6 Preferred Alternative 3 were referred to as cellular electronic
7 logbooks in the text, the devices to be considered under Preferred
8 Alternative 3 would not be the same technology as under Alternative
9 1.

10
11 Council staff added that National Marine Fisheries Service plans
12 to transition the administration of the vessel monitoring, the VMS
13 system, program from the Office of Law Enforcement to the Office
14 of Science and Technology. Council staff noted that the effects
15 of the administrative environment on Chapter 4 had been updated to
16 reflect cost information provided by the Southeast Fisheries
17 Science Center in its March 4, 2025 correspondence to the Gulf
18 Council.

19
20 Dr. Gloeckner, from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center,
21 reviewed the table of administrative costs in the Southeast
22 Fisheries Science Center's March 4, 2025 letter to the Gulf
23 Council. He noted that these costs are incremental costs to the
24 agency and that Alternative 2 is expected to cost substantially
25 less to initiate and continually operate compared to Preferred
26 Alternative 3 when summed across all respective program
27 components. Council staff added that these detailed costs are in
28 a condensed version in Table 4.1.4.1 in the shrimp framework
29 action.

30
31 A committee member noted the council's desire for the Shrimp AP to
32 discuss these administrative costs, which were not received by the
33 council for review by the Shrimp AP until the day of its meeting.
34 The committee member stated that several of the line items in the
35 Southeast Fisheries Science Center letter have already been
36 covered, or completed, and do not need to be included in the
37 budget.

38
39 A committee member then added that some budget items were being
40 duplicated, as they are already being conducted for other programs,
41 and contended that approximately 70 percent of the Southeast
42 Fisheries Science Center's projected costs for Preferred
43 Alternative 3 could be eliminated from the estimate.

44
45 Mr. Strelcheck, from the Southeast Regional Office, reviewed an
46 infographic of administrative costs between Alternative 2 and
47 Preferred Alternative 3 and emphasized that the system to be built
48 under Preferred Alternative 3 duplicates the system that exists

1 under Alternative 2.
2
3 A committee member inquired who is paying for device costs under
4 Alternative 2. Mr. Strelcheck responded that the Early Adopter
5 Program, as well as the national VMS reimbursement program, is
6 currently available to help fund the purchase of devices.
7
8 Staff inquired why development of technical specifications are a
9 cost under Alternative 3 and why customer service would be an
10 administrative cost, instead of calls go into vendors. Dr.
11 Stephen, from the Southeast Regional Office, responded that
12 technical specifications are for hardware and that the national
13 VMS program already has a contract in place, which would cover
14 devices under Alternative 2. A separate contract would be needed
15 for a program Under Preferred Alternative 3. Dr. Stephen added
16 that calls about device issues are typically received by the agency
17 first. Dr. Gloeckner responded that calls can range from
18 regulatory questions to device troubleshooting.
19
20 A committee member inquired why shrimpers would want Alternative
21 3, even though it means they would bear the cost of devices. Ms.
22 Bosarge stated that shrimpers would prefer the government pay for
23 the devices and that the industry lobbied for \$1.7 million to
24 assist with the data collection program.
25
26 She stated that there are two problems. One, devices need to go
27 from 3G to 4G and the physical server needed to be replaced with
28 a cloud-based program. She acknowledged that the cloud-based
29 server is in place and that about 300 devices will be purchased
30 through the Early Adopter Program. However, more devices should
31 have been covered through the Early Adopter Program.
32
33 She also expressed concern that, in the current budget environment,
34 National Marine Fisheries Service may not have the funds to
35 reimburse vessels for VMS units under Alternative 2. She stated
36 that the technical specification development costs should be
37 minimal, as she already wrote the technical specifications, which
38 can be found in an appendix of the shrimp framework action.
39
40 Mr. Strelcheck noted that it has long been a concern of industry
41 that data will go directly to OLE and that the agency is now
42 transitioning the VMS program administration to the Office of
43 Science and Technology. He added the requirements for government
44 security have substantially increased over time, as have the costs.
45
46 Ms. Levy, from NOAA General Counsel, reviewed the codified text
47 for Preferred Alternative 3 and noted that final details would
48 need to be approved by the council chair.

1
2 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to recommend the council**
3 **approve the Framework Action: Modification of the Vessel Position**
4 **Data Collection Program for the Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Fishery and**
5 **that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and**
6 **implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and**
7 **appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary**
8 **changes in the document. The council chair is given the authority**
9 **to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and**
10 **appropriate.** The motion carried with one abstention. Mr. Chair,
11 we have a committee motion on the board.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble, and so we have a motion
14 on the board, and I'm asking if there's any further discussion on
15 the motion. Mr. Strelcheck.

16
17 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I wanted to just go through and make some points
18 I think that I've made throughout the process, but just to kind of
19 further emphasize where we're at. So we didn't discuss a lot
20 between Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 during committee.

21
22 Alternative 3 remained our preferred, and so, in terms of the
23 amendment, there's been a lot of discussion that NMFS is
24 overestimating the costs and that only two changes to the program
25 are needed. We disagree with that assessment. Our best estimate,
26 based on the expertise of the people that actually work on this
27 program, is that there are higher costs than what industry believes
28 there are.

29
30 With that said, obviously, we recognize there's a minimum cost of
31 doing business, and the bottom line is the cost for Alternative 3
32 is higher than the cost for Alternative 2.

33
34 If you take just the values that we put forward in the letter to
35 the council, and it's also in the amendment right now, the costs
36 are 40 less for -- 40 percent for Alternative 2 relative to
37 Alternative 3, right, over a five-year period. That's a
38 substantial difference.

39
40 Even if you eliminate some of the costs the industry suggested,
41 and, for example, you take away the help desk at the Science
42 Center, the costs are still 53 percent for Alternative 2 relative
43 to Alternative 3, right, and so there is a considerable cost
44 reduction for the Science Center that would happen based on
45 selecting Alternative 2.

46
47 The Science Center, obviously, bears those additional costs, based
48 on maintaining the system, approving units, security, duplication

1 of interfaces, et cetera, and that's been, obviously, one of our
2 concerns, is this duplication of the system.

3
4 In addition to this, we have the overlay of the Executive Order
5 Unleashing Prosperity through Deregulation, and so this would be
6 a regulatory action. Any additional costs for regulatory actions
7 remember have to be offset considerably by deregulatory actions,
8 right, and so, the higher the cost, the more is going to have to
9 be offset in order to move that forward.

10
11 In terms of purchase of VMS, I think Clay and I are fully committed
12 to purchasing as many cellular VMS devices as we possibly can
13 through the Early Adopter Program. That's not going to cover all
14 the boxes, and so Alternative 2 provides then another avenue of
15 funding for the industry, because it would come out of the VMS
16 reimbursement program, versus Alternative 3, and those that don't
17 get boxes through the Early Adopter Program have to purchase those
18 boxes in the future.

19
20 In terms of cellular VMS versus ELBs, I feel like I'm a broken
21 record on this, but the hardware is identical, and so we can call
22 it something else, but the devices are the same. The question
23 would be whether the same devices would be approved under each of
24 the programs, because you potentially have different requirements,
25 or standards, that the Science Center would be implementing
26 relative to the vessel monitoring system, but there is, obviously,
27 these newer duplicative data standards and technical
28 specifications that would have to be created, and, you know, it
29 was noted that the industry has developed these technical
30 standards.

31
32 That's appreciated, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they're
33 approved and finalized by the government, and there's still work
34 that would have to be done in order to, obviously, implement those,
35 even if it's a good starting point for us.

36
37 We've talked about duplication. For those that haven't been around
38 this table for quite some time, the data used to go to a NESDIS
39 server in the northern Gulf. That server no longer exists. The
40 data are now downloaded through Gulf States Commission from SD
41 cards, and it's accessed by the Science Center, and so Alternatives
42 2 and 3 require some sort of data database to receive the data,
43 and view the data, and receipt of that data right now happens
44 through our Headquarters Office in Silver Spring, whereas
45 Alternative 3 would require the Science Center to stand up, in our
46 view, a duplicative system to be the catchers mitt to receive that
47 data at the quantity we need to receive it under the program.

48

1 Then just a couple of final points, and I guess, approval or
2 disapproval, I was taken aback, and it bothered me, obviously,
3 with some of the public comment that was made, in terms of what
4 was perceived as me threatening disapproval, right, and I'm not
5 making that decision today.

6
7 My job is to give the council guidance, like Mara and Frank and
8 others here, with regard to building a record and explaining to
9 you what we need to do in order to meet federal laws and
10 requirements, right, and, ultimately, the decision to approve or
11 disapprove this action will be based on the record you build,
12 right, and so I've heard a lot about, you know, we want to support
13 the industry, and I want to support the industry.

14
15 I want to figure out how we can do this to make it the most cost-
16 effective and efficient of a program as we possibly can, and we
17 also have to meet legal mandates, National Standards, other
18 requirements, and all of that will have to be taken into account,
19 in terms of any sort of final decision.

20
21 At the last meeting, we talked about National Standards and the
22 concerns we've had about minimizing costs and avoiding unnecessary
23 duplication. I think it would behoove the council to have a solid
24 conversation about that, about some of the things that maybe you've
25 heard, or they have come up over the last couple of meetings, to
26 continue to build that record, because, right now, you're
27 essentially making a recommendation to take final action without
28 changing anything in the document, which is a part of the record
29 that we are going to have to then make this decision on, right,
30 and so I just want to acknowledge all that.

31
32 I fully support, obviously, the program as a whole, and trying to
33 get something stood up. I think it's important for the industry,
34 and it's important for the agency, with regard to monitoring.

35
36 We've, obviously, been in disagreement in how to do this, but
37 there's certainly a lot of, to me, challenges related to costs and
38 duplication of effort that I feel like needs to be further
39 discussed. Thank you, and Clay may want to say something, since
40 this is his program, that he ultimately would have to manage under
41 this alternative, so I would like to ask Clay if he wants to say
42 anything.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Dr. Porch.

45
46 **DR. PORCH:** Thank you, Chair. Just listening to some of the
47 comments at the Shrimp AP meeting, and then subsequently, it's
48 becoming apparent that I think the Shrimp AP committee view of

1 what Alternative 3 is is a little different than the way we view
2 it.

3
4 It seems they've been advocating for basically a bare-bones type
5 approach to collect shrimp effort data, analogous to that old 3G
6 system. The problem is we need better data than that, and it had
7 a -- The old system had a number of shortcomings, and not just the
8 problems with the data due to the poor quality of the hardware,
9 and all the flaws with the 3G reporting, but also the voluntary
10 nature of the reporting, with relatively little accountability.

11
12 Things were hard to enforce reporting, and there was a lot of
13 problems with trying to match up that subsample of reports and
14 track reports with all the trip ticket information and all, in
15 order to expand it to the total effort, and those problems just
16 started increasing over time, and so there's a lot of things that
17 had to be fixed with that.

18
19 On top of it, a lot of -- I think the AP chair actually said that
20 really, you know, security -- Weren't we taking good care of it
21 back in the day, and the problem is cybersecurity requirements are
22 much higher now than they were fifteen years ago, and it's
23 expensive to implement systems that are secure, and so, when we
24 set up a new system, we've got to put in all this -- All these
25 layers of cybersecurity that we didn't used to have to. Cyber-
26 attacks weren't a big thing back in the day, when the old system
27 was in place, and things -- Times have changed.

28
29 We're also trying to improve the efficiency of viewing and
30 accessing the data. As you've heard a couple of times from the
31 Shrimp AP committee, I think it comes down to their biggest concern
32 is for law enforcement, and they don't want law enforcement to be
33 able to access where they're going in in real time, which is what
34 they could do with the systems that OLE was operating, and then,
35 even when it's transferred, under Alternative 2, to the Office of
36 Science and Technology, in principle, they have some links to the
37 data.

38
39 I don't think it would be anything close to real time, because the
40 systems don't transmit until they come within cellular range, but
41 that seems to be, from what I can tell, the biggest objection to
42 moving the system to the Office of Science and Technology, which
43 would be considerable cost savings for us, rather than setting up
44 a whole new program.

45
46 Just in general, as Andy said, we need to consolidate systems, for
47 greater efficiency and cost savings. We just can't afford to keep
48 creating independent systems, and I think this is consistent with

1 the President's executive orders on government efficiency and the
2 cost efficiency initiative. It's important for us to cut costs,
3 to save taxpayers money, and so thank you.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Porch. I see Mr. Schieble's hand
6 up.

7
8 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and I understand that, and since, you know,
9 we're talking about building a record, I just wanted to reiterate
10 the building of the record has taken us over four years to get to
11 this point, right, and we've deliberated this -- Or five years,
12 and I guess is year-five now that we've worked on this to get here,
13 and so I think it's quite extensive, the record of what we've been
14 working on.

15
16 Also, last Monday, as a reminder, we had the public hearing meeting
17 for the preferred alternative in this action, and that was a
18 perfect opportunity for us to hear from the industry in opposition
19 to what the council has selected, and, again, the summary that we
20 got from Ms. Muehlstein did not indicate that, and so that's all
21 I had.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Ms. Levy.

24
25 **MS. LEVY:** So, understanding that, yes, you have been talking about
26 this a long time, I think the point is the record on the duplicative
27 nature of things, right, and, if you're going to recommend
28 Alternative 3, how that's appropriate under National Standard 7,
29 and I don't think we've really had a robust discussion about that.

30
31 Aside from the system, I think it would be helpful for the council
32 to explain Alternative 3's requirement for cellular only, when
33 there are some vessels that are already required, for other
34 permits, to have satellite, and so what that's setting up is a
35 requirement for some vessels to have two pieces of required
36 equipment on their vessels, and I'll just point out the language
37 in the National Standard Guidelines that say management measures
38 should be designed to give fishermen the greatest possible freedom
39 of action in conducting business.

40
41 When you're limiting to cellular, and some of these already have
42 satellite, you're really not allowing that freedom, and so I guess
43 it would be helpful, if you're going to pursue Alternative 3, to
44 discuss how that in particular meets these requirements. Thank
45 you.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Mr. Sanchez.

1 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I was doing my best to stay out of this. We heard
2 an economic presentation, and the status of the industry is -- You
3 know, it's saddening. Over half the fleet is tied to the dock.
4 With that reduction in effort also comes a reduction in
5 interactions with sawfish, manta rays, turtles, finfish, et
6 cetera, all these species of concern.

7
8 This industry is 100 percent on the ropes. It's about to take its
9 last breath, and here we are arguing over budgetary items, that
10 were clearly in disagreement on, and, I mean, we're talking big
11 disagreements. The estimate from the agency and the Science Center
12 was upwards of \$5 million for Alternative 3. The industry's
13 estimate is a lot more conservative, something more along like
14 \$1.54 million.

15
16 I also remind you that the industry went to Congress to help get
17 \$1.7 million in appropriations to help fund these data collection
18 programs, and so we're at an impasse, where we're arguing over
19 things, and I can't help feel but, you know, we're being asked to
20 speak on the record, and so that's what I'm trying to do, but I
21 feel that there's been a very heavy-handed approach to this, where
22 the sole determiner, and presenter of the budgetary costs, is also
23 the one who seemingly is the sole determiner of what's viable and
24 what isn't, and that, to me, is very heavy-handed, when we haven't
25 had a proper opportunity, even though this has been being discussed
26 for four years, to really go, all right, here's our numbers, why
27 we think they're right, and here's yours, let's determine who is
28 right.

29
30 We haven't had that meaningful exchange, because, when we've tried
31 to have that, what we got instead was a letter, presented at the
32 last hour, presented to the group that would have been the most
33 productive group to have that meaningful engaged discussion, and
34 that just set the wrong tone and did not afford an opportunity for
35 that discussion, and so here we are, and I'm going to ask, I guess,
36 my colleagues on the council that we proceed with the preferred
37 alternative, because, at some point, we're going to have to have
38 that discussion, and bring this in for a landing, and I don't know
39 if it will take a third party outside person to take a look inside
40 and see whose budgetary figures are right or wrong, but we can't
41 keep just responding to, you know, a heavy-handed approach. I
42 don't respond well to being bullied, and I kind of feel like I'm
43 being bullied right now. Thank you.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Do we have any other
46 comments? Mr. Donaldson.

47
48 **MR. DONALDSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I've mentioned previously

1 in in the Shrimp Committee reports, and as Andy mentioned, we are
2 currently processing the SD cards from the old 3G system. When we
3 were approached, it was it was for a one-year term, and, as Mr.
4 Schieble pointed out, we're going on year five.

5
6 I was hoping that we would take final action at this meeting, and
7 I just want the council to know that, if we don't take final action
8 we're -- The commission is not going to be able to continue to
9 process those cards, and so that's something to consider, just for
10 the record.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Mr. Donaldson, and thank you for your
13 comments. I have a question, and maybe it's for Andy, or Clay,
14 and I'm not sure. The way I understand it is this document has
15 been in front of us for four or so years, with the same alternatives
16 in place., and, to me, in January, or maybe November, we picked a
17 preferred, and, once we picked the preferred, then we were notified
18 that the preferred was not viable, and it rubs some folks maybe in
19 the wrong way, that it's been in the document for almost four
20 years, and there was never an issue until the preferred was chosen.
21 Is there any reason for that timing?

22
23 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Clay can talk to it from the letter that was sent,
24 but the cost estimates came forward in that November or so
25 timeframe, right, and so, yes, the amendment has been developed
26 for quite some time, but we had not built the entire amendment,
27 with all the details and analysis and all that, and so that was
28 what was, obviously, coming forward at that stage.

29
30 I want to, I guess, because I have the microphone, respond to John
31 Sanchez, because I respect him highly, and we've talked about this.
32 I don't view the agency is being heavy-handed and threatening here.
33 What I'm trying to acknowledge, right, is that this is a normal
34 part of the council process, right, and we have to look at all the
35 information before us and make a decision, and that's what I'm
36 looking at, right, is what does the record say.

37
38 I get that people are saying we disagree with the numbers, but
39 this would be no different than talking about lane snapper, or
40 electronic logbook programs, and we provide these numbers for
41 different alternatives all the time. Sometimes we question them,
42 and sometimes we question the analysis. A lot of times we build
43 additional rationale and record for that particular action, and
44 that's essentially what I was laying out for the council, based on
45 all of the pros and cons of each of these approaches.

46
47 I recognize that Alternative 3 is fully supported by the industry,
48 but then we talk about things like the industry is in dire straits,

1 and economically they're not doing well, and I look at Alternative
2 3 as putting a greater burden on industry, rather than going with
3 Alternative 2, and so, even taking the government's cost out of
4 that, Alternative 3, unless there's some other congressional
5 funding to support additional purchase of ELB units, would cost
6 the industry more, right, and so it's that record, and all of this
7 information, that, obviously, builds over time. We didn't
8 necessarily have all the pieces prior to November, and, after
9 November, we've, obviously, gathered more information.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck, for that explanation.
12 Mr. Sanchez.

13
14 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I think we've discussed, you know, the issues and
15 the differences I think enough, and I guess we just don't agree,
16 but I do appreciate -- I do appreciate you reaching out and saying,
17 you know, that this is respectful, because it is, and I respect
18 you too, and this is not personal. We just happen to disagree on
19 this issue, the facts as they are.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Dr. Porch.

22
23 **DR. PORCH:** Thank you. I did want to respond to the comment that's
24 been made a couple times now that somehow the center was doing
25 something underhanded by submitting the cost estimates at the last
26 minute to the AP Shrimp committee, and I'll remind the council
27 that the letter was sent, and it did ask for the analysis in
28 advance of the council submission deadlines for the briefing book,
29 and then it did say it would be ideal if it was also presented to
30 the Shrimp AP, but there wasn't a request to submit it well in
31 advance of the Shrimp AP, and, honestly, we did the best we could
32 to get that out.

33
34 We were working on it even that morning, and we had to get approval.
35 Of course, any documents under this administration are requiring
36 a higher level of approval, and so it was quite a lot of work to
37 get that out, given all the other circumstances that are happening
38 right now, as you all are aware, and so I really am uncomfortable
39 with the continued insinuations that we were trying to sneak
40 something -- To sneak something by folks by submitting it at the
41 last minute.

42
43 That was actually -- Even the Executive Director sent us an email
44 asking if we wanted to present it or wait until the council
45 meeting, and we thought, well, we'll go ahead and present it, and
46 start that conversation, and so, again, I really regret that folks
47 are interpreting it as something underhanded. Thank you.

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Porch. I'm looking around the
2 table. Do we have any more comments, or questions? Mr. Donaldson.
3
4 **MR. DONALDSON:** I've got one more comment. In talking with staff
5 about the processing the SD cards, we -- This is just anecdotal,
6 and we don't have any -- We haven't done any actual analysis, but
7 it appears that we're getting more cards that are blank, or are
8 non-functioning, and so, at some point, that whole 3G system is
9 going to stop working, and so I think it's imperative that we get
10 something in place sooner than later, and so just again.
11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Donaldson. Is there any further
13 discussion? Not seeing any, okay. This is going to be a roll
14 call vote for final action. Go ahead, Dr. Simmons.
15
16 Bernie, I'm going to read the motion into the record. The
17 committee recommends, and I so move, to recommend the council
18 approve Framework Action: Modification of the Vessel Position Data
19 Collection Program for the Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Fishery and that
20 it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and
21 implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and
22 appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary
23 changes in the document. The council chair is given the authority
24 to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and
25 appropriate. Dr. Simmons.
26
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Anson.
28
29 **MR. ANSON:** Yes.
30
31 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Sanchez.
32
33 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.
34
35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. McDermott.
36
37 **MR. MCDERMOTT:** Yes.
38
39 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Banks.
40
41 **DR. BANKS:** Yes.
42
43 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Geeslin.
44
45 **MR. GEESLIN:** Yes.
46
47 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Williamson.
48

1 MR. WILLIAMSON: Yes.
2
3 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Broussard.
4
5 MR. BROUSSARD: Yes.
6
7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Sweetman.
8
9 DR. SWEETMAN: Yes.
10
11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Overton.
12
13 DR. OVERTON: (Dr. Overton's response is not audible on the
14 recording.)
15
16 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Captain Walker.
17
18 MR. WALKER: Yes.
19
20 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Frazer.
21
22 DR. FRAZER: Yes.
23
24 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: General Spraggins.
25
26 GENERAL SPRAGGINS: Yes.
27
28 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Strelcheck.
29
30 MR. STRELCHECK: Abstain.
31
32 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Schieble.
33
34 MR. SCHIEBLE: Yes.
35
36 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Captain Frady.
37
38 MR. FRADY: Yes.
39
40 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Osborne.
41
42 MR. OSBORNE: Yes.
43
44 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Dugas.
45
46 CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Yes.
47
48 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: The motion carried sixteen to zero

1 **with one abstention, Mr. Chair.**

2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Okay. We'll move on in
4 the report. Mr. Schieble.

5
6 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Next, we went to the 2023
7 Gulf Shrimp Fishery Effort Presentation, Tab D, Number 6. Mr.
8 Detloff, from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, presented on
9 the Gulf shrimp fishery effort in 2023.

10
11 From 2022 to 2023, effort increased in Statistical Areas 10 through
12 21, but decreased in the total Gulf. Council staff added that, in
13 Shrimp Amendment 18, the target reduction goal for juvenile red
14 snapper of shrimp trawl bycatch mortality is 60 percent less than
15 the benchmark years of 2001 through 2003 and requires monitoring
16 of days fished in the ten to thirty-fathom depth zone in
17 Statistical Areas 10 through 21.

18
19 The purpose of the target reduction goal is to assist with
20 rebuilding of the red snapper stock. A committee member noted
21 that the Gulf shrimp fishery is well within the target reduction
22 goal.

23
24 Discussion of Potential Expiration of Moratorium for Federal Gulf
25 Shrimp Permits, Tab D, Numbers 7(a) through (b), council staff
26 know that the moratorium for the federal Gulf shrimp permits is
27 set to expire October 26, 2026, as set forth in Shrimp Amendment
28 17B.

29
30 The moratorium was initially established in Shrimp Amendment 13 in
31 2006, for a period of ten years, and was then extend for another
32 ten years in Shrimp Amendment 17B. Both amendments reference the
33 prevention of overcapacity as a purpose of the moratorium. Council
34 staff added that the Shrimp AP passed a motion recommending the
35 council extend the moratorium for an additional ten years.

36
37 Ms. Bosarge emphasized of the Shrimp AP expressed interest in the
38 amendment having only one action to focus solely on the
39 continuation of the moratorium for federal Gulf shrimp permits.

40
41 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to direct staff to begin**
42 **development of a shrimp amendment to extend the moratorium on**
43 **federal Gulf shrimp permits.** That motion carried unanimously.
44 Mr. Chair, we have a committee motion on the board.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Do we have any
47 discussion on the motion on the board? **Not seeing any, is there**
48 **any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.**

1 Mr. Schieble.

2
3 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We then received the
4 remaining items from the summary of the March 4, 2025 Shrimp
5 Advisory Panel meeting, Tab D, Number 4(c). Council staff reviewed
6 a motion from the Shrimp AP related to the forthcoming results of
7 the SEDAR 87 stock assessments for brown, white, and pink shrimp.

8
9 Council staff added that the Shrimp AP motion could be brought
10 back to the Shrimp Committee when the results of the SEDAR 87 are
11 presented. Ms. Bosarge noted that the Shrimp AP was not expecting
12 the council to act on this motion. Mr. Chair, this concludes my
13 report.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble, for your report. Is
16 there any other business that needs to be discussed with Shrimp?
17 Not seeing any, thank you, Mr. Schieble. We're going to move on
18 to Captain Walker with the Data Collection Committee report.

19
20 **DATA COLLECTION COMMITTEE REPORT**

21
22 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Data Collection Committee
23 adopted the agenda and approved the minutes of the November 2024
24 meeting. We discussed loss of the Southeast Region Headboat
25 Survey, and staff from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center
26 provided a report regarding the recent loss of funding for dockside
27 validation sampling within the Southeast Region Headboat Survey
28 from Texas through Alabama.

29
30 The loss of monetary support and staffing reductions are expected
31 to continue into the foreseeable future. To mitigate this loss,
32 the Southeast Fisheries Science Center will explore using port
33 samplers or rotate sampling efforts in different Gulf states each
34 year.

35
36 Several committee members acknowledged the importance of the
37 headboat survey as a long-term data collection program and its use
38 in a substantial number of stock assessments. A committee member
39 asked how spending plans are justified within the agency. SERO
40 staff indicated that executive administrative budget priorities
41 are determined at a national level within the Department of
42 Commerce each year.

43
44 Several committee members recognized the current funding levels
45 and suggested the council communicate data needs. Communicating
46 data needs could help the agency develop funding priorities, and
47 I know -- I think we had a little bit of discussion on this.
48 Captain Frady, did you have something you wanted to point out here?

1
2 **MR. FRADY:** Yes, and thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to make
3 a motion at this time, Bernie. Thank you, ma'am. All right. I
4 want to make a motion to request the SSC provide an emergency
5 analysis and a summary about the impacts of losing the Southeast
6 Regional Headboat Survey to the fisheries management process. This
7 analysis should explore the loss of the program, which would impact
8 catch estimates, due to different effort estimates or the size of
9 the fish landed, what species information would be most impacted,
10 and what those differences could mean for the stock status
11 estimates and quotas. Contingent upon the SSC review, the council
12 requests that NOAA Fisheries consider and seek all available means
13 for continued funding of the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey as
14 an important time series for data collection. If I could get a
15 second, I would appreciate it.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We have a committee motion on the board, or
18 sorry. Not committee, but full council. We have a second by Mr.
19 Sanchez. Is there any discussion on the motion? Dr. Simmons.

20
21 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I believe
22 this really be the Science Center that would have to do this. I
23 mean, we could take it to the SSC, but I don't know that they would
24 really be able to say a whole lot on this. I think it's really
25 the Science Center taking a look at this, and looking at all the
26 assessments, which even our staff could look at the assessments
27 where we've utilized this index. You know, some of them -- I think
28 lane snapper comes to mind, and we were basing a lot of the recent
29 information on catches, I believe, just on this index alone, and
30 so I think it could be a group effort, maybe, with the Science
31 Center and council staff, if that's okay with the council.

32
33 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. You know, my whole thing is,
34 being on the water every day, and trying to get data continuously
35 coming in, and, you know, I don't care who analyzes the data, but
36 I just know there are people of influence, and there are
37 organizations, and there's bodies that work within this agency who
38 have influence, and I want to have the ability to give the agency
39 something to go to NOAA Headquarters and defend the importance of
40 this, of losing this data, and that is why I wrote a long one, but
41 I just -- I think it's so important not to lose this data stream.
42 Thank you.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Frady. Dr. Porch.

45
46 **DR. PORCH:** Thank you. I want to correct the record a little bit
47 here on the Southeast Headboat Survey. The program itself is not
48 under threat of being discontinued. It's just the supplementary

1 funding for the biosampling component.

2
3 Remember, as Mr. Donaldson said, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries
4 Commission conducted the biosampling for the better part of thirty
5 years, using their GulfFIN funding. When Gulf States dropped the
6 program a few years ago, the center and the Regional Office, at
7 various times, managed to cobble together funds to keep the program
8 going, but I sort of feel like this is a case of no good deed goes
9 unpunished, since I keep hearing folks think this is something
10 that should become a permanent obligation for the center.

11
12 Now, as Mr. Frady said, there's certainly nothing that would
13 prevent the council from asking the National Marine Fisheries
14 Service, or others, to go to their congressional representatives
15 to increase funding for this program, and it doesn't necessarily
16 have to come to the Southeast Center. It could be an increase to
17 the GulfFIN budget, so Gulf States could pick it up again, but
18 there is no money tree here at the Southeast Center, and, in fact,
19 given recent events, there's a possibility that our budget will be
20 cut, and so I would just keep that in mind as you think about this
21 motion. Thank you.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Dr. Porch, and, in response to that, Mr.
24 Frady.

25
26 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Dr. Porch, for -- This is Troy. I just
27 wanted to thank you for explaining that. You know, at this point
28 in time right now, our nation is going through some changes right
29 now, and just the uncertainty about everything out there, and I
30 appreciate your explanation, trying to make me feel a little bit
31 better about this, and I don't care where the funding comes from.

32
33 I just don't want funding to be cut, and I just think this should
34 be listed as a priority, rather than just a, you know, let's catch
35 all -- You know, get what we can, and I think it just needs to be
36 reiterated that -- Not necessarily to Congress, but to NOAA
37 Fisheries, the agency, and everyone else, because whoever wants to
38 donate the money, or we reappropriate money, but this needs to be
39 a priority. Thank you, sir.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

42
43 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair and so understood what Clay
44 was saying about, you know, it's not like the headboat survey is
45 going away entirely, but we are losing that validation component
46 for four out of the five states, which basically makes this data
47 not usable, based on what we've seen in the past, and so,
48 effectively, it kind of is going away, just because these data

1 won't be useful anymore.

2

3 I understand the concerns here all around, and this is a tough
4 situation, but, to Carrie's point, Captain Frady, maybe a friendly
5 amendment about not the SSC, and have the council staff work with
6 the Science Center, rather than SSC,

7

8 **MR. FRADY:** Yes, sir, and that would be fine. Just the SSC, to
9 me, was a little higher fruit, and I wanted the impact of the SSC,
10 and their opinion, to hopefully have influence on this process and
11 the funding. Thank you.

12

13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Mr. Frady, and so do -- Does anyone want to
14 help wordsmith, to make changes?

15

16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** **Bernie, if you could just please the**
17 **"request the Science Center and council staff", instead of "SSC."**

18

19 **MR. FRADY:** You have my permission to edit anyway you want to, to
20 change the name to --

21

22 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I guess just also, while I have a mic
23 for a moment, I mean, just to build on what Dr. Sweetman said, it
24 says, back in the letter to us, that, you know, if it doesn't pass
25 -- It's not likely to pass certification and validation for use,
26 and so this data it could not be used, potentially, without this
27 dockside validation and biological sampling, and so it would in
28 fact be null and void, and it is in the letter. Thanks.

29

30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

31

32 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I guess I wanted to talk a little bit about timing
33 here as well, and so I alluded to, in committee, that this is
34 potentially one of many budget reductions, whether it's with us,
35 with Gulf States, with other data collection entities.

36

37 From a timing standpoint, I think we'll have a much better sense
38 of what the Regional Office's and Science Center's budget is going
39 to look like toward the end of FY25, and so you were referencing
40 an emergency analysis, but, to me, I think would be better to do
41 kind of a holistic, you know, analysis of this and other impacts
42 that we might be incurring, to be able to bring that back to you,
43 and so, if you're okay with that, I think timing would maybe be
44 less of an emergency and more just, you know, when available, bring
45 back that analysis, based on budget considerations.

46

47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Do we want to edit
48 the motion? Mr. Donaldson.

1 **MR. DONALDSON:** It doesn't have to do with the motion. I just
2 have a point of clarification on some statements.
3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. I will circle back to you. Mr. Frady.
5
6 **MR. FRADY:** You're welcome to edit any way you want to. I was
7 doing good to get all this out in one sentence.
8
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. I'm looking at Andy, if he wants to change
10 some wording.
11
12 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, if Troy is willing to just delete
13 "emergency" and, you know, provide an analysis and summary of the
14 impacts, so that -- I view "emergency" as kind of an immediate
15 response.
16
17 **MR. FRADY:** Yes, sir, and that's fine.
18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez, good? The second is good.
20
21 **MR. FRADY:** But remember the emergency is kind of me groveling a
22 little bit, and, when you grovel a little bit, it gets more
23 attention. Thank you.
24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.
26
27 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I don't think it's critical in the motion, but I
28 see this not only being the Science Center and council staff, but
29 Gulf States, the Southeast Regional Office, and I think there's a
30 lot of entities that are going to have to be involved and
31 contribute to a response like this.
32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Is there any further discussion on the
34 motion? Not seeing any, I'll read the motion into the record. **To**
35 **request the Southeast Fisheries Science Center and council staff**
36 **provide an analysis and summary about the impacts of losing the**
37 **Southeast Regional Headboat Survey to the fisheries management**
38 **process. This analysis should explore if the loss of the program**
39 **would impact catch estimates due to different effort estimates or**
40 **size of fish landed, what species information would be most**
41 **impacted, and what those differences could mean for stock status**
42 **estimates and quotas. Contingent upon the review, the council**
43 **requests that NOAA Fisheries consider and seek all available means**
44 **for continued funding of the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey as**
45 **an important time series for data collection. Is there any**
46 **opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries. I'm**
47 going to circle back to Mr. Donaldson.
48

1 **MR. DONALDSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I mentioned during the
2 committee, this -- The port sampling and biosampling aspect of
3 this program was initially, back in the late 1980s and early 1990s,
4 was funded through the Southeast Fisheries Science Center.
5 GulfFIN, back in their early 1990s, decided that they were -- That
6 they were kind of in the same situation, where they were trying to
7 find secured funding for this, and GulfFIN said, well, as a stopgap
8 measure, we'll fund it until you can find secure funding for this,
9 and, lo and behold, it just became our responsibility, and so I
10 just want that in the record, and, again, the benefit of being
11 here forever, and so, you know, I'm pretty sure we have the record
12 on stone tablets. It was that long ago.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Donaldson. Okay. We'll continue
15 with Captain Walker and the committee report.

16
17 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Data Collection committee,
18 the Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff provided presentation
19 comparing administrative costs for three economic data collection
20 methods considered in Action 4 of the draft document.

21
22 The highest administrative costs would be for the no-cost
23 alternative, which is Alternative 1, which would require the
24 development, implementation, and analysis of ad hoc surveys.
25 Alternatives 2 and 3 would cost much less relative to Alternative
26 1, while providing better economic data.

27
28 Alternative 2, the census level approach, would mostly work within
29 the logbook application completely, and therefore would be
30 slightly cheaper than Alternative 3, a sampling approach, which
31 would require sampling design, notification, mailing and tracking
32 of selected participants, and more advanced statistics.

33
34 The committee reviewed the Ad Hoc For-Hire Data Collection AP's
35 February summary and the draft amendment. For Actions 1 and 2,
36 the committee agreed with the AP's rationale that submitting a
37 logbook after each trip would aid in memory retention and reporting
38 accuracy. This would especially be helpful for charter and
39 headboat vessels taking multiple trips in a single day.

40
41 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Actions 1 and 2, to**
42 **make Alternative 2 the preferred alternative. Alternative 2 reads:**
43 **Require that the owner or operator of a charter vessel or headboat**
44 **issued a valid Gulf for-hire permit for reef fish or a Gulf CMP**
45 **species to submit trip, catch, and effort information for each**
46 **trip via electronic reporting via NMFS-approved software. If fish**
47 **are harvested during the trip, electronic reporting is required**
48 **prior to offloading fish. If fishing did not occur within a weekly**

1 period, a did-not-fish report would be required to be submitted.
2 Mr. Chair, that's the motion on the board from the committee.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walker, and so we have a motion
5 on the board. Is there any further discussion on the motion? **Not**
6 **seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none,**
7 **the motion carries.** Mr. Walker.

8
9 **MR. WALKER:** For Action 3, Captain Jim Green, AP chair, reviewed
10 the rationale for the AP's recommendation. The AP recommended
11 amending Alternative 2 to require a trip declaration only when
12 leaving to conduct for-hire fishing or any for-hire activity, i.e.,
13 sunset or dolphin cruises.

14
15 The AP recommended not repeating the multiple hail-out issues
16 encountered in the first iteration of the program and suggested
17 explicitly adding language in the alternative to address that
18 issue. The committee agreed with the AP and decided to
19 additionally modify that same language in Alternative 3.

20
21 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 3 to include**
22 **for-hire in Alternatives 2 and 3. Alternative 2 is require that**
23 **the owner or operator of a charter vessel or headboat issued a**
24 **valid charter vessel/headboat federal permit for reef fish or Gulf**
25 **CMP species submit a trip declaration for trips that will be**
26 **engaging in any type of for-hire fishing or for-hire activity.**
27 **Option a is charter vessels and Option b is Southeast Regional**
28 **Headboat Survey headboats. Alternative 3 is require that the owner**
29 **or operator of a charter vessel or headboat issued a valid permit**
30 **for reef fish or Gulf CMP species submit a trip declaration for**
31 **trips that will be engaging in any type of for-hire fishing**
32 **activity. Option a is charter vessels and Option b is headboats.**
33 **The carried with no opposition.** Mr. Chair.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walker. We have a committee
36 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not**
37 **seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing**
38 **any, the motion carries.** Captain Walker.

39
40 **MR. WALKER:** Council staff stated that they would work with the
41 interdisciplinary planning team to make sure the modified
42 alternative language in Action 3 would be aligned with that in
43 Actions 1 and 2.

44
45 The committee then discussed the merits of including the hail-out
46 requirement for trips that conduct for-hire activity that does not
47 include fishing. Several committee members stated that activities
48 such as cruises do not require a federal charter boat permit and

1 do not result in catch or harvest of federally-managed species.
2 Therefore, the hail-out provision should only pertain to for-hire
3 fishing trips.

4
5 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 3 to make the**
6 **modified Alternative 3, to include Options a and b, the preferred.**
7 **Alternative 3 is require that the owner or operator of a charter**
8 **vessel or headboat issued a valid federal charter boat permit or**
9 **headboat permit for reef fish in the Gulf of Mexico submit a trip**
10 **declaration for trips that will be engaging in any type of for-**
11 **hire fishing activity. Option a is charter vessels and Option b**
12 **is Southeast Regional Headboat Survey headboats. The motion**
13 **carried with no opposition. Mr. Chair.**

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walker. We have a motion on the
16 board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is**
17 **there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any opposition,**
18 **the motion carries. Mr. Walker.**

19
20 **MR. WALKER:** In Action 4, the committee discussed an AP
21 recommendation for an alternative to the trip fee reporting
22 requirement and the mechanism for collecting economic data. The
23 three economic questions that will be asked in the survey are the
24 trip fee, fuel used, and price of fuel per gallon.

25
26 The trip fee question was controversial in the first iteration of
27 the program, and the AP had discussed an approach to increase buy-
28 in for the new program. The AP had suggested using the term
29 "market value" in place of "trip fee". This would allow for the
30 program's participants to report an estimate of the trip, but not
31 be beholden to a particular number for any specific trip, in the
32 event of an audit.

33
34 SERO and council staff economists responded that they were
35 concerned that asking for the market value would be interpreted
36 too broadly and would reduce the transparency and accuracy of the
37 data for management and other purposes. Economists are most
38 interested in the actual price paid for the trip, i.e., total
39 revenue collected for the service.

40
41 The trip fee provides an estimate of this price, or revenue, and
42 the fuel used and fuel price variables provide some estimate of
43 the cost to run the trip.

44
45 A top-line price, or total revenue information, trip fee on its
46 own is important for fishery resource disaster determination
47 requests as well as modeling the economic value of individual trip
48 components to for-hire anglers.

1
2 Together, the revenue and cost data allow economists to calculate
3 the net value of each trip, a measure of producer surplus and
4 profitability for for-hire trips. By reporting trip fee and fuel
5 information separately, the usefulness of the data for fishery
6 management advice and disaster relief determinations would be much
7 greater.

8
9 To address participants, concerns while still providing explicit
10 direction to what -- To that report, or what to report, they
11 instead suggested exploring the use of language such as "estimated
12 trip fee". NOAA General Counsel explained that, regardless of the
13 specific terminology used, the council and NMFS would need to be
14 explicit about the definitions for the fields to be collected.

15
16 For the data collection methodology, the committee determined that
17 a sampling approach would balance the reporting burden for program
18 participants, while also providing data needed by fisheries
19 economists.

20
21 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 4 to make**
22 **Alternative 3 the preferred. Alternative 3 reads: Require that**
23 **the owner or operator of a charter vessel or headboat issued a**
24 **valid federal charter vessel/headboat permit for reef fish or Gulf**
25 **CMP species submit economic data as part of the logbook when the**
26 **vessel is engaging in any type of chartered fishing or chartered**
27 **activity if selected. Annually, a stratified random sampling**
28 **design of permitted vessels will be used for selecting vessels**
29 **that are required to report this economic data. The Southeast**
30 **Fisheries Science Center will determine the strata, based on**
31 **previous years' data and minimum sample size by strata, sufficient**
32 **for providing scientific and management advice. The motion carried**
33 **with no opposition.**

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walker, and so we have another
36 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not**
37 **seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing**
38 **any, the motion carries.**

39
40 **MR. WALKER:** Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Dr. Simmons.

43
44 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, just based
45 on the changes to the June council meeting format, our plan now is
46 to try to develop a public hearing draft of this document for the
47 August council meeting, for you to look at and approve before we
48 got to the public.

1
2 That being said, we do need to think about what type of engagements
3 we want to have and the O&E gave us some information on that, and
4 so we'll bring that back in August as well.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons, I think now is an
7 appropriate time to take our break, before we get into Reef Fish.
8 Let's take a fifteen-minute break, until 10:05, or 10:10.

9
10 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We'll go ahead and move to the Reef Fish
13 Committee report. Dr. Frazer.

14
15 **REEF FISH COMMITTEE REPORT**

16
17 **DR. FRAZER:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Reef Fish
18 Committee report, April 8 and 9, 2025, the committee adopted the
19 agenda, Tab B, Number 1, and the minutes, Tab B, Number 2, from
20 the January 2025 meeting were approved as written.

21
22 Review of Reef Fish and IFQ Program Landings and State Program
23 Landings for Red Snapper, Tab B, Numbers 4(a) through (e), SERO
24 staff reviewed the status of reef fish and individual fishing quota
25 program landings relative to catch limits.

26
27 Council representatives from the five Gulf states also reviewed
28 their 2024 private angling fishing seasons for red snapper and
29 offered projections for the 2025 fishing season. The states also
30 characterized available data for observed mean lengths and weights
31 for red snapper, fishing effort, and other data.

32
33 A committee member asked about the disruptions in Florida due to
34 the active 2024 hurricane season, which saw three named storms
35 make landfall in the late summer and fall. The State of Florida
36 representative replied that hurricane activity undoubtedly had an
37 impact on the state's fishing effort in 2024.

38
39 The state representative from Alabama clarified that they would be
40 transitioning to a seven-days-a-week fishing season for 2025, and
41 its landings do include self-reported dead discards, which account
42 for between 5 and 7.5 percent of Alabama's landings by weight.

43
44 Draft Reef Fish Amendment 58B: Modifications to Deepwater Grouper
45 Management Measures, Tab B, Numbers 5(a) and (b), council staff
46 presented updated management alternatives for modifying the
47 deepwater grouper complex.

48

1 In light of recent stock assessment advice, management
2 alternatives for deepwater grouper include specifying status
3 determination criteria, catch limits, sector allocations, and
4 accountability measures. This most recent draft reflects changes
5 made by the council to the document in January 2025.

6
7 The committee heard feedback from the Reef Fish Advisory Panel on
8 the actions and alternatives presented. The Reef Fish AP
9 recommended that the council select Alternative 2 in Action 1 as
10 the preferred and thought the 4 percent buffer between the
11 commercial quota and commercial annual catch limit was no longer
12 necessary.

13
14 Captain Dylan Hubbard, the Reef Fish AP chair, recalled concern by
15 the Reef Fish AP with reallocating deepwater grouper between the
16 sectors using data which are informed by the Marine Recreational
17 Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey, or MRIP-FES. Given
18 that, the Reef Fish AP preferred Alternative 1 in Action 2,
19 retaining the status quo and allocation.

20
21 For AMs in Action 3, the Reef Fish AP preferred Alternative 5,
22 which would impose a postseason accountability measure to adjust
23 the recreational fishing season in the event of an ACL overage,
24 based on the average landings from the previous three fishing
25 years.

26
27 NOAA General Counsel asked why the Reef Fish AP did not select
28 Alternative 1 in Action 2, which performs similarly to Alternative
29 1 in that action. Captain Hubbard replied that the Reef Fish AP
30 debated the issue heavily, but ultimately was hesitant to recommend
31 any allocation changes using MRIP-FES data.

32
33 A committee member asked about the implications of selecting
34 Alternative 1 in Action 2. NOAA General Counsel replied that
35 applying accountability measures in Action 3 would be problematic
36 without defining a recreational ACL in Action 2.

37
38 Council staff reviewed Action 1, which evaluates changes to the
39 status determination criteria in the setting of the overfishing
40 limit, acceptable biological catch, and complex ACL. A committee
41 member asked about the mechanism for implementing the current
42 accountability measures, given the undefined recreational ACL.

43
44 NOAA General Counsel replied that applying the current
45 accountability measures requires NMFS to assume that the
46 commercial sector will harvest its ACL, although accountability
47 measures have not been triggered to-date. Whether a recreational
48 ACL is specified or not, the recreational sector is managed to the

1 poundage and the remainder of the complex ACL minus the commercial
2 ACL.

3
4 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to select Alternative 2**
5 **in Action 1 as the preferred alternative. Alternative 2 is revise**
6 **the MSY proxy and catch limits for the deepwater grouper complex**
7 **based on the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Scientific**
8 **and Statistical Committee's (SSC) recommendations. The OFL and**
9 **ABC for yellowedge grouper would be set based on an MSY proxy of**
10 **the yield when fishing at 40 percent SPR and the yield when fishing**
11 **at 75 percent of the FMSY proxy, respectively. The OFL and ABC**
12 **for the three remaining species would be based on Tier 3 of the**
13 **council's ABC control rule. The deepwater grouper MSY proxy would**
14 **be the yield when fishing at 40 percent SPR. The OFL and ABC for**
15 **yellowedge grouper and the three remaining species would be**
16 **combined, and all four species would be managed as a single complex**
17 **with a complex OFL of 731,035 pounds gutted weight and an ABC of**
18 **555,026 pounds gutted weight. The complex ACL would be set equal**
19 **to the ABC. That motion carried without opposition.**

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. We have a motion on the
22 board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is**
23 **there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion**
24 **carries. Dr. Frazer.**

25
26 **DR. FRAZER:** Council staff reviewed the alternatives in Action 2,
27 which considers changes to sector allocations and ACLs. A
28 committee member thought the only alternative in Action 2 that was
29 less likely to result in recreational ACL overages and closures
30 was Alternative 3, which would set the recreational ACL at 10.21
31 percent of the complex ACL, or 56,649 pounds gutted weight.

32
33 The committee member also thought the larger recreational ACL in
34 Alternative 3 would reduce the likelihood of recreational fishing
35 season closures, and thus might reduce dead discards.

36
37 The committee member asked about the precision of the recreational
38 data for the deepwater grouper species. Council staff replied
39 that, based on the vessel types required to reach the depths in
40 which deepwater grouper species occur, recreational anglers
41 targeting deepwater grouper would likely be fishing from private
42 access points, and were thus less likely to be intercepted for
43 catch surveys conducted at public ramps.

44
45 Committee members added that guidance from the NOAA Office of
46 Science and Technology is do not use landings data with a
47 proportional standard error, or PSE, exceeding 50 percent. The
48 annual, or wave, PSE for recreational landings of deepwater grouper

1 often exceeds 50 percent.

2

3 Regarding the 4 percent reduction from the commercial ACL to the
4 commercial quota, the committee thought it necessary to determine
5 whether to retain the current flexibility measures between the
6 other shallow-water grouper complex and the deepwater grouper
7 complex. The 4 percent buffer between the commercial ACL and quota
8 is in place to allow the current flexibility measures to function.
9 Removal of these flexibility measures is a current consideration
10 in Draft Amendment 58A, which considers modification to the
11 shallow-water grouper complex.

12

13 Council staff reviewed Action 3, which considers revisions to the
14 recreational accountability measures. Regarding Alternative 4,
15 council staff noted that NOAA General Counsel thought it was in
16 violation of National Standard 1, which requires annual monitoring
17 of landings against the ACL. NOAA General Counsel further
18 clarified that Alternative 4 would allow for no action for a two-
19 year period, regardless of stock status.

20

21 A committee member recalled that the Southeast Fisheries Science
22 Center presented the approach outlined in Alternative 4 as
23 scientifically viable and questioned why that would be in violation
24 of National Standard 1.

25

26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

27

28 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and a question for staff. Remind me about
29 timing for this amendment, and would it be beneficial to select
30 preferreds for Action 2 and 3 at this meeting, or would we want to
31 wait until -- Well, are we going to have this on the agenda for
32 June? Maybe that's the question.

33

34 **MR. RINDONE:** We're going to bring you guys a public hearing draft
35 back in June. If you wanted to select preferred alternatives here,
36 I mean, that might help with the analyses a little bit, as we're
37 preparing the public hearing draft, but I would definitely ask you
38 to consider selecting preferred alternatives before we go out to
39 public hearings, so the public has some idea of where the council's
40 head is at.

41

42 Then there's the subject of Alternative 4 in Action 3 for the
43 accountability measures, which General Counsel has identified as
44 being in conflict with National Standard 1, and so, as it sits
45 right now, it's not something that that we can do, and so you guys
46 would need to remove that, or we would need some other kind of
47 justification as to how we can make it work and it be in compliance.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.
2
3 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I don't know what the appetite is for the council
4 with selecting preferreds. I'm happy to make the motion to remove
5 Alternative 4 in Action 3, but, if you want to work through this
6 sequentially, I'm happy to wait as well. However you prefer.
7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Frazer.
9
10 **DR. FRAZER:** I mean, it's a pleasure of the committee, right, and
11 so --
12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Mr. Strelcheck.
14
15 **MR. STRELCHECK:** **So I will recommend that Alternative 4 in Action**
16 **3 be moved to Considered but Rejected.**
17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We'll take a moment and let Bernie get
19 Mr. Strelcheck's motion on the board. Okay. Mr. Strelcheck, is
20 this what you're looking for?
21
22 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes.
23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We have a motion on the board. Is there
25 a second? Mr. Broussard seconds. Is there any further discussion
26 on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition to the**
27 **motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.** Mr. Strelcheck.
28
29 **MR. STRELCHECK:** **I would like to make another motion to select**
30 **Alternative 5 as the preferred alternative in Action 3.**
31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and we'll take another moment and let
33 Bernie catch up. Okay. Mr. Strelcheck, is that good with you?
34 We have a second from Dr. Sweetman. Is there any discussion on
35 the motion? Mr. Strelcheck.
36
37 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so my rationale is this, obviously, is
38 consistent with our National Standard Guidelines, but also we've
39 talked a lot about the uncertainty in the data, and so this just
40 gives us some flexibility with regard to using an average over a
41 period of three years, obviously, to evaluate the accountability
42 measure, and so I think this is appropriate for a species where we
43 have higher data uncertainty.
44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Any other comments
46 or discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there any**
47 **opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.**
48 Ms. Levy.

1
2 **MS. LEVY:** I think we might want to think about adding some clarity
3 to this language, and so it says if the average deepwater grouper
4 landings exceed the average ACL, and is that the recreational ACL?
5 I assume so, because the discussion talks about it like that, but
6 then my question is do we want to make it so that it needs to
7 exceed both the average recreational ACL and average complex ACL,
8 in order to do the payback, in order to do the reduction for the
9 commercial season, and so kind of like how Alternative 3 is worded,
10 except we're using averages, as opposed to just the straight catch
11 limit, and so those are my two questions. I think, right now,
12 it's just recreational average compared to recreational catch,
13 average ACL.
14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Captain Walker.
16
17 **MR. WALKER:** I think that's a good point. Are we talking about
18 exceeding the rec ACL or the total? It could make a big difference.
19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Rindone.
21
22 **MR. RINDONE:** I mean, you guys could go other way on that, and so,
23 I mean, the intent, based on the way that it was written, was for
24 the recreational ACL, but Ms. Levy's point is well taken that you
25 could do it based on the average total ACL, and so it's an option.
26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck, and then Mr. Sanchez.
28
29 **MR. STRELCHECK:** In the South Atlantic, we haven't necessarily
30 used the average approach, but we do have this kind of multi-
31 tiered accountability measure for some species, where you have to
32 exceed both the recreational catch limit and the total catch limit
33 before an accountability measure is triggered, and so I like the
34 idea that Mara is suggesting, and I certainly would be open to
35 adding that, and would we need to modify the motion that has
36 already passed at this point, or give staff direction?
37
38 **MR. RINDONE:** Yes, you should probably make a motion.
39
40 **MR. STRELCHECK:** All right, and so --
41
42 **MR. RINDONE:** I mean, we understand what you're asking, but -- I
43 mean, would that just be done as options then under Alternative 5,
44 or, well, it will now be Alternative 4, but, you know, based on
45 the recreational ACL, or based on total ACL, or just do it based
46 on total ACL, is --
47
48 **MS. LEVY:** I think you could make a motion to change the wording

1 of the alternative however you deem appropriate, and so, right
2 now, Alternative 3 doesn't use averages, right, but it has the
3 language about the recreational ACL is exceeded and the total ACL
4 is exceeded. You could mirror that in 5, but you just need to
5 make a motion to change the language of the alternative.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy.
8

9 **MR. RINDONE:** Make a motion.
10

11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have Mr. Sanchez on hold. Is it is it pertaining
12 to this?
13

14 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I just -- I know this is evolving, and
15 we're, you know, developing this, but I'm kind of uncomfortable
16 with different sectors, you know, sharing in some burden for
17 someone's overage. I would prefer it to be, you know, if you
18 exceed your ACL as a sector, then you're solely responsible, and
19 not just take it off the whole, because I don't find that to be
20 encouraging for either sector.
21

22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Mr. Strelcheck, to that?
23

24 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so this would be specific to the
25 recreational sector's accountability measures being triggered.
26 The commercial sector wouldn't have to pay back an overage if this
27 accountability measure was triggered, right, and it would only
28 pertain to the recreational sector, but it gives them some
29 flexibility, or more flexibility, in the event that commercial
30 underharvests their quota by some amount, and recreational
31 landings, based on data uncertainty, are higher than we expect,
32 right?
33

34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. I have Ryan, C.J., and Tom
35

36 **MR. RINDONE:** So, just for actually implementing this
37 accountability measure, in the event the accountability measure is
38 triggered, we would probably need to write somewhere, and I'm
39 looking at Mara on this, that NMFS would have to -- In the year in
40 which the accountability measure is in effect, NMFS would have to
41 assume that the commercial quota would be met, and then the
42 projection of the recreational fishing season would have to be
43 based upon -- Based considerate of that, or no?
44

45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.
46

47 **MS. LEVY:** No, because the accountability measure is to ensure
48 that the recreational season does not exceed the recreational ACL,

1 but that's only triggered if you go over both the rec ACL and the
2 total, but then the monitoring and the accountability measure is
3 directed only towards the recreational ACL and the recreational
4 season.

5
6 We're going to have an ACL for the rec side, and so -- Well, if we
7 don't, none of this works, and so assuming that, right, and so the
8 only reason that the commercial plays into this, or the total, is
9 to actually trigger the need to restrict recreational harvest,
10 but, other than that, it doesn't impact the commercial side at
11 all. You don't have to assume anything about the commercial side.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

14
15 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I'm good, Mr. Chair. Andy answered my question.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Frazer.

18
19 **DR. FRAZER:** Similarly, and I'm good.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. McDermott.

22
23 **MR. MCDERMOTT:** I mean, Andy pretty much said what I was going to
24 say, but, I mean, if I understand this correctly, it's not going
25 to limit the commercial sector in any way, and it's kind of like
26 the red snapper deal we discussed, where, if there's some fish
27 left over, and the total ACL wasn't exceeded, then the recreational
28 sector wouldn't be limited in the following years, and so --

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. McDermott. Mr. Strelcheck.

31
32 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So I'll make the motion in Action 3 to modify the
33 language in Alternative 5 to read as follows, and then we need to
34 add, before "average ACL", "recreational", or "average
35 recreational ACL" I guess be better. After "ACL", "and total ACL".

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Mr. Strelcheck has motion on the board.
38 Do we have a second? Dr. Frazer seconds. Any further discussion
39 on the motion? Seeing none, is it -- No further discussion? Ms.
40 Levy.

41
42 **MS. LEVY:** Well, just so we're clear, the highlighted word -- It's
43 "recreational" that we added. It has always said "average", and
44 so I just wanted to make sure that we're not confused.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Is Dr. Frazer okay with
47 that?

48

1 **MR. RINDONE:** Mr. Chair, we call it a complex ACL throughout much
2 of the document, and so that's how we'll reflect it in there. I
3 mean, it doesn't really make a difference, but I'm just saying
4 like the way that it will be written, to be commensurate with the
5 rest of the document. Instead of "total ACL", it's "complex ACL".
6 It means the same thing, but --

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Any other discussion? **Any opposition?**
9 **Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Frazer. Sorry. Mr.
10 Strelcheck.

11
12 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I just want to go back to Action 2. I'm not going
13 to make a motion for a preferred, but, based on what I've heard
14 from public testimony, it sounded like Alternative 2 is preferred
15 by the commercial sector, and Alternative 3 or 4 was preferred by
16 the recreational sector, which leaves, obviously, a lot of
17 decisions for us, but we have, obviously, three different options.

18
19 One, obviously, would kind of maintain the status quo, in my view,
20 and the other kind of equally reduces everyone, and the third is
21 based on a recent time series for recreational, and so I'm curious
22 if there's any appetite to select a preferred here.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Banks.

25
26 **DR. BANKS:** Remind me, but Alternative 3 is the only one that
27 doesn't have a projected rec closure, and is that correct?

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Rindone.

30
31 **MR. RINDONE:** Alternative 3 results in the highest recreational
32 ACL, and so, based on the average landings, has the lowest
33 probability of a closure, but it still would result in a closure
34 about approximately half the time, based on the recent landings
35 history.

36
37 Alternative 4, there was -- If you're looking table 2.3.1, which,
38 again, would have to be tweaked a little bit, because of the change
39 in the language that you guys just approved, Alternative 4 would
40 still result in a closure most of the time, and then, of course,
41 Alternative 2, the one has the lowest recreational ACL, would
42 result in a closure all the time, despite the averaging, and so
43 just understanding that we're going to have to update this to
44 reflect the change in the language that you guys just made.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Dr. Sweetman.

47
48 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Part of my thought -- I'm

1 not too comfortable making a preferred alternative recommendation
2 today. I mean, I think Alternative 4 is kind of the equal cut
3 across the board. I recognize that there could be some potential
4 closures there, but, just based on the way this fishery has been
5 historically set up, Alternative 3 would be a drastic change, and
6 I'm not saying I'm not in favor of Alternative 3, but I, quite
7 frankly, would like to get a little more feedback from the public
8 on some of this, to be honest with you.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Sanchez.

11
12 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I'm with C.J. on that, with Dr. Sweetman.
13 I would like to hear a little more from both sides before we
14 proceed with picking a preferred.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.

17
18 **MS. LEVY:** So I would just encourage you, while you're thinking
19 about it, and if you have to pick preferreds at the next meeting,
20 to the extent we're dealing with an allocation here, right, in all
21 circumstances, whether we keep the status quo or not, whatever
22 you're going to choose, articulating how it's fair and equitable
23 and reasonably calculated to promote conservation, and so just be
24 thinking about that. Thanks.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Is there any more
27 discussion? I think -- What I think I understand is Dr. Sweetman
28 and Mr. Sanchez and Mr. Strelcheck are okay not picking a preferred
29 at this time, and so, with that being said, we'll move on. Dr.
30 Simmons.

31
32 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just had a
33 question about the flexibility measures discussion that was had in
34 committee, and thinking about all the moving pieces right now, to
35 make sure that we have that action in the right document, and so
36 we're planning to bring a final action framework for the short-
37 term solution for scamp in June, public hearing drafts of deepwater
38 grouper, yet we have the flexibility measures currently in
39 Amendment 58A. That will come much later, and so I guess my
40 question is, timing-wise, is that the correct place
41 administratively for that action?

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

44
45 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So we have -- Let me make sure I get the wording
46 right. The shallow-water grouper framework is going to be first,
47 deepwater second, and 58A, which is the long-term shallow-water
48 action, and I think -- Yes, I think we have to stay the course.

1
2 We have to, I think, keep the 4 percent in this document, and then,
3 if we want to remove that, we would remove it both for deepwater
4 grouper and other shallow-water grouper in Amendment 58, because
5 we have to remove both.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Dr. Froeschke.

8
9 **DR. FROESCHKE:** So, just to clarify, we would potentially put one
10 additional action in 58A that would further modify the deepwater
11 grouper buffer, and that's -- Operationally, that makes sense. We
12 just need to add it at some point.

13
14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and whether it's a new action or combined
15 with the existing action, but I think it can be handled
16 collectively in that amendment.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Good. Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Dr.
19 Frazer.

20
21 **DR. FRAZER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We'll move on to the
22 recreational initiative, Tab B, Number 6(a) through (d). Dr. Willy
23 Goldsmith and Mr. Andrew Loftus reviewed the final report on the
24 council's recreational initiative, including the recommendations
25 put forth by the working group.

26
27 Following the summary of working group outcomes, Mr. Robert
28 Hilliard gave an overview the recreational initiative working
29 group's progress and recommended outcomes. Lastly, council staff
30 provided a summary of the public engagement sessions held to-date.

31
32 Council staff presented a decision flow chart to perform to prompt
33 the committee to systematically move through the working group
34 recommendations. Points of consideration for the council in
35 addressing working group recommendations should include the
36 magnitude of the impacts of the recommendation and prioritization
37 of working group recommendations for action.

38
39 A committee member commended the working group participants,
40 consultants, and council staff for the effort put into the working
41 group meetings and noted that the working group was able to capture
42 the complexity in fisheries management and the multifaceted issues
43 the council is faced with when managing fisheries.

44
45 Another committee member suggested that the working group
46 recommendations be integrated into the council process, but are
47 likely to take a few meetings for the council to prioritize those
48 recommendations. A committee member suggested that rationale be

1 included in council-led decisionmaking to aid in the council's
2 prioritization of working group recommendations. Additionally, it
3 was suggested that an evaluation of necessary resources for each
4 recommendation be used to inform the prioritization discussion.

5
6 A committee member suggested that council staff coordinate with
7 the steering committee to expand on the working group member
8 recommendations to be presented to the council in a later meeting.
9 Additionally, it was suggested that, in reference to the decision
10 flowchart, the first question should be whether the recommendation
11 is within the council's purview, as it is likely that a few of the
12 recommendations fall outside of the council's authority.

13
14 Another committee member suggested that, for those recommendations
15 that do not fit within the purview of the council, the appropriate
16 agency to recommend changes should be identified. A committee
17 member suggested that those recommendations that contain a
18 regulatory component be identified and those that do not contain
19 regulatory components be prioritized over those that do, due to
20 the additional workload associated with regulatory actions.

21
22 A committee member proposed that, based on the discussion, the
23 committee suggest staff develop the appropriate tool, a flowchart,
24 white paper, et cetera, to bring back to the council to aid in the
25 prioritization.

26
27 Council staff weighed-in that timing for a staff-produced product
28 is unknown, and that there should be a larger discussion at Full
29 Council to determine if further steering committee involvement is
30 necessary. On the evening of April 8, 2025, the council held a
31 separate recreational initiative public engagement session, and a
32 summary of that public engagement session will be provided at Full
33 Council.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. Mr. Walker.

36
37 **MR. WALKER:** I think maybe we should start trying to narrow this
38 down a little bit. You know, we've had -- It was really a lengthy
39 discussion on the process we went through on this, and the outreach
40 efforts, and the meetings, and it was forty pages of explanation
41 that we got, and it was like an hour-and-a-half.

42
43 I think, at this point, we should maybe make an effort to really
44 boil this down to like some two-sentence items that we can
45 consider, that are very specific, and we know exactly the issue
46 that we're talking about, and we can, you know, maybe move past
47 the process that we went through to get here and all this now, and
48 we've all been well versed on that, and let's get right to those

1 topics, and narrow them down, and that would be my suggestion,
2 because it's still --

3
4 There's still a lot of talk about ancillary things here, it seems
5 like to me, and let's get down to some -- You know, six, and, you
6 know, there were some things listed there, but let's narrow them
7 down to some very specific items, so we can discuss them
8 specifically, and if there's actionable things to do or not.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walker. Is there an interest by
11 the council to move forward on Mr. Walker's recommendations?

12
13 **MR. WALKER:** I'm not saying I have those very specific items yet,
14 but that you -- That kind of goes to my point here, that it could
15 take a long time to start, and so I think whatever we can do to
16 try and narrow it down, and I'm not sure if that's something staff
17 could do, or that we have to do item-by-item, and it could become
18 a -- It looks like, to me, that it could become kind of a lengthy
19 process. I know there were some listed, and there was like six
20 items listed, but I don't -- I don't know that I'm ready to make
21 a motion on that exact thing right.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Dr. Simmons.

24
25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I can
26 start, and maybe I'll ask Emily to help me here, but the way I
27 understood what the council wanted us to do is kind of take that
28 flowchart, make the changes that were documented in the committee
29 report, and then maybe hone-in even more, and you guys can
30 prioritize some of those, and I'm going to have to think about how
31 we would do that, either just ad hoc or if you want some other
32 type of information to make those types of decisions.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Okay. Emily is good?

35
36 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Yes, and, I mean, I think we -- I have
37 preliminarily run all of the recommendations of the working group
38 through the flowchart, and, you know, we can separate them out
39 into things that are more like education-based, things that are
40 more scientific recommendations that might have to be made to the
41 Science Center, and then really the things that are within the
42 management purview of the council.

43
44 I think what we can do is, the next time that we bring this up in
45 a Reef Fish Committee, we can sort of re-present all of the
46 recommendations from the working group, with that filter, and
47 really get you all to prioritize the management actions and decide
48 which ones you want to take action on and sort of, you know, which

1 ones are most important and will take shorter and longer time
2 periods, and so I think we can have that ready for you next time
3 we've got some time on an agenda.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Emily. Captain Walker is good? Dr.
6 Frazer.

7
8 **DR. FRAZER:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Summary of the
9 February 2025 Gulf and South Atlantic Scientific and Statistical
10 Committees Webinar, Tab B, Numbers 7(a) through (f). Dr. Mike
11 Allen, the Gulf SSC chair, reviewed recommendations from the Gulf
12 and South Atlantic SSCs joint meeting in Tampa, Florida held in
13 February 2025.

14
15 Dr. Allen began with reviewing the SSC's evaluation of the SEDAR
16 79 stock assessment of Southeastern U.S. mutton snapper, including
17 catch limit recommendations. The council's Fishermen Feedback
18 tool and the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's fishery
19 performance report indicated neutral and positive sentiments for
20 mutton snapper, respectively.

21
22 SEDAR 79 uses the State of Florida State Reef Fish Survey, or SRFS,
23 in place of MRIP-FES for private vessels, with a terminal data
24 year of 2023. Generally, the mutton snapper stock appears to be
25 experiencing stable landings, increasing recruitment, and
26 increasing fractions of older fish composing the stock's biomass.

27
28 The SSCs thought that the increase in the minimum size limit to
29 eighteen inches total length, combined with the reduced
30 recreational bag limit, had likely been positive for the stock.
31 The SSCs concluded, based on the SEDAR 79 results, that the mutton
32 snapper stock is not undergoing overfishing, nor is it overfished
33 as of 2023.

34
35 This determination of stock status was based on the currently
36 adopted spawning potential ratio (SPR) based proxy for the fishing
37 mortality at maximum sustainable yield (FMSY) of 30 percent SPR.
38 The SSCs selected an alternative approach from the South Atlantic
39 Council's P* approach in its ABC control rule for mutton snapper,
40 because of differences in how the uncertainty in OFL was
41 characterized.

42
43 The SSCs used the geometric mean of the most recent five years of
44 recruitment, 2019 through 2023, for informing OFL and ABC
45 projections. The OFL is set at 30 percent SPR, and the ABC is set
46 at 75 percent of 30 percent SPR for the years 2026 through 2028,
47 as derived from the provided projections for 2024 through 2028.
48 Projections are provided in the table below.

1
2 Captain Hubbard reviewed recommendations from the Reef Fish AP
3 regarding the SEDAR 79 stock assessment for mutton snapper. The
4 Reef Fish AP recommended that the annual catch limit (ACL) be set
5 equal to the ABC for the Gulf and that other current management
6 measures remain unchanged.

7
8 Dr. Allen recalled that, during a period of open discussion, the
9 SSCs noted a clear need to collectively address the required
10 precision to estimate steepness, and thus estimate MSY, for
11 management advice. He noted also that there was a discussion of
12 appropriate SPR proxy values, given a broad range of life history
13 characteristics among fish species, for example, longevity, age at
14 maturity, growth characteristics, and vulnerability to
15 environmental perturbations.

16
17 The SSCs, by consensus, thought that a follow-up joint meeting to
18 address these topics is essential to the consistent application of
19 an agreed decision-making paradigm for present and future stock
20 assessments.

21
22 A committee member pointed out that the estimated stock-recruit
23 relationship for mutton snapper was poorly fit, despite allowing
24 the model to estimate MSY. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center
25 added that NMFS was working on a technical guidance document to
26 inform best practices for estimating steepness.

27
28 **The committee, and I so move, to form a working group comprised of**
29 **members of the Gulf and South Atlantic SSCs to collectively address**
30 **the best practices for estimating steepness, and thus estimate**
31 **MSY, for management advice, as well as a discussion of SPR proxy**
32 **values, given a range of life history values among fish species.**
33 That motion carried without opposition.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. We have a motion on the
36 board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is**
37 **there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion**
38 **carries.** Dr. Frazer.

39
40 **DR. FRAZER:** All right.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

43
44 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, MR. Chair, and so just a
45 little bit about timing of this. I haven't had a chance to speak
46 with Mr. Carmichael on this specific request, and I don't think
47 they're going to get some of this at their council until June, and
48 so, sometime after that, we'll try to come up with a plan, and

1 hopefully some more funding stability, and we'll work with the
2 chair and vice chair of the SSC and try to figure out a path
3 forward on this effort.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Dr. Frazer.

6
7 **DR. FRAZER:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so Dr. Allen
8 continued with the SSCs' evaluation of the SEDAR 96 stock
9 assessment on the Southeastern U.S. yellowtail snapper, including
10 catch limit recommendation. The council's Fishermen Feedback tool
11 and the South Atlantic Council's fishery performance report
12 indicated positive sentiments for yellowtail snapper and northward
13 range expansion.

14
15 SEDAR 96 uses SRFS in place of MRIP-FES for private vessels, with
16 a terminal data year of 2023. Generally, the yellowtail snapper
17 stock appears to be experiencing oscillatory, but, on average,
18 consistent landings, increasing recruitment and catch per unit
19 effort. Like mutton snapper, the estimate of steepness was
20 considered too uncertain to use the estimate of MSY from the model
21 by the SSCs.

22
23 The SSCs concluded that yellowtail snapper is estimated to not be
24 overfished and not experiencing overfishing as of 2023. Like
25 mutton snapper, this determination of stock status was based on
26 the currently adopted SPR-based proxy for FMSY of F 30 percent
27 SPR. Also, like mutton snapper, the SSCs selected an alternative
28 approach from the South Atlantic Council's P* approach in its ABC
29 control rule for yellowtail snapper, because of differences in how
30 the uncertainty in the OFL is characterized.

31
32 The SSEs used the arithmetic mean of the most recent five years of
33 recruitment, 2019 through 2023, for informing OFL and ABC
34 projections. The yellowtail snapper OFL is set at F 30 percent
35 SPR, and the ABC is set at 75 percent of F 30 percent SPR for the
36 years 2026 through 2028, as derived from the provided projections
37 for 2024 through 2028. Projections are provided in the table
38 below.

39
40 Likewise, for the SEDAR 96 stock assessment of yellowtail snapper,
41 Captain Hubbard said that the Reef Fish AP recommended that the
42 Gulf ACL be set equal to the Gulf ABC and that other current
43 management measures remain unchanged. The Reef Fish AP also noted
44 the northward expansion of the yellowtail snapper stock in the
45 Gulf.

46
47 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to direct staff to develop**
48 **a document that updates catch advice and jurisdictional**

1 **apportionments for mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper in the**
2 **Gulf and South Atlantic, in cooperation with the South Atlantic**
3 **Council.** That motion carry to that opposition.
4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. We have a motion on the
6 board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is**
7 **there any opposition? Not seeing any, the motion carries.** Dr.
8 Frazer.
9

10 **DR. FRAZER:** All right. Again, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Moving
11 on, Dr. Allen added that the SSCs recommended updating the stock
12 assessments for mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper at least
13 every five years.
14

15 Dr. Allen summarized the Gulf SSC's evaluation of the SEDAR 88
16 stock assessment of Gulf red grouper, including discussions about
17 status determination criteria and catch limit recommendations.
18 The council's Fishermen Feedback tool indicated neutral sentiments
19 for red grouper, while also noting issues with depredation by
20 sharks.
21

22 SEDAR 88 uses SRFS in place of MRIP-FES for private vessels, with
23 a terminal data year of 2022. There is no shore mode included for
24 red grouper. The estimate of natural mortality was updated for
25 red grouper, resulting in a 31 percent increase in that parameter,
26 which greatly influenced the stock assessment in terms of red
27 groupers productivity and projected biomass.
28

29 Landings for red grouper are lower in recent years. However, lower
30 catch limits may have biased these recent landings data. The
31 combined video survey indicates an increase in abundance since
32 2015. Like mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper, steepness was
33 estimable in SEDAR 88. However, the SSC was not confident in the
34 precision of that estimate, and thus did not use model-estimated
35 MSY. Instead, the SSC decided to use a proxy value for MSY of F
36 40 percent SPR, in keeping with its past decisions on the matter
37 of hermaphroditic groupers, i.e., gag, scamp, yellowmouth grouper,
38 yellowedge grouper.
39

40 Red tide episodic mortality was modeled as a bycatch fleet for
41 four red tide years of 2005, 2014, 2018, and 2021, with a
42 selectivity by red tide being variable by age, or higher
43 selectivity at lower ages. Recruitment is highly variable, but
44 generally increasing since 2010.
45

46 The SSC found the SEDAR 88 stock assessment for Gulf red grouper
47 to be consistent with the best scientific information available
48 and appropriate for management advice. The SSC set the OFL at F

1 40 percent SPR for Gulf red grouper, based on the SEDAR 88 base
2 model projections and a constant catch scenario for the fishing
3 years 2027 through 2029, at 11.28 million pounds gutted weight,
4 and the SSC set the ABC at 75 percent of F 40 percent SPR for 2027
5 through 2029 at 8.78 million pounds gutted weight.

6
7 A committee member was concerned about a default approach for the
8 SSC to use an MSY proxy of F 40 percent SPR for all hermaphroditic
9 groupers. The committee members thought red grouper were more
10 resilient and productive and that perhaps a less conservative MSY
11 proxy could be appropriate.

12
13 Captain Hubbard said that the Reef Fish AP recommended setting the
14 ACL equal to the ABC for red grouper. The Reef Fish AP also
15 recommended exploring an option for reallocation based on the
16 updated red grouper landings in SRFS units as a secondary document
17 to follow catch increases.

18
19 Regarding the 2025 recreational red grouper fishing season, the
20 Reef Fish AP expressed concern about the continued negative social
21 and economic effects of the recreational fishing season as
22 currently projected, calling attention to the positive stock
23 assessment results from SEDAR 88.

24
25 Given this, the Reef Fish AP recommended that the council explore
26 every possible avenue for extending the recreational fishing
27 season for red grouper for 2025, based on the results and catch
28 projections from the SEDAR 88 stock assessment, to address the
29 economic and social needs of the red grouper fishery.

30
31 The committee discussed a request for an emergency rule regarding
32 modifications of red grouper catch limits. SERO said that there
33 appear to be grounds for an emergency rule, based on economic
34 circumstances, and that moving forward with such a management
35 measure would need to become the top workload priority for the
36 council and SERO to implement that change in a timely manner.

37
38 A committee member thought not allowing the expansion of the
39 recreational red grouper fishing season would be detrimental to
40 the recreational fleet, especially in June and July, when fishing
41 for red snapper off Florida is also open. The committee member
42 prioritized keeping June open for red grouper.

43
44 Regarding proposed management changes, the committee agreed that
45 updated status determination criteria and catch limits would be
46 considered. Regarding sector allocations, NOAA General Counsel
47 reminded the committee that, the last time the underlying data
48 units were updated to MRIP-FES, sector allocations were updated.

1 As such, sector allocation should be reconsidered, given the use
2 of SRFs units. The committee noted that it may need to request
3 updated OFL and ABC projections from the SSC which include 2026.

4
5 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to direct staff to develop**
6 **a document that provides management advice for red grouper.** That
7 motion carried without opposition.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. We have a motion on the
10 board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is**
11 **there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion**
12 **carries.** I believe Dr. Froeschke would like to speak to the
13 emergency rule here.

14
15 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes, and if you could put that slide presentation
16 -- So we were just thinking, internally, about, if we were to do
17 an emergency rule, what the catch limits might look like. We
18 reached out to the Science Center, both for some bridging analysis,
19 to understand what the impacts of the currency change might be,
20 and then we reached out to Dr. Forrestal at the Science Center to
21 update the projections beginning in 2025, and so we tried to do
22 that.

23
24 I think that 3.81 number I'm looking at that there -- I'm not sure
25 that's correct, and so I'm going to have to go back, and we're
26 going to have to work on the bridging a little bit, to make sure
27 that's correct, but the two right columns -- She provided three
28 things really, but two -- There's a three-year average of constant
29 catch from the projections, 2025 through 2027, a five-year, and
30 then the yield stream. I didn't present that here, but the OFLs
31 and ABCs -- The 10.64, for example, would be the three-year
32 constant catch average OFL, beginning in 2025.

33
34 The ABC would be using the methodology that the SSC has previously
35 used, the 8.28 million pounds. The SSC would have to review this
36 and make a formal recommendation, and they would do that at the
37 May meeting.

38
39 If they went with that process I'm proposing here, three options
40 for the annual catch limit that we could consider for 2025, and so
41 the 8.28, which would be the ACL equal to the ABC, which we've
42 done before, and the Option 2 would be the ACL is 90 percent of
43 the ABC, or Option 3 would be 75 percent.

44
45 We presented those, and there was some concern about flooding the
46 market, potentially, and things like that on the commercial side,
47 and so we're just throwing these up there for discussion, to get
48 your all's feedback, if you want us to do something else.

1 Otherwise, we could propose these, and we're trying to do this
2 quickly, because you -- Just, by the timing of it, there won't be
3 a lot of time for council input later.
4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Froeschke. Dr. Sweetman.
6

7 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I appreciate you looking at this and putting this
8 together in such a quick manner, John. My general thoughts here
9 are I'm a bit leaning towards the Option 2, 90 percent of the ABC,
10 and it's still effectively a doubling of what the current ABC is,
11 and so that's going to get us a significantly longer season, but
12 just throwing in, I guess, a little bit of caution, based on, you
13 know, it's a significant quota bump, and, you know, there were
14 some assumptions made in that stock assessment, and so just kind
15 of accounting for a little bit of management uncertainty here, but
16 I still think -- It nearly doubles, and so I still think it's
17 golden.
18

19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Dr. Sweetman. Do we have any other
20 questions or comments for Dr. Froeschke? Dr. Frazer.
21

22 **DR. FRAZER:** I just want to kind of echo some of C.J.'s comments.
23 I think it is a significant bump, and I think a little bit of --
24 Or incorporating some of the management uncertainty would be
25 important here moving forward, whether it's 90 percent or 75
26 percent. I don't have a strong preference, right, and so it would
27 be Option 2 or Option 3.
28

29 I'm all -- I appreciate the need to access this fishery,
30 particularly in light of recent observations, but I'm not a big
31 fan of big pendulum swings in management, and so -- But I'll defer
32 to the folks around the table on how conservative they want to be.
33

34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. Mr. Walker.
35

36 **MR. WALKER:** Considering Dr. Sweetman's comments there, I think I
37 could get behind Option 2 there, with a bit of caution sewn in,
38 but still getting the benefits of such a positive stock assessment.
39 I mean, I haven't really -- I haven't seen those numbers, and so
40 I haven't thought about it too much, but I would certainly get
41 behind Option 2, or maybe Option 1, but, if the will of the council
42 here is that leave a little caution in it, then 2 would be all
43 right as well.
44

45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Osborne.
46

47 **MR. OSBORNE:** So, as you, Captain, are looking at this, and C.J.,
48 are you also looking at it with the caution of going with the

1 three-year or the five-year?

2

3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

4

5 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So I think the three and five-year will be decided
6 by the SSC, correct, and so I don't think that's really up to --
7 Yes.

8

9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, C.J. Any other discussion, or
10 questions, for Dr. Froeschke? Dr. Simmons.

11

12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think,
13 procedurally though, I think you would want to go ahead and -- If
14 you want to consider an emergency, go ahead and direct us generally
15 to start work on that, pending the SSC review, for 2025, and I
16 think, also, it would be helpful if maybe Mr. Strelcheck or Ms.
17 Levy could talk a little bit about the emergency rule process, and
18 when that would go in effect, potentially, and what that would
19 mean for both sectors, and how long we could extend it, especially
20 for new council members.

21

22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

23

24 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Carrie. So we do have emergency rule
25 guidelines that we can share around with the council. I had shared
26 those with Carrie beforehand, and I think you'll want to,
27 obviously, consider the rationale for that, in terms of
28 justification.

29

30 In terms of emergency rules, you would request the Fisheries
31 Service, and we would work with the council to develop an emergency
32 rulemaking. That would have to be a vote today, in order to
33 proceed with that. Once a rule is completed, and published, it's
34 in effect for 180 days, and then it can be extended for an
35 additional 186 days.

36

37 Red grouper is little complicated, because of the IFQ program, and
38 so we would only be able to essentially implement the emergency
39 rule from the time that we publish the rule until the end of 2025,
40 December 31, because we can't release new quota in 2026 for the
41 commercial IFQ program. That's not -- Because we can't pull it
42 back, essentially, after that first six months of the year, and so
43 that means that, after this emergency rule, the action that we
44 just voted on would have to put in place a more permanent, longer-
45 term catch level that would come in 2026 and beyond.

46

47 I can't, at this point, tell you how long the rulemaking process
48 would take, but one of the aspects of emergency rulemaking is

1 you're essentially weighing the benefits of proceeding quickly
2 with the impacts of not allowing for, you know, as detailed
3 transparent public comment and input, right, and, with the
4 emergency rulemaking process, as I mentioned, there's a lot of --
5 You know, a number of things you can use to justify it.

6
7 I think the biggest, and most appropriate, based on my review, is
8 that the emergency would be justified based on economic grounds,
9 to prevent significant direct economic loss or preserve a
10 significant economic opportunity that otherwise might be foregone,
11 and there's also aspects related to social communities and
12 preventing significant community impacts or conflicts between
13 users, and so I think we're on solid ground in terms of
14 justification, and so I'm happy to answer any questions.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Mr. Walker.

17
18 **MR. WALKER:** So, Andy is -- Are all three of these options viable,
19 and would selection of any of them make any difference in the
20 likelihood of passing this rule, or are they all acceptable?

21
22 **MR. STRELCHECK:** With the caveat that none of them have been
23 approved by the SSC at this point, right, the scientific advice is
24 consistent with the prior SSC recommendations, and so I don't see
25 any issues with them, as long as it's approved by the SSC.

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

28
29 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I'm trying to take this in for a landing here with
30 a motion, and so I'm going to work on this one on the fly, Bernie.
31 **Okay, and I might need some help from -- Okay. Here we go. Sorry.**
32 **To direct staff to develop an emergency rule for 2025 for red**
33 **grouper, based on the results of SEDAR 88 stock assessment, and**
34 **pending approval for the SSC in May. Then I'm going to add,**
35 **additionally, set the ABC or -- Sorry. Set the ACL to 90 percent**
36 **of the ABC. I think that's okay.**

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Do we have a second?
39 Mr. Walker seconds. Mr. Walker.

40
41 **MR. RINDONE:** Pending SSC approval of updated projections, or
42 updated catch projections, in May 2025, since it's going to be
43 based on a new set of OFL and ABC recommendations, and so updated
44 catch projections. That's fine enough.

45
46 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and good call.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Dr. Sweetman is good with the changes, and

1 is Mr. Walker?

2

3 **MR. WALKER:** I just wonder, and does it need to include some of
4 that specific verbiage of economic grounds and social grounds, to
5 help it pass, or is that not necessary?

6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

8

9 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So I would first recommend, instead of "to direct
10 staff", "to request NMFS to develop", because we're the ones that
11 will do the emergency rulemaking, and I think, by doing that, the
12 council can essentially write us a letter and explain the rationale
13 and reasoning, including the economic grounds for the decision.

14

15 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I'm good with that.

16

17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Frazer.

18

19 **DR. FRAZER:** I just want to circle back to the comments I made
20 originally about the Option 3 was at 75 percent, and I don't feel
21 strongly one way or the other, but the comments were based on the
22 public hearing, or the public testimony, that I heard about dumping
23 a lot of fish potentially on the commercial sector at the end of
24 the year, but, when we actually do the amendment, we can -- You
25 know, this is only going to stay for one year, and so I'm good
26 with it. I just wanted to let people know why I made, you know,
27 those comments earlier.

28

29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. I'm going to go back to
30 Dr. Sweetman. Are you good with the motion the way it's written?

31

32 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, sir, Mr. Chair.

33

34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Is Captain Walker good, as the seconder?

35

36 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

37

38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** It's seconded. Okay. Is there more discussion?
39 Mr. Strelcheck.

40

41 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Just that it needs to be a roll call vote.

42

43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Andy. Is there any further discussion
44 on the motion? Not seeing any, okay, and we'll do a roll call
45 vote. Dr. Simmons.

46

47 I will read the motion in before we take our vote. It's to request
48 NMFS develop an emergency rule for 2025 for red grouper based on

1 the results of the SEDAR 88 stock assessment and pending SSC
2 approval of updated catch projections in May of 2025.
3 Additionally, to set the ACL at 90 percent of the ABC. Dr. Simmons.
4
5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Dr. Overton.
6
7 **DR. OVERTON:** Yes.
8
9 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Anson.
10
11 **MR. ANSON:** Yes.
12
13 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Frazer.
14
15 **DR. FRAZER:** Yes.
16
17 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** General Spraggins.
18
19 **MR. BURRIS:** Yes.
20
21 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Banks.
22
23 **DR. BANKS:** Yes.
24
25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Geeslin.
26
27 **MR. GEESLIN:** Yes.
28
29 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Sanchez.
30
31 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.
32
33 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Sweetman.
34
35 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes.
36
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. McDermott.
38
39 **MR. MCDERMOTT:** Yes.
40
41 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Broussard.
42
43 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Yes.
44
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Frady.
46
47 **MR. FRADY:** Yes.
48

1 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck.
2
3 **MR. STRELCHECK:** No.
4
5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Osborne.
6
7 **MR. OSBORNE:** Yes.
8
9 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Walker.
10
11 **MR. WALKER:** Yes.
12
13 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Schieble.
14
15 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes.
16
17 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Williamson.
18
19 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** Yes.
20
21 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dugas.
22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes.
24
25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** **The motion carried sixteen to one.**
26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. The motion carries, and thank you, Dr.
28 Simmons. Mr. Strelcheck.
29
30 **MR. STRELCHECK:** For those that haven't been around the table and
31 gone through an emergency rulemaking, I always like to explain
32 this, and so, one, I'm in support of what you just passed, but, in
33 order to preserve the Fisheries Service's ability to move forward
34 or not move forward this action, I'm advised to vote no if there's
35 going to be a unanimous vote on an emergency rulemaking, right,
36 and so it just preserves our authority to decide what we should
37 move forward or not. Our intent is to move forward here.
38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Andy, for that explanation. We're
40 going to move on, I believe, Dr. Frazer.
41
42 **DR. FRAZER:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and so we will move
43 on to the Summary of Reef Fish Advisory Panel Discussions and
44 Recommendations, Tab B, Number 5(a). The Reef Fish AP discussed
45 data collection for the headboat fleet in the Gulf and recommended
46 that council encourage the Southeast Fishery Science Center and
47 NMFS to seek all available means for continued funding in the
48 Southeast Region Headboat Survey, as to continue and protect this

1 key data stream.

2
3 Captain Hubbard recalled general discussion about recreational
4 data collection and strongly recommended that the council request
5 that NMFS, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, and the
6 five Gulf states expedite the requirement for a private
7 recreational federal fishing permit to fish in the Exclusive
8 Economic Zone, and states can require similar language to their
9 state fishing licenses in lieu of a federal permit, expedite
10 implementation of the revised for-hire SEFHIER program, and create
11 and implement a similar required electronic data reporting program
12 for the private recreational fishery.

13
14 The committee recounted a previous letter to NMFS requesting
15 additional information about the headboat survey, noting its
16 importance to fishery data collection. A committee member asked
17 about any limitation with including the headboats in question into
18 the newly-proposed Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic
19 Reporting Program.

20
21 Another committee member thought that doing so would still result
22 in the loss of the current time series for the existing headboat
23 survey. SERO cautioned that continuing funding for one program,
24 considering expected budget reductions, would likely be to the
25 detriment of another program, and that decision would need to be
26 carefully considered.

27
28 The committee noted that it is not privy to all programs that are
29 being considered for cuts or elimination in the proposed NMFS
30 budget. A committee member did not want to imply that funding for
31 another program should be reduced, but rather that funding for the
32 headboat survey should continue.

33
34 Draft Framework: Other Shallow- Water Grouper Catch Limits, Tab B,
35 Number 9, council staff presented on the draft framework action to
36 modify the catch limits and recreational fishing season for the
37 shallow-grouper complex. This document is being considered to
38 reduce fishing mortality on shallow-water grouper species ahead of
39 the development and implementation of Amendment 58A, which
40 considers modifications to other shallow-water grouper management
41 measures.

42
43 Captain Hubbard reviewed the Reef Fish AP's recommendation to
44 create a new Alternative 6 in Action 2 and selecting it as the
45 preferred alternative. This new Alternative 6 would open the
46 fishing season from April 1 through May 31, close the fishing
47 season in June and July, and then reopen to fishing August 1
48 through December 31, or when the fishery is projected to close.

1
2 However, upon hearing council staff's review of the Figure 2.2.1,
3 Captain Hubbard noted that reopening in August with a new
4 Alternative 6, that is not currently in the document, would likely
5 cause the season to be closed before the end of the year. A
6 committee member concurred that Alternative 5 would be preferable
7 to the proposed new alternative proffered by the Reef Fish AP.
8

9 Another committee member stated that the public comment would be
10 useful before selecting the preferred alternative. He expressed
11 some reservations about a split season with Alternative 5 and noted
12 that Alternative 3 appeared to provide a long single season and
13 would avoid some of the discards during summer months.
14

15 A committee member inquired how long the framework action would be
16 in effect, and the council staff responded that it would be in
17 effect for 2026.
18

19 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 2 to make**
20 **Alternative 3 the preferred. Alternative 3 establish a**
21 **recreational fixed closed season for the other shallow-water**
22 **grouper complex. The recreational season would open July 1 and**
23 **close when the recreational portion of the total ACL is expected**
24 **to be met under the preferred alternative in Action 1. Action 1,**
25 **Alternative 2, closed January 1 through June 30, open July 1**
26 **through December 31. Action 1, Alternative 3, closed January 1**
27 **through June 30, closed August 18 through December 31, and open**
28 **July 1 through August 17. Action 1, Alternative 4, closed January**
29 **1 through June 30, August 25 through December 31, and open June 1**
30 **through August 24. That motion carried without opposition.**
31

32 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. We have a committee motion on
33 the board. Any discussion? **Seeing none, any opposition? Seeing**
34 **none, the motion passes unanimously.**
35

36 **DR. FRAZER:** All right, and so the committee members recognized
37 that Alternative 4 in Action 2 provided a much shorter season than
38 Preferred Alternative 3 and should not be further considered.
39

40 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 2 to remove**
41 **Alternative 4 to Considered but Rejected. Alternative 4 is**
42 **establish a recreational fixed closed season for the other shallow-**
43 **water grouper complex. The recreational season would open**
44 **September 1 and close when the recreational portion of the total**
45 **ACL is expected to be met under the preferred alternative in Action**
46 **1. Action 1, Alternative 2, closed January 1 through August 31,**
47 **open September 1 through December 31. Action 1, Alternative 3,**
48 **closed January 1 through August 31, closed October 28 through**

1 **December 31, and open September 1 through October 27. Action 1,**
2 **Alternative 4, closed January 1 through August 31, closed December**
3 **21 through December 31, and open September 1 through December 20.**
4 The motion carried without opposition.

5
6 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you. We have another committee motion on the
7 board. Any discussion? **Seeing none, any opposition? Seeing none,**
8 **the motion passes.**

9
10 **DR. FRAZER:** All right, and so we will move on to the Presentation
11 and Discussion on the Twenty-Fathom Recreational Seasonal Closure
12 for Shallow-Water Grouper, Tab B, Number 10. Council staff
13 reviewed a presentation on the history and status of the twenty-
14 fathom recreational seasonal closure for shallow-water grouper.

15
16 The committee member acknowledged the stock status for red grouper
17 and wanted to see what the fishing season projections under the
18 newly-proposed SEDAR 88 catch limits were prior to deciding. The
19 committee member also noted that removing the twenty-fathom
20 closure would be a form of deregulation. Another committee member
21 agreed, but did not want to remove the closure at the expense of
22 fishing season duration.

23
24 Captain Hubbard recalled that the Reef Fish AP recommended that
25 the council remove the twenty-fathom seaward closure for the
26 recreational sector in February through March. He thought
27 compliance with the regulation was very inconsistent and is often
28 misunderstood by recreational anglers. He added that, in his
29 experience, the twenty-fathom closure resulted in increased
30 discard mortality for smaller red grouper during February and
31 March.

32
33 The committee considered including an action for the removal of
34 the twenty-fathom closure in the requested red grouper management
35 measures document. NOAA General Counsel asked about how discards,
36 especially for gag, might change if this regulation is removed.
37 Council staff replied that discard data are not spatially explicit.
38 Captain Hubbard added that he did not think discards of gag would
39 increase. A committee member agreed, noting personal experience
40 with gag and red grouper. Final Action: Modifications to Lane
41 Snapper Minimum Size Limit, Tab B, Numbers 11(a) through (c).

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Hold on, Dr. Frazer. Mr. Rindone.

44
45 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We kind of need some direction
46 here about what to do with this twenty-fathom closure. So, you
47 know, are we going to do it as a separate document, or are we going
48 to try to roll it into what we're doing with red grouper, or like

1 what are you guys -- Not the emergency rule, but the other
2 document. Like is this -- Where do you guys want to do this?

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Frazer.

5
6 **DR. FRAZER:** Again, I mean, there's a couple things that come to
7 mind for me. I think it makes sense to roll it into the longer-
8 term amendment, right, and I think that's my preference.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

11
12 **MR. SANCHEZ:** No, and I just got my bearings straight. As long as
13 it's not going to slow down the red grouper emergency rule.

14
15 **MR. RINDONE:** All right. So noted, and it will be added there.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Dr. Frazer.

18
19 **DR. FRAZER:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and so we'll
20 move on to Final Action: Modifications to Lane Snapper Minimum
21 Size Limit, Tab B, Numbers 11(a) through (c). Council staff
22 reviewed public comments received regarding the proposed
23 modification to the lane snapper minimum size limit. Staff then
24 presented a final action draft of the document and reviewed changes
25 from the last draft.

26
27 SERO staff expressed interest in further exploring the economic
28 analyses, which may be overestimating the economic effects of the
29 proposed action, given that lane snapper is not commonly a primary
30 target on the reef fish fishing trips. The committee then reviewed
31 the proposed codified text.

32
33 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to recommend the council**
34 **approve Framework Action: Modifications to Lane Snapper Minimum**
35 **Size Limits and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce**
36 **for review and implementation and deem the codified text as**
37 **necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make**
38 **the changes -- To make the necessary changes in the document. The**
39 **council chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the**
40 **codified text as necessary and appropriate. That motion carried**
41 **without opposition.**

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. We have a motion on the
44 board. Is there any discussion on the motion? Not seeing any,
45 okay, and it's final action here, and we'll do a roll call vote.
46 Dr. Simmons.

47
48 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Williamson.

1
2 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** Yes.
3
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Sanchez.
5
6 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.
7
8 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck.
9
10 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes.
11
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Schieble.
13
14 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes.
15
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Walker.
17
18 **MR. WALKER:** Yes.
19
20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Frady.
21
22 **MR. FRADY:** Yes.
23
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Banks.
25
26 **DR. BANKS:** Yes.
27
28 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Frazer.
29
30 **DR. FRAZER:** Yes.
31
32 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Overton.
33
34 **DR. OVERTON:** Yes.
35
36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Sweetman.
37
38 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes.
39
40 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Anson.
41
42 **MR. ANSON:** Yes.
43
44 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** General Spraggins.
45
46 **MR. BURRIS:** Yes.
47
48 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Geeslin.

1
2 **MR. GEESLIN:** Yes.
3
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. McDermott.
5
6 **MR. MCDERMOTT:** Yes.
7
8 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Osborne.
9
10 **MR. OSBORNE:** Yes.
11
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Broussard.
13
14 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Yes.
15
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dugas.
17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes.
19
20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** The motion carried unanimously, Mr.
21 **Chair.**
22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons.
24
25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Can I just say one thing about the
26 economic?
27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, please.
29
30 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Staff will work with the Regional
31 Office staff on the economic effects that was discussed during
32 committee, and, if necessary, we can always have the chair take a
33 look at that before we transmit it.
34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Everyone is good? Thank you. Dr. Frazer.
36
37 **DR. FRAZER:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We'll move on to the
38 Presentation of Greater Amberjack Flowchart to Identify Decision
39 Points for Regional Management, Tab B, Number 12. Council staff
40 presented background information and decision points to consider
41 when evaluating options for state or regional management for
42 greater amberjack.
43
44 Council staff summarized the history of management for greater
45 amberjack and discussed recreational landings by state and by mode.
46 Staff noted that amendments that implemented state management for
47 red snapper would provide valuable information, should the council
48 decide to pursue state or regional management for greater

1 amberjack.
2
3 Staff discussed the main decision points and issues the council
4 would have to consider, including sector separation, maintaining
5 the recreational sector as is or establishing separate private
6 angling and federal for-hire components, management units,
7 considering state or regional management, apportionment method and
8 determining the allocation of greater amberjack between the
9 management units, delegation or conservation equivalency, and
10 accountability measures.
11
12 Committee members indicated that the greater amberjack count and
13 the next greater amberjack stock assessment would inform future
14 regional management discussions and noted that the upcoming
15 greater amberjack season is expected to be very short.
16
17 SERO indicated that, before the implementation of state management
18 for red snapper, the federal recreational seasons were getting
19 shorter, while state seasons were increasing in duration. He noted
20 that exempted fishing permits could be an option for greater
21 amberjack, provided that their purpose is clearly specified and
22 the information expected to be gained is valuable. He noted that
23 determining a practicable allocation approach for greater
24 amberjack will be key.
25
26 In response to a question on data calibration, the Southeast
27 Fisheries Science Center indicated that a portion of the Inflation
28 Reduction Act, or IRA, funds is planned to be used to run different
29 data collection systems side-by-side, which would facilitate
30 landings calibration when needed.
31
32 A committee member reiterated that the limited greater amberjack
33 ACL would make allocation decisions challenging. The committee
34 member -- Or the committee indicated its intent to move forward
35 with an amendment and asked whether a decision tool could be built.
36 Staff noted that building a decision tool would be feasible. Staff
37 suggested that the committee discuss some of the decision points
38 presented and start to determine the contours of the regional
39 management approach to consider.
40
41 A committee member inquired about the difference between
42 conservation equivalency and delegation. NOAA General Counsel
43 replied that conservation equivalency requires upfront approval by
44 the agency, while delegation can be suspended if the agency
45 determines that the terms of the delegation are not met.
46
47 Committee members and staff noted that more guidance to staff was
48 needed to develop an amendment. Committee members discussed and

1 concluded that sector separation would be included. Committee
2 members indicated that, in no particular order, the amendment
3 should include actions addressing sector separation, management
4 units, apportionment method, delegation or conservation
5 equivalency management, and accountability measures.

6
7 A committee member suggested that, rather than a document, staff
8 could provide an extended outline or presentation to support the
9 next committee discussion on this issue.

10
11 Review of Return 'Em Right Science, Tab B, Numbers 13(a) through
12 (d), Mr. Charlie Robertson, Return 'Em Right Coordinator, Gulf
13 States Marine Fisheries Commission, presented a programmatic
14 overview of science and monitoring funded by Return 'Em Right.

15
16 A committee member inquired about the Return 'Em Right funding
17 towards this SRHS. Mr. Robertson replied that the Return 'Em Right
18 provided funding to the SRHS to aid in inconclusion of Return 'Em
19 Right-specific questions and has contributed funding in each year
20 to continue that support.

21
22 Another committee member followed-up asking if Return 'Em Right
23 would have additional funding to support the ongoing efforts of
24 the Southeast Region Headboat Survey, given the potential for
25 cancellation of the survey. Mr. Robertson replied that is
26 possible, but allocation of funding would require alignment with
27 the program's ongoing goals and outcomes.

28
29 A committee member asked about the estimate of depredation rates
30 while using descending devices. Mr. Robertson replied that those
31 estimates were not included in the presentation, but it is likely
32 that they could be acquired. He noted also that the rate of
33 depredation is challenging to calculate, given the need to directly
34 observe depredation to derive an estimate.

35
36 Dr. Allen reviewed recommendations from the SSC regarding research
37 conducted with funding from the RER program. The SSC recommended
38 continuing efforts to quantify the effects of angler education on
39 fish survival following release, with specific examples found in
40 the SSC report to expand upon additional data sources to reduce
41 dead discards and improve stock assessment data streams.

42
43 Mr. Nick Haddad, Florida Sea Grant, then provided an education and
44 outreach update to brief the committee about continuing awareness
45 efforts for Return 'Em Right. A committee member asked about the
46 cost per release kit, and Mr. Haddad replied that the kit is not
47 commercially available, but, if it was, the total cost would be
48 approximately \$100.

1
2 Lastly, council staff briefed the committee on the expiration of
3 the DESCEND Act on December 31, 2025 and possible implications for
4 the Gulf relative to Return 'Em Right and the use of descending
5 devices when fishing for reef fish species in federal waters.
6

7 A committee member proposed requesting staff to develop a document
8 to replace and enhance the DESCEND Act. Another committee member
9 commented that Florida and Texas have a requirement to use a
10 descending device if the fish is experiencing barotrauma, and this
11 may be something to consider.
12

13 A committee member indicated support of replacing the DESCEND Act,
14 but highlighted that there may be some complexities in implementing
15 new regulatory components, given executive orders that focus on
16 deregulation. Another committee member inquired as to whether the
17 proposed document would include an alternative with an enforcement
18 component and a requirement that a descending device be rigged and
19 ready for use on a vessel.
20

21 A committee member concurred that the document should explore a
22 suite of reasonable alternatives, to include whether venting tools
23 will be required or are to be replaced by descending devices.
24 Council staff suggested that, if the DESCEND Act is replaced, it
25 would include a reasonable range of alternatives, to include
26 allowing the option for requiring either a venting tool or
27 descending device.
28

29 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to direct staff to develop**
30 **a document that replaces and enhances the DESCEND Act.** That motion
31 carried without opposition.
32

33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. We have a committee motion
34 on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? Mr. Schieble.
35

36 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** It's not really related to the motion, and I'm fine
37 with that, but I think just a point of discussion here, especially
38 for outreach. Going forward with this, if there's a way that we
39 can figure out how to tie in the benefits of the descending device
40 use to the outcome of a stock assessment, and, in other words, the
41 reduction of F, or fishing mortality, that value that goes into
42 the stock assessment from reducing discards, and explain that to
43 anglers, the average angler out there, with some sort of diagram,
44 and I don't know, but outreach type of thing, as we go forward
45 with this, and I think making that connection for anglers, as to
46 the value of using this thing, would be highly important.
47

48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. I think it's been noted.

1 Is there any other discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is**
2 **there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion**
3 **carries.** Dr. Banks.
4

5 **DR. BANKS:** I would like to bring something to the council's
6 attention in relation to this, with Return 'Em Right, and so I'm
7 also going to throw a motion up, Bernie.
8

9 Back in the fall, it was requested that, with Open Ocean TIG, which
10 funds Return 'Em Right, that they come in November to give us an
11 update, which was prior to a public comment period that was open
12 for them on the expansion of Return 'Em Right. Due to late notice,
13 and lack of time on our very crowded agenda, we did not receive
14 that notification, or that presentation.
15

16 As you noticed in this council meeting, the presentation was also
17 pulled, and so the council has not had the ability to comment on
18 how Return 'Em Right might expand, and so there's been very few
19 details on how Return 'Em Right is going to expand. However, there
20 has been some suggestion that that money moves to the South
21 Atlantic, in the order of millions of dollars.
22

23 This is the fifteenth year after the BP oil spill, which is how
24 Return 'Em Right is funded through Open Ocean TIG, and so, with
25 the discussions happening around this table about deepwater
26 grouper and other species, I would like to -- Bernie, if you'll
27 pull my motion up that I emailed you, or I guess Tom technically
28 emailed you, and I modified it.
29

30 I would like the council to write a letter directing, or
31 encouraging, Return 'Em Right to keep that money here in the Gulf,
32 particularly focusing on some of these deepwater grouper species.
33

34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and we'll give Bernie a moment to pull Dr.
35 Banks' motion up. Go ahead, Dr. Banks.
36

37 **DR. BANKS:** So, if I can get a second, I'll expand it a little
38 more.
39

40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay we have a second from Mr. Walker. Dr. Banks.
41

42 **DR. BANKS:** So this presentation was actually given to the South
43 Atlantic, and they have written a letter of support, along with
44 South Carolina, to move this money over there. Like I said,
45 there's extensive conversations around this table about reef
46 species that still need some research done, as well as conservation
47 efforts, as we're talking about splitting complexes and all sorts
48 of stuff.

1
2 If you look at their preferred, Return 'Em Right's preferred,
3 alternative, they're discussing expanding into highly migratory
4 species, coastal migratory species, and then outside of the Gulf.
5 Again, that money was dictated because of an oil spill here in the
6 Gulf, and it should be here to conserve our species, and I'm happy
7 to read it in the record.

8
9 **My motion is to draft a letter to the Open Ocean Trustees, Fish**
10 **and Water Column Invertebrates Restoration Coordinator and Return**
11 **'Em Right project management team emphasizing the importance of**
12 **focusing the fourth phase of this draft restoration plan on**
13 **restoring the living marine resources and their services that were**
14 **injured by the spill, particularly HMS and deepwater grouper.**

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We have a motion on the board by Dr.
17 Banks, and it was seconded by Mr. Walker. Is there any more
18 discussion? Dr. Sweetman.

19
20 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So a question, Kesley. This doesn't take away from
21 the Gulf, and it just expands it to the South Atlantic, correct?

22
23 **DR. BANKS:** Yes, and so they are talking about expanding to the
24 South Atlantic, yes, but at \$66 million, and there's still active
25 research that needs to be done here, and, out of the first thirty,
26 four projects were funded, and I don't think we should be expanding
27 to the South Atlantic just yet. I think we need to focus a few
28 more things here before we start.

29
30 **DR. SWEETMAN:** But there's an extra pot of money that would cover
31 that expansion, and so it's like not taking away from any proposed
32 research projects that would come forward in the Gulf, and, from
33 my perspective, I don't think I can support this. I will admit it
34 even caught the South Atlantic Council off-guard, because they did
35 not have a say in this, because it was just a proposal that was
36 accepted, and thought to be funded there, and it was just kind of
37 brought forward to the South Atlantic Council.

38
39 I guess I understand where you're coming from, about resources
40 should be dedicated to the Gulf, but I'm in favor of dealing with
41 barotrauma and best fishing practices, regardless of whether it's
42 in the Gulf or the South Atlantic or, quite frankly, the Antarctic,
43 you know, and like it should be done.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have Dr. Frazer and then Mr. Geeslin.

46
47 **DR. FRAZER:** Thanks for the comments, and I had to walk out for a
48 second, and so I apologize if I repeat something that might have

1 been said. You know, I think, you know, we're fortunate that we
2 had a fair number of resources to address a number of outstanding
3 data issues in the Gulf of Mexico, and I -- As an individual, I'm
4 not privy to where the funds come from necessarily that might be
5 supplemental in nature, C.J., and I don't know that.

6
7 My original concern about funds that were being appropriated
8 through the Open Ocean TIG, right, is that they be focused
9 specifically on the Gulf of Mexico, and on federally-managed
10 species, or issues that are relative to federal management.

11
12 I did have an opportunity to talk with Jamie about this a little
13 bit, and try to get some explanation of why things might be moving,
14 or effort might be placed in the South Atlantic, and what he
15 indicated to me was that, hey, there's a number of highly migratory
16 species, for example, and there's, you know, not clear, you know,
17 definitive boundaries between those species and what goes on in
18 the Gulf and Atlantic, and some of that information will be
19 transferable, and helpful, and I understood that.

20
21 I guess some of the things -- Without understanding where that
22 supplemental funding is coming from, there was a lot of effort as
23 well on species that I would consider to be managed shallow-water
24 and state, under state resources, right, and I just -- For me,
25 it's such a challenge, and a struggle, to try to keep limited
26 resources in the Gulf of Mexico, and I just -- I think this letter
27 perhaps just emphasizes that it's a significant issue for us,
28 moving forward, and it doesn't commit, or obligate, anybody to
29 making any decision, and it's just expressing an opinion that we
30 would like to have some resources, and appropriately allocated.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. Mr. Geeslin.

33
34 **MR. GEESLIN:** To that point, Dr. Frazer, I guess my concern, or,
35 even more, confusion, is that source of funding. I wouldn't
36 suggest that I'm concerned about the merit of extending Return 'Em
37 Right into the into the South Atlantic, as I think we've recognized
38 and, you know, acknowledged the benefits of that program and to
39 you know the fisheries within the Gulf of America, and extending
40 that over just seems like the right thing to do.

41
42 I just -- If this is in fact supported funded, and directed by
43 that Open Ocean TIG and the trustees, I would just want to make
44 sure that, even from a state perspective, that our trustees that
45 are representing from the states are very clear, and are aware,
46 that these funds could be redirected outside of the area of the -
47 - You know, the affected waters within the Gulf, and so that's
48 where I'm a little puzzled, and concerned, and confused here, is

1 really the source of the funds and wanting to the intent of keeping
2 those -- You know, those funding streams directed at the affected
3 area within the Gulf.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Geeslin. I have Mr. Anson, and
6 then a few more.

7
8 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, Dr. Banks, you had
9 mentioned, a little bit during your explanation of the motion,
10 that they were supposed to have a public comment period, and did
11 they have that public comment period, and I have a couple more
12 questions and comments, too.

13
14 **DR. BANKS:** So, yes, and that public comment -- Let me pull up the
15 timeline, and so, yes, that public comment did happen. Due to
16 hurricanes in the fall, council staff and offices, along with
17 state, federal, and local agencies, were unable to participate.
18 In October 21, they -- On October 21, they notified us that they
19 wanted to present at our council meeting in November. The draft
20 plan went up on the 30th, and we had our meeting, where we did not
21 discuss this, and it closed on the 16th of December.

22
23 **MR. ANSON:** All right. Thank you, and then, just echo some of the
24 prior comments Dr. Frazer had made, you know, I too would be
25 concerned about the source of funds, and, actually, Mr. Geeslin
26 mentioned that as well, and that, if they were directly as a result
27 of the Deepwater Horizon, you know, lawsuit and litigation, then
28 I would feel very strongly that those funds need to be in the Gulf,
29 remain in the Gulf, as well.

30
31 **Then, just to help reiterate that point, particularly since we're**
32 **talking about HMS, and I understand that some of the information**
33 **that's gathered could still be applied and used in other areas,**
34 **for the same species potentially, but just to help underscore --**
35 **I would just make a friendly suggestion that you add, after "the",**
36 **and before "living marine", add "the Gulf's living marine**
37 **resources" into the motion.**

38
39 **DR. BANKS:** I will accept that. I think Emily is bouncing.

40
41 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** I just wanted to clarify that the funds for this
42 expansion are not of supplementary nature, right, and they are
43 actually funds that originated from the spill, and they are the
44 still original pot of money from the spill, and so there isn't
45 some extra source of funding. This was the stuff that was intended
46 to restore the living marine resources in the Gulf of Mexico, and
47 I did receive confirmation of that, and so that's the first thing.

1 The second thing is I just wanted to clarify it looks like, in
2 this motion, you're specifying HMS and deepwater grouper
3 specifically, and I wanted to question whether or not you wanted
4 to expand that to deepwater species, right, and we do have some
5 other deepwater fisheries that we manage, and so that might be a
6 friendly amendment to consider.

7
8 **DR. BANKS:** Sure. Change "grouper" to "species" for me, please,
9 Bernie, and I'm looking at Ed, to see if you're good with those
10 changes, as the seconder.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and the seconder has approved the motion,
13 and, Mr. Walker, did you have your hand up?

14
15 **MR. WALKER:** I did, and I was going to say that I'm not familiar
16 enough with where these funds are, and how they're distributed, to
17 really make a strong recommendation, although Emily's input just
18 helped, and so I would speak in favor of it, because it's just a
19 letter that expresses that, hey, we at the Gulf Council would like
20 you to consider keeping Gulf money in the Gulf, and I don't think
21 there's anything wrong with a council that manages the Gulf asking
22 that. It doesn't direct them, and it's not a motion mandating
23 anything, and it's just a little saying, hey, we would like to
24 keep our stuff home here, and so I'm in favor of the motion.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walker. Is there any other
27 discussion on the motion? Mr. Anson.

28
29 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, and I apologize, Dr. Banks, and I'm not totally
30 aware of the structure of the trustees and all that stuff, but is
31 it -- Is it the Open Ocean trustees, or is it the Open Ocean Fish
32 and Water Column Invertebrates, or is it -- Is it the group, and
33 so you have the trustees, and so it's the state reps and the
34 federal reps and such, and so I just want to make sure that it's
35 appropriate that it would cover not only a coordinator, which may
36 be a federal trustee, but it would also go to the states, and the
37 states would also be notified of the of the letter, the individual
38 state trustees.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Banks.

41
42 **DR. BANKS:** I'm going to have to look to Emily on the coordinator
43 portion. I've always just seen it as Open -- As this here, and so
44 that's why it's like that. I'm happy to add anything in. If you
45 would like a copy sent to the states, let's go.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Emily.

1 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** So the Open Ocean trustees consist of people from
2 NOAA, from the EPA, from the USDA, and so there is a number of
3 folks. I think -- I believe, and, Tom, you're going to have to
4 help me with this, and we thought that they were state personnel,
5 but I think, after doing a dive on this, there were not state folks
6 that were part of this, and so it seems like it's a bunch of folks
7 that are sort of more federal in nature.

8
9 **DR. FRAZER:** Yes, and I think, again, there's -- The federal
10 agencies are the primary one for this particular TIG, and there
11 are others, right, that involve -- That include state
12 representatives.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Emily and Dr. Frazer. Dr. Banks.

15
16 **DR. BANKS:** I'll read the edited motion. **It's to draft a letter**
17 **to the Open Ocean Trustees Fish and Water Column Invertebrates**
18 **Restoration Coordinator and Return 'Em Right project management**
19 **team emphasizing the importance of focusing the fourth phase of**
20 **the draft restoration plan on restoring the Gulf's living marine**
21 **resources and their services that were injured by the spill,**
22 **particularly HMS and deepwater species.**

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you Dr. Banks. **Is there any opposition to**
25 **the motion?**

26
27 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I'll abstain.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** One abstention. Two. Andy. Okay. **The motion**
30 **carries with two abstentions.** Dr. Frazer.

31
32 **DR. FRAZER:** All right. Well, that will move us on to Other
33 Business, and the first item of other business is the Louisiana
34 state charter and federal for-hire red snapper 2024 trips and
35 landings, and I believe that that's Mr. Schieble.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.

38
39 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Bernie is going to pull up
40 the -- It's a three-slide presentation, real short, that's in the
41 briefing book, and then I can go through it real quickly with you
42 guys. Essentially, as you've heard some of the public comments
43 over the past few meetings here, we've had -- I'll keep going while
44 we're finding it. There it is.

45
46 So we've had a lot of public comments, over the past few meetings,
47 regarding how the structure of our state charter season in
48 Louisiana overlaps, to some extent, in the federal for-hire season.

1 Last year, as you remember, we had an early start date in April,
2 and so the state charters were allowed to start at the same time
3 as the private recreational anglers for their season.

4
5 They were also allowed to have a four-fish bag limit, and fish
6 seven days a week, and then the federal for-hire season kicked off
7 in June, like normal, and then they had to have a two-fish bag
8 limit, as per the federal regulations, and so, you go to Slide
9 Number 2, Bernie, please.

10
11 These two sets of graphs here pretty much explain everything. On
12 the left side, you'll see federal and state charter trips for red
13 snapper from 2018 to 2024, and then the graphic on the right is
14 landings for the same time series, and then that data is presented
15 in tables associated with the graph as well.

16
17 It's the exact same data, but, obviously, there's going to be some
18 differences interannually, because of the length of the season,
19 and so the number of days open is the right-hand component of the
20 table, and so it shows you that the state season, for example last
21 year, was 151 days, and the federal season, including the
22 reopening, was 132 days, and so fairly similar, except the start
23 dates were different, but, the previous year, the state season was
24 220 days, and the federal season was its longest in the time series
25 up to that point of eighty-five days, but, graphically -- The graph
26 above that, if you look at the state charters, the gold color, and
27 then the -- I'm sorry.

28
29 The federal for-hire is the purple, and it's supposed to be purple,
30 but it's blue. It's the blue color, and there's a difference every
31 year, you know, as far as the season length goes, but, also, you
32 can see that the state charters have had increased numbers of trips
33 in the past two seasons, because of the season length, and so
34 necessarily that's going to increase.

35
36 However, in 2023, it doesn't seem to have affected the federal
37 for-hire season, which had the highest number of trips that they've
38 had in the time series, and, moving over to landings, it's very
39 similar, and so you can also look at the landings graphic, in the
40 bottom-right, and the landings for 2023, and the eighty-five-day
41 season, were the highest they had for all the time series for the
42 federal for-hire fleet.

43
44 Then you can also see that the charter landings or up, but they
45 were about equivalent to what they were back in 2019, but the
46 highest landings for the state charter season was this past year,
47 and it's also an artifact of having a long season, a 151-day
48 season, for them, and so I think the telling graphic is the next

1 slide, and so, Bernie, could you dance to the next one please?

2
3 Again, we have number of trips on the left, and we have landings
4 on the right, and this is for the entire time series, but you can
5 see the gold bars over on the left-hand side of the graphic, and
6 number of trips, and they go up as the state charter season starts,
7 and then you can see when the federal for-hire season kicks in,
8 with the June start date, and then those number of trips go up,
9 but they are exponentially higher than the state charter season.

10
11 The state charter trips tend to go down during the federal for-
12 hire season, and so they're reduced, but it doesn't seem that
13 there's an effect, year after year, on the federal for-hire season
14 from the state charter season, and you can see that plainly the
15 number of trips is exponentially higher than the number of state
16 trips, even though they have a higher bag limit and an earlier
17 start.

18
19 The same thing for landings. If you go to the graphic on the
20 right, you can see the state charter landings, in the gold color,
21 and they kick off when the state season starts. They go up, and
22 then the federal for-hire season kicks in, with its start date,
23 and then the landings for the state charter season go down
24 proportionally, and that makes sense, and so I would say that,
25 looking at this graphic, the state charter season is not impacting
26 the landings of the federal for-hire season, as the landings for
27 the state charter season go down.

28
29 Yesterday, in public comment, if you recall, we heard Captain Dylan
30 Hubbard from Florida state that the federal for-hire snapper season
31 needs the longest season possible, is what his quote was, and then,
32 from the other side of the Gulf, we heard Captain Johnny Williams
33 say that we need to change the federal for-hire season to April 1
34 to May 31, and then, in the middle of the Gulf, we heard the head
35 of our charter boat association, Richard Fischer, advocate for
36 essentially the federal for-hire season should be run under state
37 management.

38
39 Moving to that level, and, Bernie, I sent you an email with a
40 motion, and, while you're pulling that up, I'll talk about it a
41 little bit, and so I'll read the motion, while Bernie is pulling
42 that up and getting it on the board for us.

43
44 It's to direct staff to begin work on a document to modify
45 **recreational management of red snapper by delegating management**
46 **authority for the federal for-hire component of the recreational**
47 **sector to the respective five Gulf states. Proposed management**
48 **measures should include an option for individual states to opt out**

1 of delegation of federal for-hire management authority. The
2 federal for-hire component in those states that opt out will
3 continue to be managed under the federal status quo. If I can get
4 a second on that, we could talk about it. Mr. Broussard.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We have a motion on the board. Is there
7 a second? Mr. Broussard. Mr. Schieble.

8
9 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So I think, you know, going forward here with what
10 the recreational initiative outcomes, or final reports were, that
11 we should look into further state management for things. This
12 seems to segue with that as well, and fit right in. Also, as I've
13 shown in our red snapper landings updates on a regular basis, that,
14 under the LA Creel system, our state, Louisiana, can monitor the
15 federal for-hire landings on a weekly basis, and so it's not a
16 wave basis.

17
18 For example, this past year, if we were monitoring the federal
19 for-hire component, we would have kept fishing at the end of
20 August, with our federal for-hire allocation, and moved through
21 and had probably an endpoint around somewhere around Labor Day,
22 maybe, or a little bit afterwards, based on landings, instead of
23 a stop and a restart, like we had, because we had to wait on data
24 from a two-month wave, and so I think the federal for-hire fleet
25 would probably have rather had that course of action, instead of
26 a stop and start.

27
28 Also, secondarily, as a reminder, we currently have two other
29 states that are on the same data reporting system within the Gulf
30 right now, and I think, with SRFS, Texas, and three states on LA
31 Creel, the states could handle this, and have probably more
32 responsive data than we currently have, in order to move forward
33 with this, and so I'll stop at that.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. We have a question
36 from Mr. Walker.

37
38 **MR. WALKER:** So this -- I believe this would have to have each
39 state allocation developed for the for-hire industry, which I'm
40 not in favor of, and I'll leave it at that. I speak against the
41 motion.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez, and then Dr. Sweetman.

44
45 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I'm going to speak against it as well.
46 Having gone through sector separation, as a former member of this
47 council, and the states fought it the whole time, and I would not
48 be in favor of this until we let the very groups that fought for

1 this for years, CFA, and Destin Charter Boat Association, et
2 cetera, et cetera, all come together, and the Alabama Charter Boat
3 Association, and weigh-in on this and say yes or no, and so I'm
4 going to say no right now.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Mr. Sanchez. Dr. Sweetman.

7
8 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think just one component
9 that could be challenging, and at least I'll just highlight some
10 of my concerns, and it's just relative to -- I think you offered
11 the flexibility of an opt-out in there, and so there's that, but
12 this is not just like -- For Florida at least, with the highest
13 amount of for-hire charter boats, it's not a simple -- This would
14 require some significant funds to add on to the State Reef Fish
15 Survey, in order to accommodate for this, and I'm not sure, in the
16 current fiscal climate, that that's something that the state
17 legislature would take on, and not something that we could control,
18 and so I do got some concerns, just questions in my head,
19 basically, that I can't really answer right now.

20
21 I mean, just to what Ed and Tom said, or what Ed and John were
22 saying there -- Since you brought this up, I've gotten like ten
23 text messages about people just -- Charter captains saying no to
24 this, but, you know, it's a document, and -- Yes, and I would have
25 to wrap my head around this a little more.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson.

28
29 **MR. ANSON:** Just picking up on what's been said already, I mean,
30 I agree that this kind of addresses some of the concerns, or
31 wishes, recommendations, that came out of the recreational
32 initiative, as far as, you know, additional opportunities for state
33 management and flexibility within the recreational community as a
34 whole.

35
36 You know, previously, when we had the option, as we were going
37 through Amendment 50 discussions, we had polled our charter,
38 federally-permitted charter, boat captains at the time, and there
39 was an overwhelming majority that did not support state management,
40 but, you know, with the states managing the private rec side, and
41 the state charter boats -- You know, there may be some different
42 feelings on that, as far as, you know, how they perceive the
43 state's ability to manage the state, as well as, again, looking at
44 the options that a state could provide in respect to a season
45 change and such.

46
47 At this point in time, although I do realize that there is, you
48 know, a lot of burden on staff, with changes in the regulatory

1 environment, with staffing, I'm going to support this motion, at
2 least initially.

3

4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. Mr. Schieble.

5

6 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So just a couple of points of questions that have
7 come up, and so, for Captain Walker's question, yes, allocation
8 would have to be figured out in this, which I think would be quite
9 easy. Just go through and look at the historical time series, and
10 we would have to set a start and stop date on that, and whatever
11 year, and then what the historical landings have been by each state
12 over that time period.

13

14 Also, to address C.J.'s question, I think that's why I included
15 the opt-out option in there, so that, if Florida would not be able
16 to financially handle this, or start in the first -- In the
17 beginning, then you could opt out, but it wouldn't mean that you
18 would have to opt out indefinitely, and it would be like, okay,
19 well, let's evaluate this, and potentially the next year we would
20 be able to jump in on it.

21

22 If you recall, when we went through Amendment 50 for state
23 management of snapper, this was included in those discussions, and
24 we had some states that wanted to have this included, and others
25 that didn't, but I think the bottom line of that is that,
26 regardless of sector separation, you could still manage this in
27 the individual state landings, whether a state opts in or opts
28 out, and the ones that are still under federal management would
29 still have their landings reported as-is. The only difference
30 would be potential season length, and you may have some states
31 that are still fishing when the federal season would be closed,
32 but we would have to figure that out.

33

34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Chris. I have Dr. Frazer, and then
35 Dr. Simmons.

36

37 **DR. FRAZER:** Again, and I remember the discussion as well, right,
38 and Louisiana was a strong proponent and advocate for this action,
39 you know, early on, but I think it was not simply an issue of the
40 states could desire to opt in or opt out, and I thought it was a
41 little more complicated than that, because, again, what you're
42 doing is the federal for-hire sector doesn't have a state-by-state
43 allocation, right, and so it really complicated things on the
44 service's, National Marine Fisheries Service's, side of things,
45 and I'm going to put Andy on the spot a little bit.

46

47 He wasn't administrator at the time, right, but Roy was, but
48 perhaps you could weigh-in on what you thought some of the

1 logistical hurdles were in implementing something like that, Andy,
2 if you care to, and sorry about putting you on the spot.

3
4 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I mean, there's, obviously, the challenge of just
5 allocating the quota, right, and I think that's the biggest thing
6 to reach an agreement on, but, you know, my remembrance of the
7 sector separation debate was like we're discussing around the
8 table, right, and there was pockets of charter captains throughout
9 the Gulf that supported sector separation, or opposed sector
10 separation, and there was some charter captains that trust their
11 states more than others, right, and so, you know, what is being
12 proposed here is trying to strike a balance, but, obviously, for
13 those that don't want to go down this path, it could put a lot of
14 additional pressure, in terms of managing the fisheries, you know,
15 at the state level, based on -- Or at the federal level, if the
16 pie continues to get divvied up.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Dr. Simmons.

19
20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so just a
21 couple things on the recreational initiative. I mean, I think, in
22 general, we heard a lot of support for regional approaches, and
23 regional management, but we did not really explicitly discuss and
24 make any recommendations, that I remember from the group, that the
25 for-hire would come under state management specifically for red
26 snapper.

27
28 It was generally talked about, and so that was that was one point,
29 and keep in mind also that you only had, I believe, two members on
30 the working group that would represent that component of the
31 recreational sector as well, and so I wanted to bring that up.

32
33 The other thing is, I mean, I think, if this motion passes, it's
34 going to be a significant amount of work, and so we're going to
35 have to figure out does this take priority over the amberjack
36 effort, or vice versa, plus we have the carryover provisions that
37 we're working on, with the individual state ACLs, and that's going
38 to be quite a bit of work, plus we've been tasked with several new
39 documents in addition to that, and so we are really going to have
40 to think about priorities and workload here at the end.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez, and then Chris.

43
44 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you. Carrie, you brought something up that I
45 was going to ask, and you kind of hinted on it. When we formulated,
46 and I wasn't here for that part, you know, and started this
47 recreational initiative, the composition of it, and how many for-
48 hire people were on that, now that we're bringing stuff like this

1 up?

2

3 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I believe there's only one federally-
4 permitted for-hire member, and that individual actually I don't
5 believe could participate in every single meeting, due to family
6 issues.

7

8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.

9

10 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and so, to Dr. Simmons' point, this is why I
11 didn't try to put a date on this, and I would like to see it get
12 on the action guide, and then, as we work through other things
13 that we've already addressed, or put on there -- To me, those would
14 be priorities, and then we are able to handle this as we can in
15 workload, and so, to me, this would be something that I would think
16 maybe we look at in November, or maybe January of next year,
17 whenever it comes to, and I don't see this as superseding other
18 things that we're currently working on.

19

20 Also, and just my opinion, we spent a lot of time, and I'm sure
21 this council spent a lot of money, on the recreational initiative,
22 and, if we are to take advice from that, I see this as one of those
23 things, and that's just my opinion.

24

25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Chris. I have Mr. Walker, and then
26 Mr. Geeslin.

27

28 **MR. WALKER:** I don't recall the rec initiative suggesting that the
29 for-hire -- I mean, I don't remember everything, but I don't recall
30 them suggesting the for-hire sector should consider dividing up
31 into states, but, you know, this possibly would have implications
32 to the SEFHIER program, which we're starting to try and kick off,
33 and not stall, but, to me, my biggest hurdle and, you know,
34 hesitation to support the motion is the state-to-state allocation
35 arguments that we're going to have.

36

37 I can see myself possibly supporting this if we had a few years of
38 SEFHIER landings information, where we had a really universal,
39 robust what landings were caught by how many charter boats in each
40 state, and I think that might be something I could get behind at
41 that time, but I don't look forward to an interstate battle over
42 how many charter boats caught red snapper in their state.

43

44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Geeslin.

45

46 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do see a lot of questions
47 and details that would need to be fleshed out, but I really see
48 this motion outside of the, you know, the workload that would be

1 involved, and I see this as being pretty benign.

2
3 We would look into this, and we would form a document, and the
4 states would certainly need to, you know, pulse their charter
5 fleets, gather the input, and then, as Chris alluded to, there's
6 this opt-out option there.

7
8 I think, notwithstanding the rec initiative, and let's just
9 untether that for a bit, but Chris is hearing some of the same
10 things I'm hearing. Time and time again, we speak about, or we
11 hear about, some of the benefits of, you know, flexibility in the
12 opening of the seasons, the season length, the reopening, and the
13 variability of those comments across the Gulf.

14
15 I think state -- You know, putting this under state management,
16 even if you don't want to, you know, tie that particular name to
17 it, that's the way to get it, and address some of those, and
18 realize some of those benefits, you know, and get away from the
19 one-size-fits-all.

20
21 It just seems like every -- Whether it's in the rec initiative
22 that we hear about some of this, or it's completely outside of it,
23 and some of those same themes continue to emerge, and so I do
24 applaud Chris for stepping out and, you know, feeling the pulse of
25 the council, the pulse of our constituents, and putting this
26 together. I would certainly support it.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

29
30 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Sorry, and one last little point here, and so, yes,
31 I appreciate the opt-out perspective on this, but, even in an opt-
32 out, you're still going to have to deal with allocation issues
33 here, and it's -- I don't understand how this is going to work
34 right now, and I just -- I have so many more questions, and I want
35 to engage the public on this before we start fully fleshing forward
36 on it. I would just like to learn more before I think I could
37 support this motion, Chris. I mean, I appreciate where you're
38 trying to go here, but -- Yeah. Thanks.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. All right. Mr.
41 Schieble.

42
43 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and so I envision that all of those types of
44 questions would be things that we work through as we get the first
45 iteration of this, is the options and alternatives to go through,
46 keeping in mind that the states that would be choosing to go this
47 route would likely have a data reporting system that reports
48 landings weekly, and so you would know where they are versus their

1 allocation, versus a state that chooses to opt out and that remains
2 under the federal system and the wave reporting, right?

3
4 Also, with regards to SEFHIER, this -- Right now, besides the
5 economic component of SEFHIER, LA Creel captures every single thing
6 we talk about in SEFHIER anyway, and so we would have that data
7 from that, and, besides that, you would have data in between, until
8 SEFHIER actually is up and running. Right now, the commercial
9 electronic logbook program isn't even running, and we lost that
10 over a year ago.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, C.J., and then Dr. Froeschke.

13
14 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Thank you, and, just to follow-up, Chris, there,
15 I mean, Florida is not weekly reporting, right, and so we're on
16 the monthly timescale there, and so that's a bit of a concern for
17 me, and so it's just not -- Given the fact that a vast majority of
18 the for-hire boats are in Florida, I think this is why it's just
19 raising my level of concern a little bit here, given these
20 uncertainties. Sorry, Tom, and go ahead.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Frazer.

23
24 **DR. FRAZER:** Again, Chris, I totally appreciate, you know, where
25 you're trying to go here, and, in principle, I'm not opposed to
26 that. What I'm thinking about, however, is, you know, just a
27 hypothetical, because I don't have the answer to this, but let's
28 say the federal for-hire guys in Louisiana said, yes, we're in,
29 right, and that's good for us, and it's good for the state, and
30 that's all good, but then the other states, you know, opted out,
31 right, because it wasn't good for them.

32
33 What that misses is what the potential consequences are of an
34 individual state's actions on the other states, right, and that
35 may be good in fact for Louisiana to do that, and hopefully it
36 would be, right, and hopefully it would be good for the other
37 states as well, but, in the absence of looking at, you know, how
38 it all shakes out, we don't know that, right, and so there could
39 be an unintended negative consequence for the other states, and so
40 I'm all for exploring this, but, you know, I'm just --

41
42 It's timing for me, right, and I don't want to push back and keep
43 you from going in that direction, but I certainly would maybe say
44 -- I'll maybe look to Mara about this. If we tabled a motion like
45 this, could we bring it back after we get more feedback from -- I
46 don't know how that process would actually work to table this
47 motion. I don't care, right, and, I mean, I just -- Chris, go
48 ahead.

1
2 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I was just going to say that, you know, I understand
3 your concern, and, from a Louisiana perspective, if -- Let's say
4 we go forward with this, and Louisiana is the only one that comes
5 out of this, and everybody else opts out, and Louisiana ends up
6 doing state management of the federal for-hire fleet, and we're
7 talking about -- Historically, it's about 300,000 pounds.

8
9 Last year, they caught about half that, because the season duration
10 for them is too short, and it's just a simple fact of the matter,
11 but I don't see 300,000 pounds impacting the entire Gulf,
12 regardless of how we fish it, you know, and so other states may
13 choose to do that.

14
15 Rick could choose that his federal fleet has whatever allocation
16 they want to fish, for whatever duration, so it overlaps with their
17 state charters, and we fix this perceived problem of state charters
18 impacting federal charters, and that really is what we're trying
19 to do here, but I would not be in favor of tabling it. I think it
20 needs to get on the action guide, and then we work it out as we go
21 through the process.

22
23 **DR. FRAZER:** Sure, and I'm just, again, trying to reiterate -- I'm
24 not pushing that necessarily, and I understand where you want to
25 go. I think it is going to take a lot of time, but so I'll just
26 step back on that one.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson.

29
30 **MR. ANSON:** Just to follow-up with what Mr. Schieble said to Dr.
31 Frazer regarding Dr. Frazer's comment, you know, if a couple of
32 states were to opt-in, so to speak, and then that would mean there
33 would be less dissension, or less disagreement, among the remaining
34 states, as far as what then NOAA could do for setting a season for
35 those remaining states, and so there would be flexibility then
36 offered to those other individual states, or individual states
37 that opted out, that would then theoretically be more in line with
38 what their needs would be too, and so, you know, even if you go
39 forward, and there's still some exclusion, there's still some
40 opportunity, I guess, for those states that decide to remain in
41 with the federal system.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Kevin, I have a couple of -- Dr.
44 Simmons.

45
46 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I'm okay.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** You're okay? Okay. Mr. Walker, and then Mr.

1 Sanchez, and then we'll try to wrap it up.

2
3 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, with all due respect, I
4 have no interest in tabling this, moving it forward, or continue
5 to talk about it.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Mr. Walker. Mr. Sanchez.

8
9 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I'm kind of there with Ed, just because, if I think
10 about it, if you have a federal permit, and the federal season is
11 closed, you're done. How is this going to work with other states,
12 with this one open, or not open, and then, to me, it kind of opens
13 the floodgates in that state for people to go that don't have a
14 federal permit and to be able to go out and fish basically
15 federally when the rest of the federal fleet is closed. This is
16 -- No.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Mr. Frady, and then
19 we're going to take it to a vote.

20
21 **MR. FRADY:** Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Schieble, for at least
22 wanting to explore this. I would say I'm opposed at this point in
23 time, because the charter-for-hire industry, especially the
24 federal charter-for-hire industry, spoke, many, many years ago, as
25 to their desire to remain separated, and I don't think there's an
26 appetite, from any of them that I know of, other than a few in
27 Louisiana who love you all's way of management, which I totally
28 respect, and, you know, there's a timing issue here.

29
30 Dr. Simmons mentioned about the importance of getting the
31 recreational initiative underway first, and see what they can do
32 about constraining effort, and making sure that no states go over,
33 because there is a definite problem in the Gulf of Mexico with red
34 snapper management, with the average weights declining, even
35 though the average length and the age may be maintained, and all
36 of us who make our living out there, and not 300 days, but maybe
37 a little less, and we make our living out there, and we're seeing
38 trends that make us a little bit nervous.

39
40 Anything that would jeopardize the constraints that we've got on
41 ourselves to make sure we don't overharvest our quota, you know,
42 I would speak in opposition of, but I do think the idea is great,
43 for those who want to do it, but I just don't think we have an
44 appetite to do it. I want to see the recognition get underway,
45 and then maybe revisit this later. I just -- I just don't support
46 it right now, because of the timing and the principle of what we've
47 already been through with sector separation for the federal -- For
48 a majority of the federally-permitted charters.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Frady. I would like to say a few
3 comments regarding Chris's motion. I would speak in favor of it.
4 I've been here for seven years, and I've been hearing the same
5 argument over the charter fleet across the Gulf, from west to east,
6 and back and forth, and they want different season dates, and one
7 wants May 1, and one wants May 31, and it goes back and forth all
8 the time.

9
10 We hear it all the time, and I understand that there's folks in
11 the eastern Gulf that are not in favor of this. I get it, and I
12 understand it, but the western Gulf I would like to say has
13 somewhat of a different opinion.

14
15 I don't see an issue with the motion being passed, and us at least
16 taking a look at it, and I'll stop there, and we'll take a vote.

17
18 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Mr. Chairman.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

21
22 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I've just, obviously, been sitting back listening
23 to the conversation, and I've heard a few things, right, one of
24 which is kind of wanting more information and feedback from the
25 charter community. This motion asks for a document, and could we
26 just bring back a presentation, or some other form of information,
27 at least as an initial starting point, before we start a document,
28 just to inform, obviously, any kind of next layer of the decision,
29 and so I just propose that as maybe a compromise between, you know,
30 those that are not wanting to proceed and those that want to
31 proceed with this.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I think what I'm hearing Mr. Strelcheck recommend
34 is the staff wants to produce a presentation, or if Mr. Schieble's
35 appetite is presentation, versus the document.

36
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I mean, I think that's up to Mr.
38 Schieble and what he would like to do. I mean, I think there's
39 going to be a lot more work on staff. I mean, we can certainly -
40 - Even if you pass this, we can start with a presentation, and, I
41 mean, it doesn't keep us from doing that.

42
43 I'm just concerned about the number of things we've added to the
44 docket, and staff resources, and so I just think we should be
45 patient. I also think about the timing of the red snapper stock
46 assessment, and when that's going to be completed, which is when
47 again, Ryan? Is it mid-2026 to late 2026-ish?

1 I mean, we have several other things dealing with red snapper
2 allocations as well on the list, and, you know, the red snapper
3 private angling allocation that we need to work on, and, as I
4 mentioned before, the private recreational accountability measures
5 for red snapper, and so we have quite a few items already on the
6 docket. Just I think, if you pass this, we can start with a
7 presentation, and think about workload, and I just -- It's going
8 to involve a lot with everything going on with the assessment.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Understood, Dr. Simmons. Thank you. Mr.
11 Schieble.

12
13 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, first, I would like to thank Andy for those
14 comments. Those are helpful, and that's the kind of thing I'm
15 looking for around the table from all of us here, whether there's
16 some that don't agree with going this direction, and it works
17 better for their states to stay where they are, and other states
18 that would like to at least look into this and see what the options
19 would be.

20
21 I think that's what we're sort of charged with here as a council,
22 is to look at new and innovative management techniques and things
23 that help, you know, our anglers in each different component of
24 the state, and so, anyway, I would be in favor of -- Yes, and, if
25 a presentation is the preferred course of action here, and then
26 look at that as a decision tool type of thing, to let us make some
27 choices, and we can vote up or vote down certain things that are
28 in the presentation, and then have a document next, and I'm fine
29 with that option, and so I'm not opposed to it.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble, and so, with that said,
32 does the motion need to be reworded?

33
34 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So I would change the motion to direct staff to
35 begin work on a presentation to the council for modification of
36 the recreational management of red snapper.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Broussard, are you okay with the changes?
39 The seconder is okay. Ms. Levy, and then we're voting.

40
41 **MS. LEVY:** Just to -- We can talk about this at the staff level,
42 and so, I mean, one option to include here is the things that were
43 considered in Amendment 50A that you did not actually choose,
44 right, and there was a should there be -- Should the states be
45 allowed to opt-in, and, if the states opt-in, how do the charter
46 vessels identify themselves with the state, and we -- There were
47 allocation options that included for-hire, if there was that
48 optional opt-in, and so one option that might be less work upfront

1 is to just bring those documents back and let you look at how it
2 was structured in Amendment 50A.

3
4 The data would not be recent data, in terms of the landings, but
5 the process of how you looked at potentially doing this before
6 would be available to you fairly quickly if we just brought those
7 documents back.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. All right, Dr. Frazer. Last
10 word.

11
12 **DR. FRAZER:** Again, I think -- To Mara's point, I think there was
13 a fair amount of discussion, and I would just expect that dialogue
14 would be captured in the presentation moving forward, and I would
15 like to just say thanks to Chris for like listening to the words
16 around the table and, you know, kind of meeting everybody halfway
17 on this, and so I'll go ahead and support this.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and we'll take a vote. **Can we have a show**
20 **of hands in opposition to the motion?** Okay. **Three in opposition.**
21 **The motion carries.**

22
23 I think we had one more agenda item in Other Business in Reef Fish,
24 but I'm going to look around the table at council members and ask
25 if you all want to work through lunch, and there's not much left,
26 or do you all want to break for lunch?

27
28 We have gag left, and then we have OLE and Other Business. Dr.
29 Simmons is going to discuss the June council meeting, and then
30 Andy has an executive order and an update on staffing, and do you
31 all want to work through lunch? Yes? Do you all want a break?
32 Do you want a ten-minute break, and then work through lunch? I'm
33 good with that. Okay let's do that. Thank you.

34
35 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We're going to get back started. Welcome
38 back from lunch, and I'm going to turn it over to Dr. Frazer.

39
40 **DR. FRAZER:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We will pick up with Gag
41 Grouper Recreational Management Measures for 2025. A committee
42 member summarized the patterns of recent recreational landings
43 against the ACLs for gag grouper and expressed a concern for
44 control over quota monitoring.

45
46 The committee member specifically wanted to avoid a situation like
47 that experience in the South Atlantic with red snapper, where
48 discards have become a significant issue. The committee member

1 recommended reducing the recreational back limit for gag for the
2 2025 fishing season only, in an effort to prevent an ACL overage
3 and allow the recreational fishery to experience improved fishing
4 season durations in 2026 and beyond.

5
6 The Reef Fish AP also discussed the 2025 gag grouper recreational
7 fishing season and recommended that the council request that NMFS
8 consider options to prevent exceeding the recreational ACL, with
9 the exception a complete fishery closure. Further discussion on
10 this topic will occur during Full Council.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. Dr. Sweetman.

13
14 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Because of time, I'm just
15 going to ask Bernie to throw up the motion there, and we can
16 certainly have some discussion on it. I definitely want
17 perspective from the council. All right, and I'll read it into
18 the record.

19
20 **The council requests NMFS implement an emergency rule establishing**
21 **a one-fish recreational bag limit for gag grouper for the 2025**
22 **fishing season.**

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Dr. Sweetman has a motion on the board.
25 Is there a second? Mr. Broussard seconded.

26
27 **MR. WALKER:** For discussion, I was going to suggest for the 2025
28 season only. I think the selling point on this is going to be
29 really to emphasize that this is a one-year thing, because I don't
30 think the public wants to buy into doing it permanently.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

33
34 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So I'm not sure that's really needed, Captain
35 Walker, just because an emergency rule is only good for 180 days,
36 and so it's kind of inherent in there, but, if we wanted to add
37 "only", just for transparency's sake, and make that crystal clear,
38 I think I'm okay with that. **We can add the word "only" if my**
39 **seconder is okay with that.**

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Broussard is okay with the changes. Go ahead,
42 C.J.

43
44 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just some discussion. I mean, I was really
45 interested to hear what the public was saying on this. I mean,
46 this is mainly a Florida fishery. People are not going to be happy
47 with me in my own state about this, and so I don't take this
48 lightly to push this forward, but I really do think that we're

1 kind of in a situation here where the benefits, you know, will
2 outweigh the negatives here in the long-term, and it's really just
3 for this one fishing season.

4
5 I want to provide people with the opportunity to get out on the
6 water, catch gag grouper, and the fishery is improving. I mean,
7 that's what everyone has been telling me, and that's actually part
8 of my concern, here is that, because, as the fishery is improving
9 a little bit, and is on the upswing, when you've got these reduced
10 catch levels, it's easier to catch them, and then you get the
11 compression, and then it's just -- I don't envy your position,
12 Andy, for trying to project what the season would be like and these
13 uncertainties with this effort compression.

14
15 I can't -- I can't even blame our Regional Administrator on that,
16 because it's just we don't know. We don't, and we saw, last year,
17 that effort compression was huge, and the year before that as well,
18 and so I think that, economically, this is going to be important
19 in the long-term.

20
21 We are so close to just getting back towards our rebuilding plan,
22 where it's the stepwise increase each year, and all this is doing,
23 really, is just providing a little bit of risk-adverse management
24 here, just for one fishing season, and I was surprised, for the
25 most part, about how people in the audience, for the most part,
26 supported it.

27
28 You know, I heard some other people that had some concerns about
29 it. I think Charlie Renier said heck no to it, but it was from
30 the perspective of that the fishery is so healthy, and that's
31 actually part of my concern, is because of those catch rates, and
32 how we're managing just to a low ACL here, and, when you have those
33 catch rates improve -- It's not like we're being punished for
34 managing the fishery better, but that's kind of what it feels like
35 when you're up against these small catch limits during this
36 timeframe, and so, like I said, the bag limit analysis that we
37 conducted with our FWRI staff, in conjunction with Science Center
38 staff, shows about a 19 percent savings there.

39
40 While that's not a huge amount, that might be exactly just what we
41 need to provide this buffer here, so we can get out of this cyclical
42 cycle of overages, and low ACLs, so we can start finally start to
43 provide an actual fishing season and get out of potential derby
44 fishing conditions, and so that's my overall justification for
45 this.

46
47 I think it's something, you know, I don't take lightly for putting
48 this forward here. I heard Ken Haddad, yesterday, saying like we

1 typically do not support a one-fish bag limit, really for any
2 species, but I think these are, you know, circumstances where it
3 might be warranted, but I certainly don't want to go this alone.

4
5 I know that it's a Florida fishery, but I really would be
6 interested from other council members around the table, just to
7 get your perspective. Thank you.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Walker.

10
11 **MR. WALKER:** So I've thought long and hard about this, and I think
12 it's the right thing to do. The issue here is this payback cycle
13 that we're stuck in. The ACL has gone up every year, and the
14 season is still getting shorter and shorter, because we're in the
15 payback, and it knocks the ACL down so low that we overfish it,
16 and so then, the next year, we overfish it again, because it's so
17 low, and we're really stuck in a cycle, and the season is getting
18 shorter while the ACL goes up.

19
20 So, you know, in the best interest of the recreational fishermen,
21 they need to shake this perpetual payback, once and for all. The
22 ACL is high enough now that, if they cannot overfish just one time,
23 they could probably have a thirty-day season, or more, but they've
24 got to get that payback monkey off their back one time, and that's
25 why this is a one-year thing, and so I speak in favor of it.

26
27 You can have a bit of a season this year, and you can keep one
28 fish per person instead of two, but the goal here is to shake that
29 payback monkey off our back and get to realize the entire ACL that
30 fishermen have essentially earned in this rebuilding plan, as it
31 goes up, and so, with the very strong mention that this is a one-
32 time only deal, and even if it fails I think we should go back to
33 two, you know, to constrain harvest, and I'm going to speak in
34 favor of it, even though, you know, it will be controversial to
35 some, but I think, if they understand how much it potentially
36 benefits the fishing community, it's in their best interest to do
37 this.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walker. Is more discussion? Dr.
40 Frazer.

41
42 **DR. FRAZER:** Just to kind of put a little more science spin on
43 this, right, and so I've been working with my group, in
44 collaboration with the folks at FWRI, and some of their stock
45 assessment scientists, and also coordinating and learning from
46 some of the staff at SERO, and one of the problems that we've run
47 into is, because of these kind of short seasons, and our inability
48 to, you know, forecast accurately any in-season types of things,

1 we're faced -- Or forced to deal with kind of historical harvest
2 levels to set, you know, the projected season length, and we've,
3 you know, regularly kind of overshot those by about two, right,
4 double where we're at, and that does put us in a precarious
5 position with regard to, you know, these paybacks and actually
6 going into a deficit.

7
8 What we've done is we've kind of looked at changing the approach,
9 and using some statistical models to help with the preseason
10 projections, as well as the kind of the in-season forecasting, and
11 I think we can do better, moving forward, with the preseason
12 projections. It's still a really short season, and, you know, I
13 don't want to get ahead of NOAA and say what that might be, but,
14 you know, even if it was similar to last year, the confidence
15 intervals around that, whether it's, you know, two weeks, or twelve
16 days, whatever, is somewhere between one and twenty-one days,
17 right, and so that's where that effort compression comes in.

18
19 If you have a lot of effort compression, and you get to the
20 confidence, and you actually only -- You know, you get your quota
21 in one day, for example, right, and you've overshot that by twice
22 as much, and, again, you're getting into a deficit, and so I think
23 what this does is this one-fish rule actually gives you an added
24 buffer, some confidence that in fact you're not going to -- You're
25 not as likely to have a payback, and then you'll be able to realize
26 the full kind of yield stream, moving forward, so it's a bit of a
27 tough pill to swallow in the short-term, and I understand that,
28 but I think we're getting better at the science, and I think the
29 rationale is good, and so I'm certainly in support of this.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. Mr. Strelcheck.

32
33 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I think would be helpful to talk a little bit
34 more about the rationale specific to why this would be considered
35 an emergency, right, and so there's four factors that we would
36 look at. Even though we've had overages, the stock would not be
37 considered overfishing, because we haven't exceeded the
38 overfishing limit.

39
40 There's not a public health emergency here for this, and so it
41 really comes down to economic or social circumstances, right, and
42 what at least I'm hearing around the table is that you are
43 concerned about foregoing better opportunities, future
44 opportunities, for harvest, based on overages, or continued
45 overages, obviously, in the short-term.

46
47 One of the concerns I have is we've built a record about not
48 wanting to decrease the gag bag limit around this table the last

1 couple of years, and we've even had that before us and decided not
2 to make those changes, and so that diminishes, in my view, the
3 emergency justification, with the exception that you've now noted
4 that, well, this would just be for one year, and this is,
5 obviously, why we're doing it.

6
7 The other thing, just so I'm clear, and I think I'm hearing this
8 correctly, is it's not necessarily to give more days for this
9 season as much as it's just to mitigate for the potential for
10 higher harvest.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

13
14 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks for that, Andy, and so -- I hear what you're
15 saying loud and clear. We did shoot this down, the bag limit
16 reduction, in the past. I mean, I think part of an emergency
17 action criteria results from recent unforeseen events, or recently
18 discovered circumstances, and I would certainly consider the
19 overages that we've had since then as kind of recent unforeseen
20 circumstances, along those lines.

21
22 As it relates to presents serious conservation or management
23 problems in the fishery, I mean, we're seeing the direct -- In the
24 rebuilding plan, right, and so, if we're not able to realize that
25 rebuilding plan, I think that presents serious conservation
26 issues, and clearly management problems in the fishery, with having
27 -- Just constantly changing the fishing season, impacting our
28 charter fishermen's ability to plan trips, along those lines there,
29 and, yes, I do think that the benefits outweigh the value of
30 advance notice, public comment, and deliberative considerations of
31 the normal rulemaking process.

32
33 We've got an eighteen-year rebuilding timeline, right, and, based
34 on how it's set up right now, we're not meeting that, unless we
35 get this under control, and so long-term, and even short-term,
36 economic benefits I feel outweigh some of the issues that we have
37 at hand here, and so I'm trying to address some of your points
38 there, and I'm not sure if you would like some additional stuff,
39 but --

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

42
43 **MR. STRELCHECK:** No, and I appreciate that C.J. Just one other
44 thought I've had, and so this goes beyond the emergency
45 justification and rulemaking, is there might be something where we
46 want to look at changes to the accountability measures, right, and
47 I'm not saying we should. I'm just saying we may want to look at
48 them, just to see if there's other options to address the

1 accountability measures going forward, because, if there are other
2 signals and things that show that we are rebuilding on track, or,
3 you know, increasing in abundance like is expected, right, we're
4 essentially paying the overage back, but the reality is we're still
5 meeting our biological goals, right, and I don't know if we have
6 the science or information that could support that, but those are
7 things I would like to at least dig into a little bit more and see
8 if there's other opportunities to take a look at those
9 accountability measures.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Captain Walker.

12
13 **MR. WALKER:** Could you elaborate on maybe what kind of examination
14 of the kind of -- Are you saying there's -- That we might be able
15 to lower it if the estimate of the stock or something changes, and
16 what avenues might be available there?

17
18 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I'm just thinking out loud, and, I mean, we have,
19 in the National Standard Guidelines, when you have an overfished
20 stock, that you should be instituting paybacks, right, and that's
21 part of the challenge here, right, but sometimes what happens is
22 our projections miss the mark, and a lot of times probably, right,
23 and so, if the status and health of the population is increasing
24 at the rate we projected, or even faster, than we don't necessarily
25 have to implement the payback provision, right, and so is there
26 ways to look at the consequences of what happened with any sort of
27 overage, how it's actually performing biologically within the
28 population, and then making an informed decision as to whether or
29 not an accountability measure should or shouldn't be implemented
30 for that particular season here.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

33
34 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I like what you're saying there, Andy, and I guess
35 my concern right now is just time, right, and, if we're dealing
36 with trying to change accountability measures, I don't think that
37 would be able to get in place with the season starting September
38 1, right, and so that's part of the issue here, but I agree with
39 what you're saying.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Is there any more discussion on the motion? Not
42 seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion?

43
44 **MR. STRELCHECK:** (Mr. Strelcheck's comment is not audible on the
45 recording.)

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Andy. We have to do a roll call vote.
48 Dr. Simmons.

1
2 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. McDermott.
3
4 **MR. MCDERMOTT:** Yes.
5
6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Geeslin.
7
8 **MR. GEESLIN:** Yes.
9
10 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Sanchez.
11
12 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.
13
14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Williamson.
15
16 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** Yes.
17
18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Schieble.
19
20 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes.
21
22 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Frady.
23
24 **CAPTAIN FRADY:** Yes.
25
26 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Sweetman.
27
28 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes.
29
30 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Overton.
31
32 **DR. OVERTON:** Yes.
33
34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Anson.
35
36 **MR. ANSON:** Yes.
37
38 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Broussard.
39
40 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Yes.
41
42 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Banks.
43
44 **DR. BANKS:** Yes.
45
46 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Walker.
47
48 **MR. WALKER:** Yes.

1
2 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Burris.
3
4 **MR. BURRIS:** Yes.
5
6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck.
7
8 **MR. STRELCHECK:** No.
9
10 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Frazer.
11
12 **DR. FRAZER:** Yes.
13
14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Osborne.
15
16 **MR. OSBORNE:** Yes.
17
18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dugas.
19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes.
21
22 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** The motion carried sixteen to one.
23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.
25
26 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just thank you all for listening to me on this. I
27 realize this was kind off-the-cuff here, and kind of rushing this
28 to get ahead of the September season, and so I just appreciate you
29 all listening to me. Thanks.
30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.
32
33 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I'm a
34 little bit concerned about timing with this and how we're going to
35 communicate some of this to the public, and so I would like us to
36 think about having a unified voice when we know what the season
37 length is going to be and we tell the public it's going to be a
38 one-fish bag limit.
39
40 They're going to embrace the wonderful news, I'm sure, on Facebook,
41 and so if we could have a unified front with the states, and not
42 just the State of Florida, but to remind anglers that, you know,
43 this fishery is not open until September, and the State Reef Fish
44 program is getting out-of-season landings, quite a few actually,
45 earlier than those dates that are open, and so please help us
46 remind anglers of these changes in the regulations, because this
47 is going to be a very tight timeline.
48

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Dr. Frazer.

2
3 **DR. FRAZER:** Well, Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. Okay. We're going to
6 move online to the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement report and
7 presentation and Mr. Walia.

8
9 **NOAA OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT (OLE) REPORT**

10
11 **MR. MATT WALIA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can you hear me?

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir, we can.

14
15 **MR. WALIA:** All right. Well, I appreciate you taking the time,
16 and I apologies that I couldn't hop on during the other supporting
17 agencies yesterday, and I wish I could be there in-person, but
18 traveling is a little difficult right now as well, but I'll just
19 wait for -- Bernie, if you can pull up -- I just have a couple of
20 slides to go over.

21
22 We don't have a current -- We're in between our reports, and so I
23 did not provide a report this time around, but I still want to
24 highlight some of the work we're doing. This data here is current
25 though, and so, you know, I just want to highlight our cooperative
26 enforcement programs, a great success, and this is how we're able
27 to get a lot of work done, with a force multiplier, working with
28 the states.

29
30 We currently have agreements with all Gulf states right now, and
31 this is great. You know, you see the numbers down there, and we
32 have forty-one referrals from partners overall this past quarter,
33 with Florida taking the higher end this time, with Florida with
34 twenty-eight cases, and you see the other ones, but there is a
35 good force multiplier, like I said, and it helps deputize state
36 officers to go out and to enforce federal regs, and so this is a
37 great part of our success.

38
39 One of our main priorities has been, and will continue to be, IUU
40 enforcement. This is a big one, and I just want to highlight and
41 showcase some of the work that we're doing here in our division in
42 the region, as well as nationwide, and so seafood fraud --
43 Protecting domestic seafood is important.

44
45 You see the logos there, and we work with a lot of our partners to
46 keep that going, and, if you go in the briefing material, that
47 link to that field DNA testing corresponds to the picture down
48 below, on your lower left, and that's pretty good news, and we

1 just had a web story that went out, and it's been pretty
2 successful.

3
4 This was actually up in New Jersey, but there's a new PCR device
5 that we've been able to work with and use, and we're testing it
6 right now. Right now, it can test up to a hundred different
7 species, and so we can be on-site, at these ports inspecting
8 seafood coming in, the containers, and test it on-site, which is
9 a huge improvement.

10
11 Before, we would usually take samples, and have to turn it into
12 our forensics labs, and it takes time to figure out, hey, is this
13 fish able to come into the country legally or not, and so, in this
14 current case, we actually detected over twenty-seven tons of fish
15 that we stopped from coming into commerce.

16
17 Also on our website, I would say we just released another story
18 that involves Brazilian red snapper coming up that that we stopped,
19 and so we worked with our Brazilian partners, and we stopped twelve
20 tons from coming in. We actually sent it back to Brazil, and they
21 seized the twelve tons of Caribbean red snapper, and, on top of
22 that, they had another forty tons that was getting ready to come
23 into U.S. commerce that we're able to stop.

24
25 The other component we have of IUU enforcement, and a lot of this
26 involves our ports of entry, and these are all mostly land-based,
27 and so this is down on the Texas border, and this has been real
28 successful too, working with the Coast Guard, working with Texas
29 Parks and Wildlife as well on this, and so all this is the seafood
30 import monitoring program. We're inspecting the containers coming
31 in, what's in there, and we're testing it.

32
33 A recent one we did from Laredo down to Brownsville, and we had
34 over 4,000 pounds of red snapper, and there was some other fish
35 species too, tilapia and barracuda, but everything was good to go,
36 and we were able to get that in, but we're still stopping it. That
37 picture on the bottom-left is actually someone that tried to bring
38 in a couple -- That is shrimp and blue crab and some other species
39 illegally across the border, and so we were able to stop that.

40
41 You've heard some of the fish were state violations, but we stopped
42 that coming into commerce too, and so there's stuff like that that
43 we're looking for that are people bringing it in on individual
44 trucks or vehicles as well coming in.

45
46 Going along with that, that other picture is us doing a ride along
47 with the Coast Guard, helping out with lanchas, and so we have
48 helped out to seize and interdict some of the lanchas there, and

1 they were kicked back over to the border as well, and so we're
2 trying to stop that effort.

3
4 What I want to do here is just quickly highlight a couple cases,
5 just show the diversity of what we have going on. This first one
6 actually took place up in South Carolina, but the reason I'm
7 highlighting it is just the overall implications of it, and so
8 this was a commercial fisherman, and this is a case that we
9 referred over to Department of Justice, and so this actually went
10 criminal.

11
12 He made false statements, and so he lied about the amount and
13 quality of fish that he caught as well, as lying to some of our
14 enforcement officers and agents during a subsequent investigation,
15 and so this went criminal. It was a three-day trial, and we gave
16 statements up there as well, and he was assessed three felony
17 convictions, and so he's awaiting sentencing right now, and we'll
18 see what the final outcome of it is, but he was three-times over
19 the limit on the snowy grouper and about one-and-a-half-times over
20 his commercial allotment for blueline tilefish, and so there's
21 some big implications.

22
23 You know, it shows the importance of all the work you do at the
24 council, why these rules -- They're set in, in quotas, and there
25 is teeth to it too, and we want to make sure that people are
26 catching what they're supposed to catch and reporting it properly.

27
28 The bottom case is something that you wouldn't really think of,
29 and this is actually off the Flower Gardens, in the sanctuary in
30 the Gulf, and this involved an energy company. There's some old
31 platforms they were required to remove, and so they piled in some
32 -- They put some piles and anchored them into the seabed down
33 there, but this was actually within the boundary of the sanctuary,
34 and it caused some issues, and so we were working with sanctuary
35 staff.

36
37 They were instrumental in this as well, and working with the energy
38 company, and they did not realize they actually had outdated
39 boundaries on all their charts and their information, and so just
40 a reminder to everyone, you know, fishermen, to make sure you have
41 the most up-to-date charts and everything on your electronics, so
42 you know exactly where you're going and where you can't go. That
43 was a \$25,000 Notice of Violation assessment that we had a civil
44 penalty for.

45
46 Two other cases that I just wanted to quickly highlight and show
47 different work, and so we had a recent charter case off of
48 Louisiana. One of our officers did a ride along with Louisiana

1 officers on this, and this was a joint patrol. We came across
2 some fishermen, and they were fishing, and we rolled up on them,
3 you know, and start doing interviews. He had a cooler, and he had
4 federally-managed reef species, as well as some HMS. He admitted
5 to, hey, yes, I'm on a charter.

6
7 He thought, because he caught some of the fish in state waters,
8 that he was okay. That's not the case, right, and so it's permit-
9 driven, and so he met the elements for that, and so he was charged,
10 and it was a little over a \$7,000 NOVA that he was charged for
11 that, and so that was good cooperation with our state partners on
12 that case.

13
14 The one below involves protected resources for TEDs, and this was
15 a JEA referral from Florida, and so it just shows when you -- They
16 were able to submit it quickly, and they had it efficient, and
17 everything was well documented, and we were able to pursue it on
18 federal charters. The angles and bar spacing were not correct,
19 and that can, obviously, you know, hurt the turtles on there, if
20 they're not able to escape out of the TEDs properly, and so that
21 was actually under the Endangered Species Act, \$4,000 NOVA that
22 was assessed on that, and so good success all around with our
23 partners.

24
25 Staying on the protected resources team, and this has been a
26 priority as well for us, and so we continue to do a lot of multi-
27 agency trainings and boardings, and I know props to the Florida
28 OPV crew that got the award. We actually just held a recent
29 training that they were at down in the Naples area, and we'll go
30 with them, with the gear management team, and show how to properly
31 measure TEDs, what we're looking for, and then put it into action
32 out on the water, and so that's what some of those pictures are,
33 working with the Coast Guard as well doing that, and also trying
34 to help out when we can.

35
36 Earlier this winter, there was a couple of cold weather events,
37 everywhere, but some big ones in Texas, and there was 200 or 300-
38 plus turtles that we helped rescue and re-release back in, once
39 the cold weather was off, and so that's what those pictures are,
40 is officers helping out some of the NGOs in Texas as well with
41 that, and so that was a good success, getting them back in the
42 water.

43
44 This is just a reminder that I wanted to throw out there. There's
45 a lot of shrimpers that have the Chauvin deflector in there, and
46 we're still getting a lot of reports that they're not installed
47 properly, and that can cause efficacy of it, and it could make it
48 harder for the turtles to actually get out of the TED, and so that

1 upper-left picture is folks are installing different size PVC on
2 that roller bar that's going across horizontal, so there's certain
3 specs you have to follow.

4
5 I'm happy to provide that after the fact, or reach out to us, and
6 we can get them to you, and so that's what that picture is. The
7 one on the bottom are folks that are putting the PVC too close to
8 the TED, and it's not allowing a proper opening for the turtles to
9 escape, and so just a notice, and a reminder, to make sure you get
10 that out there, and, when our folks see them on the boats, we're
11 working with industry to fix them on the spot, and help them get
12 into compliance too, when we see that, and you see what a correct
13 one should look like.

14
15 This is just a quick reminder, just a couple of the closures that
16 are going on, or what's going on. You know, through January, the
17 southern zone for gillnet has been closed. The Edges is still
18 closed through the remainder of this month, unless you're
19 transiting through, and you all were just talking about it, but
20 the recreational shallow-water grouper -- That is open, and just
21 be sure to follow the four aggregate bag limit. Gag continues to
22 be closed, and I guess we'll look at maybe that will be a different
23 allotment, depending on what actions are taken come September.

24
25 The last slide I have is just our number, if there's any questions
26 or anything to report, and please don't, you know, hesitate to
27 reach out and let us know what's going on, and so I thank you for
28 your time, and I'm happy to take questions, if there are any, and
29 that concludes my report, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walia. Do we have any questions?
32 Mr. Anson.

33
34 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you for the presentation. I'm curious, relative
35 to the Flower Gardens case, was there any other mitigation besides
36 the fine that the energy company had to do?

37
38 **MR. WALIA:** Not that I'm aware of. It was an old platform, and it
39 was in about 300 foot of water, that they were tasked -- It was
40 actually the lower deck that allowed the surface structure to stick
41 up, and that's what they had to -- That they were tasked to remove,
42 and so I think they -- I mean, they were fined for the action they
43 took, and I haven't heard any follow-up on that afterwards.

44
45 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any other questions for Mr. Walia?
48 Not seeing any, thank you, sir, for your presentation.

1
2 **MR. WALIA:** Thank you.
3

4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and we're going to move on to Other
5 Business, and I'm going to give the floor to Mr. Strelcheck. He
6 has a couple of items he would like to discuss.
7

8 **OTHER BUSINESS**
9

10 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Let me start with just the staffing impacts and
11 just a kind of synopsis of what's going on with the Southeast
12 Regional Office and then turn to Clay, if he's online, to talk
13 about the Science Center, and then I'll end by talking about the
14 executive orders.
15

16 As you're aware, and you probably have been reading in the news,
17 the government is, obviously, going through a downsizing. We have
18 had a number of I'll say initiatives to either encourage people to
19 leave, or that may be a reduction in force ultimately, and so
20 there's been deferred resignations that have been offered, and,
21 right now, we have an early retirement process that's being offered
22 for employees that are eligible.
23

24 Probationary employees, that had one year less of service with the
25 government, were terminated, although that's still kind of in limbo
26 with the court system at this point, until that's figured out, and
27 then there's been a hiring freeze that, obviously, has been in
28 place, not allowing us to then backfill positions.
29

30 For the Southeast Regional Office, around the start of the year,
31 we had 117 employees. We've lost nine employees since that time,
32 and we have another six that we know we're going to lose by the
33 end of April, or early May, and so, at minimum, we're going to be
34 down fifteen employees, and I expect that number to grow.
35

36 We've done a little bit better on the fisheries staffing side in
37 terms of losses. The impacts on the fisheries side were actually
38 being realized before a lot of these downsizing efforts began, in
39 that we were trying to fill key positions, and we just weren't
40 able to, and so, right now, we have our vacancy for the assistant
41 regional administrator, which was formerly Jack McGovern's
42 position, and I have several economist positions that are vacant,
43 and we have a fisheries biologist position that's vacant in our
44 South Atlantic branch.
45

46 What I wanted to just share is that, you know, going forward, we're
47 going to have to really understand the gaps and impacts that this
48 is going to have. There is also an executive order that would not

1 allow us to hire a new position unless four additional positions
2 leave, and so we will shrink before we can grow.

3
4 My expectation is the areas that the council and its constituents
5 will likely see the most impacts from the regional office in the
6 short-term will be on our economic work, and social science work,
7 as well as our permits office, because I think we're going to lose
8 several people to the early retirement as part of our permits
9 office, and so more to come.

10
11 The only other things I'll share is that there is a lot of review
12 going on with grants, with contracts, and that's resulting in some
13 impacts to partners that we work with, taking longer to get those
14 either cleared, or approved, or potentially not even issued at
15 all, and so, to the extent that, you know, you want to reach out
16 to me, I'm happy to, obviously, listen and share, obviously, what
17 I know, in terms of kind of procedurally what's happening, but
18 there are definitely some disruptions that we're aware of and have
19 been working with several key partners on that front.

20
21 I'll stop there and maybe ask if there's any specific questions
22 for the regional office before going to Clay, and so anything for
23 me? Go ahead, Carrie.

24
25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** You might not have an answer to this,
26 and you can tell me later, but are you allowed to hire contractors
27 right now?

28
29 **MR. STRELCHECK:** We are not allowed to hire contractors to kind of
30 replace losses, and right now we have contracts in place, and so
31 the question will be whether or not, you know, contracts will be
32 extended in the long-term to maintain those positions.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any questions for Mr. Strelcheck? No?
35 Then we'll give Dr. Porch the opportunity to speak, and then we'll
36 go back to Mr. Strelcheck.

37
38 **DR. PORCH:** Thank you for the opportunity to relay impacts for the
39 Southeast Center. Andy talked through the basic background of it.
40 As I think you all know, the Southeast Center has gradually been
41 downsized, since the peak of about 300 employees twenty years ago
42 to just under 250 in 2024, at least on our staffing plan, but,
43 since the new administration has prioritized further reducing the
44 size of the federal government, the Southeast Center, through the
45 processes Andy described, has so far lost about forty-seven
46 positions, due to the hiring freeze, termination, new employees,
47 and deferred resignations.

48

1 As these terminations were abrupt, there wasn't much opportunity
2 to hand off responsibilities in an orderly way, and, in addition,
3 we expect to lose about twenty more by May, due to the latest round
4 of early and retirement incentives.

5
6 The good news is that our new Assistant Administrator for
7 Fisheries, Eugenio Pineiro Soler, has onboarded this week, and
8 there will be a formal announcement pretty soon, and we just heard
9 that on a leadership call, while the council was on break, and,
10 once we get a better sense from him of the administration's
11 priorities for fisheries, and what resources will be available, I
12 can give you more details on specifically which programs are likely
13 to be cut back or eliminated.

14
15 What I can say, based on what has happened so far, is that our
16 ability to execute our budget and other administrative services
17 has been severely compromised, and so, in addition to the
18 challenges from the new BAS financial system imposed by the
19 previous administration, we now have fewer staff, and a more
20 complex approval process to work through, and so you can expect
21 some slowdowns there.

22
23 This year, you can also expect the resource survey enterprise to
24 be reduced at some level. You heard some of the potential problems
25 from Mr. Donaldson, and there's likely to be some cutbacks in the
26 coverage from the NOAA ships, and we're still working through that
27 now.

28
29 Progress in the IRA funded automation and advanced technology has
30 been slowed, as we're not able to disperse all the IRA funds, and
31 some of the employees that were hired to implement that new
32 technology were part of that class of probationary employees that
33 were fired.

34
35 Support for stock assessments, protected resources, and some
36 fishery data collection programs will also be reduced, owing to
37 the loss of personnel. For example, because of the hiring freeze,
38 we cannot backfill Ken Brennan's position, and then the CEFI
39 program, the Climate, Ecosystem, and Fisheries Initiative, has
40 essentially been eliminated, and the employees hired to do the
41 work were those probationary employees who were fired, and that's
42 going to affect things like the Shrimp Futures project, ecosystem
43 status reports, and a host of our other ecosystem activities.

44
45 Then, finally, of course, travel privileges have been limited to
46 those deemed mission-critical by the administration, and
47 particularly if there is a virtual option, hence the reason I'm
48 not there with you in-person, and that's all I have to report for

1 now, and more coming hopefully in a month or two. Thank you.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Porch, for the update. Do we have
4 any questions for Dr. Porch? Not seeing any, thanks, Clay. Mr.
5 Strelcheck.

6
7 **MR. STRELCHECK:** You know, I guess I want to put a little bit of
8 a positive spin on this, and it, obviously, can come across as
9 doom and gloom, but we're rolling up our sleeves to look at,
10 obviously, how we're going to have to restructure, what the
11 priorities are going to be for the core mission going forward.

12
13 Clay has already been working down the path, and Clay and I have
14 been coordinating on that, and so more to come on that, but,
15 ultimately, at the end of the day, you know, as I tell a lot of
16 people that ask me, we're going to land on our feet, and we're
17 going to figure out how to get through this, right, and so it's
18 just -- I think the hardest part has been losing a lot of close
19 colleagues and people very quickly, and not really having to be
20 able to have a transition plan, with those losses happening at
21 such a rapid rate.

22
23 All right, and so the last thing I just wanted to talk to you about
24 was the Executive Order for Unleashing Prosperity Through
25 Deregulation. You've heard me talk about this a number of times
26 this week. This is Executive Order 14192. A lot of you probably
27 heard of it is the ten-for-one executive order.

28
29 We've been receiving some guidance on this, and I will say that
30 the guidance is still -- I think we're still trying to understand
31 the guidance, right, and so there is guidance, but there's some,
32 I think, gray areas and things that are still a little bit
33 uncertain but a few of the things that I think are probably most
34 beneficial for you to know, and so the ten deregulatory actions
35 for every one regulatory action only applies to actions that are
36 deemed to be significant by the Office of Management and Budget.

37
38 Those significance criteria are annual effect on the economy of
39 greater than \$100 dollars, create an inconsistency or interfere
40 with an action taken by another agency, materially alter the
41 budgetary impact of entitlements grants, user fees, loan programs,
42 or raise novel legal or policy issues.

43
44 The good news is the Fisheries Service doesn't implement a lot of
45 significant regulatory actions, and so we don't foresee having a
46 lot of challenges with having to meet the ten-for-one requirement.
47 There might be some, and I won't rule it out of question, and
48 there's always potential for the Office of Management and Budget

1 to deem something significant that we would expect wasn't going to
2 be significant.

3
4 The other, I think, positive thing to note is that, in the guidance
5 we received, it does have an exemption for routine hunting and
6 fishing actions, and they even reference established annual
7 harvest limits, and so those aren't required to have an offset,
8 but they're also not able to be used for cost savings, right, and
9 so we're going to implement a red grouper quota increase here,
10 right, and that would be a deregulatory action, kind of in most
11 circumstances, and that would be a positive, you know, economic
12 benefit, but, based on this guidance, it's essentially not
13 regulatory or deregulatory, and it's an exempted activity, because
14 it's just a routine action that we can proceed with.

15
16 What we don't know is how broad that definition of routine actions
17 is, right, and so is a bag limit change, or a size limit change,
18 or some of the other things that we do around this table routine
19 actions? I would argue, obviously, like building a SEFHIER
20 program, or implementing regional management, and those are not
21 going to be considered routine, and those, obviously, will have to
22 be looked at from the regulatory aspect.

23
24 The last thing I'll just comment on is that, with all new
25 regulations, the incremental costs, and this is an FY25, shall be
26 significantly less than zero, right, and so we essentially have to
27 maintain a balance sheet that has the economic benefits, or costs,
28 that are less than zero, and so, for every regulatory action we
29 move forward, we're having to put forward deregulatory actions to
30 make sure we're below zero, in terms of economic benefits.

31
32 In 2026, that will change, and we don't really know the process
33 yet, but essentially the Director of the Office of Management and
34 Budget will identify a total amount of incremental costs for
35 regulatory and deregulatory actions, and then those total costs
36 will be imposed -- That can be imposed cannot exceed the agency's
37 allowance, right, and so to be determined as to what that allowance
38 will be.

39
40 When I start talking, around the table, and I'll be communicating
41 more with Carrie and John Carmichael and other councils about
42 really focusing on deregulatory work, it's going to be really
43 important that we balance kind of those statutorily-mandated
44 requirements for regulatory work against some of the other
45 deregulatory actions that will be needed to meet this cost-benefit,
46 essentially, calculation that we're going to be doing.

47
48 As more is learned, I'll share it with you. As I said, I think

1 there's some gray areas, some uncertainties, that we're still
2 trying to understand, but, procedurally, we've set up a process
3 internally that, even with, you know, actions they are in kind of
4 their infancy, we can start flagging them as to where we think
5 they're going to be with regard to regulatory and deregulatory
6 aspects and how that can then be accounted for as we track them
7 through the system, and so I'll take any questions.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck, for that. Do we have
10 any questions? Mr. Frady.

11
12 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Andy, I would just like --
13 You're talking about deregulation, and I understand the
14 frustration of what you all are going through, but, you know, a
15 number of years ago, we had a regulation put on the federally-
16 permitted charter boats to keep turtle gear onboard, and is that
17 one of those ten that we can get rid of, because of the nuisance
18 that it causes everybody, and it singles out a specific user group,
19 but the majority of the people out there fishing are not required
20 to have it, and is that one you all could just submit as a checkoff,
21 and I'm being serious about that, because it's a pain in the butt
22 for a charter boat to have to keep the requirements onboard, and
23 none of us have had interactions with turtles.

24
25 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So I would just say, generally, right, if there
26 are deregulatory actions that we want to look at as a council, and
27 explore, then, yes, I think those should be offered on the table.
28 We had a lot of discussion about the twenty-fathom closure this
29 week, right, and that could be viewed as a deregulatory action.

30
31 Those things don't necessarily have to meet the ten-for-one
32 requirement, and it would just be considered an economic cost
33 savings to eliminate them.

34
35 With that said, your example has Endangered Species Act
36 implications to it, and, obviously, we would have to weigh the
37 benefits and costs to the industry relative to, obviously, the
38 conservation benefits to the species, and I recognize what you're
39 saying, is you don't interact with them, and you're having to carry
40 a lot of gear.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Walker.

43
44 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and I like the concept, you know, of some of the
45 turtle package, and you could probably check-off ten unnecessary
46 regulations, with the dog bones and the hank of rope and a car
47 tire, and there's some real absurdity there, but I recognize the
48 challenges, but I love that you said that, Captain Troy.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Is there anything else for Mr. Strelcheck? Not
3 seeing any, Andy, thank you for the update. Next, we're going to
4 move to discussion of the June 2025 council meeting and Dr.
5 Simmons.

6
7 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, instead
8 of going through our normal planning activities at the end of the
9 meeting, I would like to talk about the June council meeting, and
10 so, during public comment, and afterwards, staff and council
11 members, I think, were approached by considering maybe more of a
12 hybrid approach for the June meeting, if we hold it in our office.

13
14 We've run some very rough numbers, and we have a couple different
15 options to consider, and I don't know that we have to make any
16 decisions right here, but, if there's something that the council
17 doesn't have an appetite for, then that would be helpful to know.

18
19 So, if we considered a hybrid meeting in the Gulf Council office
20 in Tampa, and not St. Pete, but Tampa, that would include the
21 public's ability to participate in-person. First, we would need
22 to secure a room block at the government rate next to our office,
23 ideally, so people would not have to get rental cars.

24
25 If we did this more hybrid approach, we could start on Tuesday,
26 perhaps, instead of on Monday, and, if you did choose to come in-
27 person to participate, we would expect you to go home the second
28 day and not incur additional costs, and, if that wasn't possible,
29 then, obviously, you could participate virtually.

30
31 A couple things with that. We would just also need to know fairly
32 soon who would want, out of the council members, how you would
33 choose to participate, and so to get ahead of that, and we would
34 probably have to do a little bit of reorganization in our office,
35 as far as having enough room. It's going to be a little tight in
36 there. We typically have twenty-three folks around the U, and we
37 do have kind of a spillover option down below that we can use.

38
39 So just very rough estimates for your information to do this, and,
40 if we did the two-day virtual meeting, we're estimating, you know,
41 bringing in the chair of the council, bringing in the SSC chair,
42 and we would hav our staff in the office, and that would be roughly
43 around \$17,000 to \$20,000.

44
45 If we did this hybrid approach, where we allow council members to
46 come in or, you know, participate virtually, however they choose,
47 but, if everyone came, we're estimating it would be about double,
48 around \$40,000, and so I'll put that out there as some approaches

1 we could take, and, obviously, we'll have a lot of things to finish
2 up with the chair and vice chair on that, but that is something
3 we're willing to consider, if there is an appetite for it.

4
5 Then I don't know if there's questions on that, but I do have a
6 very, very rough agenda that I just wanted to put up and walk
7 through, as to what we're trying to bring to the council, and so,
8 Bernie, that's a slightly older draft, and I've updated it, if you
9 just pull the one off the server, but maybe if there's questions,
10 while she's doing that.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So do we have any questions? Mr. Sanchez.

13
14 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I'm just curious, and you had suggested, depending
15 on how many people, \$20,000, and, if there's more, \$40,000, and,
16 if it's entirely virtual, what's the price tag on that?

17
18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** If it's entirely virtual, it's about
19 \$20,000, because we still have to pay salaries, and we would pay
20 for the chair to come into the office to run the meeting, so we
21 can help if needed, and then also the SSC chair.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons, correct me if I mention something
24 incorrect, but I think we have about twenty days or so, and did we
25 talk about May 1 maybe to finalize a decision?

26
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Well, May 1 is the drop-dead date for
28 our Federal Register notice, right, and so we have to get ahead of
29 that, and so I would say, next week, we need to be kind of honing-
30 in on what we would like to do.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay.

33
34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** So, right now, we're proposing three
35 committees, the Reef Fish Committee, the Mackerel Committee, and
36 the Ecosystem Committee, and so let's just start at the top.
37 Public comment is going to be a little bit different, and so folks
38 are going to have to be patient with us on that, and so we'll try
39 to do the best we can there, but we are allowing a virtual option,
40 of course, and so we're getting -- We will probably have their
41 2025 recreational gag season, hopefully, the announcement, and
42 we're planning to bring a final action draft framework on other
43 shallow-water grouper catch limits.

44
45 We hopefully can wrap up the framework action to adjust the red
46 snapper federal charter for-hire season, and we'll have the one
47 day SSC meeting summary report to report out to you, and that will
48 have implications on what we do with Reef Fish Amendment 58A, and

1 so we'll put that, as it stands, back on the agenda and make sure
2 we get some guidance from you all on what to do.

3
4 That also has implications on the red grouper emergency rule, and
5 then, I guess, based on timing, and talking with Mr. Strelcheck,
6 it seems that we do have to start talking about the red grouper
7 management actions. I was hoping we could wait until August for
8 that, but it sounds like there's some urgency there.

9
10 Then the public hearing draft for Amendment 58B, the deepwater
11 grouper, and so keep going down, and the times are not -- They're
12 just estimates right now, and I have to get with staff, and then
13 we would have a short Mackerel Committee, to try to wrap up Spanish
14 mackerel.

15
16 Then Ecosystem, and a lot of folks said this is not, you know, a
17 priority, which I kind of understand where people are coming with
18 that, but, with our Inflation Reduction Act funding, we have
19 certain deliverables that we have to get to, and a timeline for
20 that funding as well, and so we would need to take this to the
21 council, to try to get feedback, so we're not slowed down again on
22 that project.

23
24 Right now, I was thinking, you know, public comment kind of over
25 the lunchtime, and it would be a little bit early maybe for Central
26 Time, but we can adjust that, with the help from the leadership of
27 the council, and so let's keep going down, Bernie.

28
29 If we allow the in-person, we might need to add a little bit of
30 time for public comment, and then the committee reports and
31 adjourn, and hopefully I'll be able to give you an update on
32 council funding, and then we would go through our planning
33 activities to wrap it up.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons, and, again, this is a
36 rough draft, and I spoke with Dr. Frazer during the break, and he
37 made a suggestion, and I think it's a great suggestion, that, if
38 we entertain this hybrid approach, that at least the chairs of the
39 committee would maybe come in-person, and it could help with the
40 flow of things. Do we have any questions for Dr. Simmons? Mr.
41 Walker.

42
43 **MR. WALKER:** So there's no data collection discussion at this one?

44
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** No, not planned, and we would wait
46 until August for that.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.

1
2 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So what happens with I guess the hotel reservation
3 that we had in Key West? Are you able to postpone and use that
4 for next year?
5

6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, and we were able to move that
7 with no penalty to June of 2026, and so this hybrid approach -- I
8 mean, in thinking more about it, and I know we don't have to make
9 a decision right here, until we get the hotel secured, but what I
10 don't want to do is have to redo things, if they're not transparent
11 enough, or there's not enough access to it, and so I think that's
12 why we were trying to come up with this thought.
13

14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** What I recall, Dr. Simmons, is that the two main
15 points for what I understood is that the hotel piece is first, if
16 that can be solidified, and then what's the interest in the council
17 members being in-person, and I think that would be step number
18 two, and, as Dr. Simmons said, we have about a week to lock both
19 of those in place, and so I would say that, once the hotel is done,
20 if it's positive to move forward with the hotel, I would assume
21 we're going to reach out to council members, at that point, and
22 get your interest in attending. We can send out a survey of some
23 sort. Any questions or comments? Mr. Anson.
24

25 **MR. ANSON:** I'm just curious. With the hybrid approach, and having
26 the public come to provide testimony, you mentioned something about
27 a downstairs room, and so there is going to be -- I know it's the
28 busy time of year, and so there may not be a lot of, you know,
29 ability of folks to come, but we do have some bigger items,
30 particularly in that part of the Gulf, that are going to be up for
31 final action, and so I'm just thinking about, if enough people
32 come, are you able to accommodate them is all.
33

34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, and that's a fair point. Like
35 I said, we have kind of a potential overflow option downstairs
36 that we could set up with streaming the webinar, so people could
37 go back and forth, and it's not ideal, but it would still provide
38 more access to staff and council members.
39

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

42 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I don't have any hard feelings, and I'll do whatever
43 is in the best interest of you all, you know, virtual or whatever
44 you want. Now, when it comes to Monday or Tuesday, if that's still
45 up in the air, if it's only two days, is there a Tuesday and
46 Wednesday, just because Wednesday is the traditional public
47 hearing day, and travel is a little easier on a Tuesday.
48

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So the initial idea was Monday and Tuesday, and
2 then Dr. Froeschke made some valid points that maybe we should
3 entertain Tuesday and Wednesday, and so I think it's to be
4 determined, pending rates, hotel rates, and it could impact rates
5 on flights as well, you know, from Sunday to Monday, and so there's
6 options to be weighed out. Any other questions or comments for
7 Dr. Simmons? No?

8
9 Is there any other business that needs to come before the council?
10 Not seeing any, okay, and I have a few comments and/or thank you's
11 to announce before we adjourn, to the Alabama Charter Fishing
12 Association and Zeke's Marina for the social, the industry folks
13 that showed up to give public testimony. Thank you.

14
15 The presenters that presented to us, the SSC chair, Dr. Allen, the
16 AP chairs that were here, and one of my most important things is
17 the staff, and thank you, and so we'll be in touch. We'll be in
18 touch within a week. Thank you all, and safe travels.

19
20 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on April 10, 2025.)

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