

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

GULF SEDAR COMMITTEE

The Lodge at Gulf State Park Gulf Shores, Alabama

April 8, 2024

VOTING MEMBERS

- Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama
- Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
- Tom Frazer.....Florida
- Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
- C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

- Kesley Banks.....Texas
- Susan Boggs.....Alabama
- Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
- Dale Diaz.....Mississippi
- Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
- Jonathan Dugas.....Louisiana
- Bob Gill.....Florida
- Michael McDermott.....Mississippi
- Anthony Overton.....Alabama
- Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
- Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
- Ed Walker.....Florida
- Troy Williamson.....Texas

STAFF

- Max Birdsong.....Social Scientist
- Assane Diagne.....Economist
- Matt Freeman.....Economist
- John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
- Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
- Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
- Jessica Matos.....Administrative & Accounting Technician
- Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
- Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison
- Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
- Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

- Jessica McCawley.....SAFMC
- Jim Nance.....SSC
- John Walter.....SEFSC

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1 The Gulf SEDAR Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery
2 Management Council convened at The Lodge at Gulf State Park in
3 Gulf Shores, Alabama on Monday morning, April 8, 2024, and was
4 called to order by Chairman Kevin Anson.

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

10 **CHAIRMAN KEVIN ANSON:** We'll get started with the Adoption of
11 the Agenda. As far as numbers, it's myself, Mr. Geeslin, Dr.
12 Frazer, Dr. Sweetman, and Mr. Schieble, and so are there any
13 changes to the agenda needed? All right. Is there any
14 objection to adopting the agenda as written? Not seeing any,
15 and so the agenda is adopted as written.

16
17 Approval of the June 2022 Minutes, are there any edits or
18 changes needed, or clarifications? Not seeing any, is there any
19 objection to accepting the minutes as written? Not seeing any
20 objections, and the minutes are approved. That will take us to
21 Item Number III, Action Guide and Next Steps, Tab I, Number 3,
22 and Mr. Rindone.

23
24 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Thank you, sir. First up to bat will be Dr.
25 Nance's presentation, which is Item V, and Dr. Nance is going to
26 come to the podium, and he's going to summarize discussions
27 about recommended revisions to the SEDAR process in response to
28 the SSC's February 2024 review of the SEDAR 74 research track
29 assessment for red snapper and include a brief overview of the
30 revisions that the Science Center was considering as a result of
31 that review.

32
33 The SSC provided feedback for council consideration about many
34 facets of the stock assessment process, and some of these
35 recommendations have also been discussed recently by the SEDAR
36 Steering Committee, at its March 2024 meeting. The committee
37 should review these recommendations, ask question, and make
38 recommendations to the council, as appropriate.

39
40 **SSC DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE CURRENT SEDAR PROCESS**
41

42 **DR. JIM NANCE:** Thank you. It's nice to be here. This part of
43 the presentation is going to talk about the process. Tomorrow,
44 we have some slides on the SEDAR 74 track assessment, but, to
45 begin with, we had a nice discussion with the Southeast
46 Fisheries Science and the SSC at our SSC meeting.

47
48 The process recommendations that came out of that is we all felt

1 like we needed some additional flexibility in the SEDAR process,
2 as it goes forth. Our preference is for addressing key stocks
3 on a regular schedule and then assessing others as needed.
4 Prescribing specific types of assessment in advance, and, in
5 other words, operational and benchmark, we can do that through
6 the processes.

7
8 The research track assessment, the center, in their discussion
9 with us, noted that limited efficiency gains were observed in
10 the research track, in light of increased workload on data
11 providing for those types of assessments, and there was
12 discussion on the independent reviewer process and how necessary
13 that is, and, ultimately, I think we came to the conclusion
14 that, ultimately, we did not recommend continuing the use of
15 research track assessments in the future.

16
17 The peer review and working groups, probably a case-by-case
18 determination of the peer review, and how necessary those are,
19 and we can include those, the peer review process, in our terms
20 of reference, and I think it will become a little bit clearer,
21 and then consideration -- We need probably, for topical working
22 groups, to have those in the terms of reference, also.

23
24 Future plans are we're going to have a continued discussion on
25 this at our May SSC meeting on potential modifications to
26 improve efficiencies and effectiveness, and input from SEDAR
27 Steering Committee meetings are anticipated, and so I know
28 Carrie, and the staff, went to the SEDAR Steering Committee,
29 and, once we hear the outcome of those, we'll probably have
30 further discussions, at our SSC meeting, on the SEDAR process,
31 and we'll try to move that along, so that it's efficient for all
32 of us, and I think we can have a lot better input on throughput
33 through that process, and, Chair, that ends my presentation on
34 this topic.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Thank you, Dr. Nance. Any questions for Dr.
37 Nance? I am not seeing any. Thank you.

38
39 **DR. NANCE:** Thank you very much.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** That will take us then to Item Number VI, the
42 March 2024 SEDAR Steering Committee Meeting Report. Dr.
43 Simmons.

44
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Would
46 you like Mr. Rindone to do the action guide?

47
48 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Sure.

1
2 **MARCH 2024 SEDAR STEERING COMMITTEE REPORT**
3

4 **MR. RINDONE:** All right. It says Item Number IV, and it should
5 say Item Number VI, but we're going to summarize the proceedings
6 from the steering committee meeting that was held on March 25
7 and 26 in Charleston. Just a reminder to the committee that the
8 council chair and executive director represent the interests of
9 the council with respect to SEDAR on the SEDAR Steering
10 Committee, which meets twice a year, typically, to discuss the
11 stock assessment schedule process, and other topics, as
12 necessary, and the committee also discussed new approaches for
13 conducting stock assessments in the southeastern U.S. The
14 schedule, and other topics, this committee should review the
15 presentation and ask questions and make recommendations to the
16 council, the SSC, and staff, as appropriate.
17

18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I'm
19 going to summarize Tab I, Number 6, and so there's not yet a
20 summary from the SEDAR Steering Committee. We just met, in
21 Charleston, on March 25 and 26, and so this is a presentation
22 that we put together, and it was reviewed by the chair and vice
23 chair and staff.
24

25 To give you an overview, we're going to talk about the SEDAR
26 projects report, and we talked about the SEDAR process review
27 discussion, and we started hearing some information from the
28 Science Center regarding process suggestions. They had a
29 presentation that they walked us through. We had three Other
30 Business items that we discussed, that I will provide some
31 information to you all, and then next steps, as far as when
32 we're going to meet again, and then we're going to circle back
33 and talk about the assessment schedule, where we are with that,
34 and then we're going to start a discussion of key stocks that
35 the center asked us to start reviewing and thinking about for
36 the council.
37

38 I focused on the Gulf stocks, or the joint stocks, and I don't
39 have anything in here regarding the South Atlantic Council
40 stocks, and so, if you would like to look at that information,
41 you'll have to go to the SEDAR committee website to take a look
42 at that, but, to give you an update, SEDAR 96 was Southeast U.S.
43 yellowtail snapper.
44

45 The councils, both councils, the Gulf and South Atlantic,
46 requested an operational assessment to use the State Reef Fish
47 Survey for private vessel landings, and so we have reviewed and
48 approved, both the SSCs and the councils, the terms of reference

1 for that assessment. There is assessment webinars that are
2 scheduled throughout the months of May and September this year,
3 and they're expecting completion in late 2024. If there are no
4 questions on that, next slide, please.

5
6 For SEDAR 94, the Florida hogfish, a benchmark was slated to
7 begin in 2024, and it was postponed until 2025, in order to
8 allow the yellowtail snapper to be accommodated back into the
9 assessment schedule. The terms of reference were reviewed, and
10 approved, by the SSCs and the councils, to-date, and then SEDAR
11 is going to finalize that project schedule with the participants
12 as well, for both the Gulf and South Atlantic, and so, again,
13 this is for your information, and we'll have to take some of
14 this back to the SSC.

15
16 During the steering committee, we received a presentation from
17 the center, and they started discussing some changes they wanted
18 to make to the process, and so one of those things they started
19 talking about was identifying the cooperators, being the Gulf
20 Council, the South Atlantic Council, the Caribbean Council, and
21 Highly Migratory Species, identifying key stocks and assigning a
22 permanent rotating calendar to those key stocks, to try to
23 improve efficiencies and thinking about the frequency that was
24 needed for those stocks in the SEDAR schedule itself and
25 approaches to update management advice between full assessments,
26 versus like an interim assessment, that maybe accommodated, in
27 between, those bigger, larger, more complex assessments.

28
29 Then the potential for extra SEDAR assessments to address
30 emergent issues, and so we wanted some flexibility in this
31 process, as we forward, and recommendations to improve the
32 timeliness of stock assessment advice, and they want to start
33 really applying these changes, I believe, in 2026 and beyond, to
34 the stock assessment calendar, and so we kind of need to keep
35 that in the back of our minds as we're going through the stock
36 assessment schedule.

37
38 When we get to that point, we'll need some committee and council
39 feedback regarding the key stocks, and then, as Dr. Nance
40 mentioned, we're going to start bringing that information to the
41 SSC, as the center kind of moves forward with developing this
42 renewed process and trying to streamline the assessments through
43 that process to the SSC and then the council.

44
45 The Science Center recommended these changes, eliminating the
46 research track, as it was completed in the Gulf for red snapper,
47 eliminate the assessment nomenclature and slot concept. These
48 key stocks, again, with the council really trying to identify

1 what the key stocks are, and prioritizing them, and trying to
2 really think about how some of the remaining stocks could be
3 assessed, potentially using less time-consuming approaches.
4 Like, you know, do they all need to go through the more complex
5 models, and the most complex assessments, and so the SEDAR
6 Steering Committee was supportive of these recommendations that
7 were presented from the center.

8
9 Another item was discussed regarding virtual public comment for
10 in-person meetings, and so it began in 2023, and so SEDAR began
11 broadcasting plenary sessions of in-person SEDAR meetings, and
12 so the individuals that were not able to attend in-person could
13 absorb that process now via webinar, and you can use the public
14 comment form on the SEDAR website, but you have to attend in-
15 person to provide public comment.

16
17 Comments on management can be directed to the appropriate
18 management body, and so I think we discussed this, and there
19 were a lot of concerns about public comments being directed at
20 management, versus at, you know, the SEDAR process, and that
21 stock assessment, and so I think that was one of the other
22 impetuses, as well as logistics for not allowing virtual public
23 comment during those in-person meetings.

24
25 There was three Other Business items, and we discussed an update
26 on the status of Science Center efforts to automate data
27 provisions, and we spent a long time talking about this, and so
28 the outcome was that the work was going to continue with the
29 Fishery-Independent Indices Working Group. I think there's been
30 a lot of effort, and they're trying to wrap up some of that,
31 particularly with the state partners, and the center is
32 considering ways to automate data processing and to ensure the
33 best practices for these various indices of abundance, and so I
34 think there's quite a bit of work to do there, but it seems like
35 the ball is rolling.

36
37 We spent some time talking about the Center for Independent
38 Experts, which is the CIE, performance work statements, and this
39 came up, for us, during the review of the red snapper
40 assessment, and the reviewers that were selected and involved in
41 that process didn't seem to be very familiar with the fisheries,
42 along with some of the data limitations that we have in the
43 Southeast, and so we talked about this at the steering
44 committee, and the center plans to be more involved in reviewing
45 the statements for the various assessments prior to the
46 selection of those CIE reviewers.

47
48 Other suggestions were made regarding the review workshops, with

1 the SSC members and their engagement in those workshops, and so
2 I think we'll hear more from the center as we work through the
3 next iteration of the red snapper stock assessment, as well as
4 some other benchmark assessments, and so that's in the works.

5
6 For assessment webinars, this is kind of just, as we go back
7 towards benchmarks, and benchmark terminology, I think there are
8 some questions about if cooperators, such as the Gulf Council,
9 can appoint panelists to participate in those webinars, where
10 they can talk, and that was confirmed, and so I think this was
11 enough of an issue that I just wanted to say that that was
12 cleared up during the steering committee, and that was the
13 result.

14
15 The next steering committee will meet in August of 2024, I think
16 is what the plan is, and, right now, we're trying to have a mid-
17 meeting, and it will probably be virtual, and I think the August
18 meeting as well I think will be virtual, to receive updates and
19 exchange any recommendations from the council and its SSC
20 towards this reimagining and envisioning the stock assessment
21 process. Now, I think, if there's not any questions, Mr. Chair,
22 on that, we'll talk about the schedule.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Any questions for Dr. Simmons? I'm not seeing
25 any, if you want to go ahead. Mr. Strelcheck.

26
27 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** I just wanted to build upon the comments
28 from Carrie, and so, you know, we certainly recognize, as an
29 agency, the need to improve the SEDAR process and the lessons
30 learned. The Science Center gave a comprehensive presentation
31 on the research track, and what we thought it would accomplish,
32 versus what it actually accomplished, and you were there, Kevin,
33 right, and they were two very different things.

34
35 One of the things that I think we really need to be willing to
36 do is adapt to some pretty significant change going forward, and
37 our willingness to simplify the process, right, and so that's
38 not just NMFS. That's the council as a whole, in terms of, if
39 we're going to increase throughput, and ultimately have more
40 assessment advice, we're going to have to simplify things
41 considerably.

42
43 The other approach that I like is, when we get into the
44 schedule, you've all seen kind of the blocks of time that are
45 essentially put on a calendar, and sometimes we stay within
46 those blocks of time, and a lot of times we extend beyond those
47 blocks of time, but the proposal, from center staff, right, is
48 kind of a build, you know, the timeline, based on the components

1 of the stock assessment, and, as you add complexity, that adds
2 time to the stock assessment, and so, if there's technical
3 working groups, or there's other activities that are added,
4 that's all plugged into the process, and, obviously, things will
5 change, but you kind of get an idea, and is it going to be a
6 six-month timeframe, or is it going to be a nine-month
7 timeframe, or is it going to be a fifteen-month timeframe, and
8 so that also will, I think, bring some predictability, in terms
9 of the process, and so I just wanted to note that.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Sweetman.

12
13 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just general
14 questions, and I know we'll get into the schedule in a little
15 bit here, but, I mean, overall, I agree with Andy, and I'm
16 supportive of getting rid of the research track assessment
17 component. It doesn't provide management advice, and we've had
18 challenges with that in the past, and they take up a lot of
19 time.

20
21 A general question though, and so how does -- Obviously, some
22 folks in the Science Center are concerned about staff capacity,
23 and everything along those lines, and the current structure that
24 we have right now for the stock assessment process, and so
25 looking at -- I'm probably skipping ahead here, but, looking at
26 some of the key species that we've kind of looked at here, how
27 would that rotating schedule actually reduce capacity, and then
28 I'm thinking, from the perspective of -- I know, at least on the
29 South Atlantic, you know, they've done a lot of management
30 strategy evaluations, and we haven't really incorporated that
31 too much into the Gulf side here, and so I'm wondering how
32 separate things along those lines, that would require the
33 Science Center to get involved, could interact with what is
34 tentatively being proposed right now.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Andy.

37
38 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Obviously, I would want John to weigh-in here,
39 but, you know, with the management strategy evaluations in the
40 South Atlantic, we're still, I think, finding our way on that,
41 in terms of how that ultimately integrates into management
42 advice, but there has been time dedicated on the SEDAR schedule
43 to allow that to happen.

44
45 Your point, right, in terms of staffing, resources, capacity, I
46 guess the way I'm looking at it is we're not, you know, going to
47 be able to greatly expand, or maybe increase, our workforce of
48 stock assessment scientists, and so it's really about then how

1 do we simplify the process and be able to kind of schedule these
2 assessments in a way that is being informed by the complexity of
3 the assessments, and so, by identifying key stocks upfront, that
4 provides some uncertainty, but then also providing some simpler
5 approaches to how we assess these species could ultimately allow
6 those scientists that we have to produce more assessments, or
7 more interim analyses, or more, you know, products that the
8 council could receive.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Walter, to that point?

11
12 **DR. JOHN WALTER:** Yes. Thanks, and thanks, C.J. I think the
13 goal is to try and meet the complexity and resources invested in
14 an assessment with the need, and, in some cases, we've got a
15 need for integrating a whole lot of information, you know, the
16 full red snapper assessment, and, in other cases, probably the
17 need doesn't rise to the full SEDAR approach, and how can we
18 take some stocks and do it maybe a little more efficiently, and
19 then there's also the idea that we probably --

20
21 We're always going to have this time delay between the
22 conventional assessment and when management advice hits, and are
23 there things, and indeed there are, and we've talked about like
24 empirical, or index-based, management procedures that might be
25 able to be a little more responsive and adjust the catch levels
26 in response to something that might happen without spinning-up
27 the whole SEDAR process.

28
29 I think the key is going to be we've got a couple of management
30 procedures, MSEs, on the books here, and the schedule, and how
31 we do them all need to fit the need, and I think we've heard,
32 and been a little bit concerned, that MSE is going to be this
33 really intensive, long process that we fear, when it doesn't
34 need to be, and it can be a desk MSE, and it can take a couple
35 of weeks by an analyst, or it can be a full stakeholder
36 participatory MSE, but, if the management objectives are pretty
37 clear, and it's simply to be able to provide catch advice that
38 meets those management objectives, then there doesn't
39 necessarily need to be a really intensive process of developing
40 new objectives.

41
42 I think how we build those MSEs, or management procedures, to
43 just meet the needs that we have, I think is going to be the key
44 there, and one of the things that I think the SEDAR Steering
45 Committee talked about, in terms of taking some of the
46 assessments outside of SEDAR, is could we do them a little
47 simpler, and then maybe there's a process, like that old reef
48 fish assessment panel, that might be useful to stand up that

1 says, okay, this is a group of the experts appointed by the
2 council, maybe from SSC members, and they're going to have this
3 group of species, that are not the priority ones, which we'll
4 get to, and they're going to be tasked with coming up with a
5 plan, maybe, with the Science Center, with the states, on how
6 we're going to address these stocks in the most efficient
7 manner, and then actually doing it. That might be a way
8 forward, while we still do the key stocks in the normal fully-
9 transparent, inclusive manner. Thanks.

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

12
13 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** I think Dr. Walter answered the question, and
14 so, based on the SEDAR Committee's kind of deliberations, the
15 MSE type of work would be held outside of the SEDAR process, and
16 is that what you're suggesting, or would the Science Center
17 handle that?

18
19 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Go ahead, Dr. Walter.

20
21 **DR. WALTER:** In think, in some cases, yes, but I think, as we're
22 learning in the South Atlantic, it's -- Depending on the need,
23 you're going to need other players involved, and so, right now,
24 what we initially said it let's keep it out of the SEDAR
25 process, because SEDAR has a particularly rigid process for
26 doing the stock assessments, the data, assessment, and review
27 workshop, that could be adapted to developing MSEs, but, because
28 we've never done it in the Gulf yet, we might have to define
29 that process, and so that was really -- It's not that the SEDAR
30 process couldn't achieve that, because it's very good at
31 creating transparency and inclusivity and getting people there,
32 which, in some MSEs, is exactly what needs to be done, but, for
33 others, it's probably overkill, when we just need to see which
34 index works well for an interim approach. That's just kind of a
35 desk MSE assessment kind of thing. Thanks.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Simmons.

38
39 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, but, I guess,
40 to your point, Dr. Frazer, yes, historically, the steering
41 committee has requested that the MSEs not be put in the previous
42 process scheduled slots that they had, and we had asked that
43 they be done outside of the SEDAR process, but, again, moving
44 forward, and thinking about this reimagined process, I think
45 we're opening up and thinking about things a little bit
46 differently, but, yes, historically, that has been our approach.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Mr. Diaz.

1
2 **MR. DALE DIAZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not on your
3 committee, but I really am optimistic about what's being
4 discussed around the table right now, and I like where I hope
5 we're headed. I've been around the council process since around
6 2008, and my thinking has shifted on this since 2008.

7
8 I like not having an assigned name for a stock assessment. The
9 reason for that is, in the past, I think, especially around red
10 snapper, even if we had buy-in in the SEDAR process, and trying
11 to get things done, people would always want the Cadillac
12 version, instead of the version that we need, and so, anyway, I
13 like where we're going, and I like what Dr. Walter said about
14 standing up panel, and that panel should, every time we look at
15 a new stock assessment, say how can we simplify it, and what do
16 we need, and how can we get more timely data. Those need to be
17 the things that they focus on every single time, and any
18 progress we could make would be huge.

19
20 I just absolutely hate, whenever we're trying to manage, and
21 then you've got a terminal year that's two or three years out,
22 and people out on the water are seeing something entirely
23 different than it was four years ago, or three years ago, and so
24 I like where we're going, and please keep the momentum going,
25 and I really was enthused with Dr. Walter's statement a minute
26 ago, and so hopefully we can keep moving in that direction.
27 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Mr. Geeslin.

30
31 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will echo some of
32 Dale's sentiments and then move on to a more pointed
33 observation, and I am also encouraged by the efforts to create a
34 more efficient and timely SEDAR process.

35
36 Now my pointed comment is to -- I recognize the need to maybe
37 refine our CIE process review, having sat in on that SEDAR
38 workshop, and that was absolutely painful, to listen to some of
39 that, and I can only imagine what it was like sitting in the
40 room.

41
42 Some of those criticism, and feedback, weren't necessarily
43 relevant, or germane, to our fishery, and I'm talking
44 specifically to SEDAR 74, the red snapper stock assessment, and
45 so, the more we can, you know, strike that balance, and I think
46 that's what it is, is having that independent review, that has
47 some unbiased perspectives, and striking that balance with, you
48 know, those comments, and criticisms, that are both relevant,

1 and, more importantly, probably reasonable to come back to, and
2 so some of that I felt was kind of pie-in-the-sky comments that
3 I didn't even know how our SEDAR folks would deal with that, and
4 so I do sympathize with some of the folks that had to deal with
5 that. Thank you.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** I appreciate the comments, and, Dale, your
8 comments about, you know, an eye toward, you know, throughput,
9 efficiency, so that we can kind of keep up with the fishery, and
10 so -- Andy talked about it a little bit a minute ago, and one
11 thing that I was encouraged to hear, by the staff that were
12 there, the NOAA staff that were there, was, you know, an
13 understanding, a desire, to, you know, put energies into some of
14 those less-technical assessment processes, with an eye toward
15 trying to get more throughput forward, you know, with management
16 advice.

17
18 I was encouraged to hear what was talked, and discussed, about
19 it around the table. You know, certainly there is, you know,
20 the nuts-and-bolts of how this newly-envisioned process is going
21 to work, and, although they're trying to get away from slots, at
22 the end of the day, it still comes down to, you know, available
23 bodies, and resources, to be able to do whatever it is that's
24 selected for whatever species, you know, but the first jumping-
25 off point, if you will, for that process, as I understand it, is
26 for the respective councils to come back with this kind of list
27 of species.

28
29 Then, as they develop what is the -- You know, internally how
30 they're going to set this up, and that would be helpful, as they
31 kind of envision 2026 and beyond, how that first year is going
32 to look, and those types of things, and so that's something that
33 we have yet to discuss, but certainly I look forward to the
34 SEDAR Steering Committee members, and then we can have
35 discussion at Full Council, of course, of trying to identify
36 those priority species.

37
38 If there's no other discussion about kind of the process, and
39 certainly we'll hear more about it in upcoming council meetings,
40 when those details get fleshed out, but, right now, I think
41 we'll go to the current SEDAR schedule. Ryan, did you want to
42 handle that?

43
44 **REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF THE GULF OF MEXICO SEDAR SCHEDULE**

45
46 **MR. RINDONE:** Yes, sir, Mr. Chair. We updated the schedule, as
47 you see on the screen here, current as of the last SEDAR
48 Steering Committee meeting. There are still some old system

1 assessment nomenclature used in here, because we're not expected
2 to really phase out of that until we get into -- Or beyond 2026,
3 but we'll be working on that as we move forward with that.

4
5 For 2024, we have the expectation of starting -- Or of
6 continuing and finishing the red grouper operational assessment.
7 The SSC would be expected to review that, I believe, in
8 November, and the red snapper benchmark assessment will be
9 expected to start later this year. The data workshop, or
10 initial data discussions, the phone calls and whatnot, begin in
11 the third quarter of this, and a data workshop in December, and
12 I think we're looking at The Renaissance in Mobile for that, Mr.
13 Chair, and so we expect to see your shining face there.

14
15 We will also be continuing to work on the shrimp benchmark
16 assessment, and so FWC will be wrapping up the mutton snapper
17 assessment and starting the yellowtail snapper assessment that
18 was requested by both councils, and both of those assessments
19 will also consider the State of Florida's State Reef Fish
20 Survey, as will the red grouper assessment.

21
22 Then FWC has contracted with a consulting group to work on the
23 development of an MSE for black grouper, and, at this time, we
24 expect that process to carry into 2025, and so, when there's
25 more to report on the development of that, we'll let you know.

26
27 For 2025, we hope to finish up that benchmark for red snapper,
28 and do an operational for gag grouper, or start one for gag
29 grouper, and we also want to start the benchmark for gray
30 triggerfish, which has been out of the assessment loop for a
31 while, and so it's time to bring that one back in, and an
32 operational assessment for kingfish. We've been hearing a lot,
33 obviously, from our fishing public about matters related to
34 kingfish harvest being down considerably from previous years,
35 and so it's time to take a look under the hood there.

36
37 Then we'll finish up shrimp, and FWC will have finished up the
38 other two Florida species, and they'll pick up Florida hogfish,
39 which will be all the way down the coast, and we hope to see
40 that black grouper MSE wrap up. We finalized 2026 also, with
41 finishing up the gray triggerfish benchmark assessment, and the
42 gag operational, and starting a benchmark for greater amberjack.

43
44 We also have a cobia assessment listed on here as well, and
45 cobia tends to be churned out pretty quickly, and so then FWC
46 should wrap-up its work on hogfish that year as well. I'm just
47 going to keep going, unless somebody, you know, puts a flare up.

1 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just a real quick question, Ryan. Relative to
2 king mackerel, the operational assessment, obviously, we've
3 heard a lot about that. Is there the potential to incorporate
4 the findings from the port meetings and whatnot that are being
5 conducted across the various councils into that assessment?
6

7 **MR. RINDONE:** It's certainly plausible. It just depends on the
8 timeliness of those reports becoming available and being able to
9 see what kind of information is generated there and how it might
10 help inform what's going on. The kingfish assessment is kind of
11 a curious one, right, and like it's -- Based on the catch limits
12 anyway, it's not overharvest, and so where have the fish gone,
13 and nobody seems to be getting, you know, a return phone call
14 about that, and so it will be a curious effort, for sure, with
15 the next examination of kingfish, to try to figure out if
16 there's something environmental at-play, or, you know, if
17 there's something else, and so lots of questions there right
18 now. Mr. Gill.
19

20 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Mr. Gill.
21

22 **MR. BOB GILL:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm not on your
23 committee, but I know there was discussion, at the steering
24 committee, about the planning grid, or the appropriateness of
25 that kind of grid, but I note that the current planning grid, on
26 the SEDAR site, is not consistent with the current schedule. Is
27 that because the grid hasn't been updated, or it is not intended
28 to be updated, but, in terms of the schedule, the first thing I
29 vote for is take a look at that grid, and find out where things
30 are, but, at the moment, there seems to be a disconnect, and
31 does anybody know why?
32

33 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Simmons.
34

35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so recall
36 the report hasn't come out yet from the SEDAR Steering
37 Committee, and so we were just trying to update it for ourselves
38 in the Gulf, and we are waiting to get that information from
39 Julie, and so what you saw was what we reviewed during that
40 meeting and not the results of that.
41

42 I also wanted to point out that, Ryan, in 2026, my understanding
43 is -- It says "final" on our schedule here, but my
44 understanding, from the center, was they wanted to start this
45 re-envisioning process in 2026, and that's when we get back to
46 the key stocks slide. It was something they wanted us to start
47 thinking about beginning in 2026, and is that correct?
48

1 **MR. RINDONE:** It's something that we'll start trying to
2 implement in 2026. In the meantime though, these were all still
3 species that the Gulf had agreed that were important to have on
4 the board at that time, and so, you know, things like gray
5 triggerfish will have started in 2025, and be getting wrapped-
6 up, and gag will have started in 2025, and be getting wrapped-
7 up, and then, you know, cobia was undergoing overfishing the
8 last time that we assessed it, and that one is a pretty easy
9 turnaround for the center to be able to do.

10
11 The council will have an interest in knowing what's going on
12 with cobia at that point, and then greater amberjack will have
13 been out of an assessment for a while at that point, and we had
14 talked about -- We've been talking, for a couple of years, about
15 having another assessment of greater amberjack, and so that was
16 the next available point in time to slip in it, was in 2026,
17 and, based on our initial discussions at the SEDAR Steering
18 Committee, we had every expectation that greater amberjack would
19 be identified as one of the Gulf's key stocks, and so that's
20 kind of where we were on that.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** But the message is, from 2026, the species
23 after it could be subject to change, depending upon the
24 priorities and the schedule that we select here at this meeting,
25 or maybe the next, but --

26
27 **MR. RINDONE:** There could still be some tweaking for 2026, and,
28 if you guys recall, and this might pre-date some of the newer
29 council members, but we try to put final on these things as much
30 as, you know, a deterring label, you know, kind of like a
31 caution label of don't screw with this, because, as we move
32 species around on the agenda, or on the schedule, it certainly
33 has a ripple effect for resource allocations for FWC, and for
34 the Science Center, for being able to properly allocate human
35 and other resources to the assessment process, and so final is
36 kind of like a don't touch unless absolutely necessary sort of
37 label.

38
39 When we get out beyond, into like the proposed, there's a lot
40 more fluidity that we tend to look at that part of the schedule
41 with, for being able to change, and we have made changes, in the
42 past, to things that were labeled final, and we had emergent
43 issues, but making space for those emergent issues is one of the
44 goals that the steering committee noted in its meeting in March.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** All right. Any other questions, or discussion,
47 on the schedule? All right, and so our homework, or charge, was
48 to -- Dr. Simmons.

1
2 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so,
3 Bernie, could we put the presentation back up? There's a slide
4 to get the committee's, and council's, minds thinking about how
5 we would identify, and prioritize, key stocks.

6
7 Staff has put together a draft list, and we're certainly not
8 saying that the center could take on eight species in 2026, and
9 so don't have a panic attack, but we're just trying to start
10 putting some stuff down on paper, and so some things that we
11 talked about, at the Steering Committee, were key stocks of
12 importance to management, but they don't have to be necessarily
13 the most data-rich stocks, and so that was discussed.

14
15 Then some considerations that we thought of, internally after
16 the meeting, that we thought were important to put on this
17 slide, were, you know, does the council consider prioritization
18 to be, you know, just high-profile stocks, stocks that might
19 suffer from episodic mortality, stocks that have either a larger
20 commercial or recreational component, or both, and/or all of the
21 above, and so, just to get the conversation going, we have
22 provided a draft list of stocks for the committee, and the
23 council, to provide feedback, because I know we're getting close
24 on time, Mr. Chair.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** So, staff has put together this list for
27 discussion, and is there any discussion? Mr. Gill.

28
29 **MR. GILL:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know I'm going to
30 discuss something, and I'm not on this committee, and so I
31 appreciate the recognition. One stock that's not on that list
32 is shrimp, and was that intentional, and, if so, why?

33
34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and so
35 it's an annual crop, and I'm hoping, from the benchmark
36 assessment process that is currently underway, and I think we're
37 going to get the data workshop here wrapped-up in the next month
38 or so, that we will hopefully not have to embark on a more
39 complex assessment process again, but, if you're suggesting like
40 a more interim, or update, approach, we can certainly consider
41 weaving that into this process, but I think staff was thinking,
42 you know, we will just have completed, in 2026, that larger
43 assessment process for the three penaeid shrimp, is my
44 understanding.

45
46 **MR. GILL:** To that point, Mr. Chairman, but we're identifying
47 two stocks not for 2026, but for the future, on how we're going
48 to operate the assessment schedule, and 2026 is what it is, but

1 I guess I'm trying to figure out the rationale for how one can
2 say that shrimp is not a key stock, because, in the long term --
3 Well, given what the industry state is at, and we all understand
4 that, but certainly it ought to be under consideration. What we
5 have here is finfish, and, granted, shrimp are different, but,
6 however the current assessment of shrimp comes out, in my mind,
7 it is immaterial to whether shrimp is considered a key stock or
8 not.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Point taken with me, Mr. Gill, yes, and I think
11 this slide was intended just to, again, provide some basis for
12 starting a discussion to kind of flesh out, again, what those
13 priority key stocks would be, and then, if there can be a
14 priority identified with those key stocks, kind of prioritize
15 them, and so, if you feel like there is certainly a species, or
16 a suite of species, that are closely related, that need to be
17 input on the list, then we can do that.

18
19 Now, I would just say that, at the end of the day, resources are
20 still going to be limited, you know, and so we have like sixty-
21 some-odd species under our FMP, and one could argue that we put
22 them all in there, but, you know, we have to kind of make some
23 decisions as to what we feel like deserve merit, you know, and,
24 as you -- What I think we're alluding to is the importance of
25 shrimp relative to the economic importance of it, as well as
26 potentially if there are things going on there environmentally
27 that we're not capturing, that maybe the assessment might be
28 able to find that, and so do we have anybody that wants to add
29 to the species? Dr. Frazer.

30
31 **DR. FRAZER:** Just, again, these are probably, I mean, the eight
32 most commonly-targeted ones, and I'm not sure that king mackerel
33 is in the top eight, but, you know, yellowtail snapper is one I
34 would think about, right, and the reason that I would think
35 about that is because it's jointly managed by both councils,
36 right, and we know that those fish are likely undergoing some
37 distributional shifts, right, and the dynamics in the fishery
38 are likely going to change, and so I would like to consider, you
39 know, a little forward-thinking stuff going here.

40
41 You know, king mackerel is tough, right, and we don't really
42 know what's happening, but I would say that cobia is in the same
43 boat, right, and so these coastal kind of pelagics -- I mean,
44 again, I think that's maybe not so much an assessment exercise
45 as it is what are the plans for data collection that would allow
46 us to actually assess those stocks, moving forward, and so those
47 are the two big things that I think about.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Sweetman.

2
3 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I agree with what Tom is saying, but, to the
4 yellowtail point, how does FWC fit into this updated kind of
5 process here, with how our FWRI staff are conducting assessments
6 through the SEDAR process right now?

7
8 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** I'm not sure. Dr. Walter.

9
10 **DR. WALTER:** I think this is the council's prioritization, and
11 so we're agnostic on that particular aspect of it. We share the
12 workload with our partners, and particularly with FWRI, who
13 carries the lion's share of the workload on a number of stocks,
14 like hogfish, yellowtail, black grouper, et cetera, but, in
15 terms of the council's priorities, that's what we're seeking
16 guidance on. Thanks.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Mr. Rindone.

19
20 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Dr. Sweetman, I think it's
21 all a negotiation between the cooperator, which in this case is
22 the Gulf Council, and the analytical agency, which, in the case
23 of yellowtail and the other species Dr. Walter mentioned, would
24 be FWRI, and so, if any, or all, or some combination thereof, of
25 those south Florida species, or Florida-centric species, that
26 fall under FWRI's assessment purview are listed as key stocks,
27 then the routine nature with which they would be assessed, and
28 the capacity, and resources allocated to that, would just be
29 something that the cooperators, because we share a lot of these
30 with the South Atlantic, would have to be negotiated with FWRI,
31 through that steering committee process. There is no definitive
32 answer about it now, but, you know, we all know each other, and
33 we'll be able to hash it out if those species get added to the
34 list.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Any other discussion on priority or key
37 species, key stocks? All right. I guess that concludes that
38 item, and, under Other Business, there was no -- Mr. Schieble.

39
40 **OTHER BUSINESS**

41
42 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** I asked Bernie to pull up the motions
43 report from the last meeting in January, and I think it's page 8
44 that has the motion that the council passed with regard to the
45 SEDAR process, and I just sort of wanted to pull it back up,
46 real quick, and I don't want to take a bunch of time with this,
47 but I wanted to see if the council feels that this motion was
48 adequately addressed in the steering committee meeting, with

1 particular consideration to the last three parts of it.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Dr. Simmons.

4
5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so we've
6 been discussing this motion, and I think I sent it to the center
7 right after the January council meeting, and we were hoping
8 that, after the SEDAR meeting, they might be ready, the SEDAR
9 Steering Committee ready, to provide the council, and the SSC,
10 with more information, but they're not going to be ready for
11 this meeting. They've requested to move that to June, to
12 provide more information on this reimagining process, and so I
13 think we can just remind them of these other items in there as
14 well, and so I think that is their intent, but I will look at
15 Dr. Walter, to be sure.

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

18
19 **DR. WALTER:** Thanks, Chair. On a couple of these things, and
20 remember there is a lot wrapped up in here, and a lot of work on
21 really -- That's been outlined here, and I think what we saw, at
22 the SEDAR Steering Committee, was really a collaborative
23 approach towards really trying to get at a proposed action plan,
24 and I think there was a lot of progress there, and there's still
25 more to be made on that, like identifying the key stocks and
26 what they're going to get.

27
28 In terms of the consideration of state surveys being fully-
29 integrated replacements for FES, it's not something that the
30 Science Center can do exclusively on our own, and a lot of
31 things have to be in motion, in terms of how those get addressed
32 within each individual assessment.

33
34 One thing that we are doing, with regard to that, is the
35 evaluating whether -- We had talked about this percent change
36 approach, about whether we can manage using a percent change,
37 even if we have different units going into the assessment, and
38 we're managing different units, and I don't want to scare
39 anybody with this word, of how we're addressing that, but we're
40 using a simulation testing framework that evaluates that, and
41 it's called a desk MSE, but to be able to explore how well that
42 option works.

43
44 I think that's going to be a useful thing to present to the SSC,
45 as the Executive Director said that we're going to do, and then
46 see whether that's something that we can show whether it works
47 before proposing it to the council, and that would be going to
48 that percent change, and managing for a percent change, in the

1 catch.

2

3 The conducting assessments outside of SEDAR, I think that's
4 conversations that the steering committee is really having, and
5 I think we're getting to that point. As I mentioned, that --
6 Maybe that reef fish assessment committee, and there used to be
7 something like that, that would vet these non-SEDAR assessments,
8 and so, for the ones we think we can do that way, that might be
9 a way to go, and then, obviously, they would also potentially be
10 tasked with other methods, that might be those simpler ones, and
11 I think we're making progress on those, and I think it's just
12 we're going to have to have further conversation before this
13 proposed action plan is fleshed out even more, but, given the
14 timeframe, I thought we made pretty good progress, and the
15 steering committee was quite effective in moving this forward.
16 Thanks.

17

18 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. I appreciate that, and it
19 was really just to bring this back up to the attention of the
20 council, and make sure this doesn't get lost in the works, and
21 that we're moving forward with it, and potentially, the next
22 SEDAR Committee, whenever we have that scheduled, we can bring
23 it back up again, to see where the progress is.

24

25 **CHAIRMAN ANSON:** Thank you. Any other discussion? There's no
26 other business, and, seeing none, we'll go ahead and adjourn the
27 SEDAR Committee.

28

29 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on April 8, 2024.)

30

31

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