

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL  
 ECOSYSTEM COMMITTEE

Embassy Suites Panama City Beach, Florida

October 25, 2023

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 Kesley Banks.....Texas  
 Susan Boggs.....Alabama  
 Billy Broussard.....Louisiana  
 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC  
 Tom Frazer.....Florida  
 Michael McDermott.....Mississippi  
 Anthony Overton.....Alabama  
 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS  
 Troy Williamson.....Texas

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Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama  
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1 The Ecosystem Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management  
2 Council convened at The Embassy Suites in Panama City Beach,  
3 Florida on Wednesday morning, October 25, 2023, and was called  
4 to order by Chairman Bob Gill.

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

10 **CHAIRMAN BOB GILL:** I call the Ecosystem Committee to order.  
11 Before we get into the agenda, we'll go through the constituents  
12 of the Ecosystem Committee, and this is so that those that are  
13 not members of the committee should not vote on our motions. I  
14 am Chair, and Dr. Banks is Vice Chair. Susan Boggs, Billy  
15 Broussard, Dave Donaldson, Dr. Frazer, Mike McDermott, Dr.  
16 Overton, Andy Strelcheck, and Troy Williamson constitute the  
17 committee.

18  
19 Going to the agenda, the first item is Adoption of the Agenda.  
20 Does anyone have any changes they would like to make to the  
21 agenda? Seeing none, is there any opposition to approval of the  
22 agenda? Seeing none, the agenda is adopted. Next comes  
23 Approval of the June 2023 Minutes. Are there any changes to the  
24 June 2023 minutes? Is there any opposition to approval of the  
25 June 2023 minutes? Seeing none, the June 2023 minutes are  
26 approved. The next item is the Action Guide and Next Steps.  
27 Dr. Mendez-Ferrer, if you would take us through that.

28  
29 **DR. NATASHA MENDEZ-FERRER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. On the agenda  
30 today, we have the Ecosystem Technical Committee  
31 Recommendations, and staff will review the recommendations  
32 provided by the ETC, one of the many acronyms you will hear  
33 today, the Ecosystem Technical Committee, during its September  
34 2023 meeting. The ETC provided additional feedback on the  
35 structure of the fishery ecosystem plan, the FEP, steps within  
36 the fishery ecosystem issue, the FEI, loop, and ways to  
37 prioritize beginning work on an FEI.

38  
39 The committee should review the meeting summary and provide  
40 feedback on the draft structure on the FEP, as well as consider  
41 approving the ETC's recommendations to use red tide as a pilot  
42 FEI to further develop the necessary steps to have a successful  
43 FEP.

44  
45 Following this committee, staff will provide the Administrative  
46 and Budget Committee an overview of the Inflation Reduction Act  
47 climate-ready fisheries council funding priorities and process  
48 recently released by NOAA Fisheries. Several ongoing actions

1 regarding the council's efforts in developing could directly  
2 meet the priorities of this new funding opportunity, and any  
3 suggestions that the council members may have on identifying  
4 additional activities and efforts to consider in future  
5 proposals would be appreciated, and so we have quite a few  
6 overlapping administrative priorities. Then, if time allows, we  
7 have other business that can be brought up for discussion. Mr.  
8 Chair.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Thank you, Dr. Mendez-Ferrer. I would like to  
11 operate a little bit differently in this particular case, and  
12 that is, after slide, I would like to pause and have discussion  
13 about whatever the item on that slide is, before we move on to  
14 the next one, and, if there is no discussion, then it's assumed  
15 that the committee agrees with whatever is on that slide.

16  
17 We do have one motion that I would like to consider, which is on  
18 the last slide, and that's on the ETC's recommendation for the  
19 FEI to start with, and, with that in mind, Dr. Mendez-Ferrer, if  
20 you would take us through your presentation.

21  
22 **ECOSYSTEM TECHNICAL COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

23  
24 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before I begin, I  
25 also want to point out that we have the ETC's chair online, Dr.  
26 Mandy Karnauskas, and so, if the committee has any questions  
27 that you would like to ask her, she is ready to speak.

28  
29 All right, and so the way that I have designed this presentation  
30 is to highlight the recommendations, and the discussions, that  
31 the ETC had for each one of these agenda items, and so, first, I  
32 will go over the discussions around the Gulf FEP, and then that  
33 will be followed by another iteration of the fishery ecosystem  
34 loop, and the committee has some recommendations there that we  
35 have modified, and we will be presenting to you, and then we'll  
36 discuss the prioritization metrics, and so this was an agenda  
37 item that was based around the council's direction for the ETC  
38 to come up with ways to rank FEIs, as we open it up for the  
39 public, and so this was a homework assignment that we gave the  
40 group.

41  
42 Then we will revisit the FEI list that the group had sort of  
43 been working on, but it was an unofficial recommendation, and so  
44 we had some good discussions here, and then the last agenda item  
45 was the regional management councils' climate resilience  
46 funding, IRA funding opportunity, and so the ETC had a  
47 presentation from staff on this item, but this will be discussed  
48 during the next committee, and I won't cover that during this

1 presentation.

2  
3 Thinking about the FEP, in my mind, the FEP is two things. The  
4 FEP is a document, and the FEP is a process, and so we have to -  
5 - You know, there has to be a way to document this, and so what  
6 you're seeing in front -- What you have in front of you is there  
7 is like a scheme of what we envision would be included in this  
8 document, and so this is a modified version of what LGL had  
9 produced for us during their contract work.

10  
11 In Chapter 1, you know, we introduce the national guidance to  
12 implementing EBFM, ecosystem-based fisheries management, into  
13 the council process, talk about some examples of the council's  
14 EBFM efforts, and the overall goals and objectives of the FEP.  
15 Then the second chapter would be like the introduction of what a  
16 fishery ecosystem plan would be, how we will be designing it  
17 around the FEIs, a protocol for prioritizing the FEIs, because  
18 we do expect that, when this is opened up to the public, we may  
19 receive a lot of input, but we need to find a way to prioritize  
20 them, and begin work, and then a protocol for addressing extra  
21 jurisdictional issues, since some of these issues that may come  
22 up may not be under the council's purview, but it will affect  
23 fisheries.

24  
25 Another thing is the communications plan, which has been tasked  
26 to the O&E Technical Committee, should have its own section.  
27 FEIs are strongly based on stakeholder input, and so coming up  
28 with a good plan should be very well documented within the FEP,  
29 and the Chapter 4 will be explaining more how the FEI loop --  
30 What that process would look like.

31  
32 The ETC recommended adding an appendix that would host the list  
33 of FEIs that are on the docket, and then that this list would be  
34 revised at an interval determined by the council, and it can be  
35 annual, or it can be biannual, or it could be every five years,  
36 and so that's a way to maintain transparency and let the people  
37 know that, hey, these are the FEIs that we've received and the  
38 things that we may be considering.

39  
40 Then, as we work on this FEI language and having separate  
41 modules, and these could live within our council ecosystem  
42 website, where you have access to the FEP, but, if we're working  
43 on an FEI, say red tide, then that would be a separate link, a  
44 separate document, that the people can access and see the  
45 progress on how things are looking. I guess I can stop here and  
46 see if the committee likes this framework, the format of how the  
47 document is looking, and like is there any additional  
48 information that you think might be important that would be

1 helpful for the council to include in here, and, otherwise, I  
2 can continue.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Any discussion by the committee on the document?  
5 It's pretty quiet. You all might need some more coffee. I have  
6 one comment on the appendix, and the revision schedule will show  
7 up on a later slide, and I think we ought to have some  
8 discussion on that, about our thoughts as to what that frequency  
9 ought to be to help guide the ETC in their further discussions,  
10 but, seeing no discussion, Natasha, let's move on.

11  
12 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** Sure, and one thing that I do want to  
13 mention is that, you know, right now, we haven't actually begun  
14 writing, right, and so just keep in mind that this is a flexible  
15 process, and this may change as we move along.

16  
17 Thinking about the process of the FEP, the ETC recommends  
18 staying, you know, very involved, as we develop this, and having  
19 the opportunity to review and reassess the FEI list, as we  
20 prepare that, and the whole FEI loop, to ensure the success of  
21 the FEP, and so we do expect to be, you know, keeping them  
22 involved as we start working on drafts of this document.

23  
24 There was a discussion around the annual revisions of this FEI  
25 list, since this is something that may entail a large workload,  
26 and so the group was thinking that maybe, you know, a three to  
27 five-year time range might be more appropriate, but we don't  
28 have to make a decision on that right now, and I think this is  
29 something just to keep in the back of your head, and, once we  
30 have a more finalized process, and maybe we open up -- When we  
31 receive the initial list of FEIs, we can make a decision on how  
32 we think we need to be addressing them. Another thing is just  
33 persistent feedback and communication with the public is very  
34 important throughout this process. If we go to the next slide -  
35 - Andy.

36  
37 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** I mean, one comment, and then I certainly  
38 am cognizant of workload, and the council members are appointed  
39 to three-year terms, and I think having a review within that  
40 three-year cycle, at least for every member, would be ideal, and  
41 I think that staff, and those working on the FEIs, could decide  
42 kind of what level of detail and information that that review  
43 would entail, so that we could manage the workload.

44  
45 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** That's a good point.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Any other discussion on the previous slide? One  
48 thing that's not there, Natasha, is the consideration of

1 revision of the FEP. It seems, to me, that, while we're talking  
2 about revising the FEI list, then, at some greater frequency,  
3 consideration of no earlier than five years, is my preference,  
4 and that it be something like seven, but we ought to be thinking  
5 in terms of that, because the FEP won't be static, and the world  
6 will be different by the time we get down there, and so I think  
7 some consideration of that would probably be -- Any discussion  
8 by the committee relative the FEI revision, or to Andy's  
9 comments? It's quiet this morning. Susan.

10  
11 **MS. SUSAN BOGGS:** You know I don't like to be quiet. I would  
12 concur with Andy. I mean, I think that's a very good point,  
13 because at least the council might feel like -- A council member  
14 might feel like they've completed something.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Thank you. I think that's it, Natasha. Next  
17 slide.

18  
19 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** That's a good point, and I think, as we've  
20 been -- Especially like looking at the ecosystem loop, and the  
21 FEI loop, and thinking about the communications plan, we were  
22 planning on having some checkpoints along the line, to just see  
23 how we're doing, you know, what kind of progress we're making  
24 and how are the stakeholders responding.

25  
26 The next item that we discussed was the fishery ecosystem issue  
27 loop, and the committee saw a draft of this modified version at  
28 the June meeting, and so LGL produced the first draft of what an  
29 FEI loop would look like. The ETC had some recommendations in  
30 streamlining it, and making it easier to understand, and so we  
31 moved away from boxes and arrows and into this more circular  
32 diagram, but still following the -- You know, still following a  
33 similar outline of what the steps would be.

34  
35 Different from the version that you saw in June, we added a new  
36 step, and the Ecosystem Technical Committee recommended having  
37 this Number 3, where the star is, and it's execution of the  
38 workplan, to kind of indicate that, okay, we've already done the  
39 scoping, and we have a workplan of what we need to do, and this  
40 is where we begin, and so that's the new step that we've  
41 included, but the rest of the steps just remain the same, and  
42 everything just got renumbered.

43  
44 First is scoping, and second is the workplan, three is the  
45 execution of the workplan, and then four is probably where we  
46 would spend also a lot of time in like the implementation, doing  
47 tradeoff analyses, what kind of research we need to be doing,  
48 and then, once all of that is completed, it gets brought to the

1 council, and then the council then -- That's the management  
2 recommendation process, and either a management action can come  
3 out of this or it can help better inform like why we selected an  
4 alternative as preferred.

5  
6 Then, after all of that, there is the evaluation process, like  
7 are the performance metrics being met, were there any unintended  
8 results, or anything that we weren't accounting for that we need  
9 to consider, and all of this falls under the big umbrella of we  
10 need to keep stakeholders engaged. There is a constant feedback  
11 loop of we need to learn and adjust and keep the communication  
12 going with our stakeholders. Are there any questions about the  
13 FEI loop?

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Committee, any comments? Peter.

16  
17 **MR. PETER HOOD:** I realize that this will be somebody else's  
18 problem, but one of the questions that I have is just really how  
19 does the IPT function in this system, and, you know, for a  
20 normal IPT, you start with a council motion, and we end up with  
21 a management action, and, you know, how does an IPT work here?

22  
23 I guess what I'm concerned with -- I think, when you set up an  
24 FEI, you know, that sort of is going to be the starting point of  
25 an IPT, but what is actually the end of it, and, you know,  
26 there's a lot of development here, and then you get to doing the  
27 management action, which, you know, takes quite a while, and I  
28 guess I just want -- It would be nice to know what the endpoint  
29 is, and how long somebody is going to be committed to an IPT,  
30 because it could really be a -- You know, it could just take a  
31 lot of staff time. Thanks.

32  
33 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** We need more staff. No, but that is a good  
34 question, and I've been scratching my head from that, you know,  
35 coming from the traditional IPT process when we're developing  
36 our documents, and, in thinking about how complicated some of  
37 these FEIs are going to be, and what kind of knowledge and  
38 expertise are we going to have, and do we need to think about,  
39 as we're working on this, you know, having like the ETC more  
40 involved, and I don't have the answers to that yet, which is why  
41 I'm hoping that, you know, with a pilot FEI, we can begin to  
42 answer some of these questions and figure out what the work  
43 dynamic is going to be, as we're moving forward.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Other comments by the committee? Clay.

46  
47 **DR. CLAY PORCH:** Thank you, Chair, and I don't think it's so  
48 much that people are asleep, but more that you've had like a

1 little extra coffee, because you are quick. There's a one-  
2 second pause.

3  
4 I love this, and I love the whole idea of this hopper, this  
5 structure, but, for this to work, the selection of the FEIS has  
6 to involve a criteria that somehow reflects the council's  
7 willingness to put management actions into effect based on the  
8 recommendations, and so I'm wondering how that fits in.

9  
10 In other words, what we don't want to do is expend tons of  
11 effort developing and doing the research and producing  
12 management recommendations that the council really can't act on,  
13 and all we do is write letters to other organizations, and so I  
14 think it's absolutely critical, somewhere in here, that, when we  
15 decide what FEIs to do the work on, that we explicitly consider  
16 what kind of actions the council could take.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Good point. Thank you, Clay. Natasha.

19  
20 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** Yes, and so, a few slides forward from this,  
21 we will be sort of -- We had that discussion during the meeting,  
22 on how to prioritize these FEIs, and so hopefully that will  
23 answer some of your questions, but, at the same time, you know,  
24 there will be issues that will touch on a lot of extra  
25 jurisdictional -- Like, at the council, we probably need to  
26 think about how we're going to interact with other agencies and  
27 how to address these extra jurisdictional issues that maybe  
28 could go beyond just writing a letter or being in a taskforce or  
29 something like that.

30  
31 I think the FEP is providing a novel way for us to think about  
32 how to stay -- Like how to keep the lines of communication open,  
33 hopefully, with other agencies, just to be like, hey, heads-up  
34 that these stocks aren't doing very well, and, you know, at the  
35 end of the line here, maybe it's more state management, and it's  
36 not telling another agency, you know, this is what you need to  
37 do, but it's just like, hey, FYI, as you're evaluating, you  
38 know, nutrient inflows, or freshwater inflows, I just wanted to  
39 let you know that gag is not doing well, and we need to take a  
40 closer look at nursery habitat, or just things like that, and  
41 so, down the line, I do expect that we need to spend some time  
42 on how to flesh out how the council would like to be involved in  
43 things that are outside of the purview, but, at the same time,  
44 we don't want to limit creativity, and we don't want to limit,  
45 too much, stakeholders. It's like, you know, we hear you,  
46 right, and maybe we can't do something right now, but we don't  
47 know, down the line. Does that kind of answer your question and  
48 touch on some of the points?

1  
2 **DR. PORCH:** Kind of, but I will wait until I see that last  
3 bullet in the slide you were referring to.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Dr. Simmons.

6  
7 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I  
8 think that's a really valid point, but I think, as we work on  
9 this process, we shouldn't, as Natasha said, just throw out some  
10 of these very creative ideas that may not directly modify the  
11 regulations that the council is working on, but more inform,  
12 holistically, the council's decision-making process.

13  
14 I think, as we develop these, we might not be able to take  
15 direct management action on these, until more information is  
16 available on that, but I think one of our tasks is going to be  
17 to determine, once this is developed, how these are going to  
18 inform our current regulatory documents.

19  
20 Even if we're citing what's in that FEI, or we're better  
21 explaining why we're seeing sharks in the summertime, when there  
22 is the peak effort, that kind of example, that could help  
23 inform, you know, some of the council's decisions, and,  
24 unfortunately, I see that that's something that may happen early  
25 on, but, to me, that's still a win, and so I think maybe setting  
26 expectations, perhaps, is a good point, and we also need to do  
27 that with our stakeholder engagement process as well, but  
28 hopefully that helped a little bit, but it was part of the  
29 prioritization process that we discussed, and that was a metric  
30 that was discussed, during the prioritization of the FEIs, with  
31 the Ecosystem Technical Committee. Does that make sense?

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Natasha, next slide. Sorry, Andy.

34  
35 **MR. STRELCHECK:** You're ignoring me down here. I suggest we  
36 take a loyalty pledge, so that we -- No, but, to Clay's point, I  
37 was thinking about this as well, right, in terms of where do we  
38 see the council in this process, right, and so the green dot in  
39 the lower portion of the slide, where the council management  
40 recommendations emerge, and the bigger kind of circle, on the  
41 lower right, is, you know, where the FEI process is making  
42 management recommendations.

43  
44 I don't think we're going to get to a point where the council is  
45 going to steer the process to specific recommendations that we  
46 would implement, especially early on, and I don't think we want  
47 to do that, and that's what I'm hearing, but, to me, there might  
48 be a role that the council could play, in terms of being

1 informed in discussions with those running the FEI, kind of  
2 around Steps 2 and 3, right, and so maybe before the full  
3 execution of the plan, but as that development occurs, and so  
4 just food for thought, in terms of kind of where we could at  
5 least insert some discussion and conversation with those that  
6 are operating the FEI.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Thank you for those comments, Andy. Now next  
9 slide, Natasha.

10  
11 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** Okay, and so we also had council staff  
12 present sort of a vision of how the Outreach and Education  
13 Technical Committee would be playing a role in the development  
14 of the FEP and the FEI loop, and so, preliminarily, you know, we  
15 see this group being really involved, you know, at the beginning  
16 of the work, like in identifying the FEIs and how to prioritize  
17 them and how to communicate the purpose and the process to the  
18 stakeholders.

19  
20 Then, while we're doing the work, while we're working on, you  
21 know, the research and the various parts of the FEI loop,  
22 continue maintaining stakeholders' engagement and having sort of  
23 like an individualized approach to each one of the FEIs,  
24 because, you know, not all the issues will affect stakeholders  
25 the same way.

26  
27 Then, after the FEI loop is completed, again, you know, evaluate  
28 how effective the communication was, and is there anything that  
29 we need to modify, and do we need to engage people earlier, or  
30 do we need to engage people in various -- With various  
31 approaches, and so I do -- You know, it's very helpful when we  
32 have members of the O&E Technical Committee also attend our ETC  
33 meetings, just kind of providing that feedback on like the  
34 stakeholders' concerns and approaches, because our meetings  
35 sometimes can get a little bit too technical, but, you know,  
36 thinking about the FEP is something that we need to keep in  
37 mind. You know, there is the science, and then there's also  
38 like the public component.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Before we open this up for discussion, I would  
41 like to ask Emily if she has any input that we should consider  
42 that would help.

43  
44 **MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN:** Thank you. I have two things, and so  
45 Natasha just alluded to this, and the first is this ETC process  
46 is really heady. It's like really high-level, and the ETC folks  
47 operate on a level of intellect that is hard for, you know,  
48 myself to digest, and so having the ETC be part of -- Or having

1 the ETC and the Outreach and Education Committee work together  
2 is really helpful, because we kind of need this intermediary  
3 step between what's going on in the ETC and then digesting it  
4 through the O&E, and then out to the public, because it's really  
5 high-level stuff.

6  
7 The one thing that I do want to sort of preview for you guys is  
8 you are going to look at a motion that came out of the ETC about  
9 piloting an issue, and so I would suggest, because we have our  
10 first O&E since this has kind of come about, meeting in  
11 December. We've set aside some time already for the O&E to  
12 start working on this process, and it would be very helpful if  
13 you critically look at that motion today, and consider it,  
14 because it may help us have a direction for where we need to go  
15 starting in December.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Thank you, Emily, and I do intend that we make a  
18 motion to solidify that, and so is there discussion by the  
19 committee? You all like the plan? That's good. Natasha.

20  
21 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The next slide is  
22 going back to Clay's point about how to prioritize the FEI loop,  
23 and so, to remind the committee, when the group first saw LGL's  
24 iteration, there was a big motion that directed the ETC to  
25 continue working on the FEP, to propose the top-four FEIs and  
26 come up with a way to prioritize them, and so, you know,  
27 thinking about sending this out to the public, how are we going  
28 to figure out where to begin in how to address this?

29  
30 We had an initial discussion with the ETC, during the April  
31 meeting, on what the categories that we would need to rank the  
32 FEIs would be, but it's a hard process, and the group requested  
33 spending more time to think about they would rank these, and so  
34 we gave them an assignment, and we gave them a few weeks for  
35 them to work on a spreadsheet, in which, you know, they would  
36 come up with categories and what values we would assign for each  
37 one, so that, you know, we can prioritize the FEIs and do  
38 something that's a higher priority, a medium priority, and a low  
39 priority, for example.

40  
41 There were some themes, as a result, that we received, in  
42 thinking that we do need to look at, you know, a social  
43 component, and we need to consider what are the impacts to  
44 stakeholders going to be, and how is this affecting like an  
45 ecological scope, thinking about like how it would be affecting  
46 our FMPs, and like is this only affecting Spiny Lobster, or is  
47 it only going to be Coral, or is it applying to multiple FMPs,  
48 and then the geographic scale. Giving it a higher score, the

1 larger the scope, the geographical scope, would be.

2  
3 It was sort of broken into two tiers, and there's that social  
4 and ecological tier, but we had the most issues on how to rank  
5 the management capacity, and like why it would be ranked highly  
6 by the council when looking at these FEIs, and so, within that  
7 tier, there were four categories, and they were sort of  
8 discussed and felt that might be appropriate, but, again, this  
9 is not a final recommendation, and this is something that we're  
10 still working on.

11  
12 One of them was a pathway to actionability, which alludes to  
13 what Clay was saying, and then the FEI responsiveness. You  
14 know, if there's a management action that comes out of this, is  
15 it really -- Is the result from the FEI loop going to lead to a  
16 management action? How urgent is it on our priority list, and  
17 then what happens if we don't address this right away, and like  
18 what are the impacts of not beginning to look into the details  
19 and the research, but it's still something that we're working  
20 on.

21  
22 The group, at this point, couldn't really reach a consensus, I  
23 guess, on how would we rank something highly, in terms of like  
24 being a management priority, and so I know this is hard, and it  
25 was very hard for me too, and so, if the council has any  
26 comments on this, great, and, if you don't, that's okay too, and  
27 we don't have to make a decision right now, and hopefully, as we  
28 move this process forward, we can think about it a little bit  
29 more.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Thank you, Natasha. Is there input from the  
32 committee? No hands at all? Dr. Simmons.

33  
34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Well, I just wanted to say that I  
35 was really impressed with the membership of the ETC and how much  
36 thought they put into it. You know, the individual members put  
37 together some different spreadsheets, and they spent a lot of  
38 their own time prior to the meeting, and so I was really  
39 impressed with that, and I think we have a good group of people  
40 working on this, and so I appreciate that.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. I agree. Other input?  
43 Clay.

44  
45 **DR. PORCH:** I just wanted to pick up that point again, under the  
46 pathway to actionability, and I just wanted to remind the  
47 council that it's not as though there is a big pool of funds  
48 that is going to feed this, and so we're going to be relying on

1 us, the Regional Office, the states, to actually supply the  
2 horsepower to achieve any of these FEIs, and we all have our  
3 prioritization processes.

4  
5 For instance, you know, I'm going to be held to account how I  
6 dedicate our resources to this, and one of the questions would  
7 be to what end, and so that's why -- That's kind of the impetus  
8 behind my question, in terms of how the council is being  
9 involved and in terms of saying, if we get this kind of  
10 information, these are the types of actions that we would commit  
11 to take, and I think that's going to be really key, because I  
12 know I can't invest many resources in something that I don't  
13 know what the end of it is going to be. You know, we just  
14 provide information and say, oh, it's holistic, but then we  
15 don't do anything with it, and do you follow what I mean?

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Thank you, Clay. Kevin.

18  
19 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm not on your  
20 committee, but, to that point, I mean, as I understand this  
21 whole FEP and FEI process, I mean, this is an attempt by the  
22 council to address, you know, what the agency had wanted to  
23 implement amongst all of the councils, fishery management  
24 councils, regarding ecosystem-based fisheries management, and so  
25 this is our attempt to try to go down that path, and, you know,  
26 each council, I think, tailors how they address ecosystem-based  
27 fisheries management based on what you just described, is that  
28 there is limited amounts of funds and resources, for manpower  
29 and such too, to go down that road, and so this would be  
30 something I think that the council staff, you know, is also  
31 going to be taxed a little bit, and, as you mentioned, states  
32 potentially have the potential to provide information, and so,  
33 you know, again, this is what I think the culmination is, as of  
34 right now, realizing those externalities, if you will, exist,  
35 and issues, and so thank you.

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Any other discussion by the committee? At this  
38 point, I think, before we go to the next slide, I would like to  
39 ask Dr. Karnauskas, who is the chair of the committee, to see if  
40 she has any input, or comments or thoughts, that we ought to  
41 consider from her perspective. Are you there, Mandy?

42  
43 **DR. MANDY KARNAUSKAS:** Yes, I'm here. Thank you, Chair, and I'm  
44 following the conversation. I think this is a great  
45 conversation, and thanks for all the points that are brought up,  
46 and I think they're important ones, and I don't have anything  
47 additional to add at this point, and thank you for the  
48 opportunity.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** All right. Thank you. Natasha.

3  
4 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is my slide,  
5 and, again, you know, recapping that, initially, in an effort to  
6 push the FEP forward, we have some received some direction from  
7 the council to select the top four FEIs, but, as you can see,  
8 it's a really complicated process, and I feel like we've done a  
9 lot of work to-date, and, in coming up with that recommendation  
10 at this point, of four FEIs, and it's doable, but I think that  
11 we're at a point where we really need to sit down and work on  
12 the process.

13  
14 In having this discussion with the ETC, the group recommends to  
15 select one pilot FEI, in order to further develop the FEP  
16 process and the FEI loop procedures, and the ETC recommends red  
17 tide to be the FEI that is initially piloted, and the reasoning  
18 for selecting red tide is that there is enough data out there  
19 that we can begin inputting into the process that we have  
20 drafted so far, and there is also enough stakeholder and  
21 industry buy-in that we can, you know, already utilize, and  
22 there has already been stakeholder workshops, and we can have  
23 lessons learned to further develop the communications plan.

24  
25 This might be an opportunity for at least for us, as staff, also  
26 to just sit down and start filling in the blanks and maybe  
27 coming up with additional questions. There is enough  
28 information out there on a red tide that we could potentially  
29 just, you know, begin to push this along, and so we're putting  
30 this out there for the committee's consideration.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Thank you, and this is the item that I would  
33 like the committee to, after discussion, provide a motion on  
34 whether we agree or disagree, if we want to do something else,  
35 but, with that in mind, is there discussion by the committee?  
36 Tom.

37  
38 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, you know, I  
39 understand, and appreciate, all the work that's going on,  
40 particularly as it relates to red tide. When I was going  
41 through this presentation, and looking the various slides and  
42 processes and things like that, and so there's a prioritization  
43 for FEIs, and that's ultimately what you've got here, but I  
44 don't see the process for identifying FEIs, and I didn't see any  
45 list of potential FEIs, and so, in this particular case, I have  
46 four, right, and they've prioritized one, but I don't really  
47 have any way to evaluate what the alternatives were and why this  
48 one was better, other than we do a lot of work on that.

1  
2 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** So this FEI did not go through that ranking  
3 process. What the committee saw, in June, was sort of a working  
4 list that the ETC had been looking at of what kind of data are  
5 out there, and these are some potential issues, but this would  
6 be kind of like taking a detour, a slight detour, and not  
7 looking at the prioritization process just yet. One of the  
8 discussions, and one of the things that has come up during the  
9 meeting, is that, before we even open this up to the public, we  
10 need to have a better idea of how this process looks, and I  
11 think that selecting a pilot FEI could help us fine-tune that,  
12 so that, when we open it up to having the larger FEI list --  
13 There are some questions that we still need to answer, but we  
14 can't answer them without running it -- You know, taking a test  
15 drive, I guess, with it. This is taking -- Like I said, it's  
16 taking a detour on that initial motion.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Dave.

19  
20 **MR. DAVE DONALDSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. To Tom's point, I  
21 was just curious, and did the group consider any other issues  
22 than red tide?

23  
24 **DR. MENDEZ-FERRER:** Yes, and so we -- Red tide was -- When we  
25 did an exercise, during the April meeting, red tide was one of  
26 those that kind of bubbled up as being a potential FEI, and so I  
27 do encourage you to look back, and you can see all the sticky  
28 notes from all the various recommendations that had come up, but  
29 that was the first iteration, and the group hadn't reached a  
30 consensus on what the recommendation would be for the council.

31  
32 When we brought up an update, in June, it was to sort of  
33 highlight that, hey, this is sort of where the discussions are  
34 going, and do you like the direction, and is there anything that  
35 you want us to like pivot, but, again, it was just like the  
36 first thought on it, and we don't have like a final list. We  
37 were working with five of them, I think, or it was six of them  
38 that had bubbled up, and then, in June, the committee said I'm  
39 not so sure about these other two, but that wasn't a final  
40 recommendation, and I think that there was a bit of confusion  
41 during that discussion.

42  
43 During that April meeting, also, we had a presentation from a  
44 researcher that looked at red tide and the various management  
45 actions, and the various outcomes, stakeholder efforts and how  
46 do they fit in within this mold, and there were some gaps, and  
47 so, you know, is this something that there's enough information  
48 out there right now that we can work and refine the process, and

1 I don't know if Dylan -- I don't want to call on Dylan, but he  
2 was there during the April meeting, and one of the things that  
3 he was recommending was specifically the -- Yes, the stakeholder  
4 input is very important, but we also need to come up with a more  
5 concise plan, to get better buy-in.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Is there further discussion by the committee?  
8 Clay.

9  
10 **DR. PORCH:** I just wanted to point out that Dr. Karnauskas had  
11 raised her hand to this point.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Thank you, sir. Dr. Karnauskas.

14  
15 **DR. KARNAUSKAS:** Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to weigh-in a  
16 little more on how the ETC got to red tide as an initial pilot.  
17 It was among, you know, one of the FEIs that we discussed in our  
18 previous meeting, as Dr. Mendez had mentioned, and we realized  
19 that it might not be the, you know, absolutely top priority of  
20 the council, but we saw it as something that was doable.  
21 There's been a lot of work done on red tide, and we thought it  
22 would be really useful to just start going through the motions  
23 of, you know, what would this FEI process look like, where might  
24 we get stuck, and really just try it out.

25  
26 This motion was intended to, you know, have this pilot project  
27 kind of run in parallel with the fishery ecosystem plan being  
28 finalized, so that, you know, we could work through this pilot  
29 project, figure out if there's issues with the FEI process, as  
30 we've proposed it, and then, if there are issues, if something  
31 doesn't work, or if something needs to be tweaked, we could kind  
32 of work that into the fishery ecosystem plan before it gets  
33 finalized.

34  
35 The intention was to kind of run this as a parallel process, and  
36 I think there was a lot of agreement within the ETC that, you  
37 know, we can talk and talk and talk about what we're going to  
38 do, but we really would like to start seeing this stuff in  
39 action, and so this was a step towards, you know, trying to  
40 actually put this into place and start working on it and seeing  
41 what results we might get. Thank you.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Thank you, Mandy. At this point, I would like  
44 to get a recommendation from the committee, or, excuse me, a  
45 motion from the committee, relative to this recommendation, and  
46 I will get to you in a minute, Andy, on what our reaction and  
47 suggestion for the ETC is, relative to their recommendation, and  
48 so, Andy.

1  
2 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Watch out, Mr. Chair. I'm going to get more  
3 coffee here in a few minutes. I appreciate getting to the  
4 recommendation here, but just a few thoughts, and so, based on  
5 what Mandy just said, and, I mean, I appreciate where they're  
6 coming from, in terms of completing something that is doable,  
7 and, you know, information may be more readily available, and  
8 this is an easier topic to pilot, and I think I'm okay with  
9 that, and support that, but I would go back to two of the major  
10 issues, to me, that I would really like to hit the ground  
11 running with FEIs going forward, right, and this is discards and  
12 climate change, right, because I think those are going to --

13  
14 They're continuing to eat our lunch, and, ultimately, they will  
15 be very informative to future management around this table, and  
16 so I support the red tide from a pilot standpoint, making sure  
17 that we kind of work out the kinks in the process, but I would  
18 recommend that, you know, we would move to some of those other  
19 more weighty topics that may be a little more difficult to  
20 wrestle with, going forward.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Thank you for that, and I don't read this as  
23 preempting those, and they were on the list of the four, and so  
24 I think that continues, but your point is well taken. Tom.

25  
26 **DR. FRAZER:** I was just going to say that we didn't know what  
27 the four were, right, and so that's where I'm struggling with  
28 right now, and, to Andy's point, and to Clay's point, there's  
29 only so much that we can do, right, as a council, and as a  
30 fisheries management business, and I totally understand how  
31 important red tide is, as it relates to the ecosystem and  
32 particularly on, you know, the ecology of the fishes that we  
33 manage.

34  
35 The issue that I have is that the council has no control really  
36 over anything to do to help resolve the red tide, other than to  
37 say it impacts the resource that we manage, and so we're totally  
38 dependent on the Southeast Fisheries Science Center and the  
39 state agencies and the academic community to weigh-in with  
40 information that might tell us how red tide is initiated, you  
41 know, how it's transported into the environment, you know, how  
42 it might affect all of the fishery resources, and that will take  
43 time, right, and so it gets to Clay's point.

44  
45 You know, what are we going to do to make this information  
46 actionable, and so what I haven't seen, and because I wasn't  
47 part of the discussion, is, if we embark upon this issue, what's  
48 our objective specifically, and maybe we haven't figured that

1 out yet, but what piece of information is going to allow us to  
2 make a management decision, right?

3  
4 Are we going to relate the forecasting of red tide to a  
5 recruitment index, or something like that? If I had that  
6 information, I could say, oh, that's cool, because we have those  
7 two pieces of information, but I don't know, and I understand  
8 that I don't know, and I don't want to be able to be critical,  
9 but, to Andy's point, you know, as we move forward, there are  
10 things that are happening that we need to know that affect our  
11 ability to effectively manage fisheries, right, and how do  
12 changes in the environment -- How do existing data -- How might  
13 fisheries efforts, for example, shift in response to the changes  
14 in distributional patterns of fish, right, and how is climate  
15 going to change and affect all of that?

16  
17 Again, I understand we're in the early stages of all of this,  
18 and I'm not being hypocritical, because I spent a lot of my  
19 career trying to understand how ecosystems work, and they're  
20 complicated, but we -- They require data that we don't have, for  
21 the most part, right, and we manage them with a sledgehammer,  
22 right, for lack of a better word, and so we have to think about  
23 what are the most simple types of information, or data products,  
24 that we can get in our hands that are going to allow us to make  
25 decisions.

26  
27 That is what I am struggling with, and, as this evolves, I'm  
28 sure that I will get more involved in it, but it's hard for me  
29 to make any informed decisions, because I haven't seen any of  
30 the information at this point.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Thank you, Tom. Before I call on you, Natasha,  
33 I want to defer to the Chairman. We're five minutes past our  
34 allotted time, and one way to proceed is to terminate the  
35 committee and carry on at Full Council, when we've all had a  
36 little more time to discuss this, and Mandy has her hand up, as  
37 does Natasha, and how would you like to proceed, sir?

38  
39 **MR. ANSON:** Maybe if you can wrap it up in five or ten minutes,  
40 to try to get some direction within that time.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Very good, Mr. Chairman. We'll do that. Dr.  
43 Karnauskas, if you will give us your input, please.

44  
45 **DR. KARNAUSKAS:** Yes, thank you, and I will try to be brief  
46 here, given the time, but I just wanted to try and answer that  
47 last question on what actually can the council do, and I agree  
48 that a lot of the red tide issues are out of the council

1 jurisdiction, but the Science Center has done a lot of work that  
2 we feel could inform red tide management, along with its  
3 collaborators, and so, for example, we have done management  
4 strategy evaluations looking at, you know, how the council might  
5 think about managing in the future, if the severity of red tide  
6 were to increase, and we've looked at VMS data, looking at  
7 shifting fleet dynamics, how fleets respond to red tide, and  
8 look at what the implications are for behavior in shifting  
9 effort, shifting discards, looking at the consolidation that  
10 occurs after some of the severe red tide events, and so what  
11 happens to the industry following some of the really severe and  
12 extended red tide events.

13

14 I just wanted to try and answer the question that we do think  
15 that there are some elements of this issue that could be  
16 relevant to the council management process, and it's not just an  
17 issue of, you know, water quality issues that are external to  
18 the council process. Thank you.

19

20 **CHAIRMAN GILL:** Thank you, Mandy. Given where we are, I think  
21 we'll defer further conversation until Full Council, and, after  
22 we do the committee report, we'll reopen this, so that we can  
23 think about it a little more, about whether the council wants to  
24 weigh-in on the ETC recommendation on red tide. With that being  
25 said, the next item on the agenda is Other Business, and is  
26 there any other business to come under this committee? Seeing  
27 none, Mr. Chairman, back to you.

28

29 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on October 25, 2023.)

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31

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