

GULF COUNCIL

305TH MEETING

FULL COUNCIL SESSION

Gulf Council Office and Virtual

Tampa, Florida

June 4, 2025

VOTING MEMBERS

- 12 J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
- 13 Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama
- 14 Kesley Banks.....Texas
- 15 Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
- 16 Troy Frady.....Alabama
- 17 Tom Frazer.....Florida
- 18 Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
- 19 Michael McDermott.....Mississippi
- 20 Jason Osborne.....Mississippi
- 21 Anthony Overton.....Alabama
- 22 John Sanchez.....Florida
- 23 Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
- 24 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
- 25 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
- 26 C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida
- 27 Ed Walker.....Florida
- 28 Troy Williamson.....Texas

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

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

STAFF

- 35 Matt Freeman.....Economist
- 36 John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
- 37 Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
- 38 Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
- 39 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
- 40 Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison
- 41 Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
- 42 Camilla Shireman.....Administrative & Communications Assistant
- 43 Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director
- 44 Verena Wang.....Ecosystem Analyst

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

- 47 Chance Adams.....Freeport, TX
- 48 Brendon Baldwin.....

1 Heather Blough.....NOAA
2 Susan Boggs.....Orange Beach, AL
3 Eric Brazer.....Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance
4 Rick Burris.....MS
5 Scott Childress.....
6 Bud Corbin.....
7 Jason Delacruz.....FL
8 Richard Fischer.....LA
9 Brad Gentner.....
10 Ken Haddad.....ASA, FL
11 Frank Helies.....NOAA
12 Scott Hickman.....Galveston, TX
13 Dylan Hubbard.....
14 Zachary Istre.....FL
15 David Johnson.....
16 Trenton Knepp.....
17 Randal Kramer.....
18 Randy Lauser.....
19 Brian Lewis.....FL
20 Jessica McCawley.....FL
21 Clay Porch.....SEFSC
22 Charlie Renier.....
23 Clay Shidler.....FL
24 Jason Underwood.....
25 John Walter.....SEFSC
26 Jim Zurbrick.....Steinhatchee, FL

27
28

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PAGE 39: Motion to approve "Modifications to Spanish Mackerel Catch Limits in the Gulf of America" and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary changes in the document. The council chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and appropriate. The motion carried on page 41.

PAGE 43: Motion to approve the Framework Action: Other Shallow-Water Grouper Complex Management Measures and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary changes to the document. The council chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and appropriate. The motion carried on page 49.

PAGE 55: Motion to accept the SSC's recommendations as it relates to catch limits based on the MSY proxy based on F 40 percent SPR for scamp and yellowmouth grouper. The motion carried on page 55.

PAGE 57: Motion in Action 2 to make Alternative 3 the preferred alternative. The motion carried on page 59.

PAGE 63: Motion to include an alternative in Reef Fish Amendment 62 for a phased-in approach over a period of years for the increase in the red grouper stock ACL. The phased-in approach for the increase in the stock ACL would be 70 percent of the ABC in year-one, 80 percent of the ABC in year-two, 90 percent of the ABC in year-three, and 100 percent of the ABC in year-four-plus. The motion carried on page 70.

- - -

1 The Full Council of the Gulf Council convened at the Gulf Council
2 office in Tampa, Florida on Wednesday morning, June 4, 2025, and
3 was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

4
5 **CALL TO ORDER, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND INTRODUCTIONS**
6

7 **CHAIRMAN J.D. DUGAS:** Okay, folks. We're going to get started in
8 Full Council. Welcome to the 305th meeting of the Gulf Council.
9 My name is J.D. Dugas, chair of the council. The Gulf Council is
10 one of eight regional councils established in 1976 by the Fisheries
11 Conservation and Management Act known as the Magnuson-Stevenson
12 Act.

13
14 Our purpose is to serve as a deliberative body to advise the
15 Secretary of Commerce on fishery management measures in federal
16 waters in the Gulf of Mexico, ensuring sustainable fisheries
17 resources that benefit the nation.

18
19 The council consists of seventeen voting members, eleven appointed
20 by the Secretary of Commerce from various Gulf regions with diverse
21 fisheries experience, plus the five state fishery managers from
22 each Gulf state and the Regional Administrator from NOAA's
23 Southeast Fisheries Service. Several non-voting members also
24 participate. Public input is essential to our deliberative
25 process.

26
27 We welcome both oral and written comments throughout the process.
28 Virtual attendees wishing to speak during public comment must
29 register online. In-person participants should sign-in at the
30 registration kiosk in the back of the room. Only one registration
31 per person is allowed. Public comment may conclude before the
32 scheduled time if all registered participants have spoken.

33
34 This meeting is being digitally recorded for public record. As a
35 courtesy, I kindly ask that each participant introduce himself or
36 herself, once your name is called. Bernie.

37
38 **MS. BERNADINE ROY:** Kevin Anson.

39
40 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Kevin Anson, Alabama.

41
42 **MS. ROY:** Kesley Banks.

43
44 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** Kesley Banks, Texas.

45
46 **MS. ROY:** Billy Broussard.

47
48 **MR. BILLY BROUSSARD:** Billy Broussard, Louisiana.

1
2 **MS. ROY:** Dave Donaldson.
3
4 **MR. DAVE DONALDSON:** Dave Donaldson, Gulf States Marine Fisheries
5 Commission.
6
7 **MS. ROY:** J.D. Dugas.
8
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** J.D. Dugas, Louisiana.
10
11 **MS. ROY:** Troy Frady.
12
13 **MR. TROY FRADY:** Troy Frady, Alabama.
14
15 **MS. ROY:** Tom Frazer.
16
17 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** Tom Frazer, Florida.
18
19 **MS. ROY:** Mara Levy.
20
21 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Mara Levy, NOAA Office of General Counsel.
22
23 **MS. ROY:** C.J. Sweetman.
24
25 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** C.J. Sweetman, Florida.
26
27 **MS. ROY:** Michael McDermott.
28
29 **MR. MICHAEL MCDERMOTT:** Michael McDermott, Mississippi.
30
31 **MS. ROY:** Chris Schieble.
32
33 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** Chris Schieble, Louisiana.
34
35 **MS. ROY:** Lt. Jackson Morton.
36
37 **LT. JACKSON MORTON:** Lt. Jackson Morton, United States Coast Guard.
38
39 **MS. ROY:** I believe Jason Osborne is absent. Anthony Overton.
40
41 **DR. ANTONY OVERTON:** Anthony Overton, Alabama.
42
43 **MS. ROY:** Clay Porch or John Walter. Dakus Geeslin.
44
45 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** Dakus Geeslin, Texas.
46
47 **MS. ROY:** John Walter. Go ahead, John.
48

1 **DR. JOHN WALTER:** I'm present. John Walter, Southeast Center.
2
3 **MS. ROY:** Thank you. John Sanchez.
4
5 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** John Sanchez, Florida.
6
7 **MS. ROY:** Rick Burris. Go ahead, Rick.
8
9 **MR. RICK BURRIS:** Rick Burris, Mississippi.
10
11 **MS. ROY:** Andy Strelcheck.
12
13 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast
14 Regional Office.
15
16 **MS. ROY:** Frank Helies.
17
18 **MR. FRANK HELIES:** Frank Helies, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional
19 Office.
20
21 **MS. ROY:** Ed Walker.
22
23 **MR. ED WALKER:** Ed Walker, Florida.
24
25 **MS. ROY:** Troy Williamson.
26
27 **MR. TROY WILLIAMSON:** Troy Williamson, Texas.
28
29 **MS. ROY:** Jessica McCawley.
30
31 **MS. JESSICA MCCAWLEY:** Jessica McCawley, State of Florida, but
32 also the South Atlantic Council rep.
33
34 **MS. ROY:** Carrie Simmons.
35
36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Carrie Simmons, council staff.
37
38 **MS. ROY:** John Froeschke.
39
40 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** John Froeschke, council Staff.
41
42 **MS. ROY:** Okay. I'm done.
43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Bernie. Okay. Before we move to the
45 next agenda item, we have a few other things to address, and I'll
46 turn it over to Dr. Simmons first.
47
48 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Since Camilla

1 is here today with us, helping run this meeting, I just wanted to
2 announce again, congratulations. Congratulate Camilla on her
3 retirement, at the end of the month, and thank you for her service
4 to the council's mission, and so we'll miss you, Camilla.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Next up, I would like to
7 say a few words for Mr. Williamson's retirement from the Gulf
8 Council. It is my great honor to recognize the service of Mr.
9 Troy Williamson, whose term on the Gulf Council concludes this
10 year, after six remarkable years, from 2019 to 2025.

11
12 Troy has been an unwavering advocate for our fisheries and has
13 contributed his thoughtful voice to fisheries issues across the
14 country. His decades-long commitment to preserving our marine
15 resources is evident in every role he has taken on, from
16 representing Texas on the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
17 to his leadership on the Executive Committee of the Center for
18 Sportfish Science and Conservation at the Harte.

19
20 Troy has consistently brought science, stewardship, and a deep
21 respect for our fisheries to the forefront. His contributions to
22 the council and its advisory panels have reflected a balance of
23 expertise and passion. He worked hard to create fair regulations
24 across both sectors.

25
26 Troy, your work has made a lasting impact, and your legacy will
27 continue to shape fisheries management in the Gulf and beyond. On
28 behalf of the council, and the countless people, and your efforts
29 you have supported, thank you for your dedicated services, your
30 leadership, and your enduring commitment to conservation. I'm
31 going to turn it over to Dr. Banks for a few words.

32
33 **DR. BANKS:** So, Troy, I will be playing postal service for you.
34 We have a couple of gifts for you, the first being a barometer
35 with an engraving of "In honor of your dedicated service to NOAA
36 Fisheries, an invaluable contribution to the Gulf of Mexico
37 Fisheries Management Council mission, from 2019 to 2025". We've
38 also gotten you a couple personal gifts, including a Knobs Creek,
39 the ten-year-old version, model, and a crystal clear ice cube
40 maker, because we know you like those square ice cubes, rocks, the
41 big rocks.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Troy.

44
45 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** May I speak?

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir.

1 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Dr.
2 K., and I just would like to say to everyone around the U that it
3 has been my pleasure to serve with you all on the council. As I
4 take my leave, I wish you all good health, and the best of luck.
5 So long.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Williamson. Next, we'll move to
8 Dr. Simmons.

9
10 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so it is my
11 pleasure to honor the exceptional service of Dr. Tom Frazer, whose
12 leadership on the Gulf Council has left a lasting mark on our
13 fisheries, our communities, and the future of marine resource
14 conservation.

15
16 Dr. Frazer began his tenure on the council in 2016, and, over the
17 past nine years, he has exemplified what it means to lead with
18 integrity, intellect, and a deep respect for science and all
19 stakeholder perspectives. He chaired the Reef Fish, the Coral,
20 and the Migratory Species Committees, some of the most complex and
21 dynamic management environments that managers face in making
22 decisions.

23
24 He also served as both the vice chair and the chair of the council,
25 and, during Tom's three years as the chair, he led the council
26 through the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, with four-day-long
27 virtual council meetings.

28
29 These grueling meetings tested not only council members' and
30 staff's attention span, but everyone's ability and capability and
31 resolve, and so, throughout it all, Tom remained steady, a fair,
32 calculated, and thoughtful leader. His ability to listen, to
33 balance different views, and to base decisions on sound science
34 make him a trusted voice at the table.

35
36 He brought not only a deep academic expertise, as his impressive
37 professional resume makes that abundantly clear, but also
38 humility, respect, and clarity to every conversation and decision.

39
40 Dr. Frazer, your contributions have strengthened the foundation of
41 sustainable fisheries management in the Gulf, and, on behalf of
42 the council, staff, and all who have had the pleasure to working
43 alongside of you, thank you for your service, your wisdom, and
44 your unwavering commitment to Gulf natural resources and its
45 people. Congratulations, and thank you.

46
47 **DR. FRAZER:** I'll just keep it sweet. It's been -- Not short and
48 sweet, but just sweet. It has certainly been an honor and a

1 privilege to be part of this group, and I have a tremendous amount
2 of respect for not every -- Not only everybody around the table,
3 but all of the stakeholders, and the participants, and there -- I
4 have so many friendships that were developed during these past
5 nine years, and that's probably the most valuable part of this, to
6 me. Those are lifelong relationships, and I appreciate all that
7 I've learned from everybody, and hopefully we'll continue to cross
8 paths, and hopefully we'll all do a little fishing together one
9 day, and so thanks, guys.

10
11 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you. Next, we'll move on to Agenda
14 Item II, Adoption of the Agenda. Dr. Simmons.

15
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, for Other
17 Business, could we add a brief overview of the impacts for
18 discontinuing the dockside component of the headboat survey, and
19 Dr. Walter, I believe, is going to provide that.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and so we'll add that to Other Business.
22 Is there any opposition to that? Okay. Not seeing any, can I get
23 a motion to approve the agenda? Dr. Banks. Dr. Sweetman. Next
24 is the Approval of the Minutes. Are there any edits to the minutes?
25 Not seeing any -- Mr. Donaldson.

26
27 **MR. DONALDSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just have a couple minor
28 edits. On page 72, line 46, "efforts" should be "effort", and then,
29 on page 73, line 2, "for" should be "from", and then, line 3, "for"
30 should be "from".

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Mr. Donaldson. Thank you for that. Can I
33 get approval of the minutes, as edited? Dr. Sweetman. Dr. Banks
34 seconds. The next agenda item will be the Presentation of the
35 2024 Law Enforcement Team of the Year, and Dr. Sweetman and Ms.
36 McCawley will assist with that.

37
38 **PRESENTATION OF THE 2024 LAW ENFORCEMENT TEAM OF THE YEAR AWARD**

39
40 **DR. SWEETMAN:** All right. Good morning, everyone, and so,
41 gentlemen, if you wouldn't mind coming up here. On behalf of the
42 Gulf Council, it is my true honor to present the 2024 Law
43 Enforcement Officer of the Year Award to a truly exceptional team.

44
45 The crew of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's
46 offshore patrol vessel, Senior Officers Jason Richards and Jeremy
47 Foell, operating a thirty-eight-foot patrol vessel out of Key West,
48 and these officers protect some of the most remote and biologically

1 sensitive waters in the Gulf of America, from the Dry Tortugas out
2 to the Pulley Ridge.

3
4 Their responsibilities include federal fisheries enforcement,
5 search and rescue, public safety, disaster response, and community
6 outreach. In 2024 alone, Officers Richards and Foell logged 334
7 hours on patrol, with a strong focus in enforcing fisheries laws
8 in areas as far as 125 nautical miles offshore. Their dedication
9 and effectiveness are evident in the cases that they've led.

10
11 In April, their inspection of a commercial shrimp vessel uncovered
12 274 snapper that were over the legal limit, as well as illegal
13 blue crabs and lobster during the closed season. In May, during
14 NOAA's TED enforcement operation, they identified six violations
15 that directly impacted endangered sea turtle populations, and,
16 throughout the year, they documented numerous illegal fishing
17 activities inside the Ecological Reserves of the Dry Tortugas,
18 protecting some of the most sensitive habitats in the Gulf.

19
20 **MS. MCCAWLEY:** Together, these officers have logged over 2,800
21 hours of offshore patrol since joining the OPV program,
22 consistently exceeding federal requirements and earning respect
23 across agencies and among their peers.

24
25 They lead with integrity, perform with excellence, and protect our
26 marine resources with unwavering dedication. For their
27 outstanding service, professionalism, and lasting impact of the
28 fisheries and communities of the Gulf of America, we are proud to
29 recognize Senior Officers Jason Richards and Jeremy Foell, the FWC
30 Trident team, as the 2024 Law Enforcement Officers of the Year.
31 Congratulations and thank you for your service.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you Dr. Sweetman and Ms. McCawley.
34 The next agenda item is public comment, a little different for us,
35 but that's how we're going to do it today. Bernie, I'm sorry that
36 we didn't discuss this prior, but we're going to rotate online and
37 in the room.

38
39 Good morning. Public input is a vital part of the council's
40 deliberative process, and comments, both oral and written, are
41 accepted and considered by the council throughout the process.
42 The Sustainable Fisheries Act requires that all statements include
43 a brief description of the background and interests of the persons
44 in the subject of the statement. All written information shall
45 include a statement of the source and date of such information.

46
47 Oral and written communication provided to the council, its
48 members, or its staff that relate to matters within council's

1 purview or public in nature. Please give any written comments to
2 the staff, as all written comments will be posted on the council's
3 website for viewing by council members and the public, and will be
4 maintained by the council as part of the permanent record.
5 Knowingly and willfully submitting false information to the
6 council is a violation of federal law.

7
8 We will welcome public comment from in-person and virtual
9 attendees. Anyone joining us virtually that wishes to speak during
10 public comment should have already registered online. Virtual
11 participants that are registered to comment should ensure that
12 they are registered for the webinar under the same name they used
13 to register to speak.

14
15 In-person attendees wishing to speak during public comment should
16 sign in at the registration kiosk located in the back of the
17 meeting room. We accept only one registration per person.

18
19 Each speaker is allowed three minutes for their testimony. Please
20 note the timer lights on the podium or on the webinar. They will
21 be green for the first two minutes and will blink yellow for the
22 final minute of testimony. At three minutes, the red light will
23 appear, and a buzzer may be enacted.

24
25 Time allowed to dignitaries providing testimony is extended at the
26 discretion of the chair. If you have a cell phone or similar
27 device, we ask that you keep them on silent or vibrating mode
28 during the meeting. Also, for all to be able to hear proceedings,
29 we ask that you have any private conversations outside the meeting
30 room.

31
32 Please note public comment may end before the published agenda
33 time if all registered in-person and virtual participants have
34 completed their comment. We'll start in the room with Mr. Brad
35 Gentner.

36
37 **PUBLIC COMMENT**

38
39 **MR. BRAD GENTNER:** Brad Gentner, Southeast Conservation Director
40 for Coastal Conservation Association. I want to start out by
41 saying I fully support Action 2, Alternative 3 as the preferred
42 Amendment 58A. I would also like to thank the council for taking
43 a broad view on deregulation and improving the competitiveness of
44 fisheries writ large. You can't get more deregulatory than giving
45 management to the states, and we support that.

46
47 We support flexibility. We support multiyear regulations. We
48 support more timely, less complex stock assessments. We support

1 better data collection for recreational fishing, and all sectors.
2 Increasing management efficiency improves management for all
3 sectors. We look forward to working with everyone here to improve
4 management at the council level.

5
6 The red grouper -- As an economist, the red grouper higher catch
7 limit discussion I want to point out is really an allocation
8 discussion. We've seen this before in red snapper. Whether you
9 have an economics degree or not, every businessman knows there's
10 a break-even price in that business, the price that takes
11 production from not profitable to profitable.

12
13 Quota lease price is equal to the profit per pound realized by
14 quota holders. Quota sales prices tend to be about ten-times the
15 lease price. That's true for all IFQ fisheries and so, as prices
16 fall, quota lease prices, and sale prices fall also, and it's
17 pretty obvious why the commercial sector doesn't like to see large
18 increases in quotas in IFQ fisheries.

19
20 This red grouper discussion has brought up some very interesting
21 questions about what is the council's role regarding economic
22 efficiency? Is it to maximize share value? Is it to consider the
23 price impacts of quota increases or decreases? Both of these are
24 clearly economic efficiency concerns. Should the council try to
25 maximize economic efficiency? I think so, or are we here to
26 maximize biological yield, which a lot around the table think.

27
28 We have an executive order that implies we need to focus on yield.
29 I know what the recreational sector wants to advocate for,
30 enhancing economic efficiency through changing allocations. I
31 find the debate on quota values and TACs very interesting. It
32 seems that the commercial sector understands that there's a TAC
33 that maximizes their profit. It seems like they know there's a
34 TAC for some species that takes away all of their profit, and it
35 may even cause them to leave fish in the ocean.

36
37 These aren't guesses. We've seen this play out. The actions of
38 supply and demand dictate dockside prices. Dockside prices dictate
39 profits, as long as costs stay the same. It pains me to see the
40 same folks that understand that dynamic intimately refuse to admit
41 that the same dynamic plays out in recreational fishing.

42
43 Deep down, you know there is a TAC that maximizes your profit,
44 even though it may give fish to another sector. It seems like
45 there's some common ground here. It's too bad there's no way to
46 do intersector trading, because you would see the recreational
47 sector acquire quota as prices fell. If the commercial sector
48 doesn't want more red grouper, they should let the recreational

1 sector have them. This is the economic efficient solution. Thanks
2 guys. I'm glad you find that funny.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Gentner. Do we have any questions?
5 Not seeing any, next up would be Mr. Richard Fischer, followed by
6 Mr. Ken Hadden.

7
8 **MR. RICHARD FISCHER:** Thank you Mr. Chair. Good morning council.
9 How are you all doing? I've got to say I'm pretty surprised to
10 see this many more names in-person than on the webinar. I guess
11 you all just can't keep people away. Thank you all for allowing
12 me to speak. Richard Fischer, representing the Louisiana charter
13 fishing sector.

14
15 I actually missed most of the grouper conversation yesterday,
16 because we had a fun commission meeting, where we had both
17 fishermen and water access issues kind of being pitted against
18 each other, and with each other, and it was just -- It was a fun
19 couple of hours at our state commission yesterday, and so I didn't
20 get to pay attention to much of the grouper stuff, and so I'll
21 just kind of say, vaguely, that, you know, we've got an April to
22 October, or May to October, fishery in Louisiana.

23
24 As for the months that we would like to see it open, we would
25 really just like to see you all consider the months that we're
26 able to fish out in the western Gulf, where, early in the year,
27 and late in the year, the weather just kind of doesn't really allow
28 us to get out there, and so just please go ahead and consider that
29 when you're making grouper decisions.

30
31 This also kind of dovetails into, again, and here goes the broken
32 record of state management, regional management, where, when you
33 give states, or regions, the flexibility, and the opportunity, to
34 open seasons that best fit their fishermen, and their needs, that's
35 just going to be better for everyone, and I think Brad just made
36 a great point, and it was one that I was going to touch on, which
37 is one part of the meeting that I did get to listen to yesterday,
38 on the drive up to Baton Rouge, was about some of the executive
39 orders and some of the deregulatory nature of some of those
40 executive orders, how ten deregulations need to be made for every
41 one regulation that's made.

42
43 Well, there are a lot of states that want state management, not
44 only for the private recreational sector, but some states even for
45 the charter sector, and so, you know, as Brad mentioned, that's
46 pretty doggone deregulatory, and I would certainly hope that it
47 would be considered a deregulatory action to go to state
48 management, and if there has to be a ten-to-one ratio, and getting

1 to that ten helps the agency do one of the one regulations they
2 want to do, well, we would be happy to help facilitate some of
3 that, on state or regional management on red snapper, amberjack,
4 other reef fish, as well as other species too, and so that's really
5 all I had. I appreciate you all allowing me to speak from Louisiana
6 this morning, and I'm happy to address any questions.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Fischer. Do we have any questions?
9 Not seeing any, thanks, Richard. Next up is Mr. Ken Haddad,
10 followed by Zachary Istre.

11
12 **MR. KEN HADDAD:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ken Haddad, with the
13 American Sportfishing Association. First, I want to thank Tom and
14 Troy for their wonderful service. I count you in my short list of
15 good friends, and I look forward to seeing you in the future.

16
17 Okay, and we are fine with Spanish mackerel and where you're at on
18 that one. The shallow-water grouper framework, we're okay, but we
19 want to emphasize not to use what's in that framework as the base
20 for 58A. In 58A, we just want to make sure there's a fair
21 allocation, based on recent fishing distributions, and it's based
22 on the approach you've taken in other FES conversions, and we're
23 okay with breaking up the complex.

24
25 For deepwater grouper, we support Action 2, Alternative 3. It is
26 the most direct conversion, FES data conversion, based on recent
27 year timeline, and it's, again, consistent with how you have
28 converted allocation for other species, such as red grouper. We
29 also support Action 3, Alternative 4, due to the extreme
30 uncertainty of these rare-event species, and we think that that
31 helps average out some of the noise in the system.

32
33 For red grouper, we will support the SRFES conversion, which, by
34 the way, would reduce the current rec allocation, but that's been
35 our consistent position throughout all these conversions, which
36 is, when you make a conversion, you've got to bring the allocation
37 along with it, and convert it exactly the same way, and that
38 results in us supporting Action 1, Alternative 3, and, if you
39 deviate from just a straight conversion, it's our feeling that you
40 need to do a full-blown assessment of allocation, as found in your
41 policies.

42
43 Now, you've heard -- At the last meeting, you heard a good bit of
44 testimony supporting the council moving forward to replace the
45 DESCEND Act. We know there's a lot of changes out there, but the
46 support is there, the science is there, the momentum is there, and
47 the rec initiative made it a high priority, and we just hope this
48 council, in amongst all your discussions on priorities, will make

1 replacement of the DESCEND Act a high priority. We hope you'll
2 just do it, and don't overcomplicate it. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Haddad. Do we have any questions?
5 Not seeing any, thanks, Ken. Next up is Zachary Istre, followed
6 by Jim Zubrick.

7
8 **MS. ROY:** Zachary, you'll have to unmute your line to speak.

9
10 **MR. ZACHARY ISTRE:** Can you hear me now?

11
12 **MS. ROY:** Yes, we can.

13
14 **MR. ISTRE:** Okay. This is Zachary Istre, a commercial
15 spearfisherman out of the Big Bend area, kind of Tampa to
16 Steinhathee, in the upper Gulf. Just on the gag, there's more
17 gags than I've seen in probably twenty years spearfishing up here
18 underwater.

19
20 On the red grouper, I agree with what I think it was Jay that said
21 yesterday about trying to do maybe like a 15 percent increase,
22 like for a four-year plan, instead of 60 percent all at once, and
23 to kind of see how that works, because, the last time you all did
24 that, I mean, it crushed -- It crushed the industry for quite a
25 while, and we're not seeing -- Up this way anyway, we're not seeing
26 the red grouper like they should be. I know they're doing good
27 down south, but up here they're not, and that's all I've got.
28 Thank you.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Istre. Do we have any questions?
31 Not seeing any, next up is Mr. Jim Zurbrick, followed by Scott
32 Hickman.

33
34 **MR. JIM ZURBRICK:** Thank you, council, for allowing me to speak
35 today. Jim Zurbrick from Steinhathee. I'm not seeing the red
36 groupers off of Steinhathee like we did, but, when I'm asking for
37 a 30 percent increase, or something less, it's not because I'm
38 trying to keep the amount of red grouper shares that I own up in
39 value, so I can get more for my lease.

40
41 I have a history of giving the guys that fish for me -- I'm a
42 dealer also, and, last week, my wife and I did retire from active
43 fishing. We sold our boat, but I have a history of giving the
44 guys the red grouper and gags, until everything got kind of
45 cattywampus with that increase we had back -- Way back when, and
46 we couldn't catch them for a while, but it's not about money. It's
47 about that we're not seeing them, because, I mean, just look at
48 the landings in the northern Gulf. They're tremendously down.

1
2 I would like to have a little more discussion about discards. If
3 we get this 60 percent increase on red grouper, somebody needs to
4 put a number up of how many actual red grouper discards in the
5 recreational sector that's going to be, because, when you see that
6 number, it's staggering.

7
8 If 95 percent of all discards of red grouper are recreational, and
9 95 percent of red snapper discards are recreational, it's a scary
10 number, when you see that put up, and so maybe we just ought to
11 tread lightly on this red grouper increase, for the discard issue.

12
13 I hope that the guy that bought my boat is going to continue to
14 use the cameras from Mote Laboratory, because, the last three years
15 that I've had them, it changed my fishing directive a little bit,
16 but not enough that made me a bad guy and going to a good guy, but
17 at least I was able to get up here and share with you my discards,
18 and so I'm a big proponent that we get more cameras on some of the
19 boats, that we should go out of our way to try to get these on
20 some of them.

21
22 I do resent the comments about the economics, that we don't want
23 the 60 percent increase because of share value. That's not the
24 way the Zurbricks feel, and not the way that most people feel that
25 I know they're in the industry. It's because we're just not seeing
26 the fish, and we're worried about them. Thank you.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Zurbrick. Do we have any
29 questions? Not seeing any, next up is Mr. Scott Hickman, followed
30 by Mr. Jason Delacruz.

31
32 **MR. SCOTT HICKMAN:** Good afternoon, council. Mr. Chairman, this
33 is Captain Scott Hickman, from beautiful Galveston, Texas. Too
34 bad I can't be with you today, but moving out of Key West was kind
35 of a big disappointment, and so we're out fishing today, and
36 Starlink is working wonderfully, and it's great way to get data
37 collection off of charter boats and commercial boats, but I would
38 like to say, you know, Troy and Tom, you all have done a fabulous
39 job, and we really appreciate your service. A lot of people don't
40 understand the hardships of being a volunteer, and getting away
41 from family and business and everything else, and we appreciate
42 everything you all have done.

43
44 We really appreciate the council working forward on this ecosystem-
45 based management, the fishery ecosystem plan. I'll give you an
46 example. Last week, in Galveston, was the oldest tournament.
47 Myself, and many other captains, who for years have been very
48 successful king fishermen and cobia fishermen, and, in one day of

1 fishing, and, you know, many of the guys are, you know, running
2 seventy or eighty miles in every direction, and we had zero king
3 mackerel weighed-in, and zero cobia weighed-in in that tournament,
4 which used to be an incredible tournament for king mackerel and
5 cobia, a late May and early June tournament, and so there's
6 something going on.

7
8 I think it's definitely ecosystem-driven. I would like to find
9 out some reasons why these fish are not around anymore, and, you
10 know, if red snapper is what we've got, it's what we've got, but
11 I'm glad to see the fishery ecosystem plan. I appreciate the
12 council making that a priority.

13
14 For you all in that part of the Gulf, big issues with hypoxic
15 zones, low oxygen zones, in this part of the Gulf, and let's figure
16 this out, and so that's it. I appreciate you all, and I hope you
17 have a safe trip home.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Hickman. Do we have any questions?
20 Not seeing any, Scott, thank you again. Next up is Mr. Jason
21 Delacruz, followed by Mr. Brian Lewis.

22
23 **MR. JASON DELACRUZ:** Good morning. Thank you, guys, for the chance
24 to speak. I feel like I've become more preachier. I've been doing
25 this for twenty years now, and this one is going to be for Tom,
26 because this is his last meeting, and so I think we've lost sight
27 of a lot of the reasons we're here.

28
29 We're here for the fish, and this thing that we're doing with this
30 deepwater fishery is killing me, even though I don't personally
31 get a chance to fish in it. My guys fish during the summer a
32 little bit, but the even haircut that John mentioned seems the
33 fairest way to do this, but to take from people that are harvesting
34 fish for people to eat, to give to a handful of ultra elites, so
35 that they can deepwater fish with, you know, million-and-a-half-
36 dollar boats and \$2,000 reels, and \$1,000 rods, it's crazy to me,
37 and for recreation, and these people will do something else. The
38 economics won't change.

39
40 It seems so wrong that our fishery, from a deepwater perspective,
41 changed, unbeknownst to us, because we were so desperate to get
42 that particular gear type, longline, back in the water that we
43 accepted a hook limit that was going to affect that fishery that
44 we didn't understand, and that's the truth.

45
46 The only way you're effectively deepwater fishing -- If you told
47 all the guys in the western Gulf that you were going to take them
48 down to 750 hooks, they would all stop deepwater grouper fishing,

1 and so we have a disadvantage in the eastern Gulf, and that's where
2 our landings have fallen off from.

3
4 We're going to take it from guys that make a living doing that,
5 that are struggling, and drive their allocation costs up, so that
6 they're going to lose money, and give it to somebody so he can go
7 out in his quad-engine boat, and catch a lot of fish actually,
8 when you look at the numbers, and it's kind of staggering how much
9 fish.

10
11 It really does bother me, and so, Tom, this one is for you. It's
12 really about the fish. Let's make this rule about the fish, and
13 not about just letting people go catch more fish so that they can
14 put them in the freezer.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Delacruz. Do we have any
17 questions? I'm not seeing any. Next up is Mr. Brian Lewis, and
18 I believe he will be followed by Mr. Eric Brazer.

19
20 **MR. BRIAN LEWIS:** Can you hear me?

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir. Go ahead.

23
24 **MR. LEWIS:** Good afternoon. Brian Lewis, owner of the Fishing
25 Vessel Trip Limit out of Clearwater Beach, Florida. My fishing
26 boat, I have a fulltime captain that runs that boat. I'm an IFQ
27 shareholder. My predominant catch is red grouper, and I have no
28 trouble having access to get that, and I am actually paying a very
29 fair price to lease those fish. I don't see there's really a major
30 problem there.

31
32 Maybe for some other people there is, but what I don't understand
33 is how we're going to wave a magic wand, and, in my opinion, that's
34 what it is, to increase the red grouper and give us a whopping 60
35 percent. We're sitting here right now, as of today, and I looked
36 on the IFQ login page, and we have landed 45 percent of the red
37 grouper quota, okay, that we're allocated.

38
39 All right, and we're in June, right, and so, if I come out right
40 with this, we'll be lucky if we land 80 percent of that, for the
41 whole year, and so we're going to be given an additional amount,
42 and how is that going to play out? We're going to get more
43 fishermen to fish, and get a cheaper lease price, and, you know,
44 I'm not concerned about selling my shares, or losing any value in
45 my shares, or a lower lease price.

46
47 You know, a lower lease price helps the other fishermen out, sure,
48 and makes them more profitable, but what's going to happen is,

1 also, we need to take other considerations. What about flooding
2 the market with the fish that the ex-vessel price drops? What
3 about that, because I believe that's probably what might very well
4 happen, and, you know, but we're here for the fish.

5
6 We're supposed to protect the fish, right? That's the first goal,
7 and in some -- I don't know if this is politicking one-on-one or
8 what, but I feel like this whole red grouper increase is not going
9 to do us any good, and then back to what Jim Zurbrich said, and
10 discards, right? Discard mortality, and big words, right? We've
11 had those big words for a long time.

12
13 We should be very concerned about that, because we're going to get
14 an emergency rule here, and we're going to extend the red grouper
15 season for the recreational fishermen, and what about the overages
16 that they've had, okay, and so, because we're going to get an
17 emergency rule to increase the red grouper, that whole overage
18 goes away? I don't understand it. It doesn't compute to me, you
19 know?

20
21 So, as a vessel owner, IFQ holder, I'm concerned about our fishery
22 getting right back to where we were before, and we've already seen
23 it. This is like the broken record, okay? That's exactly what -
24 - John said it best too, right, and so it's not about economics.
25 I don't feel like that should be like the whole thing here, and
26 like we're worried about the economics of it. That's not really
27 the case.

28
29 I'm worried about the fish being here, and if I'm already -- I
30 can't even keep hardly any gags, okay, and my boat is averaging -
31 - Okay, and there's no fish up above -- No red grouper really to
32 be had above the 28 line, okay, and I'm concerned about that as
33 well, okay, and so we're going to have 150 boats all down south,
34 trying to catch red grouper, and what's going to happen to that
35 population?

36
37 It's a big concern for me, and I really think we need to think
38 about like not a big 60 percent increase. Maybe we need to do it
39 in a little more steps, okay, and I know we've got amendments that
40 we'll have to be working on after the emergency rule expires, but
41 please keep the fish in mind. That's what we're here for. We
42 need fish for the people to eat, as well as the recreational
43 fishermen to put in their freezer, okay, and thank you for your
44 time, and I appreciate it.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for your comments, Mr. Lewis. Do we
47 have any questions? Not seeing any, next up, I believe it's Eric
48 Brazer.

1
2 **MR. ERIC BRAZER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Eric Brazer,
3 Deputy Director of the Gulf of America Reef Fish Shareholders
4 Alliance. First off, Tom, Troy, wherever you are, Camilla, thank
5 you all. I really appreciate your time, your support, your
6 friendship, your leadership.

7
8 Now onto the meat of this. With the executive order, you know,
9 we're supportive of the council's participation in this process,
10 and, rather than go through our recommendations, I'm just going to
11 refer you back to our letter for specific recommendations, but, in
12 doing this, in going through this, we really urge you to prioritize
13 core services that keep commercial fishermen on the water, things
14 like stock assessments, data collection, accountability measures,
15 IFQ operations, permitting systems, disaster relief mechanisms.

16
17 All these things are really important, and we can't afford to let
18 them fall to the cutting room floor, and, also, please take full
19 advantage of this to modernize data collection.

20
21 With deepwater, you know, it's pretty clear this is an allocation
22 debate, and it's unclear to us, and the public, where you are
23 following the council and NOAA's allocation policies, and so we
24 would ask that, if possible, we would love to get a presentation
25 from staff, at the next meeting, that lays out the policies, and
26 the document, and to match them up to see where they are and are
27 not being followed.

28
29 Second, you have selected a preferred alternative that is the
30 largest reduction in commercial quota, which takes the most
31 allocation away from the sector that is literally counting and
32 weighing every pound of fish landed, and you're giving it to a
33 sector that has a PSE that is so high it's not recommended for
34 use.

35
36 I think I mentioned this before, and I'm going to do it again,
37 because it's really important, and I don't think this has been
38 given sufficient consideration. According to NOAA, NOAA
39 Fisheries' Marine Recreational Information Program presents a
40 warning when the PSE for an estimate exceeds 30 percent, and
41 recommends it should be used with caution, and it does not support
42 the use of highly imprecise estimates when the PSE exceeds 50
43 percent.

44
45 Then I'm going to read something from the deepwater grouper
46 document that says the PSE about the annual recreational landings
47 estimates for the species in the deepwater grouper complex
48 regularly exceeds 50 percent, even when aggregated to the greatest

1 possible degree, and so, at this point, at least to us, it appears
2 as though your preferred alternative is arbitrary.

3
4 You haven't provided enough rationale and justification yet to
5 take it out to the public, and at least with Alternative 4, you
6 would be mitigating some of the negative impacts of this PSE
7 problem, and would be applying proportionately the same degree of
8 reductions to each sector, and that appears to be the most fair
9 option at this point.

10
11 Real quick, red grouper, we really urge you guys to be cautious
12 here. Listen to the fishermen. We've seen this movie before. We
13 need more stability. We've got to get away from this whipsaw,
14 and, with ecosystems, I really appreciate the council taking this
15 up and advancing the recommendations from the ETC. I'm part of
16 the ETC, and I'm proud to be part of the ETC, and would love to
17 see this continue forward.

18
19 Annual ecosystem status reports, we appreciate Clay automating
20 this process, and just make sure that we continue to talk about
21 this, so this doesn't get -- So it doesn't fall through the cracks.
22 Thank you.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Brazer. Do we have any questions?
25 Not seeing any here, Eric, next up will be Chance Adams, followed
26 by Randal Kramer.

27
28 **MR. CHANCE ADAMS:** All right. Chance Adams, Freeport, Texas. I'm
29 a commercial red snapper fisherman. I'm a charter captain, and I
30 own my own vessel. I'm a federal dealer, and I've kind of got a
31 lot of stuff going on. That being said, I don't have a dog in the
32 fight with the red grouper or gag grouper. We don't have those in
33 Texas to worry about.

34
35 I just want to kind of share my struggles. I've been coming to
36 meetings for about -- This is my fourth meeting, and first time to
37 give a public testimony, and my biggest struggle is finding
38 allocation to lease, and, when I can find it, it's so expensive.
39 They mentioned the ex-vessel price, and it's almost nothing.

40
41 I'm out there, you know, risking everything, the boat, the engine,
42 the fuel, the bait, and everybody behind me knows what I'm talking
43 about, and I'm just getting pennies on the dollar, and so that's
44 my biggest struggle, my biggest issue, at the moment. I know it
45 wasn't talked about in this meeting, but just something to put on
46 you all's radar. Thank you.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Adams. Do we have any questions?

1 Not seeing any, next up is Randal Kramer, followed by Clay Shidler.

2

3 **MR. RANDAL KRAMER:** Hello. My name is Randal Kramer. I fish and
4 work for Fish Busters. We're having an issue that nobody has
5 really talked about here so far, but, with the observer program,
6 we have to have safety inspections, in order to have the observer
7 on the boat.

8

9 We've been told that now our Starlink that we put on the boats
10 don't qualify to talk to the Coast Guard, as our communication. I
11 don't know how -- You know, we've gone through Inmarsat phones,
12 Iridium phones, and we finally got something that works, and, I
13 mean, it really works. You can see -- You know, if we have a
14 problem on the boat, we can video chat with somebody, and get that
15 problem fixed, and keep them fishing.

16

17 What the observers tell us is that all we can have is a single
18 sideband, really is the only thing that qualifies, except the Coast
19 Guard doesn't monitor the signal sideband anymore, and so I'm just
20 trying to find out where we stand. We've got seven to ten boats
21 right now that have got Starlink on them. It's expensive, but
22 it's worth the effort.

23

24 We need to get this thing approved somehow, so that we can
25 communicate with our boats efficiently and get things done. I
26 don't know, and I don't have anything else to say, but I appreciate
27 your time.

28

29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Kramer. We have a question from Mr.
30 Walker.

31

32 **MR. WALKER:** So that's -- I appreciate you bringing that up. I
33 hadn't heard that, but, obviously, you know it to be true, and I
34 think that's something the council might request from the Coast
35 Guard, because a lot of us have Starlink now, and it's ten-times
36 bigger than any satellite phone ever was.

37

38 **MR. KRAMER:** Absolutely.

39

40 **MR. WALKER:** And the satellite phone used to be acceptable to the
41 Coast Guard, and so that really doesn't make any sense to me, and
42 so I'm going to make a note to that and see if the -- Well, I know
43 we have one of our Coast Guard guys on the line now, but I'll
44 follow-up on that, and we'll see if we can fix that problem.

45

46 **MR. KRAMER:** I appreciate that. I've talked to the observer
47 program, both in Galveston and in Panama City, and to the U.S.
48 Coast Guard, and, you know, they're trying to follow the rules,

1 but it's -- There's nothing that's -- I don't think they can be
2 followed anymore, and so thank you. I appreciate it.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Lieutenant Morton is on the line, if he wants to
5 chime-in.

6
7 **LT. MORTON:** Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks for the question. I'm
8 not intimately familiar with the requirement that you're speaking
9 of, but it seems like it may be statutory, a compliance thing,
10 where only certain approved devices are able to do -- But, yes, I
11 would say keep bringing up that issue, and hopefully we can work
12 on something.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Lt. Morton. Next up is Clay Shidler,
15 followed by Scott Childress.

16
17 **MR. CLAY SHIDLER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This is something I wrote
18 a few weeks ago. I would like to start by saying that I'm fully
19 in support of one gag grouper per angler for the 2025 gag grouper
20 season. I own twelve permitted charter boats out of Crystal River,
21 Florida, Shrimp Landing Marina.

22
23 It is my personal opinion there are many positive attributes to
24 having a gag grouper season that's not built on the traditional
25 framework of starting on September 1 and ending when the estimated
26 quota is met, breaking up the quota across September 1 through
27 December 31, with a breakdown of the available quota as follows,
28 50 percent in September, twelve-and-a-half percent in October,
29 twelve-and-a-half percent in November, and 25 percent in December.

30
31 These are the positive aspects. The gag grouper harvest primarily
32 takes place along the Florida west coast, and, as the 2024
33 hurricane season showed us, one powerful storm has the ability to
34 halt fishing along nearly the entire west coast of Florida for an
35 extended period of time. With the season set to open on September
36 1st, that named storm is going to have a dramatic impact on the
37 fishery. Having no more than three fishing days per week minimizes
38 the number of fishing days that can be lost to a single storm.

39
40 This is a big one, predation. Predation is a variable that seems
41 to be growing as anglers are undoubtedly having more interactions
42 with predators, sharks, porpoises, goliath groupers, and any other
43 predators.

44
45 With breaks between clusters of fishing days, this will force
46 predators to find an alternate food source that does not allow
47 them to develop a pattern, as they would in a consecutive-day
48 season.

1
2 In a consecutive-day season, it is challenging for both the data
3 collection and law enforcement divisions to have boots on the
4 ground for each day of the season, due to workweek limitations and
5 payable time limitations. In a format where the season is broken
6 up, both of these divisions of FWC, for example, will have more
7 staff on the water, to make sure that we can be more confident in
8 all aspects of our fishery.

9
10 National Marine Fisheries and NOAA has worked hard to change many
11 fishery formats, to minimize derby-style formats. With our current
12 short season for gag grouper, it stands to reason that we have
13 created a derby-style fishery, where people will push the limits
14 of weather and safety to capitalize on the opportunities to land
15 illegal fish. Breaking up the days will adjust the concept in
16 people's mind that they will have more time to be out on the water,
17 even if the total number of days remains the same or fewer.

18
19 In-season monitoring is a concept that people believe could save
20 us from overfishing our quota, and there is no way to gather data
21 and analyze it fast enough to make adjustments before it is too
22 late. By loading the quota, as I said before, it will give the
23 opportunity for data to be collected early in the season, and
24 possibly analyzed fast enough to have a little bit of a buffer
25 left at the end of the season whether that can be open or closed.

26
27 User satisfaction is becoming a very important factor in modern
28 fisheries, and users voiced their opinion that a September-only
29 season was not going to be productive for them, due to the majority
30 of the better gag grouper fishing occurs when water temps begin to
31 drop. Having scattered days in the fall can only increase user
32 satisfaction, and rule-makers can pick the days of the week that
33 historically see less fishing pressure, to curb some of the added
34 pressure that we will see in October and November.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Shidler. Do we have any questions?
37 Not seeing any, thank you. Next up is Mr. Scott Childress,
38 followed by Mr. Randy Lauser.

39
40 **MR. SCOTT CHILDRESS:** Hi, council. Thank you for letting me speak.
41 I haven't been to a meeting in about four years, and I want to say
42 this one has ran extremely smooth. I have never seen so many
43 breaks before, and so I would love to see some more questions from
44 some of the people that are speaking, but we'll get to that.

45
46 I agree wholeheartedly with Jason Delacruz, and, by the way, I'm
47 an owner-operator. I've been in the fishery for a little over
48 twenty years, charter and commercial, primarily commercial

1 spearfishing for the last sixteen or so.

2
3 I wholeheartedly agree with Jason on the deepwater. The scamp,
4 shallow-water, with mixing it with the yellowmouth, I would love
5 to see yellowmouth thrown out, in the way that we threw out
6 rockhind and graysby back in the day. There's not enough of it to
7 be making decisions on the scamp, based on the yellowmouth, in my
8 opinion.

9
10 Red grouper, I hate to see 2015 all over again, and that's what
11 appears is going to happen. We begged you guys not to increase
12 our quota, back in 2015, and it always seems that the council is
13 a couple years behind where we need to be, which faster stock
14 assessments and all that, and that's what we need, and we all know
15 that, and so I would love to see everybody go with a small increase,
16 like a few people have asked, rather than just throwing the big
17 lump back to us, because, if you look at 2015, it was a peak, and
18 we were saying, hey, we're starting to not catch them, and, in the
19 following years, it went down the mountain and to where we're at.

20
21 We're starting to rebuild. I don't see it being rebuilt yet, and
22 so a full increase, as big as you're giving us, I just think isn't
23 warranted, and I would love to see a smaller increase.

24
25 One thing that was really weird, and I've never seen it, and we've
26 always been based -- You guys have always stressed science
27 management, and, just to hear somebody bring up price of allocation
28 and shares yesterday, I was astounded. I don't even understand
29 why that's in the picture.

30
31 I'm a shareholder. It doesn't matter to me, and I know, a lot of
32 big guys, yes, it does matter. We all knew that when we started
33 IFQ, there would be monetary interest and things like that in it,
34 but it was done for the fishery, to try to keep the fishermen
35 fishing all year, and to be accountable, and I just don't want to
36 lose sight of that based on price. I don't think it should be an
37 issue at all for the council. I think the fish should be the
38 issue, and that's it.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for your comments. Do we have any
41 questions? Dr. Sweetman.

42
43 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks for your testimony, Mr. Childress. A
44 question for you on scamp. As I was trying to look at the landings,
45 and we're discussing kind of allocation issues there for that
46 fishery, it appeared to me that there was a pretty significant
47 shift in commercial, starting in 2018, where it was just less
48 landings from that, and so I'm curious if you have any perspective

1 as to maybe why that occurred and if you've seen any changes in
2 the fishery in recent years.

3
4 **MR. CHILDRESS:** I know, when I was fishing -- 2014, the horrible
5 red tide that we had, that was Apalachicola to Clearwater, a
6 hundred miles offshore, it decimated the Middle Grounds. I didn't
7 dive out there, really, for three years after that. I would make
8 a run once or twice a year, just to see, you know, if it improved.
9 I think that chased a lot of those fish out. There were some years
10 prior to 2014 that we harvested a lot of scamp, and it was really
11 neat to see.

12
13 I really feel like they're more of a deeper-water fish anyway
14 though, and we get lucky sometimes, and they do come in shallow,
15 you know, following bait and temperature things like that, but I
16 think the red tide was a big factor at that point, and maybe it
17 just hasn't gotten better for them to come back in.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Childress. Not seeing any other
20 questions, next up is Mr. Randy Lauser, followed by Mr. Jason
21 Underwood.

22
23 **MR. RANDY LAUSER:** Good morning, council. Randy Lauser, owner of
24 a longline boat in the Gulf of America. I just gave up fishing
25 there six months ago, but I'm all for a red grouper increase,
26 because, back down in Key West, when you all implemented Amendment
27 53, everything was great.

28
29 We told you what was going to happen when you all did that. I was
30 paying thirty-cents a pound for red grouper release, and, after
31 you all did that, it went up to \$1.50 to \$2.00 a pound, and it
32 just got out of hand, and then, with the gag groupers, losing the
33 gag groupers on top of that, that just added to -- I mean, that
34 was a pretty big financial cut that the fishermen took, and so I'm
35 all for a red grouper increase, and, right now, with the fishery
36 the way it is, with the IFQ system, it's out of hand. It's out of
37 hand.

38
39 It wasn't made to be a stock market. It was made to be in the
40 fishermen. Whenever it went public, it just ruined everything.
41 It should have been in the hands of the fishermen. That's why you
42 see no new people coming into fishery, because it's too expensive.
43 You can't get these young guys, when they got to go borrow a
44 million bucks from their parents to come into the fishery, because
45 it's all out of hand.

46
47 It's just way too expensive, and, if you give us something -- I
48 don't -- I mean, just Amendment 53 alone is what jacked the price

1 up, and so, if you give us those fish back, I think it would be
2 good. It would bring the lease price down, the share price down,
3 and it would make it the fishermen, who are catching the fish --
4 It would make us a lot happier, because we took a really major hit
5 from the gags and the red groupers alone, and so thank you very
6 much.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Lauser. We have a question from
9 Mr. Strelcheck.

10
11 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Randy, thanks for being here. You mentioned
12 you're supportive of an increase. We've heard a lot of testimony
13 about kind of more modest increases relative to what the stock
14 assessment indicates, and I'm just curious your perspective on the
15 health and status of the fishery and the size of the increase for
16 red grouper.

17
18 **MR. LAUSER:** Well, the status of the fishery is great. At our
19 fish house, you can come down see how many red groupers are
20 unloading. We have no problem, even above the 28 line. All the
21 way up to the 28-40, we're catching fish. We don't we don't see
22 a problem, and it was fine until Amendment 53 went in.

23
24 That amount of fish is what killed the market right there. That's
25 what drove the lease price sky high, and everybody is making money
26 but the fishermen. The fishermen are paying for the IFQ system,
27 and the shareholders aren't. It's just it's not fair, and we need
28 to revamp the IFQ system and make it where it's for the fishermen,
29 and not for a stock market, like it is right now. Thank you.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Lauser. Next up is Mr. Jason
32 Underwood, followed by Brendan Baldwin.

33
34 **MR. JASON UNDERWOOD:** How you doing? Jason Underwood, boat owner
35 and operator. I think we should give a lump sum for the red
36 grouper back, so the fishermen can start making money. It's all
37 IFQ, and every -- The IFQ shareholders, they're making all the
38 money on it. They're raking us over the coals, from red snapper
39 to gags to red grouper, and, until something changes, it's -- Our
40 profits are going down into the tanks, and it's hard to make a
41 living at the way it is, and that's it.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Underwood. Any questions? Not
44 seeing any, next up is Mr. Brendan Baldwin, followed by Trenton
45 Knepp.

46
47 **MR. BRENDAN BALDWIN:** How are you guys doing? Brendan Baldwin,
48 one of the young guys in the fishery, nine years now running a

1 boat, and it's almost become impossible for us to make a paycheck,
2 with the snapper quota prices being four bucks, the red grouper
3 price is almost two dollars, and no gags. It's becoming a very
4 major issue.

5
6 The scamp deal, the reason we're not seeing the scamps is none of
7 us are allowed to keep any gags, and so nobody is going out to the
8 deep water to target them. That's why you're not seeing them.

9
10 With the red grouper issue, I believe that giving the commercial
11 guys the quota will do a large help for us. It will benefit us in
12 the long run, help us make a little more money while we're dealing
13 with the gag situation that you guys have put on us, and that's
14 all I've got.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Baldwin. Do we have any questions?
17 Not seeing any, next up is Mr. Trenton Knepp, followed by Mr. Dylan
18 Hubbard.

19
20 **MR. TRENTON KNEPP:** Hi, and my name is Trenton Knepp. I'm a
21 commercial grouper fisherman. I do a little bit of stone crabbing
22 as well. My parents have had commercial longline boats since I
23 was knee high to a grasshopper, the way they say.

24
25 We know that we have -- Trump has signed an executive order to
26 figure out why U.S. production is down and how we can help the
27 fishermen and what the holdbacks are, and, yesterday, we had a
28 little open panel discussion amongst the council members, and I
29 was shocked and appalled that out of -- I mean, I know we've got
30 some very, very intelligent people at this table.

31
32 I truly believe you are some of the smartest of the smart around
33 here, and for not one single person to go, you know, maybe these
34 fishermen paying five-dollars a pound for the right to catch a red
35 snapper could be a financial holdback is absolutely preposterous.
36 It's insane. It's mind-blowing.

37
38 My buyer, last year, was getting red snapper from overseas for
39 five dollars a pound. After you factor on the NOAA 3 percent, I'm
40 paying five-dollars a pound for the right to catch red snapper,
41 and so, if I'm making zero dollars and zero cents, how many pounds
42 do you have to catch to become a millionaire? We've got to factor
43 in fuel and bait and wear and tear, and it's absolutely insane.

44
45 I know that most of the people here were not here when the whole
46 thing was started. There was a book wrote about the whole IFQ
47 system called *The Fish Market*. I've got plenty of copies in my
48 truck, if anyone would like to read about how it started and how

1 it has destroyed fisheries all across the world, and not just here.
2 It's just absolutely insane.

3
4 I mean, and, red grouper, two bucks a pound. Now, this year, red
5 snapper overseas is up, because of tariffs and stuff, but now I
6 can't find red snapper quota, and no one will lease it to me. I
7 asked a million fishermen to come here to testify, and none of
8 them will show up, because of a couple reasons.

9
10 One, they say our voice is not being heard, and it's never been
11 heard, and I kind of feel like that. Two, I have text messages
12 where fishermen are saying I'm not coming, because I don't want to
13 be blackballed, and then there's three, and they saw how I got
14 harassed after I started showing up, and so I don't know, and the
15 whole system is a wreck.

16
17 We're live streaming on TikTok. This is our first TikTok council
18 member live stream, to my knowledge, and so I just thought I would
19 throw that in. I've got a Starlink on the boat, and we live
20 stream offshore every day. If you want to see how hard a guy works
21 on a little dinky day boat, check us out, and you might feel a
22 little bit sorry for us. I don't know, and it's a mess.

23
24 We lost our home into the hurricane. We don't have enough money
25 to build back, and my job is so unprofitable that there's no hope
26 in getting a mortgage to build back, at my age, and why? Because
27 all the money goes to pay these stupid shares.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Knepp. Do we have any questions?
30 Not seeing any, Dylan.

31
32 **MR. DYLAN HUBBARD:** All right. Thank you for the opportunity to
33 speak. I first want to start by thanking Tom and Troy for their
34 service. I apologize that I had something come up last night, and
35 I missed the soiree, but I definitely appreciate all you've done,
36 Tom, especially for me, as a mentor and someone I've looked up to
37 that's focusing on the fish, and so thank you, Tom.

38
39 Also, as far as gag grouper, and, also, I want to mention that I'm
40 speaking on behalf of the Destin Charter Boat Association, the
41 Charter Fishermen's Association, and the Florida Guides
42 Association as well.

43
44 On gags, I would suggest the council, moving forward, is very
45 conservative in setting the recreational season, that window we
46 were given of fourteen to twenty days. I definitely want to have
47 the longest possible season, for the most amount of access, but I
48 also am very, very cautious about overrunning the quota and having

1 more paybacks next year, and so being conservative this year could
2 potentially allow us a lot more exponential access next year, as
3 those quotas continue to go up in this rebuilding program.

4
5 As far as shallow-water grouper goes, I support the effort of the
6 council to separate out black grouper moving forward in 58A. That
7 discussion around the table was very, very good, and I suggest
8 that we continue on with that effort.

9
10 Also, I support the effort to reduce the buffer of the ABC control
11 rule. The yellowmouth grouper recreational landings are so small
12 that it doesn't make sense to add an additional 4 percent buffer
13 on the recreational fleet because of those minuscule landings.

14
15 As far as the executive order directive, I support fully the
16 removal of the twenty-fathom closure. I think that's an easy
17 deregulation. I just want to throw that out there. Also, the
18 shark fin ban effort I think would be really great to see removed.

19
20 Also, turtle gear requirements, and we talked -- Or you guys talked
21 about it around the table, as far as the commercial vessels, but,
22 also, I want to put a reminder out there that charter boats have
23 to carry those ridiculous turtle requirements as well, and so I
24 would like to see those removed. Also, the removal of the crew
25 size restriction as well.

26
27 As far as red grouper goes, I look forward to seeing the season
28 projections based on Action 1. I think that will really drive the
29 conversation, where those season projections come. Also, in Action
30 2, I fully support Alternative 2. I just want to mention, again,
31 removing that twenty-fathom closure.

32
33 Then, finally, I'll conclude with full support moving forward with
34 SEFHIER. I know it was supposed to be talked about at this meeting,
35 but things kind of changed around, but, moving forward, I would
36 like to keep that in the forefront of the council's mind, standing
37 back up SEFHIER as soon as possible for our federal for-hire fleet.
38 Thank you.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Hubbard. We have a question from
41 Mr. Walker.

42
43 **MR. WALKER:** Thanks, Dylan. I would be interested in hearing your
44 opinion on how the red grouper increase might be implemented on
45 the recreational side. Would you be in favor of all of it right
46 out of the gate or a phased approach? I can tell you that's been
47 a big conversation around the council, and all opinions, especially
48 the recreational side, we would love to hear more.

1
2 **MR. HUBBARD:** I mean, for me, red grouper is one of those things
3 that we depend on pretty heavily. Red grouper, especially in those
4 times when things aren't open, outside of the summertime season
5 for example, and we need a fish to sell trips, and red grouper is
6 one of those things that we can rely on in south central and
7 southwest Florida.

8
9 It's very prevalent, and it's a big fish, and so it helps us to
10 sell trips. In the summertime, it's helpful to have it open,
11 because you encounter those red grouper so often in deep water,
12 while we're out there fishing for red snapper, and so, on one side
13 of the coin, it's like keep them closed in the summer, and we've
14 got red snapper to sell, but then you have a lot of regulatory
15 discards, and so having red grouper open, if the science says we
16 can have them open, I think I would support.

17
18 As far as like a conservative step forward, and maybe a stepwise
19 increase, it's hard to come out and support fully, but it's all
20 about the fish, right, and, if we're focusing on the fish, I think
21 that's a conservative step forward, and I think it could
22 potentially maybe alleviate some of the economic concerns that a
23 lot of the back of the room has, that we're working towards
24 increasing, but maybe doing it more conscientiously, with the fish
25 at the forefront of the conversation, but I want more red grouper
26 access, to answer your question.

27
28 **MR. WALKER:** Fair enough. Thank you for your insight there.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Hubbard. Not seeing any other
31 questions, next up is Mr. Charlie Renier, followed by Mr. David
32 Johnson.

33
34 **MR. CHARLIE RENIER:** My name is Charlie Renier, second-generation
35 fisherman. My daughter is third generation, working at my fish
36 house now. I was born and raised in the Keys. You all have heard
37 my story. It's all I know, is seafood. We catch it, and we feed
38 people.

39
40 When you all started with the quota system -- I talked to four of
41 my fishermen yesterday. The quota system was made to go up and
42 down. That way, they could fish all the time, all year, and go
43 when they wanted. The four fishermen I talked to yesterday got
44 right around a hundred thousand pounds issued to them when it was
45 started. The most one has today is 32,000. Never bought or sold
46 a fish. They caught them all, and so they have lost two-thirds of
47 what they were assigned to start with, and so, theoretically, you
48 all have taken two-thirds of all our fish, total, off the board.

1
2 Basically, our fishery is the red grouper fishery. We buy catch
3 gags, and we buy catch snappers. Snappers, we pay \$4.85 a pound,
4 for snapper quota, and the boats get \$6.85. They make two-dollars
5 a pound.
6
7 Our gag grouper now, that we used to pay two-dollars for quota,
8 we're now paying five-dollars for. It's an eight or an \$8.50 fish.
9 They make three-dollars on gags, and so we're left with our red
10 grouper, which is where we make our money.
11
12 I have to lease enough red grouper, in January and February, to
13 get all my boats through the entire year, because, if I don't, we
14 don't get to fish, and so we get all ours right off the bat. We
15 go lease it.
16
17 Since you all have taken that 420,000, 460,000, pounds, our quota
18 did go from fifty-cents to \$1.85. That was huge to us. I mean,
19 that huge. We hardly ever catch 200,000 or 300,000 pounds, because
20 the guys that got the quota at the end of the year are always
21 trying to get three-dollars a pound for it. It's absolutely
22 ridiculous.
23
24 My boats, I keep them on limits. We can catch a lot more. I know
25 I can catch, just at my fish house -- Them boats can catch another
26 500,000 pounds of red grouper, if we had them. You all are talking
27 about giving us 1.6 million. To me, that's great.
28
29 500,000 is going to get us even back where we were. 500,000 is
30 what we're going to catch extra, and so that leaves another 600,000
31 for the rest of the fleet, which probably is pretty close, because
32 I think I have half the longline boats in the fleet fish for me.
33 We survive off of that.
34
35 Now, the difference is, on a red grouper boat, an average trip is
36 5,000 pounds of red grouper to the boat. That dollar a pound,
37 that they're not going to have to pay for the quota, means that
38 captain and crew and boat makes \$5,000 extra a trip. Twelve trips
39 a year is \$60,000. \$60,000 these guys huge, huge, especially since
40 we lost the gags, and now you all are taking deepwater from us.
41
42 I mean, you're painting us in the corner. We're here to help.
43 Month after month, I come up here and tell you all we have more
44 gags than we have ever seen in our life, and, for four years, I've
45 been saying send the scientists to us, so we can take them and
46 show them. I haven't seen them. They don't want to go out in the
47 boat. They don't want to see what we got to tell them.
48

1 You all need to understand that these fish move. They don't stay
2 in the same spot. Gags are usually in the deeper water. Since
3 the hurricanes, there are gags everywhere, the beaches, the canals,
4 all over. All the deep water gags, all the gags everywhere, have
5 been pushed in our area. There's tons of gags.

6
7 The red grouper, I personally -- Me personally, because of the
8 twenty-fathom rule on the commercial boats, I don't ever think
9 that we can hurt the red grouper, in our fishery, because 75
10 percent of the bottom that you catch red grouper in are inside 120
11 feet. We fish about 25 percent of the bottom. It's probably the
12 best rule you all ever made, was the twenty-fathom rule, because
13 I can go forward in my life knowing my daughter could run a fish
14 house for fifty years and still have red grouper to catch.

15
16 The red grouper inshore, we don't ever go in there. Yes, some of
17 the pleasure boats do, but we don't, and that's our breeding ground
18 that feeds us offshore.

19
20 We need help. We're constantly here asking you all for help. I've
21 spent millions of dollars in buying quota, millions of dollars. I
22 had nothing. I was in a different fishery. When I came to St.
23 Pete, I bought quota, boats, permits. I've got millions of dollars
24 tied up in it. We feed millions of people.

25
26 Like Jason said, you may have a hundred people that have got one,
27 two, three-million-dollar boats to run offshore and catch a
28 deepwater grouper. What about the millions of people we feed? I
29 mean let's think about that. This is for the better of everybody.
30 It's not the Gulf of Mexico, and it's the Gulf of America. We're
31 feeding Americans.

32
33 Help us out, and, when you need help with us, come see us. We're
34 willing to do anything. We don't want to kill off a fishery. We
35 want to keep it there.

36
37 Another thing I want to bring up is about the sat phones that Mr.
38 Kramer brought up. The one thing he did not say is, when they
39 call us and want to put an observer on the boat, if they come down
40 and the observer won't get on our boat, because it doesn't have an
41 inspection or a satellite phone, we get a fine. I know, because
42 I've got plenty of them. The first one starts out at \$10,000, and
43 you negotiate down to \$1,000. It happens again, it's \$2,500. It
44 happens again, it's \$10,000.

45
46 That new Starlink is the best thing going. Somebody needs to step
47 up in here, and get with the Coast Guard, and we need to get
48 something done. Every boat I've got Starlink on, I could talk to

1 twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Some of my boats have
2 got three sat phones on them, and I can't get to them, and so, you
3 know, just think about us, guys.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Renier. Any comments? Do we have
6 any questions? Mr. Sanchez.

7
8 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Hello, Charlie. I would like to hear your take on
9 the 750-hook regulation in deep water.

10
11 **MR. RENIER:** Okay, and here's what I'll tell you. 750 hooks in
12 shallow water is absolutely no problem. When we step outside, in
13 that deep water, we need to be at 1,500 hooks. Years ago, we
14 fished 3,000 out there. You have to cover -- When we're catching
15 grouper, we're setting on fish in bottom.

16
17 We're looking for edges, holes, fish. When you're out in that
18 deep water, and people don't realize it, and most of the yellowedge
19 grouper we catch are out in the mud. Sometimes they'll come to
20 the to the edge to spawn, but, offshore, we need to be able to put
21 some hooks and some gear out there to catch them fish.

22
23 It's a lot harder fishery, especially with only 750 hooks. If we
24 were able to double up offshore -- If a boat goes offshore, he
25 should be able to have those hooks, for sure, and I know a lot of
26 those guys over in the Gulf -- They're all fishing 3,000 hooks.
27 They couldn't survive with 750 hooks out of Louisiana and Texas.
28 No way.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

31
32 **MR. SANCHEZ:** In previous testimonies, we've heard that the effort
33 has declined in the deep water, because the captains aren't there,
34 and the boats aren't there.

35
36 **MR. RENIER:** Absolutely.

37
38 **MR. SANCHEZ:** The fleet isn't there. If we were to do something
39 with the hooks, to get that right, would that -- Would they come
40 back?

41
42 **MR. RENIER:** Absolutely. Absolutely, and the other thing I heard
43 yesterday -- Everybody was worried about a glut of fish coming.
44 If they dump fish at the end of the year, a glut. October,
45 November, December, that's our winter months. It's rough. You've
46 got Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's. Nobody fishes hard those
47 three months.

48

1 There's not going to be any big amount of fish caught, and, if you
2 did dump a big amount of fish, it doesn't matter what time, and
3 there's not the boats to go catch them anymore. You all have --
4 I've got two longline boats at the dock, because I don't have a
5 captain and crew for them.

6
7 We are constantly hunting young guys, and I think, if we were to
8 get some cheaper fish, it would help these young guys come back to
9 fish, because they know they would make some more money.

10
11 If you think about it, our longline boats -- It's \$7,000 to \$10,000
12 for them to leave the dock, because they go for ten to fourteen
13 days, and so they've got to catch \$7,000 to \$10,000 worth of fish
14 to break even, and that's what a lot of people don't think about.

15
16 They're like these guys are catching all these fish, and where's
17 all the money, and it's expensive. It's expensive to run a boat.
18 It costs a lot to go catch fish, but, like I said, we're here
19 feeding millions of Americans, and not one or two sport boats
20 running offshore catching the fish and some millionaire to put one
21 up and say look what I caught. All the people all over this
22 country, that can't afford to go catch it, can go to a restaurant
23 and eat it, and that's what we're here for.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Renier.

26
27 **MR. RENIER:** You're welcome.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up, we have Mr. David Johnson, followed by
30 Ms. Susan Boggs.

31
32 **MR. DAVID JOHNSON:** Good afternoon, council. David Johnson. I'm
33 a longline captain and boat owner. Sorry that I'm a little
34 unprepared. I just hit the dock this morning and just unloaded.
35 To all those people who say there's no fish above the 28 line, you
36 bumped your head, and you need to hire a new captain.

37
38 Anyways, I am all for the red grouper increase. Anybody who says
39 this is not about economics is a shareholder who doesn't want to
40 see their shares decrease in value. We need it. Everybody here
41 has told you. An increase in everything else has decreased the
42 profits in the industry as a whole. I'm working harder to make
43 less money. That's the truth, you know, and so I am all for the
44 red grouper increase. I think it's what this industry needs,
45 especially in this area.

46
47 Gag grouper, you can't get away from them. You know, I have done
48 probably 70 percent of my career fishing in greater than 200 foot

1 of water, you know. The forty break, forty fathoms, that's been
2 where I've been much of my career.

3
4 I can't go there much anymore, because there are so many gags, and
5 so, this past year, I'm like, okay, I'll fish the fence, and I'll
6 be one of those guys, a red grouper pounder. I'm catching gags
7 right on the fence, where you've never seen them before. There's
8 gags everywhere, and we need to, you know, maybe get a little more
9 better data.

10
11 I would like to get these opened up maybe a little quicker than
12 the proposed time there. I mean, I'm a little unprepared. As I
13 said, I just hit the dock. If you guys have got any questions,
14 I'm happy to answer them.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Johnson. Do we have any questions?
17 I'm not seeing any. Thank you. Next up is Ms. Susan Boggs.

18
19 **MS. SUSAN BOGGS:** Good morning, council. My name is Susan Boggs,
20 Reel Surprise Charters and Marina at Orange Beach, Alabama. Tom
21 and Troy, thank you for your time on this council. I really
22 appreciate working with you all at the time that I was here. Tom,
23 you've been a great mentor, and you've taught me a lot over the
24 last many, many years. Thank you for that.

25
26 I'm here today to talk about the Southeast Regional Headboat Survey
27 and the funding that has not been available for the port agents.
28 We own a sixty- five-foot headboat, federally-permitted, in the
29 Gulf of America. We've been reporting to this survey for twenty-
30 three years. It's one of the longest-running surveys in the Gulf
31 of America and the South Atlantic.

32
33 This is the only data that has been used as a proxy in most of the
34 documents that come before this council to make decisions on
35 seasons and bag limits. The port agents are a necessity to be
36 able to collect the additional data for the weights, the lengths,
37 to take the otoliths out to do the ageing on these fish.

38
39 We all know that data collection without any kind of validation is
40 not valid data collection, and my understanding is this survey has
41 been one of the very few that can be used as a proxy being used in
42 these documents to determine basically everything that the
43 recreational, or the charter-for-hire, excuse me, can catch and
44 how you set your limits.

45
46 This is important to me. Our daughter is twenty years old. She's
47 coming into the fishery. She's got her own boat. She's a 200-
48 ton master licensed captain now. This is important for her future,

1 and I would really press the agency and the Science Center to
2 please find the funding for this.

3
4 We want to participate. My concern is lack of compliance will
5 continue to go down, or not continue, but will go down, because we
6 know that, without the validation, you can't use the data, and I
7 don't want to see this lose -- This survey lose its integrity for
8 this council to use for making these decisions.

9
10 Just real quickly, grouper, you all have got me so confused on
11 grouper. Just think about what you're doing, and don't end up
12 having all these unintended consequences that will affect the
13 commercial fishermen.

14
15 They seem to be the ones that are going to be impacted the most,
16 with whatever decisions that you all make, and I do have a quick
17 comment, or question, actually back to the council. Yesterday,
18 when you all were talking about the executive orders, there was a
19 comment about anywhere "commercial fishery" is used, if fishery -
20 - If "commercial" is not in front of it, that's charter fishery.

21
22 Would it not be also -- If it's not a commercial fishery, it would
23 be all other fisheries, meaning recreational, private, and I just
24 wanted to clarify that, because I would think it would have to be
25 all-inclusive, and it couldn't just be just one other sector.
26 Thank you for your time.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Boggs. Do we have any questions?
29 Not seeing any, okay, and we're going to go online, Bernie, to
30 Andy Egeland.

31
32 **MS. ROY:** Mr. Egeland, you'll have to unmute your line to speak.

33
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Well, that's the end of public comment.
35 Before we move along, I would like to thank all the folks in the
36 groups that put on the social last night. It's much appreciated.
37 Thank you, all, and honoring Dr. Frazer for sure. Thank you.

38
39 Let's take a fifteen-minute break, and let's come back at 11:45
40 and start with the Mackerel Committee, and then move into Reef
41 Fish until our lunch at 12:30. Thank you.

42
43 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, folks. We're going to get started with the
46 Mackerel Committee report, and Mr. Walker is going to take us
47 through that.

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COMMITTEE REPORTS
MACKEREL COMMITTEE REPORT

MR. WALKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Mackerel Committee adopted the agenda, Tab C, Number 1, and approved the minutes, Tab C, Number 2, of the January 2025 meeting as written.

Final Action: Modification of the Gulf Migratory Group Spanish Mackerel Catch Limits, Tab C, Numbers 4(a) and (c), the committee reviewed Draft Framework Action 14 along with the associated public comment summary and codified text.

For Spanish mackerel catch limits, Action 1, the committee decided to update catch levels to reflect those produced as a result of the most recent stock assessment, SEDAR 81, and set the acceptable biological catch equal to the stock annual catch limit, ACL.

The committee also decided to modify the accountability measures, Action 2, such that the stock ACL -- If the stock ACL is exceeded in a fishing year, then, the following fishing year, the Regional Administrator will close the fishing season for Gulf Spanish mackerel for the commercial and recreational fishing sectors if the stock ACL is reached or projected to be reached.

The committee recommends, and I so move, to recommend the council approve modifications to Spanish mackerel catch Limits in the Gulf of America and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary changes in the document. The council chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and appropriate. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Thank you, Mr. Walker. We have a committee motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? I'll take a moment for folks online, if they have a comment. Okay, and I'm not seeing any hands up. We're going to do a roll call vote. Dr. Simmons.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Sanchez.

MR. SANCHEZ: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Broussard.

MR. BROUSSARD: Yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. McDermott.

1
2 **MR. MCDERMOTT:** Yes.
3
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Frady.
5
6 **MR. FRADY:** Yes.
7
8 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Geeslin.
9
10 **MR. GEESLIN:** Yes.
11
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Anson.
13
14 **MR. ANSON:** Yes.
15
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Sweetman.
17
18 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes.
19
20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Schieble.
21
22 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes.
23
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Burris.
25
26 **MR. BURRIS:** Yes.
27
28 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Osborne. I'm not sure if he's on
29 or not. No? Okay. Dr. Overton.
30
31 **DR. OVERTON:** Yes.
32
33 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Williamson.
34
35 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** Yes.
36
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Frazer.
38
39 **DR. FRAZER:** Yes.
40
41 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Walker.
42
43 **MR. WALKER:** Yes.
44
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Banks.
46
47 **DR. BANKS:** Yes.
48

1 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

2
3 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes.

4
5 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dugas.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes.

8
9 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** **The motion carried unanimously with**
10 **one absent, Mr. Chair.**

11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Okay. Is there any other
13 business that needs to be discussed before the Mackerel Committee?
14 Not seeing any, okay, and we're going to move to the Reef Fish
15 Committee report. Dr. Frazer.

16
17 **REEF FISH COMMITTEE REPORT**

18
19 **DR. FRAZER:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The committee
20 adopted the agenda, Tab B, Number 1, and the minutes, Gab B, Number
21 2, from the April 2025 meeting were approved as written.

22
23 A discussion of the 2025 recreational gag grouper fishing season,
24 Tab B, Number 4, Southeast Regional Office staff reviewed the
25 landings from the 2024 gag grouper recreational fishing season,
26 which resulted in an annual catch limit average of 88,991 pounds
27 of gutted weight.

28
29 This results in a reduced 2025 recreational ACL of 310,009 pounds
30 gutted weight and an annual catch target of 230,009 pounds gutted
31 weight, with a projected season duration of fourteen days, based
32 on the 2024 estimated fishing effort, or twenty days, based on the
33 average of 2023 and 2024. SERO is still reviewing these data and
34 will announce the 2025 recreational gag fishing season duration as
35 soon as possible.

36
37 A committee member asked whether SERO had made any progress on the
38 council's emergency rule request to reduce the recreational gag
39 limit to one fish per person per day for 2025. SERO replied that
40 they had prioritized the red grouper emergency rule and were still
41 reviewing the gag emergency rule request.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman, you have a question?

44
45 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and thank you, Mr. Chair, and so just a comment
46 here. I mean, I would certainly -- We've got, in Florida, some
47 significant concerns, obviously, with this gag fishery, and the
48 repeated cycles of overages, and so I would urge our federal

1 colleagues a little caution when setting this season here.

2
3 I'm looking forward to seeing what happens with the emergency rule
4 request for the bag limit reduction too, and then I guess the
5 question that I have is we kind of have a standing request about
6 an interim analysis for gag grouper, but I don't think we've
7 actually ever received one, and I'm just curious. I see Ryan
8 jumping up here. Go ahead.

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

11
12 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Thank you. Yes, and we actually just spoke to
13 the Science Center about that today, and they're going to be
14 talking with FWC about the timing of receiving the G-FISHER data
15 for 2024. As far as -- The letter was sent back in November of
16 2023, and then they had to go through the process of preparing the
17 interim analysis for being able to use G-FISHER, and last year was
18 a busy SSC year, with a bunch of stock assessments being reviewed,
19 and so things were kind of stacked, but we'll be ready for that
20 this fall, and, if we need to move the SSC meeting date in order
21 to accommodate the timing of when the G-FISHER data will be
22 available, then we'll do that, and so we'll keep you guys apprised.

23
24 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Ryan.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Mr. Strelcheck.

27
28 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, C.J., thanks for your comments.
29 Obviously, we haven't decided on when we'll be able to announce
30 this, but, obviously, we're trying to do it as soon as possible.
31 I guess I wanted to ask you and the other states, kind of
32 considering any sort of consistency requirements, if there's some
33 timing limitations that we need to be considering with regard to
34 announcement of the season, so that you could implement a
35 consistent season as well.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

38
39 **DR. SWEETMAN:** We briefed our commission two weeks ago about the
40 potential overage and the season structure of how it might be set
41 up, and so we've already highlighted to them that our staff
42 recommendation will be to go consistent with that, and we could do
43 that through an executive order, rather than formal rulemaking,
44 and so we can do it pretty rapidly.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Frazer.

47
48 **DR. FRAZER:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Final Action:

1 Framework Action: Other Shallow-Water Grouper Catch Limits, Tab B,
2 Number 5, the council staff reviewed written public comments
3 received regarding proposed management changes in the draft
4 framework action.

5
6 Following a committee member's question, council staff will try to
7 gather analytics from pushing public comment noticing through the
8 Fish Rules regulations app by Full Council. Council staff reviewed
9 the actions and current preferred alternatives with the committee.

10
11 A committee member noted the proposed catch limit reductions for
12 the other shallow-water grouper complex, and, since these
13 reductions stem from proposed reductions for scamp and yellowmouth
14 grouper, asked about the feasibility of the concurrent reduction
15 in the recreational fishing season being applied only to scamp and
16 yellowmouth grouper and not to black grouper and yellowfin grouper.

17
18 Council staff replied that the complex would need to be divided
19 and managed separately in that way, as is proposed in Reef Fish
20 Amendment 58A. This framework action is intended to be a stopgap
21 measure until Reef Fish Amendment 50A can be completed and
22 implemented. NOAA General Counsel asked that the council staff
23 update the document with a history of the catch level
24 recommendations from the council's Scientific and Statistical
25 Committee. SERO staff reviewed the proposed changes to the
26 codified text.

27
28 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to approve the Framework**
29 **Action: Other Shallow-Water Complex Management Measures and that**
30 **it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and**
31 **implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and**
32 **appropriate, giving the staff editorial license to make the**
33 **necessary changes to the document. The council chair is given the**
34 **authority to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary**
35 **and appropriate.** That motion carried without opposition.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. We have a committee motion
38 on the board. Is there any discussion? Dr. Sweetman.

39
40 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just to kind of highlight some of the discussions
41 that we had during committee, but, obviously, this would be applied
42 to the entire shallow-water grouper complex, including black
43 grouper, and so, from my perspective, it's my intent, as we move
44 forward with 58A, to -- Obviously, we don't have significant
45 concerns, like we have with scamp, for black grouper, and so having
46 a season applied to them might not make sense, and potentially
47 even discussion about splitting that out of the complex, and so I
48 know some of our --

1
2 Especially people in south Florida are going to be concerned about
3 a season being set up for black grouper in the Gulf when there's,
4 at the moment, no current conservation issues that we're trying to
5 navigate there, and it's more or less just a function of the way
6 that this complex is set up, and so I just kind of want to point
7 that out there for the general public, that I hear your concern
8 there, and we'll work in the future, you know, through 58A, to try
9 and fix that issue.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Sanchez.

12
13 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I would agree with, with Dr. Sweetman on
14 that, and, also, it is jointly managed with the Atlantic, and so
15 another reason to kind of treat that one differently and separate
16 it out.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Walker.

19
20 **MR. WALKER:** Just to clarify, and is approving this, approving all
21 of the changes that we made -- Are we going to go through -- Does
22 this encompass all of the other things that we went through on
23 this issue or --

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

26
27 **MR. WALKER:** It does include the catch limits and the seasons, and
28 we're voting that up or down right now? Okay, and I just -- Thank
29 you.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Is there any other questions, or comments, on the
32 motion? Not seeing any, this will be a roll call vote. Dr.
33 Simmons.

34
35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I'm sorry. Mr. Anson.

38
39 **MR. ANSON:** I was wondering, and I thought maybe Troy had a motion
40 or something that he wanted to discuss during this item, Troy
41 Frady.

42
43 **MR. FRADY:** Yes, sir. Thank you. We're up here in the northern
44 Gulf, and we're trying to figure out what to do about the shallow-
45 water grouper, and, you know, I wanted to make a motion in Action
46 2.2, Action 2, to choose Alternative 4 as the preferred.

47
48 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Let's go to Ms. Levy. Is this okay,

1 since we have a -- This was a committee motion to forward it, and
2 can we go back and open up the document and look at the preferreds
3 again?
4

5 **MS. LEVY:** Technically, we should have done this before, right?
6 You can't make a substitute motion, but I guess you could agree,
7 as a Full Council to -- You could table this, right, and a motion
8 to table, and so then it stops, and you discuss what should have
9 happened before, and then you untable it. That technically I think
10 would be the appropriate procedure, and then you don't debate the
11 motion to table. You just vote to table.
12

13 **MR. FRADY:** Okay, and so I would make a motion to table, and is
14 that correct, to make a motion to table?
15

16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** If that's what you would like to do, yes, sir.
17

18 **MR. FRADY:** Yes, sir.
19

20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So, Mr. Frady, you are welcome to make a motion
21 to table this one, and we'll vote it up or down.
22

23 **MR. FRADY:** Yes, sir. Thank you.
24

25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson.
26

27 **MR. ANSON:** I'll second.
28

29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson seconds. Mr. Frady, is the motion on
30 the board your intent?
31

32 **MR. FRADY:** Yes, sir.
33

34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Is there any further discussion on Mr.
35 Frady's motion? Okay. There's no discussion, and I'm sorry.
36 We're going to it vote up or down. Is there any opposition to the
37 motion? Okay. Bernie, we have to go online and see if there's
38 any opposition to Mr. Frady's motion.
39

40 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** So can I -- So I think there's a bit
41 of confusion, Mara, and so I think what Captain Frady is trying to
42 do is not take final action, and so we open the document back up,
43 and I thought he wanted to bring up another point on the season,
44 and then come back and still potentially take final action, but I
45 believe he was wanting to go back and look at the preferred
46 alternatives, I believe.
47

48 **MR. FRADY:** That is correct.

1
2 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** So is this the correct process?
3
4 **MR. FRADY:** That is what I wanted to --
5
6 **MS. LEVY:** So we're tabling the motion that was on the board so
7 that you can discuss something else that needs to happen before
8 you address that. Then we go back, and you untable the motion you
9 just tabled, once you finish your discussion.
10
11 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** But we're not tabling taking final
12 action at this meeting. I think people were confused about that.
13
14 **MS. LEVY:** As long as you vote to untable, when you're done with
15 your discussion, then you go back to that motion to take final
16 action.
17
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Okay, council members, and
19 we're having some confusion, and so we're going to switch gears
20 and go to a roll call vote. Dr. Simmons and Bernie, whenever
21 you're ready. A roll call vote on the motion to table.
22
23 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** All right. Mr. Geeslin.
24
25 **MR. GEESLIN:** No.
26
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Frazer.
28
29 **DR. FRAZER:** No.
30
31 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Frady.
32
33 **MR. FRADY:** Yes.
34
35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. McDermott.
36
37 **MR. MCDERMOTT:** Yes.
38
39 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Broussard.
40
41 **MR. BROUSSARD:** No.
42
43 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Burris.
44
45 **MR. BURRIS:** Yes.
46
47 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Sanchez.
48

1 MR. SANCHEZ: Yes.
2
3 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Anson.
4
5 MR. ANSON: Yes.
6
7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Captain Walker.
8
9 MR. WALKER: No.
10
11 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Sweetman.
12
13 DR. SWEETMAN: No.
14
15 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Strelcheck.
16
17 MR. STRELCHECK: Yes.
18
19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Overton.
20
21 DR. OVERTON: Yes.
22
23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Banks.
24
25 DR. BANKS: No.
26
27 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Schieble.
28
29 MR. SCHIEBLE: No.
30
31 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Williamson.
32
33 MR. WILLIAMSON: No.
34
35 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Okay, and so motion failed eight to
36 seven with one absent.
37
38 CHAIRMAN DUGAS: I'm a no.
39
40 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Nine to seven.
41
42 CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Okay. The motion fails. I'm looking at Ms. Levy,
43 and so now we're back to the final action, the first motion.
44 Another roll call vote. Dr. Simmons and Bernie, whenever you're
45 ready. Dr. Simmons.
46
47 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr.
48 Anson.

1
2 **MR. ANSON:** Yes.
3
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Williamson.
5
6 **MR. WILLIAMS:** Yes.
7
8 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Geeslin.
9
10 **MR. GEESLIN:** Yes.
11
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Banks.
13
14 **DR. BANKS:** Yes.
15
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Osborne is absent. Mr. Sanchez.
17
18 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.
19
20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Walker.
21
22 **MR. WALKER:** No.
23
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Wait, and this is final action with
25 the preferred alternatives. Does everybody know what we're walking
26 through? Okay. Thank you. Dr. Overton.
27
28 **DR. OVERTON:** Yes.
29
30 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Was that your correct vote, sir? It's
31 hard to hear you. You said yes? Okay. Mr. Strelcheck.
32
33 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes.
34
35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Burris.
36
37 **MR. BURRIS:** Yes.
38
39 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. McDermott.
40
41 **MR. MCDERMOTT:** Yes.
42
43 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Schieble.
44
45 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes.
46
47 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Frazer.
48

1 **DR. FRAZER:** Yes.
2
3 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Sweetman.
4
5 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes.
6
7 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Frady.
8
9 **MR. FRADY:** No.
10
11 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Broussard.
12
13 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Yes.
14
15 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dugas.
16
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes.
18
19 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay. **The motion carried fourteen to**
20 **two with one absent.**
21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Dr. Frazer, are we going
23 to move down the -- Or maybe we won't. Dr. Simmons.
24
25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Well, I mean, I don't want to prolong
26 this here, but I think -- I think maybe just a learning maybe
27 lesson here, and so I guess, if, for the future, when we're taking
28 final action, and we're in committee, Ms. Levy, the right approach
29 would be to make sure that we're happy with the preferred
30 alternatives before the committee would move forward with the
31 document, potentially, and I think that's what we're trying to
32 undo, but, just in the future, I think that's maybe what happened,
33 and so try to get ahead of that, and I was just trying to explain
34 perhaps what occurred.
35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Okay, Dr. Frazer.
37
38 **DR. FRAZER:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and so a committee
39 member reiterated a sentiment of opposition to closing black
40 grouper as a result of this document. Council staff noted that an
41 option to modify the recreational fishing seasons in Reef Fish
42 Amendment 58A will be discussed later.
43
44 Summary of the May 2025 Gulf SSC meeting, Tab B, Number 6, Dr.
45 Allen reviewed the agenda items from the May 8, 2025 SSC meeting
46 associated with shrimp. He noted that there was a request to
47 council staff for the SSC to further discuss the shrimp bycatch
48 estimation methodology for finfish species at a future meeting.

1
2 A committee member noted that a SERO request would be forthcoming
3 for an agenda item on shrimp bycatch of protected resources during
4 the August 2025 council meeting.

5
6 Following a question by council staff, a committee member from
7 Florida said it was uncertain at this time if a joint effort by
8 the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils would be needed for smalltooth
9 sawfish.

10
11 Discussion on Executive Orders restoring American Seafood
12 Competitiveness, Tab B, Number 7, council staff provided an
13 overview of the Executive Orders Restoring American Seafood
14 Competitiveness, EO 14276, and Unleashing Prosperity Through
15 Deregulation, EO 14192, and reviewed the NOAA Assistant
16 Administrator's request for each regional management council to
17 provide a prioritized list of recommended actions to reduce
18 regulatory burdens on domestic fishing and increase production,
19 which has a deadline of September 30, 2025.

20
21 Staff outlined a plan to gather input for perspective actions from
22 the council's advisory panels and the public prior to further
23 discussion of the EOs at the August 2025 council meeting.

24
25 The committee discussed the need for further clarification on
26 regulatory, deregulatory, and routine council actions. The
27 committee also discussed the need to streamline management to align
28 with reductions in capacity for stock assessments and data
29 collection, which would reduce regulatory burdens.

30
31 A committee member mentioned that, although the executive orders
32 appear to be aimed toward commercial fisheries, they apply to both
33 commercial and recreational sectors, unless otherwise specified,
34 per the May 2025 Council Coordination Committee meeting.

35
36 The committee provided the following initial list of recommended
37 actions for further discussion and prioritization: remove low-
38 priority species from fishery management units, for example cubera
39 snapper and species in the jacks complex and other than greater
40 amberjack, species in the midwater snapper complex, other than
41 queen snapper and spiny lobster; multiyear ACLs and accountability
42 measures; carryover options for unharvested quota; allowing shark
43 harvest to alleviate depredation; streamlining stock assessments;
44 revisiting the shark fin ban; commercial and for-hire requirements
45 for turtle gear; crew size limits on dual-permitted vessels;
46 reporting requirements when not fishing; allowing red snapper
47 quota to move between states with a Gulf-wide quota; commercial
48 weight estimate requirement prior to landing fish; marine mammal

1 deterrence; regional management; and sector separation.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. We have a couple of hands
4 up. Mr. Schieble, and then Dr. Sweetman.

5
6 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I apologize. I guess I
7 was a little slow on drawing -- On getting my hand up on here to
8 ask a question. This is regarding the SSC summary topic, that we
9 just finished prior to getting to this, and maybe we can talk about
10 this later. I know we're going through priorities and task
11 scheduling at the end of the meeting, and this may be more relative
12 to that, but my question was going to be as far as timing of the
13 October SSC meeting.

14
15 I know there was some mention of potentially allowing the SSC more
16 time to review the shrimp bycatch reporting and publications that
17 were reviewed. Initially, it seemed like they were sort of short
18 on time, and had to skim through it, and I know Dr. Allen mentioned
19 that he felt that the SSC would potentially like to have time to
20 review it better at a forthcoming meeting.

21
22 We're going to be talking about the moratorium amendment for
23 shrimp, and so I'm assuming we're going to have a Shrimp Committee
24 meeting in August, and would it be relevant to have this back on
25 the agenda for the SSC at their October meeting, for potentially
26 a Shrimp AP meeting subsequently to that, or is this stuff we
27 should talk about later on, at the end of the meeting? Thank you.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Chris. Dr. Simmons.

30
31 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Well, I think I can try to address
32 that now, and so I think we're trying to figure out for our July
33 SSC meeting. Now that we have some stability with some funding,
34 I'm going to talk about, at the end, whether these materials, and
35 the presenters, would be available in July, to accomplish this, or
36 whether it would have to go to the October SSC meeting, and I don't
37 know the answer to that right now.

38
39 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Okay. As a follow up, are there plans to have a
40 Shrimp AP meeting in October then, or is that not scheduled yet?

41
42 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Not in particular to this issue. This
43 impacts -- The way I understand it, this bycatch estimation
44 methodology impacts all of the finfish stock assessments, and so
45 I don't think we are thinking of engaging directly with AP on that
46 right now. I'll look to Dr. Freeman, to see if I'm mistaken there.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and we'll move on. Dr. Sweetman had a

1 question.

2
3 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Can you just scroll down, Bernie, to that list, and
4 I'm just making sure that everything was kind of covered in there.
5 All right, and we've got -- So one thing that I'm not seeing here,
6 that I think I talked about yesterday, is the consideration for
7 ability to land species that exhibit depredation. Right now, they
8 just have to kind of throw them back. Am I missing that on here?
9 No, and I don't see it.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So, Dr. Sweetman, you want to add that to the
12 list?

13
14 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, Mr. Chair. Consideration for the ability to
15 land species that exhibit depredation, and so a fish that's been
16 bit in half, or something like that. Right now, they have to throw
17 them back.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.

20
21 **MS. LEVY:** I'm sure we can flesh this out, but do you mean outside
22 of season and size and bag and like -- Or just because they have
23 to normally land them whole?

24
25 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Because they have to normally land them whole.

26
27 **MS. LEVY:** Thanks.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and do we have any other questions or
30 comments? Mr. Walker.

31
32 **MR. WALKER:** So we have this list, and what are we doing with it?
33 It does have a deadline. It seems like we just put some stuff
34 down, and we're moving on, but is there a step we can take at this
35 meeting? I know we're going to get more input from -- I don't
36 know that we have time to do APs or something, but I know we're
37 expecting more input, but is there something we can start to
38 finalize or, you know, take a step forward, before we're out of
39 this meeting, on this executive order list, or are we just going
40 to move on?

41
42 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Well, and I guess you weren't paying
43 attention when I gave my presentation. Just kidding. Which is
44 understandable, and it was pretty dry.

45
46 **MR. WALKER:** You gave a presentation?

47
48 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I'm just joking, and, no, and I think

1 maybe we could prioritize these. Right now, I think, when you
2 think about binning them, maybe, and actually looking at the
3 regulations that are behind these -- Without looking at that, to
4 me, it's a little bit difficult.

5
6 The other question I had are just some of the general things, like
7 streamlining stock assessments, and that's kind of an enterprise
8 effort we've been undergoing currently with the Science Center,
9 through the SEDAR Steering Committee, and so that kind of fits
10 everything, and so is that, you know, just a general mission that
11 we're trying to accomplish, regardless of the executive order, and
12 so I have some questions like that, but I can reach out to
13 individual council members, but I would think, if there's certain
14 priorities that you guys can agree upon, that might help us right
15 now.

16
17 I would also look to Mr. Strelcheck, to see if he has additional
18 guidance on how we might accomplish this task after we get the
19 AP's feedback, as well as the public comment session we're planning
20 to have before the August meeting.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

23
24 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So, obviously, I don't view this as, you know, we
25 did this, and we put this list together, and we're moving on,
26 right, and so I feel like this is just the very first start of a
27 longer process. We want to get the AP's input, and we want to get
28 more ideas, beyond just what we discussed around this table, as
29 people think about them, and then I agree.

30
31 I think we come back to that and look at this list more
32 comprehensively. What are the deregulatory actions we can pursue?
33 What are things that are outside the scope of the council, that
34 are going to have to be forward to HMS, or the agency, or others,
35 and where does that then fall into our priorities for, you know,
36 for the mandated activities we're working on, as well as the
37 deregulatory actions we want to support.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Andy. Is there any further discussion?
40 I'm not seeing any. Let's take our lunch break. We're a few
41 minutes early. Let's take our lunch break until 1:00 Eastern Time,
42 and then we'll reconvene. Thank you.

43
44 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on June 4, 2025.)

45
46 - - -

47
48 June 4, 2025

1
2 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION
3
4 - - -
5

6 The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at the Gulf Council
7 office in Tampa, Florida on Wednesday afternoon, June 4, 2025, and
8 was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.
9

10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, folks. We're going to get started where we
11 left off, Reef Fish Amendment 58A. Dr. Frazer.
12

13 **DR. FRAZER:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and so Draft Options, Reef
14 Fish Amendment 58A, Shallow-Water Grouper Complex Management
15 Considerations, Tab B, Number 8. Dr. Allen reviewed the council's
16 motion for the SSC to review projections for F 30 percent SPR and
17 F 40 percent SPR for scamp and yellowmouth grouper.
18

19 The SSC made two motions for the 2027 through 2031, one for the
20 resulting OFL and ABC at F 40 percent SPR, and recommending it for
21 management, and another recognizing that the resulting OFL and ABC
22 for the F 30 percent SPR and not recommending it for management.
23

24 A committee member inquired if Alternative 2 in Action 2 is viable,
25 given the SSC's motion at its May 2025 meeting. Another committee
26 member recommended getting legal advice on the viability of
27 Alternative 2, and using an MSY proxy not supported by the SSC, as
28 not being consistent with the best scientific information
29 available and whether the alternative should be removed.
30

31 Council staff noted that the catch limits recommended by the SSC
32 were informed by the 54 percent reduction in landings assumed to
33 take place in 2026 under the other shallow-water grouper framework
34 action and based an F rebuild on F rebuild as estimated in the
35 updated scamp and yellowmouth grouper projections reviewed by the
36 SSC.
37

38 These updated projections were made at F rebuild because continued
39 higher than sustainable harvest of scamp and yellowmouth grouper
40 has continued since the terminal year of the stock assessment,
41 which is estimated to have drawn the complex biomass to continually
42 lower levels.
43

44 A committee member inquired if the new status determination
45 criteria would translate to a status of overfishing for the
46 proposed scamp complex. NOAA General Counsel responded that the
47 proposed catch limits account for that.
48

1 The committee recommends, and I so move, to recommend the council
2 accept the SSC's recommendations as it relates to catch limits
3 based on the MSY proxy based on F 40 percent SPR for scamp and
4 yellowmouth grouper. That motion carried without opposition.
5

6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. We have a committee motion
7 on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? Dr. Sweetman.
8

9 **DR. SWEETMAN:** No concerns with the motion. Since I was the person
10 that put forward the 30 to 40 percent, sending it back to the SSC,
11 I guess the only recommendation that -- I was looking maybe for a
12 little bit more detail than life history and biological attributes,
13 as to why they selected one or the other, and so, just for future
14 reference, whenever we get to that point, maybe a little bit more
15 added detail from the SSC would be appreciated, but I've got no
16 concern with this motion on the table.
17

18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Is there any
19 other discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there any**
20 **opposition to the motion? Not seeing any opposition, the motion**
21 **carries.** Dr. Frazer.
22

23 **DR. FRAZER:** A committee member inquired if a phased-in approach
24 for a shift in allocation over time is feasible. SERO staff
25 responded that a record would need to be built for justification,
26 but that it was feasible.
27

28 Another committee member noted that Alternatives 2 and 3 in Action
29 4 shift a large fraction of the allocation from the commercial
30 sector to the recreational sector and encouraged stakeholders to
31 speak during public testimony as to this shift. The committee
32 member also inquired if other alternatives could be considered
33 which would inform an allocation change using a longer time period.
34

35 A committee member recommended removing the commercial sector's 4
36 percent ACL/ACT buffer for the proposed scamp complex and black
37 grouper complex, since the flexibility measures between other
38 shallow-water grouper and deep-water grouper would no longer
39 exist.
40

41 The committee discussed the Reef Fish Advisory Panel's motion from
42 its December 2024 meeting to consider a 14 percent ACL/ACT buffer
43 for the recreational sector. A committee member suggested having
44 separate actions for the ACL/ACT buffers for the recreational and
45 commercial sectors.
46

47 A committee member inquired how removal of the flexibility measures
48 would impact the commercial sector and requested input from the

1 commercial sector during public testimony. Another committee
2 member thought landings of speckled hind through flexibility
3 measures were driven by allocation prices.
4

5 SERO staff noted, in 2023 and 2024, that roughly 71 percent of the
6 speckled hind landings, about 24,000 pounds of gutted weight, were
7 landed under other shallow-water grouper. Council staff noted
8 that alternatives in Action 7 could consider different fishing
9 seasons for the scamp complex and the black grouper complex.

10
11 Based on discussions during the other shallow-water grouper
12 framework action, council staff stated that no closure for the
13 black grouper complex would be considered, along with the start
14 date within the preferred alternative from the other shallow-water
15 grouper framework action, for the scamp complex.
16

17 A committee member recommended reviewing projected season
18 durations for scamp and yellowmouth grouper, based on the proposed
19 catch limits, when the council reviews the next draft of the
20 document.
21

22 Public Hearing Draft, Reef Fish Amendment 58B: Modifications to
23 Deepwater Grouper Management Measures, Tab B, Number 9, council
24 staff reviewed the actions and alternatives in the draft document,
25 paying specific attention to the council's current preferred
26 alternatives.
27

28 Council staff noted that language would be added in the next draft,
29 which would clarify that the current 4 percent buffer between the
30 commercial ACL and commercial quota, which is in place to
31 facilitate the flexibility measures present between the shallow-
32 water grouper and deepwater group complexes, would cease to exist
33 if those flexibility measures are not carried forward in Reef Fish
34 Amendment 58A.
35

36 A committee member recalled a more generic definition for maximum
37 sustainable yield proxies using the language of "or a more
38 reasonable alternative that is consistent with National Standard
39 2". The committee member thought that such a definition would
40 remain in compliance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery
41 Conservation and Management Act, while offering flexibility to
42 future modifications of the MSY proxy, should they occur.
43

44 The committee thought it best to consider such a modification in
45 a generic amendment, since it would also be applicable to species
46 in other council-managed fishery management plans. Committee
47 members considered allocation options in Action 2 and discussed
48 how the fisheries for deepwater grouper have changed over time.

1
2 The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 2 to make
3 Alternative 3 the preferred alternative. Alternative 3 is the
4 deepwater grouper complex ACL is set to the deepwater grouper
5 complex ABC. Establish a recreational ACL in the sector allocation
6 based on the average recreational landings from the most recent
7 five years of 2019 through 2023. This results in a recreational
8 ACL of 56,649 pounds gutted weight, or approximately 10.21 percent
9 of the complex ACL. The commercial sector is allocated
10 approximately 89.79 percent of the complex ACL, or 498,377 pounds
11 gutted weight. The commercial quota is reduced from the commercial
12 ACL by 4 percent and is set at 478,441 pounds gutted weight. The
13 recreational and commercial ACL sum to equal the deepwater grouper
14 complex ACL. That motion carried 10 to 2 with four abstentions
15 and one absent.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. We have a committee motion
18 on the board. Is there any discussion? Mr. Walker.

19
20 **MR. WALKER:** Does this include the elimination of the flexibility
21 measure here? Okay. I just want to point out, somewhere along
22 the way here, that, in the previous paragraph, we were mentioning
23 that maybe we'll get some public testimony from the commercial
24 guys about elimination of the flexibility measures, and nobody
25 said anything about it, and so I think that's a pretty -- Well I
26 won't say universally, but I don't think there's mass opposition
27 to getting rid of the flexibility measure.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Froeschke.

30
31 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** I guess my understanding was that we were
32 going to deal with that in 58A, and then, when we did that, then
33 it would automatically happen for this one. We would just put the
34 required changes in 58A to address that 4 percent buffer on 58B.

35
36 **MR. WALKER:** Is that not what the 4 percent listed in this motion
37 is?

38
39 **DR. FROESCHKE:** It is, but my understanding is we're going to leave
40 it in here, and then 58A is where we would actually remove the
41 flexibility, and so, when that actually happens, then we would
42 retroactively fix that buffer.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

45
46 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I'm going to speak in opposition
47 to this motion. I think Alternative 4 is the one that is the most
48 fair, because it just creates an -- I mean, this is an unfortunate

1 situation across-the-board, but having that equal reduction, to
2 me, seems the most appropriate and most fair thing here, and so,
3 because of that, I think I'm going to speak in opposition to this
4 one.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Walker.

7
8 **MR. WALKER:** I'm going to disagree with my colleague. I don't see
9 90 percent to one sector and 10 percent to the other being -- You
10 know, 10 percent to the rec side being some unreasonable inequity,
11 really. It's not like we're splitting it in half or something
12 like that. It's just a few pounds, and it may potentially keep
13 the rec season open all year, and so I'm in favor of the motion.

14
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Mr. Walker. Dr. Banks.

16
17 **DR. BANKS:** They're going to get 4 percent back, and so I do
18 understand that everybody is taking a haircut, but the rec -- Or
19 the commercial is getting that buffer removed, whereas it will not
20 be removed from the rec.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you Dr. Banks. Is there any other
23 discussion on the motion? Okay. I know we have one in opposition.
24 Two? Okay. Let's -- Okay, and we're going to try hands, a show
25 of hands. No? Okay, let's roll call it. Dr. Simmons.

26
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you. Okay. Mr. McDermott.

28
29 **MR. MCDERMOTT:** Yes.

30
31 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Sanchez.

32
33 **MR. SANCHEZ:** No.

34
35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Burris.

36
37 **MR. BURRIS:** Yes.

38
39 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Anson.

40
41 **MR. ANSON:** Yes.

42
43 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Walker.

44
45 **MR. WALKER:** Yes.

46
47 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Williamson. Mr. Williamson.
48 Okay. Mr. Helies.

1
2 **MR. HELIES:** Yes.
3
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay. Captain Frady.
5
6 **MR. FRADY:** Yes.
7
8 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Banks.
9
10 **DR. BANKS:** Yes.
11
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Osborne.
13
14 **MR. JASON OSBORNE:** Yes.
15
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you. Mr. Broussard.
17
18 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Yes.
19
20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Sweetman.
21
22 **DR. SWEETMAN:** No.
23
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Geeslin.
25
26 **MR. GEESLIN:** Yes.
27
28 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Schieble.
29
30 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes.
31
32 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Frazer.
33
34 **DR. FRAZER:** Yes.
35
36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Overton.
37
38 **DR. OVERTON:** I'm a yes. Okay, and so, for Strelcheck, we need a
39 yes.
40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. **The motion carries.** Dr. Frazer.
42
43 **DR. FRAZER:** Thank you Mr. Chairman. We'll move to discussion of
44 the red grouper documents, Tab B, Number 10. Red grouper updated
45 projections, Dr. Allen reviewed the updated 2025 through 2027 catch
46 projections for Gulf red grouper.
47
48 The SSC recommended OFL was 10.64 million pounds gutted weight,

1 and the ABC was 8.28 million pounds gutted weight. The SSC also
2 recommended annual interim analyses to monitor the health of the
3 stock. The committee discussed the life history of red grouper
4 and how differences in the biology of the stock may determine catch
5 limits.

6
7 SERO staff noted that the council has a latitude to set the ACL
8 below the ABC to the degree to which the council thinks it
9 appropriate to count for the management or other uncertainty, and
10 application of a stepped buffer over time could be considered, if
11 desired.

12
13 The committee discussed some of the SSC dialogue regarding the
14 effect of large increases in commercial quota in an IFQ program.
15 The committee also noted the possible effects of ex-vessel prices
16 and the timing of when the increase might take effect, i.e., mid-
17 year versus the beginning of the year.

18
19 Red Grouper Emergency Rule Update, SERO staff recounted the
20 requested emergency rule for the 2025 fishing year, which will
21 affect the commercial and recreational sectors. The emergency
22 rule is currently anticipated to take effect on July 2, 2025.

23
24 Based on the projected catch limit increases from the SSC's updated
25 OFL and ABC recommendations and setting the recreational ACT at 90
26 percent of the recreational ACL, no closure of the recreational
27 red grouper fishery is anticipated in 2025. This projection is
28 pending implementation of the emergency rule.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Hold on, Dr. Frazer. Frank.

31
32 **MR. HELIES:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We don't anticipate the
33 emergency rule publishing any earlier than July 5th, and so just a
34 correction on the July 2nd date that's in the summary there.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for that clarification. Dr. Frazer.

37
38 **DR. FRAZER:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Proposed Red Grouper
39 Management Modifications, council staff presented draft options
40 for modifications to red grouper management following the SEDAR 88
41 stock assessment, which staff intend to develop into a document
42 for the August 2025 council meeting.

43
44 The first proposed action would modify sector allocations and catch
45 limits from those previously said in Reef Fish Amendment 53. This
46 would follow updated catch advice which uses the State of Florida's
47 State Reef Fish Survey landings data for private vessels.

1 The current management criteria use data informed by the Marine
2 Recreational Information Program's Fishing Effort Survey.
3 Proposed alternatives follow those previously considered in Reef
4 Fish Amendment 53 and generally resulted in sector allocations of
5 about 67 to 68 percent commercial and 32 to 33 percent
6 recreational, regardless of time series used to inform the
7 allocation option.

8
9 The second proposed action would reconsider the current
10 recreational shallow-water grouper closure in February and March,
11 which the Reef Fish AP has recommended be removed. Another
12 proposed action could consider recreational fishing seasons, as
13 appropriate.

14
15 Council staff suggested a draft timeline for document development
16 that would see the council consider final action in January 2026.
17 Given the broader scope of scientific uncertainty, the Southeast
18 Fisheries Science Center indicated that the current projections
19 were suitable across allocation alternatives.

20
21 While the OFL and ABC projections would change based on different
22 allocation options, the differences are estimated to be minimal
23 and within the range of management error. As such, and contrary
24 to prior similar management changes, the SSC will not be asked to
25 provide OFL and ABC recommendations for each allocation scenario.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. Dr. Sweetman.

28
29 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I have a question for
30 Mr. Helies. I am -- Just process-wise, how this is going to work
31 with the emergency rule, if that goes in effect this year, and so
32 that would be good for this year, and then we enter into 2026,
33 and, based on what I'm seeing here, we could potentially go final
34 in January of 2026, but, by not having gone final, the new catch
35 limits won't have been implemented, and so what is going to be --
36 How are we going to navigate dealing with the emergency rule ending
37 and that time between when this rule actually gets promulgated, as
38 far as the catch limits go?

39
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Helies.

41
42 **MR. HELIES:** Thanks, C.J., and so the catch levels will revert
43 back to what the status quo was prior to the emergency rule, and
44 then we would likely have to get something in place in 2026, and
45 so, ideally, we want it in place before the end of June, right,
46 for the rec season. Because we're increasing the catch levels for
47 the commercial sector as well, we don't have to hold back any
48 quota, and so they'll just get the additional quota whenever the

1 final rule is effective.

2

3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Walker.

4

5 **MR. WALKER:** So it seems, to me, that we kind of skipped over the
6 red grouper allocation discussion, didn't we? I mean, it just
7 says proposed alternatives, and we didn't really discuss them all
8 that much, did we? I mean, we didn't pick a preferred, right?
9 Okay, and so we're still -- It just seemed -- I didn't hear the
10 discussion, I thought, on allocating red grouper between the
11 commercial and the rec with SRFS.

12

13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Froeschke.

14

15 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I guess what I was thinking is, for this, we're
16 just looking to get feedback on the range of alternatives, and are
17 there alternatives, or allocation scenarios, that we haven't put
18 in the document that you would very much like to see?

19

20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

21

22 **MR. SANCHEZ:** On that note, yes, and I wanted to include an
23 alternative for consideration, and I think -- Can we get that
24 pulled up somehow? All right, and I'll make it simple, and then
25 I guess, while it's coming up, in the interest of time, I'll kind
26 of explain it.

27

28 It's going to add some buffers going forward, post-emergency rule,
29 to the ACL, the total ACL, and escalate them over time, just so,
30 in the event that we've been too, I guess, unrealistically generous
31 with the quota, with the ACL, and we don't want to do harm to the
32 sustainability long-term of this fishery, and these are for us
33 next time, to have them in the document, to look at, consider them,
34 change them, play with them, as we see fit, with the benefit of
35 having some landings, hopefully, coming out during -- You know,
36 post-emergency rule, and see how this is trending, and then give
37 us some options, to err on the side of being conservative.

38

39 Okay, and I think there it is, and, also, I don't -- I don't want
40 this to be carved in stone either. You know, if somebody, once
41 it's out there -- For us to get into when Amendment 62 comes out,
42 and we can play with the percentages, and I wouldn't mind even
43 adding that, hey, it looks like it's trending in the good
44 direction, and we don't have to continue marching on to year-two,
45 year-three, year-four, and we can pull the plug, and so these are
46 the kinds of things I want to at least have something out there,
47 a tool that we can use.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez, would you mind reading your motion?
2
3 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Sure. To include an alternative in Reef Fish
4 Amendment 62 for a phased-in approach over a period of years for
5 the increase in the red grouper stock ACL. The phased-in approach
6 for the increase in the stock ACL would be 70 percent of the ABC
7 in year-one, 80 percent of the ABC in year-two, 90 percent of the
8 ABC in year-three, and 100 percent of the ABC in year-four, five,
9 six, et cetera, et cetera.
10
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Do we have a second for
12 the motion?
13
14 **MR. ANSON:** I'll second it.
15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson seconds. Is there any discussion on
17 the motion? Mr. Walker.
18
19 **MR. WALKER:** I would be interested to hear what others have to say
20 about the concept. I could go either way on it.
21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** John, do you want to follow-up to that, and then
23 Dr. Sweetman.
24
25 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and just, while we're doing this, preparing
26 this, to have a more meaningful discussion going forward, and then,
27 obviously, we'll have some staff, I guess, present us with some
28 projected season lengths resulting from these different
29 percentages.
30
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Dr. Sweetman, and then
32 Dr. Overton. I have a list.
33
34 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I can't say whether
35 I'm opposed or supportive of this. I mean, we're just adding it
36 into the document, and so I think I'm fine with adding it as
37 another alternative. I think I'm fine with that.
38
39 I think what is tough to evaluate right here is what that would
40 look like, in terms of season projections, right, and so, when we
41 bring this forward, you know, if this translates into an eleven-
42 month season, maybe that's okay. If it translates into a six-
43 month season, gets us back to where we have been, that might not
44 be okay, and so I think the devil is, obviously, going to be in
45 the detail there, but, overall, you know, I understand where John
46 is coming from.
47
48 It's quite a significant quota increase, but, at the same time,

1 you know, it's rare that we get stock assessments this positive,
2 and I do tend to trust the science that's associated in that
3 assessment, and so it's tough one way or the other to say, but I'm
4 not going to oppose this motion at this time, just because it's
5 adding an alternative.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. I have Dr. Overton.
8

9 **DR. OVERTON:** Thank you, J.D., and thanks, John, for this
10 suggestion. I like this. My question was very similar. I just
11 wanted to see what others thought about this. I hadn't seen this
12 approach before, but it reasonably makes sense.
13

14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Overton. Dr. Froeschke, and then
15 Mr. McDermott.
16

17 **DR. FROESCHKE:** So two comments. I'll start with the first, which
18 is different, a little bit different, but what I would see hard to
19 implement on this is what would be -- There would either be
20 triggers built in, for example, if the longline -- Like the G-
21 FISHER, or something like that, index. Otherwise, I don't -- There
22 wouldn't be anything that would prevent these automatic increases,
23 and if you didn't have -- If you had some information to the
24 contrary, that suggests maybe that's not the right thing to do,
25 you would still have to go back and write an amendment.
26

27 I mean, the other way you could do it, or one other way, is you
28 could start at say, for example, the 70 percent, and then try to
29 just do interim analyses every year, and just base it off that
30 reference.
31

32 The other thing, that Carrie kind of pointed out, is the SSC catch
33 advice is based on 2025 through 2027, and then prioritizing interim
34 analyses, and so, I guess, in this, it would really be 2026 and
35 2027, and so it would really just be the first 70 percent and the
36 80 percent, based on the way that motion is constructed, and so
37 some things to think about.
38

39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Froeschke. Some considerations.
40 Mr. Sanchez, did you have something regarding that?
41

42 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, and I'm not opposed at all to putting in some
43 meaningful triggers. I don't know what they would be. I'll leave
44 that for you, and please have liberty to incorporate them, so that
45 we can do this, and, if this is going in the wrong direction, as
46 the landings play out and suggest, then we'll pull the plug on it
47 and use some of these meaningful ways to do that.
48

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Dr. Froeschke.

2
3 **DR. FROESCHKE:** One simple way you could think about, and I don't
4 know whether it would be the G-FISHER or the longline or something,
5 but you could say something like the increase -- So long as the
6 trend of those was stable, or increasing, something like that, and
7 you could just take a look at those, and, if that was that was
8 okay, then you would do it. If not, you would revert to the same
9 one. We've never done that, and so we would have to figure out
10 how to write that, if that's even something you would be interested
11 in.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for that information. I have a list
14 running. Mr. McDermott, Dr. Walter, Mr. Walker, and then Mara.

15
16 **MR. MCDERMOTT:** I think John has got a good idea here. The
17 challenge that I see with it is we don't have a mechanism that --
18 I mean this is, as I understand it, is specific to the red grouper
19 deal. I think this is a good approach to take to all increases,
20 but, when I've talked with folks about it, and asked about this,
21 we can't step in a decrease.

22
23 You know, we just saw the opposite thing with gag, where we slashed
24 it, and now we've got an opportunity to increase it, and we want
25 to phase it in, which I'm in support of, but we have no mechanism
26 to phase in the decrease, which makes this decision tough.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. McDermott. Dr. Walter.

29
30 **DR. JOHN WALTER:** Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. I think
31 I'm going to kind of show my age, and the fact that I've worked on
32 SEDAR 42, SEDAR 61, and now we have SEDAR 88 for red grouper, and
33 so one of the things we've always seen is that we sometimes get
34 the assessments that have a whole -- Really positive signs coming
35 out of it, and then I think sometimes we overshoot things, and so
36 I think the sentiment is right here, and I think there's some
37 reason for where you might want to have some caution like this, so
38 we don't overshoot, from what we heard from public testimony, and
39 then from previous assessments, where we kind of ride one really
40 good year class, and we may not get something on the back end of
41 it.

42
43 I think tying it to an indicator, like G-FISHER, which I think is
44 the index that is best fit in the modeling, might be very good to
45 do, and allowing for that phase-in, while we look at the
46 indicators, either with an interim assessment at some point,
47 ideally scheduled, so that it would be able to adjust the catch
48 based on that, or simply looking at it, to ensure that we're on

1 track.

2

3 I think, and I just wanted to clarify here, that what this might
4 do is, if the ABC -- If we take the ABC yield streams, those are
5 a declining yield stream, and so this would kind of keep things
6 fairly constant, which we've done in the past when we've had those
7 kind of yield streams, and so it might be more of a constant yield
8 coming out of this approach, which has benefits for a lot of
9 things, because we've heard, from a lot of the fishery, that they
10 often want some stability, and not have big increases or big
11 decreases.

12

13 I think this might keep it relatively constant over time, even
14 though, if it's using the ABC yield stream, or if it's just 70
15 percent of the ABC in year-one, then it's a phase-in increase, and
16 I think there's two different approaches, and maybe we want to see
17 the details at some point, but, again, I think it's a useful thing
18 for the council to consider here. Thank you.

19

20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. I have Mr. Walker, then
21 Ms. Levy.

22

23 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a couple thoughts I had
24 during the discussion, and one was I had the same thought as Mr.
25 McDermott, that, you know, we've never been offered a chance to
26 step down into a decrease, and you get it all. We don't say we'll
27 give 70 percent this year, and then 80 percent next year, and so
28 that's a -- That's a consideration, and I think you're spot on
29 with that.

30

31 There's also, you know, the perception out there that, you know,
32 you've a bad stock assessment, and you get a big reduction, and
33 you have to take it, and now we have a positive stock assessment,
34 and we're maybe -- We're waffling on giving out what it says it
35 can give out, and so there's the perception of that, and I -- I'm
36 not sure that's a precedent, you know, that we want to go down,
37 but I'm not opposed to leaving it in for discussion, for sure.

38

39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

40

41 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I just
42 want to clarify that the SSC recommended using the three-year
43 projections from 2025 to 2027 to calculate the average OFL and
44 ABC, giving a constant catch for the OFL of the 10.64 and the ABC
45 of 8.28 million pounds gutted weight, and so they did it -- They
46 gave us a constant catch for those three years, and they also
47 recommended as well prioritizing those interim analyses, and other
48 pertinent evaluations of the stock on an annual basis, because

1 they also had some of those concerns.

2

3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Ms. Levy.

4

5 **MS. LEVY:** Thank you, and so I guess, if the desire is to look at
6 some triggers, and so it just strikes me that this is -- That this
7 conversation is very similar to the regulatory streamlining
8 amendment that we were talking about, I don't know how long ago,
9 and then it kind of got put on hold, where we were looking at an
10 automated process, like a closed framework to adjust catch levels
11 based on interim analyses, right, and that's what it seems like
12 this is trying to do.

13

14 If that's true though, we need to build it in here, meaning this,
15 this as written, is very different than we have some trigger we're
16 looking at to decide what to do next, in terms of giving the agency
17 direction, and so, if the desire is to have it at 70 percent of
18 the ABC, and we don't bump it up, based on some criteria, or we
19 do, we need to write that criteria in.

20

21 We need to figure out who is making the decision, right, and like
22 based on the G-FISHER, and I don't know what that means. Like who
23 is deciding whether it's up or whatever, and I don't know, and
24 maybe it's the Science Center, and so I guess it would just be
25 helpful to clarify if it's that sort of iterative process that's
26 desired, or it's this more static process that's desired, because
27 those are very different, in terms of writing them up and figuring
28 out how they'll work.

29

30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Mr. Sanchez, and then Mr.
31 Anson.

32

33 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you. Yes, and I wanted to say, to Mike's
34 point, I'm not opposed at all to doing the same thing in reverse
35 when we're being hit with a dramatic reduction. In fact, you've
36 heard me, on my SPR rants, bring up something like that, that, you
37 know, we cross some threshold of some, you know, percentage of
38 SPR, and then we're overfished, and we're overfishing, and, boom,
39 now we've got to shut things down.

40

41 I would 100 percent love the same thing in reverse, and, in fact,
42 I think I've been saying that, and so I'm with you there. Now, as
43 far as this, you know, goes, I'm just trying to err on the side of
44 sustainability and conservation, and, between that and the optics
45 and perception, I'm going to err on taking care of these fish the
46 best that I can, and being sustainable, and I would rather do that.

47

48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Mr. Anson.

1
2 **MR. ANSON:** So I -- When you mentioned this yesterday, John, as a
3 possible path forward, I was intrigued, and I still am, and, you
4 know, certainly, to Mr. McDermott's concerns, you know, I certainly
5 agree with him that that is problematic, when you only go one way
6 when the outcome is good, but don't go the other way, and I don't
7 know if we have much flexibility in being able to step down, when
8 you have to go -- Based on bad news, but, at least as it pertains
9 to this, something --

10
11 It might be premature to do it here, and we can certainly maybe
12 bring it up as we get the document, and more information, but,
13 inasmuch as threading the needle with trying to, you know, err on
14 the side of the fish, particularly with this fish and the history
15 of it and its susceptibility to certain environmental conditions
16 that may come up, you know, maybe we -- You might consider, John,
17 right now, for this motion, is to change the percentages, and maybe
18 go a little bit more higher, and so 80, instead of 70, and 90, and
19 then 100, so you would reach the 100 in three years, versus four,
20 and just a recommendation, but, again, we may begin to discuss
21 that, you know, if it passes, at the next opportunity.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Anson, for those comments. Next,
24 I have Dr. Sweetman, and then Mr. Rindone.

25
26 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So Michael's idea I think is a perfect thing, and,
27 as Kevin was highlighting, we could probably add that to that list
28 of things to consider in the executive order there that we'll send
29 out, but I guess my question here is a little bit of -- Yes, and
30 it's a question, and not necessarily a concern at this point, but
31 the timing aspect of being able to implement something like this,
32 because we are under the gun for this amendment here, as it relates
33 to the emergency rule and then moving this forward, and so, as
34 long as it doesn't impact timing, obviously, then that's okay for
35 us to look at. It seems like that there's an appetite at the table
36 to consider this phased-in approach here, and I'll leave it there.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Rindone, and then
39 Ms. Levy.

40
41 **MR. RINDONE:** I just wanted to remind the council that a phase-in
42 -- Carryover and phase-in are both things that there's a NMFS
43 technical memorandum on, as far as things that the council can
44 have considered as part of ABC control revisions, and phase-in
45 allows you to do exactly what you're talking about, stepping in
46 those strong decreases over a period, not to exceed three years,
47 and this is essentially the inverse of that, which is something
48 that we did talk about also when we were going through that

1 carryover amendment, about being able to phase things in going up
2 or down, and so both of those are reasonable things to -- You know,
3 for you guys to consider as it relates to changes to the ABC
4 control rule.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ryan, I have a question for you regarding your
7 comments, and is that a whole for the entire fishery, or is it
8 specific per species?

9
10 **MR. RINDONE:** The way that the advice is structured is for it to
11 apply to the smallest component, because you could have differences
12 in the ages, or lengths, at which fish are selected by different
13 fleets, and so, if you have things broken up in much smaller chunks
14 of allocation, then that would be a way -- You know, that would be
15 something to think about. Again, it's something you would look at
16 on a species-by-species basis, and the SSC advice on that would be
17 very helpful.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Ms. Levy.

20
21 **MS. LEVY:** Just to C.J.'s point in the timing, and so I totally
22 agree with that. The more complicated this gets, the harder it's
23 going to be to actually get you to take final action in January,
24 and so the whole idea of this iterative process, and building that
25 in, if that's the desire, may run counter to the objective to get
26 it done quickly, whereas something that just steps it up without
27 any other decisions -- That would be fairly simple to implement,
28 from a regulatory perspective, but I'm not sure it gets you what
29 you want, if we're just like doing it without looking at any
30 impacts, and so I'll just leave it there.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Is there any other
33 discussion on the motion? Is there anyone online that would like
34 to speak? Dr. Sweetman.

35
36 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Sorry, and not to beat a dead horse here, but just
37 the trigger component of it, and so like I'm like wondering, John,
38 from your perspective, and so let's say, in year-one, we exceed
39 the 70 percent ABC, and what is the next step then? Do you not go
40 to 80 percent in year-two, or do you still go to the 80 percent in
41 year-two? What is your thought process there?

42
43 **MR. SANCHEZ:** You know, I don't know, and I'm just trying to be
44 conservative, really, and everything is so difficult. At this
45 point, I'm almost like maybe we should let Florida manage the
46 Florida groupers, because, everything you try to do here that's
47 conservative, it becomes, you know, there's a million reasons why
48 we can't do what's seemingly right, and I'm frustrated.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.
3
4 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I'm not pushing back against the concept, John, and
5 I think there's value to it. I understand your frustration there,
6 and it's just, like I was telling you, I think the devil is in the
7 detail here, and there's just -- The timing is a concern, relative
8 to just what we have to navigate here, but I think there's value
9 in what you're putting forward. I'm just trying to understand the
10 details.
11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman, and, to John's comment,
13 I think there's several of us that would agree with you that
14 Florida should manage their own species. Dr. Frazer.
15
16 **DR. FRAZER:** Again, John, I would just, again, applaud you for
17 putting this motion forward. I do think it's a step in the right
18 direction. As C.J. said, the devils are in the details, but
19 there's some pretty simple things, right? If you propose a 70
20 percent, you know, of the ABC in year-one, and, you know, you go,
21 and maybe you catch 80 percent, or something like that, and you
22 still haven't exceeded the original ABC, and it's not like you're
23 glaringly busting through the limit, and so I think you can just
24 express that in in the text that surrounds the alternative, and so
25 I actually think we're on good footing here. Thanks, John, for
26 putting this forward, and I look forward to seeing in the document.
27
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. Is there any other
29 comments, or questions, on the motion on the board? Okay. **Is**
30 **there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion**
31 **carries.** Dr. Frazer. Mr. Anson.
32
33 **MR. ANSON:** If we can pull the committee report up, and I'm probably
34 going to do it anyways, but I just wanted to -- In my mind, I see
35 a timing problem, potentially, as to what Mara mentioned regarding
36 this particular action relative to trying to get something final
37 in 2026.
38
39 If it were to go final in 2026, what would be the timing of having
40 that being approved by the Secretary, and relative to the season,
41 and I'm talking about the recreational season, and is the timing
42 such that -- Would it be possible, and necessary, to consider
43 another emergency action for next year, if the timing is delayed
44 or misses the recreational season, and that's what I'm trying to
45 determine.
46
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.
48

1 **MS. LEVY:** I guess I'll try to answer that, and so, I mean, I think
2 Frank talked about the timing, and, if the council were to take
3 final action in January, the goal would be to try to implement it
4 by -- What did you say, the end of June, like for the for the rec
5 side?
6

7 The feasibility of doing another emergency rule, I mean, I don't
8 really -- I mean, it becomes not an emergency again, because it's
9 predictable, right, and we've done it, and you also have the added
10 complication of, you know, giving it out to the commercial sector
11 before this has been approved and implemented, and so that's kind
12 of like a pre-decisional thing, because we can't claw it back if
13 the decision is not to approve and implement it, and so, in that
14 sense, like I'm not sure another emergency rule would be feasible
15 for 2026, which is why we're trying to jam this through.
16

17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Dr. Frazer.
18

19 **DR. FRAZER:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and so that would
20 take us to Other Business, and there was no other business brought
21 before the committee, and so, Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.
22

23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Frazer. Moving on to Ecosystem
24 Committee report and Mr. Anson.
25

26 **ECOSYSTEM COMMITTEE REPORT**

27

28 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so the committee adopted the
29 agenda, Tab Q, Number 1, and the minutes, Tab Q, Number 2, from
30 the August 2024 meeting were approved as written.
31

32 Ecosystem Technical Committee Recommendations on Fishery Ecosystem
33 Plan, Tab Q, Numbers 4(a) through (b), staff provided an update on
34 progress toward development of the Gulf fishery ecosystem plan,
35 including support through the Inflation Reduction Act to contract
36 a social scientist to conduct stakeholder engagement efforts for
37 the fishery ecosystem plan.
38

39 Staff reviewed the Ecosystem Technical Committee's (ETC)
40 recommendation for the scope of work for the social science
41 consultant to focus on evaluating either social or economic impacts
42 of fishery ecosystem issues on stakeholders. Staff clarified that
43 the ETC suggested that the council would be unlikely to solicit a
44 consultant with the capacity to effectively conduct both social
45 and economic analyses. A committee member recommended focusing on
46 gathering economic information, which has been lacking in the past,
47 and would provide valuable context for the council.
48

1 Discussion of Red Tide Fishery Ecosystem Issue Pilot, Tab Q, Number
2 5(a), staff provided a presentation on efforts by the ETC to begin
3 work on the red tide fishery ecosystem issue pilot. Committee
4 members were supportive of the initiative and inquired how the
5 council would communicate with other agencies and stakeholders
6 about a naturally occurring problem like red tide that can be
7 exacerbated by land use issues.

8
9 Staff reminded the committee of the proposal in the red tide
10 communications plan to develop a red tide federal fisheries report
11 to illustrate to other agencies the impacts of upstream actions on
12 Gulf fisheries.

13
14 Dr. Clay Porch, of the Southeast Fisheries Science Center,
15 supported the flexible approach by forming a technical working
16 group to work on the red tide fishery ecosystem issue, given the
17 reductions in Southeast Fisheries Science Center staff, and he
18 reiterated that the Science Center would continue to do its best
19 to support future ecosystem initiatives under reduced capacity.

20
21 Committee members suggested that ongoing research projects in
22 support of red tide forecasting could allow the council to be more
23 responsive to red tide, perhaps allowing for consideration of
24 proactive harvest of biomass ahead of red tide events, and further
25 inquired about biomass loss during red tide events.

26
27 Dr. Mandy Karnauskas, ETC Chair, Southeast Fisheries Science
28 Center, contributed that loss of biomass was significant during
29 major red tide events and added that better information about red
30 tide has allowed the SSC to be less risk adverse when setting catch
31 limits. The committee discussed the value of red tide forecasts
32 in allowing industry to plan ahead for potential red tide impacts.

33
34 Any remaining Ecosystem Technical Committee Recommendations, Tab
35 Q, Number 4(a), staff provided an update on efforts by the Science
36 Center to automate the production of ecosystem status reports,
37 which will allow for annual updates of Gulf ecosystem status
38 reports in the future. Other Business, no other business came
39 before the committee. Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. Is there any concerns that
42 need to come before the Ecosystem? Not seeing any, okay, and thank
43 you, Mr. Anson. We'll move on to an Update on the Council Funding
44 and Discussion of Council Planning and Primary Activities, which
45 would be Dr. Simmons.

46
47 **UPDATE ON COUNCIL FUNDING AND DISCUSSION OF COUNCIL PLANNING AND**
48 **PRIMARY ACTIVITIES**

1
2 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I'll
3 start, but I would like the Regional Office staff, maybe Heather
4 or Frank, to kind of weigh in on some of their staffing workload
5 bottlenecks, as well as some of the permits database issues we're
6 running into.

7
8 That being said, we've been -- We've been told we are going to
9 receive -- All regional management councils are going to receive,
10 very shortly, a little bit over \$800,000, and, if we are level
11 funded to the 2024 budget, that would be about 70 percent of our
12 annual operating budget, and so, that being said, our plan is to
13 go forward with the August council meeting in-person, as we have
14 the dates on the website, in San Antonio. Questions?

15
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Does anyone have any questions for Dr. Simmons?
17 Not seeing any.

18
19 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay, and so, that being said, this
20 is going to be quite different than what we have posted for the
21 action guide right now, and so bear with us. I think it's trying
22 to really take a realistic look, with the staffing issues that we
23 have right now, at what we can get done for the August council
24 meeting, and without fully understanding some of the implications
25 of the executive orders that are ongoing and some of the current
26 council actions that we have on that schedule and whether those
27 work together or not, I guess is the best way to say it right now,
28 or meet those goals or not.

29
30 Okay, and so the planned final action on Reef Fish Amendment 58B
31 to modify the deepwater grouper management measures, we'll
32 complete that, and there's a couple missing sections in there,
33 hopefully in time for the public hearings, and we're going to do
34 three in-person public hearings and a virtual hearing on that, to
35 have that ready for final action in August.

36
37 Bring back a draft of Reef Fish Amendment 62, and that's the red
38 grouper management measures we just talked about, and have a draft
39 of Reef Fish Amendment 58A, and that's the modifications to the
40 shallow-water grouper management measures that Dr. Freeman walked
41 you through based on the updated yield stream projections at F
42 rebuild for the scamp and yellowmouth complex, and working through
43 dividing those complexes, and it's the big long amendment we've
44 been working on, that we have to pick up again.

45
46 We're also going to bring a draft of Shrimp Amendment 19, which is
47 the permanent moratorium requirements. Because of the timing issue
48 we have on that, we're hoping we can make that very simple, one

1 action, and hopefully two alternatives, or three at the most.
2
3 Final Action on the Framework to Modify the Red snapper For-Hire
4 Season, and we've seen that several times, but that didn't have
5 all the completed sections, and so we're planning to bring that
6 back to you for final action in August, and then, as staff and
7 agenda time allow -- The Gulf Council has the administrative lead
8 on the yellowtail and mutton snapper management measures, and so
9 we'll start trying to draft out what that's going to look like, as
10 options at least, potentially for the August council meeting.

11
12 If we go down, you all will notice we have not transmitted the two
13 documents you took final action on in April. We are still trying
14 to complete all the relevant sections, have the review done by the
15 Science Center, and get those in the condition they need to be to
16 transmit, and so we have a bit of a backlog there with that as
17 well, that we're still trying to work through with the Regional
18 Office, and that's that that list, the two documents you just took
19 final action on at this meeting and then the two from the April
20 council meeting.

21
22 Those are kind of listed in what we understand is the priority
23 order to get completed and transmitted, and also for SERO to
24 consider the rulemaking package for.

25
26 A couple things, which you all might ask me about anyways, but
27 just to point out, and I think we heard some of this in public
28 comment, and so, right now, the electronic reporting amendment for
29 charter-for-hire, the Reef Fish Amendments 59A, 59B, and 60, that
30 is the distribution of shares held by NMFS, recovering
31 distribution, that's the IFT program changes, you'll recall.

32
33 We are thinking that needs to be paused right now, due to the
34 database constraints we have, as well as staffing, as well as
35 trying to work through the executive orders, and so I'll stop
36 there, and maybe others want to fill in the gaps and ask questions.

37
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons, for that information.
39 Any questions? I see Dr. Sweetman.

40
41 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair and Dr. Simmons. Just a quick
42 question about when we think we might work on putting forward the
43 DESCENT Act into Gulf Council regulations, since it's expiring.

44
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I don't know the answer to that. We
46 have to work through that with the Regional Office, but I'm not
47 sure, based on this current list.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.
2
3 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so you answered one of
4 my questions, which was the 59A, 59B, and 60. The other, back to
5 what you had mentioned about 70 percent of your annual budget being
6 appropriated, or I don't know if you want to speak on this now or
7 later, but where would the shortfall be then? Later in the year,
8 we would end up with problems with the November meeting, or the
9 January meeting for next year, or do you not anticipate issues
10 like that?
11
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.
13
14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, and so it's our
15 understanding that we are hoping to get the remaining amount of
16 funding sometime before the August council meeting. Whether we
17 get that in time to have a budget that we can talk about and have
18 the council review, I'm not sure, and we'll have to decide that,
19 and, if that doesn't come through by August, we will have to make
20 some decisions about other meetings.
21
22 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Okay. Understood. Thank you.
23
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson.
25
26 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, Dr. Simmons, you
27 mentioned about 59 and 60, delaying that, and part of that delay
28 is due to the work on trying to resolve the permits for the IFQ
29 program, or what was that?
30
31 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** So I think it would be best if the
32 Regional Office staff kind of chime-in here, but it's the permits
33 database, I believe.
34
35 **MS. HEATHER BLOUGH:** So there are two reasons. I mean, the primary
36 reason right now that we're pausing those is staffing related.
37 We're down 17 percent right now from planned staff levels, and
38 most of that is in our Social Sciences Branch, which is creating
39 like a really serious bottleneck, because we need them for analyses
40 for basically all of these amendments that we're working on,
41 including in the South Atlantic and the Caribbean.
42
43 Right now, just the pause doesn't mean stop, and it's a pause while
44 we direct limited resources to clearing the decks. We have already
45 rules that have been submitted to us that we need to get out the
46 door.
47
48 We have rules -- We have amendments that you all have approved,

1 but that haven't made it to us, because you need our help, and the
2 economists' help, like getting those across the finish line, and
3 then these other few, I think six that Carrie went over, right,
4 that we've identified as the highest priority, and that don't
5 require the completed datasets, and 58A is the one that we do need
6 some better permit data for, but we're hoping that, by the time we
7 get that to the finish line, we'll have the snapshot figured out.

8
9 Some of these that are paused will be dependent on our ability to
10 like work through the permitting issues, and we're doing the best
11 we can on that, but I don't have a clear timeline, or schedule,
12 for when that's going to get sorted out.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson.

15
16 **MR. ANSON:** Just I heard what you said just now, but I just want
17 some further clarification, and so there are issues with the permit
18 database, but you have these other things that are, you know, more
19 administrative, as part of that process, and so do you have an
20 anticipated -- Is that permit database issue being resolved
21 internally, or is that being resolved through a contractor?

22
23 **MS. BLOUGH:** Both. We're working with a contractor to resolve it.

24
25 **MR. ANSON:** So is there an anticipated time when the contractor
26 will be completed with that task?

27
28 **MS. BLOUGH:** No.

29
30 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you. Do we have any other questions?
33 Not seeing any, we'll move on. Dr. Simmons, do you have anything
34 else? Okay. Then we'll move on to Other Business, and we added
35 an item for Dr. Walter to give us an overview of impacts of
36 discontinuing the dockside component of the Southeast Regional
37 Headboat Survey. Dr. Walter, are you online?

38
39 **DR. WALTER:** I am, Chair.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** The floor is yours, sir.

42
43 **OTHER BUSINESS**

44 **IMPACTS OF DISCONTINUING THE DOCKSIDE COMPONENT OF THE SRHS**

45
46 **DR. WALTER:** All right. Thank you very much. Good afternoon,
47 everyone. We have submitted this letter in response to some
48 specific questions about the impacts beyond just -- You know, we

1 notified previously the council that we are going to have to cease
2 the port agent biosampling from Alabama to Texas, the headboat
3 port agent biosampling, and then there was a further request to
4 discuss the effects downstream from that.

5
6 Just as a review, the funding for the port agents really came from
7 excess funding that we had available over the years, and not
8 directed funding, and, for example, last year, we used funding
9 that was repurposed from SEFHIER to be able to pass over to GulfFIN
10 to fund those port agents.

11
12 This year, we're partially funding the program, with an extra
13 \$50,000 contribution from NOAA National Saltwater Fisheries
14 Recreational Fisheries Program. However, in the future, neither
15 the Southeast Center nor SERO are in a position to confirm that we
16 will have long-term funding for the program without sacrificing
17 other priority activities.

18
19 Unfortunately, I have to be the bearer of this unfortunate news,
20 and I know that the program is of high concern, and high interest,
21 to many of you, and, in particular, we heard that in public
22 comment, and we've heard that recently.

23
24 The biological sampling component of it collects hard parts for
25 age, size, and weight of the fish that are brought back to the
26 dock, and, while that's only a small -- The headboat is only a
27 small component of the overall catches, it punches -- The actual
28 biological survey punches well above its weight in providing a lot
29 of the information as a proxy for the larger recreational fishery,
30 where we don't have this kind of program, in terms of being able
31 to collect the size and age composition, and often we use that
32 size and age composition to characterize the recreational fishery.

33
34 What may likely happen, in terms of the programmatic impact to the
35 science, is, in collecting fewer and less of that data, it may
36 lead to us to have to use different types of assessment models, or
37 it may add more uncertainty to the existing stock assessment
38 models, as we have fewer age information to input to the stock
39 assessments.

40
41 One of the big concerns that has been pointed out is that the port
42 agents serve a valuable role in shall we say incentivizing
43 reporting for the logbook reporting program, and so the headboat
44 reporting program is independent of this. That is going to
45 continue, and I did receive notice that the funding has been
46 approved, and I think that the contractor should have that funding
47 available to continue that program, and so that will continue.

1 We highly recommend that headboat operators continue the reporting
2 program, and maintain the quality and integrity of that reporting,
3 even if they see fewer or no dockside port agents, and so that
4 program is critical. That program is mandatory, even if the port
5 agents aren't there to incentivize the compliance.

6
7 Now, we had -- We do have concerns that that could degrade the
8 quality of that information, and we hope that that is not the case,
9 but that could be one of the potential impacts. We also use this
10 to get the weight of fish to monitor annual catch limits, and so
11 this could mean that the catch limit monitoring is challenged a
12 bit as well.

13
14 In terms of the management impacts, in particular our partners at
15 SERO rely on this information for a lot of the regulatory scoping
16 and fishery management plans, and that it often gives us
17 information on the landings and catch rates, to be able to then
18 basically inform different management decisions and management
19 options, such as size limits, bag limits, et cetera.

20
21 This may restrain, or restrict, the ability to do some of that
22 management, because that information will be more limited. We
23 still have the self-reported logbook data, but we may not have as
24 much information on the size or age of the landed catch, and so
25 that may be a limitation in how management can occur, and it may
26 be a reduction in the precision of management.

27
28 The program is also used -- The data is also used for social and
29 economic analyses for fishery management plans, that we are
30 required to do under the management process, in terms of looking
31 at size limits, bag limits, possession limits, closures, both
32 seasonal and or spatial, and so that may be challenged,
33 particularly as the spatial distribution and coverage of port
34 agents are reduced.

35
36 Now, an additional problem that we are facing is, throughout our
37 center, and throughout the agency, we've experienced fairly
38 substantial losses of staff across-the-board. We are now 30
39 percent down from what would have been a fully-staffed 2025 program
40 at the Science Center.

41
42 A lot of those losses have come across-the-board, but, in
43 particular, it has hit our commercial port agents quite heavily,
44 such that we are now I think down at least five port agents
45 throughout our region. We had originally thought that one of our
46 mitigation plans was going to be able to platoon some of our
47 commercial port agents to address the gap in headboat sampling,
48 and perhaps do some double duty, or split time. Unfortunately,

1 given the loss of port agents, and our uncertainty as to whether
2 we will be able to backfill or not those, we won't be able to use
3 our existing port agents to cover those gaps very well.

4
5 We can scroll down to the end user or partner impacts, and so,
6 because this was done in partnership with the Gulf States Marine
7 Fisheries Commission, who contracted often state employees to do
8 this, this will impact them, and that may require release -- Or
9 ending the program or release of staff, and we're unfortunate to
10 have to convey that information as well.

11
12 Now, in terms of mitigation strategies, we will get information
13 from the headboat at-sea observer data collected by the red snapper
14 IRA initiative for the timeframe that that continues, which will
15 end in 2027.

16
17 I had mentioned that we consider supplementing the program through
18 commercial port agents. However, that's unlikely to be able to
19 fill in the gap. The primary mitigation strategy is going to be
20 to adapt our stock assessments to the reduction in data inputs.
21 Remember that during COVID we had reductions in our ability to
22 sample, and we were able to adapt then. It may lead to greater
23 uncertainty, and more precautionary catch limits, as a result, and
24 it may be that the management approaches will need to similarly
25 adapt to more uncertain or lacking information.

26
27 Another mitigation strategy is for states to be able to pick up
28 some of this. States are often well positioned, in terms of having
29 local resources in the area, and they may be able to pick up this,
30 if it becomes a priority for each individual state, and so I know
31 that Florida has picked this up and is conducting sampling this
32 year, and so, with that, I will take further questions.

33
34 I'll note that the full impact of staffing reductions, and budget
35 reductions, that we may face, we have yet to really determine, and
36 so we're still in the process of reassessing what we can still
37 provide, what our footprint looks like, and what our staffing looks
38 like, but it's very likely that it's going to require some fairly
39 significant changes into the services that we can provide from
40 across the science and management, as well as the assessment,
41 standpoint. Thank you, and I'm sorry to have to bring this up to
42 the council.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter, for that overview. We
45 have a couple questions for you in the room. Dr. Banks, followed
46 by Dr. Sweetman.

47
48 **DR. BANKS:** Hi, Dr. Walter, and thank you for that information.

1 I'm sorry you were also the bearer of bad news. I have a quick
2 clarifying question, and so we've heard from a letter to the South
3 Atlantic, and we've heard about SEFHIER not being able to volunteer
4 data, because it's unvalidated, and are you suggesting that the
5 Gulf states observers will now become the validation component for
6 the headboat survey in this next year?

7
8 **DR. WALTER:** Do you mean the -- So the observers, the headboat
9 observers, at-sea being the source of validation?

10
11 **DR. BANKS:** Yes, and I think what's up on the screen is talking
12 about the Gulf states at-sea observers.

13
14 **DR. WALTER:** Right, and that will provide us length data. We
15 hadn't necessarily considered that they would also have a role as
16 validators, and I probably need to go into a little bit of
17 historical context here, because the concern is that the program
18 may no longer have a validation component, and we had asked this
19 question, about whether that would somehow jeopardize the
20 integrity of the program, and it really has been grandfathered in,
21 and I don't see it losing its status, you know, after the fact,
22 due to basically the morphing of the port agents into a quasi-
23 validation component.

24
25 We asked the Office of Science and Technology, and they said that
26 they don't anticipate that being the case, that the certification
27 program was something that has been applied to programs that
28 started after this program, and so, unless something were to
29 happen, where that would be challenged, the integrity of the
30 program, then it would continue to exist, and continue to be valid
31 data to be used, and I hope that -- I think that's answering the
32 concern about the lack of validation.

33
34 I don't think we would then no longer use it, because it would be
35 what is available. Now, whether we would use those observers to
36 conduct that, to the extent that having a presence of somebody
37 observing on a boat motivates the mandatory reporting, and it
38 might, but I don't know, and I have not had a conversation with
39 those programs, or our staff haven't had those conversations, about
40 what role they would play, or pick up on that, but, actually,
41 that's a good consideration. Thanks.

42
43 **DR. BANKS:** Just to clarify, and so there will be no validation,
44 and you're not currently suggesting the at-sea observers pick up
45 that role in any capacity.

46
47 **DR. WALTER:** We're not currently suggesting that.
48

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. We have a question from
2 Dr. Sweetman.

3
4 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks for the presentation, Dr. Walter, and so I
5 guess one of my big things, kind of thinking big picture here, as
6 it relates to the headboat survey, is how the Science Center
7 prioritizes this survey relative to the various other programs,
8 and so it's not fully clear in here, and I appreciate the details
9 about impacts and everything that will stem from this, but I guess
10 I'll just ask a basic question, and how much does it cost to fully
11 implement the headboat survey overall, when you're fully staffed?
12

13 **DR. WALTER:** So, for the headboat port agents from Alabama to
14 Texas, it's \$500,000 a year for that particular component of it.
15 For the full headboat survey, in addition to for the contract to
16 administer the logbook survey -- Is that enough? Is that --
17 Because I don't have the full total cost at ready access, and just
18 the Alabama to Texas port sampler.
19

20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck. Thank you, Dr. Walter.
21

22 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I just wanted to make a couple of kind of high-
23 level comments, and hopefully I'm not stepping out of bounds with
24 what Clay and John would agree with, and so, first, you know, C.J.,
25 and you didn't hear John, but he said \$500,000 is nothing, right,
26 and, well, I don't necessarily disagree, right, in the whole scheme
27 of a larger budget, that that's a fairly small amount.
28

29 We've talked about this program, and it was funded initially by
30 the Science Center, and it then came over and was being funded by
31 Gulf States, and, in more recent years, the Science Center and
32 Regional Office have been providing some funding support,
33 obviously, for the program, to keep it stood up. We're now facing
34 a 28 percent budget reduction across National Marine Fisheries
35 Service, and so we have to make cuts somewhere.
36

37 Your other point is really well taken, right, which is how do we
38 prioritize headboat survey reductions, elimination, versus other
39 programs, and we're in this time of kind of rapid uncertainty,
40 right, and we lost a tremendous amount of staff in a short period
41 of time, and so we're being impacted, just because we don't have
42 the boots on the ground to even go out and do some of this work,
43 and maybe not for headboat, but for port sampling.
44

45 Then, until the dust settles with regard to really understanding
46 where our budget is going to land, it's really hard to say, okay,
47 well, what's going to be the priorities, and how are we going to
48 actually fund some of these activities going forward, and I know

1 Clay and John, coordinating with the Regional Office, talking with
2 some of the councils, have been looking at, you know, how do we
3 essentially conduct science and research to support management
4 going forward, and that was a large focus of the last CCC meeting
5 just a few weeks ago, is how are we going to now align that with
6 management.

7
8 I appreciate and get the concerns about, man, this is tough to
9 swallow right now, and maybe we can come back in a year or two and
10 say headboat is a higher priority than something else, but, right
11 now, the uncertainty around actually being able to fund this is
12 just far greater than the ability for us to fund it at this point.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Do we have any other
15 questions for Dr. Walter? Not seeing any, thank you for the
16 overview, Dr. Walter.

17
18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dave Donaldson.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I'm sorry. Hold on. Mr. Donaldson has a question.

21
22 **MR. DONALDSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and not a question, but
23 just a clarification. C.J. asked how much it costs for the port
24 agents, the port samplers, for headboats, and, for the commission,
25 the \$500,000 actually was Texas through Florida as well as paying
26 for BlueFIN, and so about \$500,000 covered the entire Gulf, to
27 make that clarification.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Donaldson, for that information.
30 Okay. Is there -- Mr. Walker.

31
32 **MR. WALKER:** Not on this topic. I had another question, when
33 you're done with this.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and we're going to move on, and is there
36 any other business to come before the council? Mr. Walker.

37
38 **MR. WALKER:** I would just like to make a request, and maybe Lt.
39 Morton or someone --

40
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Lt. Morton, if you're still on, and I've received
42 a message that you have maybe an update for us on the cellphone
43 usage, or Starlink? Sorry.

44
45 **LT. MORTON:** Yes, and I looked -- I'm not exactly sure if this was
46 the exact statute that was in question here, but it's a little
47 hard to do without the statute up, and I have a -- I sent an email
48 with the link that brings up the Code of Federal Regulations, and,

1 if you could put that up, that would be great, but, if not, it
2 does say that, in there, for communication devices, you can -- In
3 lieu of like a radio telephone, you can use a cellular device that
4 has capabilities to contact the Coast Guard.

5
6 In my opinion, and this may not be the same for every commercial
7 fishery safety examiner -- If you go down, and so if you see there
8 on Section (d) there, and so cellular telephone capable of
9 communicating with public coast station or U.S. Coast Guard station
10 serving the area in which the vessel is operating is acceptable as
11 an alternative to the requirements (a)(2) through (a)(4).

12
13 If you go through (a)(2) through (a)(4), it does look like each
14 vessel operating more than twenty miles or a hundred miles, in
15 which there's no public -- Those are the different requirements,
16 and so you should be able to, in my opinion, use your personal
17 cellphone if you can find a way to make that call over internet,
18 and using Starlink should suffice that, but, again, I'm not 100
19 percent sure if that's the statute, or the requirement, that the
20 individual that was making the public comment was talking about.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for that information, Lt. Morton. Do
23 we have any other questions of Lt. Morton? Mr. Walker, are you
24 good?

25
26 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and I'm going to try and reach out to the
27 gentleman in public testimony and see if that's what he was told,
28 and it sounds like there's some -- Perhaps some people in the
29 observer program, and there might be something we're missing there,
30 and it might not be a Coast Guard issue, and it might be a NMFS
31 observer issue, and so I'll follow-up on it.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I see that Dr. Walter has his hand up.

34
35 **DR. WALTER:** Thank you, Chair. I did reach out to our observer
36 program, and I think the issue is that it's not always clear. If
37 it is indeed that you can use your cellphone with Starlink, which
38 should be able to communicate wherever they are, then, if that is
39 a valid and legal form of communication, and I think the problem
40 is that not all agents are aware of that, and it's not been made
41 clear that that's the case.

42
43 I think some communication that indeed that would suffice would be
44 helpful, both for our observers, so that they have that
45 information, because, if an observer is on a boat that is
46 noncompliant with the safety regulations, they are referred to the
47 NOAA Office of Law Enforcement, and so that's an unfortunate
48 position to put our observers in, to have to say, hey, you don't

1 have something that's compliant, and particularly, in this case,
2 if they are compliant, which is what we heard might be the case,
3 then if we could just simply have a notification that they are
4 compliant, that everyone is aware of, we could kind of probably
5 solve this problem right off the bat, so that vessels who got that
6 won't get a notice, or be worried about that, and that our
7 observers won't be placed in a situation where they feel they have
8 to report some sort of noncompliance, and so thank you, Lt. Morton.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter, for that information. Is
11 there any other business to come before the council, before we
12 adjourn? Not seeing any, okay. Before we adjourn, I have a few
13 announcements that I would like to make.

14
15 I would like to thank the folks for the social last night, again,
16 and I would like to thank Dr. Mike Allen, with the SSC, for
17 providing us his report, and I would also like to thank Troy and
18 Tom, again, for their service on the council. I would like to
19 thank the staff for their hospitality here in their office. It
20 was a nice meeting, in my opinion, and I would also like to thank
21 the council members for working through lunch with us, and we'll
22 see you in San Antonio for a full meeting. Safe travels.

23
24 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on June 4, 2025.)

25
26 - - -
27