

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES COMMITTEE

Hilton Bayfront and Virtual

St. Petersburg, Florida

November 4, 2024

**VOTING MEMBERS**

- 10 Kesley Banks.....Texas
- 11 Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama
- 12 Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
- 13 Troy Frady.....Alabama
- 14 Tom Frazer.....Florida
- 15 Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
- 16 Anthony Overton.....Alabama
- 17 Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
- 18 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
- 19 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
- 20 C.J. Sweetman(designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida

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- 23 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
- 24 J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
- 25 Michael McDermott.....Mississippi
- 26 LT Jackson Morton.....USCG
- 27 Jason Osborne.....Mississippi
- 28 John Sanchez.....Florida
- 29 Ed Walker.....Florida
- 30 Troy Williamson.....Texas

**STAFF**

- 33 Max Birdsong.....Social Scientist
- 34 Assane Diagne.....Economist
- 35 Matt Freeman.....Economist
- 36 John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
- 37 Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
- 38 Sarah Gardiner.....Fishery Biologist
- 39 Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
- 40 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
- 41 Kathy Pereira.....Meeting Planner & Travel Coordinator
- 42 Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison
- 43 Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
- 44 Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director
- 45 Camilla Shireman.....Administrative & Communications Assistant
- 46 Verena Wang.....Fishery Biologist

**OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

1 Tim Griner.....SAFMC  
2 Frank Helies.....NOAA  
3 Clay Porch.....SEFSC  
4 John Walter.....SEFSC

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1 The Sustainable Fisheries Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery  
2 Management Council convened at The Hilton Bayfront in St.  
3 Petersburg, Florida on Monday morning, November 4, 2024, and was  
4 called to order by Chairman Kesley Banks.

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

10 **CHAIRMAN KESLEY BANKS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This committee is  
11 comprised of myself, Mr. Anson, Mr. Broussard, Captain Frady, Dr.  
12 Frazer, Dr. Sweetman, Mr. Schieble, Dr. Overton, Mr. Geeslin,  
13 General Spraggins, and Mr. Strelcheck.

14  
15 The first order of business is the Adoption of the Agenda. Does  
16 anybody have any other business they would like to add? Seeing  
17 none, I'll entertain a motion to adopt the agenda. General  
18 Spraggins? Second by Mr. Geeslin. Any opposition? Seeing none,  
19 the next order of business is to approve the minutes for August  
20 2024. Any clarifications, or edits to the minutes? Seeing none,  
21 is there a motion? Kevin.

22  
23 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Just a minor thing, again for consistency.  
24 There's reference to a geographic strategic plan on page 11, line  
25 19. It's not capitalized at that instance, but it is everywhere  
26 else where it's mentioned in the document, and so just for  
27 consistency. Thank you.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you very much. We'll get that fixed.  
30 Anything else? Okay. Seeing none, I'll entertain a motion to  
31 adopt the minutes, with that change.

32  
33 **MR. BILLY BROUSSARD:** So moved.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Mr. Broussard. Seconded by Dr. Frazer. Any  
36 opposition? All right. The next thing on the agenda is the Action  
37 Guide and Next Steps. Dr. Diagne.

38  
39 **DR. ASSANE DIAGNE:** Thank you, Dr. Banks.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Give us just a second. We're going to do some  
42 chair shuffling.

43  
44 **DR. DIAGNE:** Good morning and thank you, Dr. Banks. For the  
45 Sustainable Fisheries Committee, the first item on the agenda would  
46 be a discussion on the research and monitoring priorities for 2025

1 to 2028. Dr. John Froeschke is going to give a presentation to  
2 the council. He'll do it from over there.

3  
4 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** I'm ready.

5  
6 **DR. DIAGNE:** Okay. Essentially, he will review the priorities.  
7 As you know, these priorities are intended to foster a better  
8 understanding of the gaps in knowledge and data the council hopes  
9 to mitigate. After this presentation, the committee should review  
10 the information presented, make recommendations, and approve these  
11 for the next grant cycle, as appropriate, and, finally, the SSC  
12 will review and provide comments during the December 5<sup>th</sup> virtual  
13 meeting. The council chair will finalize and account for those  
14 suggestions, and recommendations, from the SSC before submission.  
15 Thank you. Dr. Froeschke.

16  
17 **PRESENTATION: RESEARCH AND MONITORING PRIORITIES FOR 2025-2028**  
18 **PRESENTATION AND DOCUMENT**  
19

20 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Thank you. The timing of this is a little bit  
21 different, given the disruption and the cancellation of the SSC  
22 meeting from Hurricane Milton, and so the original plan was the  
23 SSC reviewed it in July.

24  
25 They gave us quite a bit of feedback to reconsider, and asked for  
26 more time, and so were going to present it to them at the next  
27 meeting, and then bring it to you all for a final approval and  
28 consideration of their subsequent review, which we have not yet  
29 received, and so that's why we've got a kind of a modified  
30 timeline, and so we'll try to meld all this together the best we  
31 can.

32  
33 I'm just going to give you a little bit of the high level and then  
34 try to work you through some of the previous feedback that we've  
35 already received from both you all as a body and the SSC. Again,  
36 this is a requirement of the council, is to identify these research  
37 monitoring priorities and to update them. As you know, the council  
38 functions on a five-year, and now four-year, grant moving forward,  
39 and so we update those coincident with that timing.

40  
41 Part of this is the council, along with feedback from the SSC,  
42 will review the previous iteration of priorities, which we've done,  
43 and so we've updated this list. Once we have a list that you all  
44 are satisfied with, we'll distribute this to NMFS and make this  
45 available on the council website, to the public and anyone that's  
46 interested. The goal of this information is to facilitate research

1 and monitoring that is consistent with the council's needs.

2  
3 The SSC originally reviewed an updated research and monitoring  
4 priorities list that the staff prepared in July. The SSC provided  
5 quite a bit of feedback, that I'll go through here and try to  
6 summarize what the SSC said, as a body, and then that's going to  
7 be in yellow. Then the white italicized bullets are kind of what  
8 we, as council staff, have done in response, to hopefully improve  
9 this for you all.

10  
11 The first thing, as these meetings always go, the SSC commented  
12 that it was a new body, and they didn't have as much time to review  
13 what we had prepared for them, just by the way the briefing books  
14 work, and so we provided it earlier for the October meeting, which  
15 was canceled, but we did provide that, and we will provide it again  
16 to them, and so that was kind of one thing. It's a fairly long  
17 list. We had many new members who weren't familiar with this, and  
18 so that was one thing.

19  
20 The way that we had historically grouped this into themes, and  
21 then, within each themes, there were kind of items, and we had  
22 ranked them priority A, B, C, et cetera. As you all know, there  
23 are many themes on the list. There are many other themes that are  
24 not on the list.

25  
26 I mean, the things that come around this table are -- It's a very  
27 long list, and so the way it worked is that everything that we --  
28 It made it on the list, because just by -- As an omission, all the  
29 things that we deal with is simply not there, and it kind of  
30 divided itself into priorities and lesser priorities, and so, when  
31 we tried to rank everything that was already on the list, those  
32 are high priorities, and so it sort of worked out that there were  
33 many A items, and it wasn't helpful going from A, B, and C, because  
34 there were so many As. You know, just by being on the list, it's  
35 a high priority.

36  
37 We kind of went away from that system and tried to acknowledge  
38 that we're not putting everything that the council may view as a  
39 priority. It would be a thirty-page document of bulleted items.  
40 It doesn't really help focus the priorities, and so we just went  
41 away from that, and what -- We tried to approach it as that  
42 everything that's on the list, whether it's a theme or a bullet,  
43 is a priority item of the council, and not worry so much about  
44 splitting hairs on A-minus and B-plus and things like that.

45  
46 The other thing was streamlining categorized priorities, and so we

1 have done that. We've tried to keep them in themes, rather than  
2 get in the weeds so much, recognizing that these are high-level  
3 things and that researchers, or funding groups, may take these as  
4 suits their needs and combine them, rather than getting so far  
5 into the weeds that it's not flexible, and there may be new items  
6 and things like that to come up.

7  
8 Then the other thing we requested is to look a little further on  
9 how, once the council has prepared these research priorities, how  
10 are they used down the line, and so we worked with some of our  
11 NMFS partners, and we had planned a short presentation about this,  
12 and how they were used, and we have not received that yet to the  
13 SSC. We do plan to get that, but that's sort of one of the  
14 responses that we hope for.

15  
16 The SSC is composed of active researchers, many academics and  
17 things, and there's kind of a juxtaposition of two things in the  
18 list. It's research and monitoring, and, in science, those are  
19 sometimes opposed, in that monitoring are routine and ongoing  
20 activities, but they're not necessarily hypothesis-driven,  
21 investigating new grand ideas and things.

22  
23 The SSC, in particular, and we have many new members, and they  
24 asked why there's so much of this, and then, from the council's  
25 perspective, we rely on stock assessments for management advice  
26 and things, and, yes, they do ingest new information, but they  
27 also rely on these long-term stationary indices for ages and sizes  
28 and effort and all these kinds of things, and so try to make it  
29 clear that there is a role of the council.

30  
31 You all place a lot of weight on these, based on everything that  
32 we do, and try to make that a little more clear in the actual  
33 research priorities, about what these are and the priorities.

34  
35 Then the other part of this is that these monitoring programs do  
36 generate lots of scientific research. I reached out to, for  
37 example, the GFISHER, and that program, and they have a list of  
38 publications and things from generating all these data, and the  
39 other programs do as well, the SEAMAP and things, and so lots of  
40 academic research comes through, simply because they are long-  
41 term, and there's so much information that's collected, and so  
42 they're not totally opposed.

43  
44 The other part about that is, just by individual academics,  
45 sometimes these -- We rely on information Gulf-wide that we can  
46 apply, and individual investigators -- It is difficult. I mean,

1 you get funding from studying one place, and it's hard to  
2 understand how that works at the level that you all are responsible  
3 for managing, and so it's a back-and-forth on how that works.

4  
5 Then another thing that they asked is, well, these species-specific  
6 priorities, in the earlier version, and we had sort of a laundry  
7 list of high-profile species, and some of the things that the  
8 council staff felt were necessary to improve it, and we provided  
9 that in a list, and, again, this could easily delve into a long  
10 list, and we looked at the stock assessments and things, and so we  
11 tried to refocus this a little bit.

12  
13 We, in recent meetings, had a discussion about key stocks, and  
14 then, you know, some high-profile species, and the species in our  
15 previous one really focused on species that were overfished and in  
16 rebuilding programs, and so we tried to kind of meld this together  
17 and then focus on species in rebuilding programs and on key stocks.

18  
19 Then what I've done here is kind of highlight that many of those  
20 species are the same, and so it's not two separate lists, and so  
21 species that we focus on as priority species are on the screen.  
22 The ones that are also in rebuilding plans are in the orange, and  
23 then red grouper and gray snapper are the key stocks, as identified  
24 by the council, that are not currently in rebuilding programs, and  
25 so that's sort of what we focused on.

26  
27 We looked at the recommendations from the stock assessments, but  
28 we didn't want to limit ourselves to those kinds of things, and we  
29 didn't really feel like it was, for this list, that it was helpful  
30 to go and say, well, we need an investigation on the point estimate  
31 of a mortality parameter or something like that. That's too weedy,  
32 and so we try to keep that more high-level, and we also want to be  
33 flexible, that everything that we put in here -- There may be new  
34 science, new information, new needs that come up that are not  
35 encompassed with this list, but they may emerge during the next  
36 review period.

37  
38 Then we got quite a bit of feedback on the economic and social,  
39 and so we tried to focus the themes, if you will, on what's on the  
40 screen, and, again, we try to keep this more high-level, rather  
41 than going through bit by bit and trying to identify precise needs,  
42 because simply there are many, and they change often, and so this  
43 is intended to be a forward-thinking document as well.

44  
45 Then, on the ecosystem, we tried -- The SSC asked, you know, what  
46 information we actually need to get to this, and, well, it turns

1 out, as you all know, we need a lot of things, and, rather than to  
2 list out a whole laundry list of things that we think we might  
3 need, we tried to keep this more high-level, and, again, this  
4 circles back to how this information is used, and I think they are  
5 used by funding agencies, and individual investigators and things,  
6 and they're much better about linking their own work, and ideas,  
7 and how they fit into these things, than I think we could, from  
8 our perspective, and just telling them specific bits of information  
9 that we need, because we don't always know that.

10  
11 One of the feedback that we received at the last council meeting  
12 was to take a look at the Southeast strategic plan and see how  
13 that melds with what we're doing here, and so we did take a look  
14 at that plan, and the strategic goals, and the three primary  
15 strategic goals in that document are listed in yellow.

16  
17 Most of those things are really incorporated with what we're  
18 already doing, and so it seems that we're -- At least in this  
19 instance, that their strategic goals and the council's research  
20 priorities are in pretty good sync.

21  
22 What we had originally planned for this meeting, like I said, was  
23 we were going to provide you with the most recent SSC feedback,  
24 which we have not yet received, and then we were going to ask you  
25 to final approval, if you're satisfied.

26  
27 Well, we're not quite there yet, and so we're going to take any  
28 information or feedback you have here, and we'll take this back to  
29 the SSC, when we have a virtual meeting. We'll try to take their  
30 feedback, to try to meld that together, and then we'll work with  
31 you all to try to get this finalized before the end of the year,  
32 unless you have a different plan. Once that's done, we'll make it  
33 available to the public, and we'll provide it to NMFS as well, and  
34 so I'll stop there. I think that's the last slide. Dr. Sweetman.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** C.J.

37  
38 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Dr. Froeschke. A quick question, and  
39 so I think, obviously, with the last SSC meeting being canceled,  
40 because of the hurricane and whatnot, I was hoping, at least, that  
41 we would get SSC feedback on that prioritized list.

42  
43 I will say that like what you guys have done makes it much easier  
44 to digest. It definitely whittles it down quite a bit, but,  
45 obviously, we work on a lot of different things in there, and even  
46 still, within that list, part of me was still hoping for SSC input

1 as to how it was even further prioritized in there.

2  
3 Given that, with what you just said, how we're trying to finalize  
4 this before the end of the year, it almost sounds like it's not  
5 feasible to get direct feedback from the SSC to the council before  
6 we can move this forward, and so I'm just wondering, process-wise,  
7 what that interplay is with council getting feedback from the SSC,  
8 if that's feasible.

9  
10 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I think our initial plan is that hopefully they're  
11 mostly satisfied, and, if they don't have major sweeping changes,  
12 then the chair would just agree, and we could come up with  
13 something and be done with it. In the event that they have large-  
14 scale changes, we might have to adapt that plan, I guess, and bring  
15 it back, but I'm not sure on that.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Any other questions? Andy.

18  
19 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Thanks, John, for the presentation. I guess  
20 a couple of thoughts, in reaction to what you presented. So, first  
21 of all, I want to commend you and the team for putting this  
22 together. It's a short, concise document. We often, at the  
23 Fisheries Service, struggle with like our grant programs being  
24 this laundry list of priorities.

25  
26 Then, because everything is a priority, nothing becomes a priority,  
27 and we get lots of different varieties of proposals. With your  
28 priority sections, I guess, first, a couple of reactions. One is,  
29 with fishery-independent and fishery-dependent monitoring, I fully  
30 agree that it's really important, but you can only make so much  
31 change in a short period of time, and so, to me, the focus needs  
32 to be then more on pilot efforts, in order to kind of get these  
33 jumps started, but, in terms of long-term funding streams, right,  
34 there's something that's going to be needed beyond this, in order  
35 to support that. I'm just curious if that's kind of the thinking,  
36 based on your priorities here.

37  
38 **DR. FROESCHKE:** To be honest, we haven't really got into that part,  
39 if there was a new program stood up and how that would feed into  
40 a long-term system.

41  
42 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Okay, and I think that's the challenge, with  
43 especially fishery-independent monitoring, because, as you well  
44 know, oftentimes you need at least a time series of multiple years,  
45 and by the time you have a time series, with short funding  
46 scenarios, it ultimately doesn't necessarily lead to the benefits

1 that we had hoped.

2

3 The other comment is really related to the list of species, and I  
4 don't disagree with kind of your approach, in terms of key stocks  
5 and rebuilding specie, but we have so many broad, diverse  
6 challenges, you know, and so I don't want to overlook stocks that  
7 maybe are actually improving, like lane snapper, or yellowtail  
8 snapper, some that are expanding and benefit from climate change,  
9 and then the coastal pelagics, in particular, trying to figure out  
10 what's really going on in the environment that's affecting their  
11 abundance, but it gets back to my earlier comment. If you add all  
12 those species in, everything becomes a priority, but nothing is a  
13 priority, and so I'm curious if you had some discussions beyond  
14 the list of the six that you mentioned.

15

16 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes. We talked about that, for those exact reason,  
17 and I think the two things that we kind of landed on is, one, it's  
18 not an exhaustive list, but, in general, for example, if a  
19 different species were placed on a rebuilding plan, I think it  
20 would have a place as a priority species, just by the virtue of it  
21 saying we're focusing on rebuilding species, and this is our  
22 current list, but, if it changes, I think we would modify our  
23 priorities accordingly.

24

25 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Tom.

26

27 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. John, I agree with C.J.  
28 and Andy. I think the group did a pretty good job trying to  
29 consolidate this and things. You know, you tried to stay out of  
30 the weeds, but I was thinking about some of the weeds a little  
31 bit, right, and so, like in that Section 1, where you've got kind  
32 of higher, you know, broad priority areas, and one of them is  
33 discards and discard mortality, and I think everybody agrees that's  
34 an issue.

35

36 What I didn't see in there, and it relates to the fourth one, when  
37 you get down to ecosystems, is how do you deal with depredation,  
38 right, and maybe that's a specific item, and maybe that's too far  
39 in the weeds, but it's certainly an issue that continues to raise  
40 its head here, but it raises a bigger question to me, you know,  
41 and, when we're trying to identify data streams, we tend to be  
42 focused on reef fish, right, and we just had, you know, a  
43 discussion about habitats, right, and then we've got a whole HMS  
44 group, and a whole different part.

45

46 From my perspective, one of the priorities would be how do you

1 kind of identify and inventory these datasets, that exist in  
2 different places, and actually put them together in a meaningful  
3 way to aid the management process, and so, just, you know, some  
4 thoughts, as I was reading through this, but I think you guys did  
5 a pretty good job.

6

7 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Thank you.

8

9 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Carrie.

10

11 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. So  
12 just a couple of things, I think, in response to some of the  
13 questions that have come up that have kind of been a struggle. I  
14 mean, some of the issues we're having in the Southeast, obviously,  
15 is long-term data sets that are robust enough and that capture the  
16 different life phases of the many species we manage.

17

18 Right now, there's a huge data gap for that, right, and we're not  
19 capturing, you know, the juvenile size classes of amberjack in any  
20 of our surveys, and we're not capturing, you know, young-of-the-  
21 year triggerfish in any of our surveys, until they're dropping  
22 down, which we may get them in the SEAMAP, and so those are just  
23 examples, tangible examples, and so we have many, many gaps like  
24 that.

25

26 That's just one piece of it. On top of it, we have the climate  
27 change issue. We're trying to get at some of these environmental  
28 factors, and I think, through the Inflation Reduction Act monies  
29 that are coming in, we're trying to work with the Science Center  
30 staff.

31

32 They have a whole branch, I think, now dedicated to that, and we're  
33 starting to get going with our staff on starting to try to put  
34 pieces together and look at some of the specifics for some of the  
35 CMP species, like king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia, where  
36 we can, but, again, the problem is we do not have data, spatial  
37 data, at the scale we need, for many of these issues we're dealing  
38 with, and so that's going to take a lot of resources to get us  
39 where we need to go, but, by doing these efforts, we hope to better  
40 boil down the direction we need to go with those specific types of  
41 projects.

42

43 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Any other questions? Dr. Walter.

44

45 **DR. JOHN WALTER:** Thanks. Good morning, everyone. John Walter,  
46 Southeast Fisheries Science Center. I really do like the

1 streamlined presentation here. I think it hits upon many of the  
2 priorities and emphasizing the collection of fishery-independent  
3 and dependent data, and putting that front and center I think is  
4 key, primarily because that is the main information by which we  
5 assess and manage our stocks, and keeping that at the forefront is  
6 excellent, and, also, the bycatch and discards being some of the  
7 major drivers of fishing mortality are quite important.

8  
9 I think it dovetails with a lot of the Science Center priorities,  
10 and my question is what does the process of engagement with the  
11 Science Center look like? Are you wanting us to provide some  
12 written comments, or are you going to present it to us and then  
13 have us incorporate that? What does that process look like?

14  
15 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Do you want to try that, Carrie?

16  
17 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Sure. I'll try. I don't think we've  
18 had a formal review from you guys on these priorities. We  
19 typically talk about it in a public forum, such as the SSC meeting,  
20 where you have staff that are present and can help provide feedback  
21 on that type of forum, but, if you want to provide more detailed  
22 written comment, that would have been nice to have before we  
23 presented it to the council, because we're essentially running out  
24 of time right now.

25  
26 My understanding is this has to be provided before the start of  
27 2025, but, if we have wiggle room there, which I think that's maybe  
28 an Andy question, then maybe we can take some more time to look at  
29 this, but my understanding is we need to get this updated, and  
30 finalized, before January 2025.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Any other questions or comments? Tim.

33  
34 **MR. TIM GRINER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. This is, I guess, a  
35 question for John. John, you alluded to the importance of this  
36 fishery-independent data, but I was curious, you know, given the  
37 limitations and what I've heard here, do you see fishery-dependent  
38 data becoming more integrated in what the Science Center is doing  
39 here in the future, or the near future?

40  
41 **DR. WALTER:** Thanks for that question. In terms of being able to  
42 characterize the discards and the catches, absolutely, and, to the  
43 extent that we can get a better handle on the size and age  
44 composition of discards, it's absolutely part of our data  
45 improvements, trying to put observers on for-hire vessels and to  
46 be able to characterize what is really one of the greatest sources

1 of uncertainty.

2

3 Now, in terms of using that data for indices, that's something  
4 that we've largely moved away from, and tried to emphasize our  
5 surveys, rather than use fishery-dependent indices. It's  
6 something that I think that certainly we're requested to do that.  
7 However, the challenges we face, in trying to make that data the  
8 equivalent of our surveys, with changing technology, and changing  
9 selectivity, and catchability-- Really, we struggle sometimes with  
10 that, and I think that's one of the reasons we wanted to lean on  
11 our surveys as the key information. Thanks.

12

13 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Any other questions? I've got two here. Dr.  
14 Frazer first and then Dr. Simmons.

15

16 **DR. FRAZER:** John, I appreciate your input over there. Just,  
17 again, and I don't want to speak for Carrie or the staff, you know,  
18 but one of the things I think about is who's actually doing the  
19 analysis, right, and it's the folks in the Science Center, and  
20 it's being evaluated kind of at a scientific level by the SSC, and  
21 so I think you guys are actually in the best position to say, you  
22 know, what are the data that you need to actually reduce the  
23 uncertainty, right, to provide better estimates, and so, from my  
24 perspective on the outside, whatever input that can be provided by  
25 your shop, as to what potential priority items are, that would be  
26 really helpful.

27

28 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Dr. Simmons.

29

30 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess,  
31 just to build on that, and thinking about, I think, the previous  
32 comment regarding, you know, the fishery-dependent questions, and  
33 what's needed for robust stock assessments, and we're going to get  
34 into it a little bit later, I guess, in the Data Collection  
35 Committee, but, I mean, if you look at the different programs,  
36 they're not really consistent surveys across the different fleets,  
37 necessarily.

38

39 There could be duplication there, and so I guess the question is,  
40 is depredation, you know, a priority question, and can it be  
41 utilized in the stock assessment process, or some type of  
42 interaction with marine mammals questions, and so I think it's a  
43 valid point. We really need to think about this, moving forward,  
44 and how it can be used, and not just asking questions that the  
45 data won't be utilized in the management or science process.

46

1 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Mr. Anson.

2  
3 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you, and, just to add on to some previous comments  
4 relative to the process and, you know, having some feedback from  
5 the Science Center as to what they, you know, put importance on,  
6 or how a certain topic would be beneficial in the assessment  
7 process, is going to kind of go back into priorities, but a theme  
8 -- Whether or not maybe themes could be identified, and not  
9 necessarily individual items, but things that kind of are helpful,  
10 or kind of interrelated, and maybe that can be identified, after  
11 it goes through a review from the Science Center that says, hey,  
12 this type of information would be most valuable to us through an  
13 assessment process.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Any other comments, or questions?

16  
17 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** I've got one.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Dakus.

20  
21 **MR. GEESLIN:** Kevin, that's got me thinking. I mean, the themes  
22 as to what? Other extraction methods from the fishery? I mean,  
23 we talk about discards, dead discards, depredation, IUU fishing,  
24 how these things all take -- The fish don't know the difference,  
25 right, and all those things take away from those fish in the sea,  
26 and how that plays into Carrie's point, and into the stock  
27 assessment, that's the black box out there. I don't have an  
28 answer. I'm just asking rhetorical questions here.

29  
30 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, and then just, you know, a theme, a specific topic  
31 that is related to another topic, if they were bundled together,  
32 and that was emphasized, you know, for researchers to kind of focus  
33 on for given projects that they were proposing, that would be --  
34 That they would be considering, and, you know, you could have some  
35 additional synergies there within, you know, similar topics  
36 potentially.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Anything else? Seeing none, we'll move to the  
39 next agenda item. Thank you, Dr. Froeschke. We are looking at a  
40 presentation for the consideration of wahoo for federal  
41 management. Mr. Rindone.

42  
43 **PRESENTATION: CONSIDERATION OF WAHOO FOR FEDERAL MANAGEMENT**

44  
45 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and so we're going to  
46 present a summary of the life history, management, and recent

1 landings for wahoo, and you guys are considering whether wahoo  
2 requires federal conservation and management, at the request of  
3 the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary.

4  
5 We will review some of the Magnuson recommendations that you guys  
6 can consider as part of your discussion, before you make a  
7 recommendation to the council, and so you guys should review the  
8 information presented, ask questions, and then make that  
9 recommendation to the council about whether or not to move forward  
10 with developing management for wahoo in the Gulf, and so I'll pull  
11 that presentation up.

12  
13 Okay, and so wahoo are everywhere. Their global distribution  
14 spreads throughout tropical and subtropical waters across the  
15 globe, and the migratory groups are genetically similar throughout  
16 the western and north Atlantic, and it doesn't take a lot of gene  
17 flow for there to be no real genetic difference between what would  
18 otherwise be large populations, and so, again, suffice it to say  
19 that we don't have any real delineations between stocks or anything  
20 like that. Genetically, it's all the same thing.

21  
22 They're a pelagic species, and juveniles are often associated with  
23 the sargassum mats, and they can aggregate around vertical relief,  
24 reef structures, floating debris, or really anything likely to  
25 attract and hold baitfish.

26  
27 The females are generally larger than the males, and, you know, in  
28 an absence of anything to say otherwise, we assume the sex ratio  
29 is one-to-one. They don't live more than about nine years, and  
30 they're uncommon older than about six years, and half of the  
31 females are sexually mature at just over thirty-six inches fork  
32 length, and just under one year old, and so they grow very quickly,  
33 and they are ready to reproduce before they're -- Well, half of  
34 them, half of the females anyway, are ready to reproduce before  
35 they're even one year old.

36  
37 They do form spawning aggregations, and they're batch spawners.  
38 They can spawn up to every five days during the summer months, and  
39 there is some propensity for skip spawning, but we don't know the  
40 frequency with which that happens. We just know that it can  
41 happen. The batch fecundity is positively correlated to fish size,  
42 and so bigger females are more important to the stock's overall  
43 spawning success.

44  
45 Here's some of the recent landings for Gulf wahoo, in pounds whole  
46 weight, and this is using FES data. The PSEs, or the proportional

1 standard errors, for the point estimates for the individual years,  
2 exceed 50 percent in all years, and, in most years, they exceed  
3 100, and so, while there is a point estimate, you should not, you  
4 know, go run into hard rock bets on that or anything like that.

5  
6 These landings data are very uncertain coming out of FES, and a  
7 reason why that might be might be tied to the fact that, when  
8 you're talking about fishing for a pelagic species, you're usually  
9 talking about larger center consoles, or sport fishers that, you  
10 know, could be leaving from and returning to private access points,  
11 which means that they're not going to be captured by the APAIS  
12 side of the survey, and so they're only going to be captured by  
13 the mail survey for the effort, and so we may be under-surveying  
14 the catch side for wahoo.

15  
16 That lack of access to private access points, in terms of recording  
17 catch, would also be suspected to be the case for like the  
18 Louisiana survey and the Texas survey.

19  
20 So why are we here? In June, you guys received a request from the  
21 Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, which shared a  
22 concern that the harvest of wahoo might not be sustainable within  
23 the sanctuary's boundaries, and you guys passed a motion to  
24 consider whether you wanted to look at wahoo for federal  
25 conservation or management.

26  
27 Wahoo are managed on the eastern seaboard by the New England, Mid-  
28 Atlantic, and South Atlantic Councils, and the recreational  
29 regulations and commercial regulations in the South Atlantic are  
30 shown there. The councils on the east coast have identified  
31 several habitat areas of particular concern, and landings though  
32 remain consistently below the ACLs that have been established on  
33 the east coast.

34  
35 Right now in the Gulf, the only state that actively has management  
36 in place for wahoo is the State of Florida, two per person per  
37 day, and so, just like we did with wenchman back in April, I  
38 believe it was, we're going to walk through those ten points about  
39 whether we should manage something or not.

40  
41 The purpose of this is to get some discussion from you guys and  
42 some thought down about what you think, and so this list is  
43 obviously not exhaustive. There might be reasons why you would  
44 say yes to certain things on this list and still not want to manage  
45 wahoo, and there might be things not on this list that would make  
46 you want to manage wahoo, and so don't think of it as, you know,

1 the only things to be considered.

2  
3 The first one is that the stock is an important component of the  
4 marine environment. Wahoo is a pelagic predatory species, and its  
5 predator-prey and ecological interactions are poorly known. There  
6 is some gut content science, in terms of the things they like to  
7 eat, and, reasonably enough, they like to eat the things that are  
8 in the pelagic environment, things that they can find, and so it's  
9 a species that swims very long distances, or can, and so what it  
10 finds along the way that it can eat, it will eat. At any point,  
11 you guys can stop and stop me and ask questions and have discussion  
12 and what have you.

13  
14 The stock is caught by the fishery. Well, wahoo is harvested in  
15 the Gulf, but, you know, we talked about the landings, and they  
16 are not very informative, based on the uncertainty. It's a rare-  
17 event species, and that increases the uncertainty around those  
18 point estimates for landings.

19  
20 The private recreational angler survey protocols may under sample,  
21 given that larger vessels, with extended range, that is typically  
22 required to harvest wahoo, may not be landing at public boat ramps,  
23 et cetera, where sampling would be likely to occur, on the APAIS  
24 side of things, to measure that catch.

25  
26 Whether an FMP can improve or maintain the condition of the stock,  
27 we have no idea what stock status is. We've never done a stock  
28 assessment for wahoo in the Gulf, and, based on the data that are  
29 available, I would say we'd probably be pretty hard-pressed to do  
30 one, and so its stock status is uncertain, but it is a component  
31 of the otherwise greater western Atlantic stock that's also managed  
32 by the three Atlantic councils. As far as the Atlantic councils  
33 are concerned, it's not overfished, or undergoing overfishing,  
34 based on the information that they have. The stock is the target  
35 of a fishery. While it's harvested opportunistically -- Sorry.  
36 Go ahead.

37  
38 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just a point of clarification there, Ryan. There's  
39 no stock assessment for wahoo in the South Atlantic, correct, and  
40 so just that population status, not overfished or experiencing  
41 overfishing --

42  
43 **MR. RINDONE:** It's presumed, and so it's what the management from  
44 the three Atlantic councils has operated under, since the harvest  
45 hasn't been exceeding the ACL, and so they have presumed that  
46 overfishing is not occurring.

1  
2 All right, and so it's the target of a fishery. Wahoo are harvested  
3 opportunistically with other pelagic species, and they can be  
4 targeted. Fishermen have told us this, at the last couple of  
5 meetings, and we've known this from discussions from our CMP  
6 Advisory Panel in the past, in some brief discussions about mahi  
7 and wahoo.

8  
9 They can be targeted during certain times of year, with people who  
10 know what they're doing, but they're not targeted to the same  
11 degree that say a kingfish run is expected to be targeted, just  
12 based on the anecdotal information that we've received from  
13 fishermen in the past.

14  
15 The stock is important to commercial, recreational, or subsistence  
16 users. Wahoo is sold commercially, and served in restaurants, and  
17 it is served in Gulf restaurants, but it's not necessarily always  
18 locally caught, especially folks around here. If you've gone to  
19 any of our seafood restaurants in west-central Florida and asked  
20 where the wahoo came from, most of the time it's come from the  
21 east coast, and so there's just not a lot of it that gets landed  
22 here in the Gulf commercially. If you go back to that landing  
23 slide, you'll be able to see that, if you want to toggle back to  
24 that on your own.

25  
26 Recreational landings are highly variable and uncertain. Both  
27 commercial and recreational anglers are primarily harvesting wahoo  
28 with the same style hand-line gear. There is some spearfishing  
29 for wahoo that occurs in pelagic waters, and that's primarily  
30 recreational, and there is no known subsistence fishing for wahoo  
31 in the Gulf.

32  
33 The fishery is important to the nation and the regional economy.  
34 Landings are all over the place, anywhere from, you know, about  
35 100,000 to over a million pounds whole weight annual harvest, and,  
36 for a comparison in the Gulf, cubera snapper, which we do manage,  
37 has an ACL of about 5,000 pounds, and that's in MRFSS. Hogfish  
38 has an ACL of about 150,000 pounds, and the same thing, or, well,  
39 CHTS. Then red snapper has an ACL, in CHTS, of sixteen-million-  
40 pounds-and-change.

41  
42 Wahoo is economically valuable. People do make sure that they're  
43 prepared to catch them, when they're fishing out, you know, in  
44 deep water, and so usually you'll have a couple of pitch baits  
45 ready, or something like that, if you happen to see one, or if you  
46 know you're in an area where you'll have good odds of trolling one

1 up, and so anglers do prepare for them.

2  
3 Commercial vessels are unlikely to discard them. There's no reason  
4 to. There's no trip permit or anything to keep them from being  
5 brought back on a commercial vessel, and recreational vessels may  
6 specifically target them during opportunistic times.

7  
8 There's some need to resolve competing interests, or conflicts,  
9 among user groups, and would an FMP further that resolution? We're  
10 not really aware of any conflicting user groups that are, you know,  
11 kind of at odds with each other over the non-management of wahoo  
12 at the moment in the Gulf.

13  
14 It's primarily caught, again, with other pelagic species, and  
15 there's no catch limit or sector allocation for wahoo, and so  
16 there's really not a source of consternation on which to base any  
17 user conflicts.

18  
19 Economic condition of the fishery and whether an FMP could produce  
20 more efficient utilization. Well, the efficiency of the fishery  
21 is largely, unknown along with the landings, and so this one is  
22 really difficult to be able to answer, and, also, the scope of the  
23 economic condition of the wahoo fishery is difficult to  
24 characterize, because of the boom-bust cycle from the landings,  
25 and we just generally don't know that much about it.

26  
27 There's needs for a developing fishery and whether an FMP can  
28 foster orderly growth. Well, the fishery is less developed than  
29 other pelagic fisheries, like kingfish or Spanish mackerel, or  
30 even cobia, and it's unknown, or undecided, whether the Gulf wahoo  
31 fishery would benefit from any further fishery development, and so  
32 the fishery might be as developed as we would expect it to be, and  
33 so it has certainly not been limited by management bias in federal  
34 waters.

35  
36 The extent to which the fishery is already adequately managed by  
37 states, state and federal programs, federal regulations, pursuant  
38 to other FMPs or international commissions or by industry self-  
39 regulation, consistent with the MSA and other laws.

40  
41 Well, the stock in the Gulf is also jointly managed, along with  
42 the three east coast councils who have management measures in  
43 place, and the Gulf does not, but it is all the same species, and  
44 they do make their way around the southern tip of Florida. Four  
45 of the five Gulf states don't have any specific regulations. Only  
46 Florida currently has something on the books, and we don't have

1 any international cooperative management agreements for wahoo, at  
2 the federal level, between the United States and any other  
3 neighboring countries.

4  
5 Since wahoo is one stock, you know, is the stock adequately managed  
6 in the rest of its range, by the states or by the other councils,  
7 and should this council consider federal management, and, if so,  
8 should the council manage wahoo on its own, or should it try to  
9 proceed with some sort of co-management strategy with the other  
10 Atlantic councils? These are questions for you guys to answer.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** All right. C.J.

13  
14 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I'll take a shot here and see how people feel about  
15 this. From my perspective here, and we don't have any super  
16 concerns, and just context. You know, the South Atlantic Council  
17 did look at wahoo relatively recently. They're jointly managed  
18 through dolphin and wahoo, in one FMP there.

19  
20 The South Atlantic Council ultimately chose not to make any  
21 significant changes relative to wahoo, because the stock does --  
22 As Ryan was highlighting, the stock does appear to be pretty  
23 healthy there, not having any significant overages or anything  
24 like that relative to that stock, and so from my perspective, it  
25 does seem like the other councils do a very good job in managing  
26 this stock, and so I'm not sure an FMP is warranted along those  
27 lines.

28  
29 However, I am of the perspective that unchecked harvest, in  
30 response to some of those pictures, I will say, that we've been  
31 seeing, but this does seem to be a regional component, and so I  
32 guess my thoughts here would be to look at the other states and to  
33 see if that was something that they would consider, in their own  
34 boundaries there, rather than forming a formalized FMP here,  
35 because I think that could accommodate for some of these things.

36  
37 Given that some of this is going out of Texas, I'm going to look  
38 at you, Dakus, a little bit more in particular there. I'm not  
39 trying to put pressure on you there, but the other alternative is,  
40 since this does seem to be a Flower Garden Banks issue, you know,  
41 under National Marine Sanctuaries Act, they're kind of doing their  
42 own due diligence here, where they're giving the council the first  
43 right of refusal to develop an FMP for wahoo, and, if we choose  
44 not to do that, ultimately, the Flower Garden Banks could put in  
45 regulations, whatever they want them to be, quite frankly, within  
46 Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary.

1  
2 From my perspective, those are probably the two more viable  
3 options, I think, that I would probably go towards, but I'm  
4 certainly interested to what the rest of the council has to say.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Dakus.

7  
8 **MR. GEESLIN:** Love to. Thank you. C.J., I tend to think that,  
9 you know, while those unchecked harvest from pictures is rather  
10 dramatic, you know, digging around, and talking to some of the  
11 folks, especially some of the headboat community, I hear that that  
12 is the exception, rather than the norm.

13  
14 Even with -- Let's say you had, you know, fifty folks on -- Fifty  
15 anglers on that headboat, and you had a two-fish bag limit, and  
16 you could conceptually have 100 fish. That picture would still be  
17 dramatic to me, and so, unchecked harvest from pictures, I think  
18 I would probably advocate more of a science-based management  
19 approach.

20  
21 We're lacking in the science. We recognize the data deficiencies  
22 here. You know, if this is a localized issue, and specific to the  
23 Flower Garden Banks Marine Sanctuary, and there's options for that  
24 particular body to implement fisheries management, I tend to decide  
25 that that may be the more appropriate course of action here, rather  
26 than the council take this on.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** All right. Mr. Schieble.

29  
30 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I tend to agree with  
31 the very succinct response that C.J. just gave us. I think, you  
32 know, a couple of items on there. Looking at our LA Creel landings  
33 over time, they pretty much match exactly what Ryan pulled up with  
34 the Gulf-wide landings. They're all over the place. There's years  
35 where they're high, very low, and they go back up again high. I  
36 think it has to do with, you know, environmental conditions, and  
37 opportunity to harvest as well.

38  
39 With that said, you know, we received the presentation, at the  
40 last meeting, from the Flower Garden Banks. I pulled up some LA  
41 Creel data on there, to show where the landings were coming from,  
42 after that presentation, and they're really -- In Louisiana anyway,  
43 they're coming from the Venice area. They're not coming from the  
44 western portion of Louisiana.

45  
46 Boats are, you know, picking up wahoo close to the mouth of the

1 river. They're not picking them up close to the Flower Garden  
2 Banks, and so I think, as C.J, said, as well as Dakus, it may be  
3 a Flower-Garden-Bank-specific management issue in that area.

4  
5 Maybe perhaps some management, relative to just that Flower Garden  
6 Bank zone, may be appropriate here, instead of a Gulf-wide, but,  
7 also, finally, I agree with what C.J. said about potentially state  
8 management from the individual states, as Florida has already done,  
9 and look at size and bag limit analysis and consider similar --  
10 Adopting similar regulations within each of the states, until you  
11 see differences within the harvest levels in those states, and so  
12 I would be in support of that.

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. Dakus.

15  
16 **MR. GEESLIN:** To that point, Chris, Ryan, in your research here,  
17 were you able to peel apart any of the state-specific, either rec  
18 or commercial, landings information?

19  
20 **MR. RINDONE:** Some of the data at the state level ended up being  
21 confidential, and so we just combined all of it, and that, you  
22 know, also, you could say kind of speaks to the uncertainty for  
23 those data. Florida has the highest landings, and it also has the  
24 most recreational anglers, and so that's not unexpected.

25  
26 As far as like individual trends at the state level, I mean, it's  
27 all over the place. Some years, at least relative to what a  
28 specific state might be landing, whether it's normally in say the  
29 thousands of pounds, and some years it might be, you know, dozens  
30 of pounds, and then, the next year, it's 10,000 pounds, and then,  
31 the next year, it's 1,000 pounds, and so it's not very reliable.

32  
33 **MR. GEESLIN:** To that point, Ryan, and I'll just speak to Texas  
34 commercial landings, and, within the last ten years, I see our  
35 highest commercial landings is just over 1,000 pounds. 1,000  
36 pounds.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** I have a little bit of a list going here. Dr.  
39 Frazer, then Andy.

40  
41 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. I've got a couple of  
42 questions, Ryan. You know, because wahoo are managed, I guess, by  
43 the three Atlantic councils, with an ACL, and they've set a two-  
44 fish bag limit, without an assessment, what drove those decisions?

45  
46 **MR. RINDONE:** Specifically, I don't know. We didn't go that far

1 back. Those regulations have been on the books though for a  
2 considerable amount of time. If I was to hypothesize, I would say  
3 probably because it's similar to what they are for kingfish, you  
4 know, two fish per person.

5  
6 **DR. FRAZER:** I'm just -- Again, maybe we can dig a little bit more  
7 in that regard. I guess part of the reason that I'm asking that  
8 too is that the previous discussion that we had, about kind of  
9 priorities and habitat maps and coordinating efforts and  
10 consistency, you know, it seems like the federal entities that are  
11 involved have imposed a two-fish bag limit, right, the state  
12 entities that are involved, and management in Florida, at this  
13 point, is two, and so I'm not pushing for any more management.

14  
15 Don't get me wrong. I'm just talking through this process right  
16 now. If we are going to think about consistency, right, and  
17 coordination and communication among the various entities, that's  
18 something that we probably should consider.

19  
20 Then, with regard to C.J.'s point about maybe this is a sanctuary  
21 issue, we spent a lot of time talking through fisheries-related  
22 issues of management in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary,  
23 right, and how we were somewhat reticent to let the sanctuary folks  
24 manage fisheries, and so, you know, it may seem like a simple push-  
25 off, in this particular case, but it sets a precedent that I'm not  
26 sure we want to go down that path.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you. Andy next. All right. Hold on. Mr.  
29 Rindone.

30  
31 **MR. RINDONE:** I had one to Tom's point about consideration of a  
32 daily bag limit. I think the thing to remember, with a highly  
33 opportunistic species like this, where the landings are really  
34 uncertain is that, when we come back to you -- If you guys were to  
35 request something like that, and we were to come back to you with  
36 a bag limit analysis, it's not going to tell you anything of use,  
37 because the majority of trips that are happening out there are not  
38 going to be trips that are landing the daily bag limit options  
39 that we would be proposing.

40  
41 Most, I would say probably better than 99 percent of trips, are  
42 going to land one fish or less per person per trip, and it may be  
43 even -- It may be that it's about that per vessel, and so, if  
44 you're putting something like that in place, really the thing that  
45 you're going to end up explicitly targeting would be, you know,  
46 like the multiday limit situation that we have for vessels that

1 are off more than thirty hours, and so like the picture that's in  
2 the presentation -- A trip like that would be affected, but the  
3 majority of the rest of the directed fishing effort would be very  
4 unlikely to be materially affected by that.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. Mr. Strelcheck and then Mr. Anson.

7  
8 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** I agree with a lot of the points around the  
9 table. Just a couple of clarifications, and so, in the South  
10 Atlantic, wahoo is unknown, for both the overfishing and overfished  
11 status. We just recently added wahoo and dolphin to the Caribbean  
12 Council's fishery management plan, and so there's additional  
13 management.

14  
15 In looking at the landings data, and I didn't, obviously, have an  
16 opportunity to pull Louisiana or Texas quickly, or headboat, but  
17 the majority, 90 percent in most years, is coming from Florida, in  
18 the Gulf of Mexico, as reported, with obviously lesser amounts to  
19 the west, and so we already have some regulations in place with  
20 the State of Florida.

21  
22 You can argue whether there's sufficient or not. We don't have a  
23 lot of data, and information, to go on, but I think there is  
24 certainly management that's happening elsewhere, as well as off of  
25 Florida, to argue why maybe the council wouldn't need to manage  
26 wahoo.

27  
28 Then, kind of to the points that were made earlier, certainly  
29 there's benefits that states would want to come in and just have  
30 some conservative management. You know, there could be a bag  
31 limit, or a size limit, imposed. These fish mature at very large  
32 sizes, thirty-five-plus-inches, I think, but I think my greatest  
33 concern is the picture, right? As Dakus has pointed out, it's  
34 still going to be impactful if it's two fish per person.

35  
36 I think what we really want to do is just avoid fishing on spawning  
37 aggregations, and that's been something that all of us, or not all  
38 of us, but many of us have supported over time, in terms of just  
39 a good management practice, and so I think we could go back to the  
40 sanctuary and encourage them, obviously, to come up with some  
41 management strategies to help avoid fishing on aggregations like  
42 this, or at least reduce the mortality from fishing on aggregations  
43 like this.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. Mr. Anson, and then Mr. Osborne.

1 **MR. ANSON:** As Andy said, I agree with the comments being made  
2 around the table. We currently aren't looking at putting any  
3 restrictions, bag limits or size limits, on wahoo for Alabama,  
4 but, as Andy pointed out, and others pointed out, you know, for  
5 this particular species, at the Flower Gardens Sanctuary, some  
6 sort of closure during the spawning season might be very, very  
7 beneficial, but, you know, generally, as far as the landings and  
8 such, I think it would be difficult to try to tease something out.

9  
10 You know, this fish, it's solitary, and it travels mostly  
11 throughout the year, outside of spawning period, in small groups,  
12 and so, you know, when you catch one, you generally catch one, you  
13 know, at least within that school, if you want to call it that.  
14 They are fast-growing. It's impacted each year by, at least in  
15 the northern Gulf -- If you have a windy, relatively windy, summer,  
16 you're probably not going to catch as many, because the smaller  
17 boats won't be able to get them.

18  
19 You know, if there's a high discharge in the late spring out of  
20 the Mississippi River, that's going to muddy up the water. That's  
21 going to push the fish out farther, and so, you know, there's just  
22 a lot of uncertainties there with this particular fish, but,  
23 potentially, even though it will open a proverbial can of worms  
24 with the sanctuaries managing fish, I think, for this one, if it's  
25 crafted very specifically, for a certain time of year, for a  
26 certain type of fishing, I think that would be -- It could be  
27 impactful.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** All right. Mr. Osborne, and then Mr. Sanchez.

30  
31 **MR. JASON OSBORNE:** I'm good. Thanks.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. Mr. Sanchez, and then Dr. Sweetman.

34  
35 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** Thank you. I'm not on this committee, but,  
36 having dealt with Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary during  
37 its designation, I don't know that you want to crack that door  
38 open again, in the fisheries management with the sanctuaries. This  
39 process is super friendly to the public, and transparent, and my  
40 experience there, and a different sanctuary, not so much, and so  
41 I kind of concur with Tom that be mindful if you want to go down  
42 that road.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. Thank you. Dr. Sweetman and then Mr.  
45 Broussard.

46

1 **DR. SWEETMAN:** That was going to be one of the things I wanted to  
2 hit on there, and which is why I kind of brought the idea of the  
3 states implementing regulations, because, in my experience, in  
4 dealing with some of our National Marine Sanctuary partners, it's  
5 hitting with a hammer, you know, rather than nuanced regulations  
6 like we try to do that provide access, and so I'll just throw that  
7 out there. When you push it back to the sanctuary, ultimately, we  
8 don't really have a say at that point anymore, and so I'm just  
9 throwing that out there. It could be a total prohibition on there.

10  
11 A couple of things that I also wanted to point out here is the  
12 spawning season. I'm not sure when those pictures were actually  
13 taken, but it's my understanding that people are fishing those in  
14 kind of November, this time of the year, when the spawning season  
15 is in the summer for wahoo, and so I'm just throwing that out  
16 there.

17  
18 Then, to hit on why the two-fish regulations was put in place for  
19 wahoo in the Atlantic, this -- Like Ryan was saying, this was an  
20 old regulation, that was put in the past, and the reason why that  
21 was done -- It actually was relative to the swordfish fishery and  
22 the longline fishery that's going on out there.

23  
24 At the time, swordfish was overfished. There was a lot of closures  
25 for the shark fishery, and there was a lot of concern that there  
26 was going to be directed effort towards wahoo, and so these were  
27 actually proactive measures that they put in place, and, ever since  
28 then, the fishery has continuously been managed. ACLs have not  
29 been exceeded, and so the South Atlantic Council, and the other  
30 east coast councils, have just continued on with that two-fish  
31 regulation, and so that's why that two-fish is in place.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you. That picture was taken in February.  
34 The picture is dated in that corner. Billy.

35  
36 **MR. BILLY BROUSSARD:** C.J. kind of made my point, was that it's  
37 not a spawning aggregation. They start mid-November, December,  
38 and then it will run through March, and so it's exactly in line  
39 with not spawning, and it's primarily feeding on -- You've got to  
40 keep in mind as well that Flower Garden Banks are from 100 to 140  
41 miles offshore, and, in the wintertime, in the western Gulf, it's  
42 rough, and you seldom can make it out there to do it.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Yes, and I will just take my chair hat off for a  
45 second and say, from personal experience, we've gotten thick into  
46 them off a weed line forty miles offshore, and so, I mean, with a

1 center console, I don't know that you're going to obviously put a  
2 hundred fish on the deck. You're going to run out of space, and  
3 ice, but, yes, I think there's some things to think about here.

4  
5 To summarize, back with my chair hat back on, it sounds like we  
6 lean a little bit toward it could be a Flower Garden Banks issue,  
7 or a state issue, where they put in regulations. However, we're  
8 worried about opening that can of worms, leaving fisheries  
9 management to the sanctuaries. I see Mara's hand up. Miss Levy.

10  
11 **MS. MARA LEVY:** So just a couple of things. The decision point  
12 about -- Your decision point is does this stock need conservation  
13 management in the Gulf, and, if the answer to that question is  
14 yes, you can't rely solely on the states taking action for that  
15 conservation and management, right, and so I just want to throw  
16 that out there.

17  
18 Then, if you do say yes, you can't just establish the management  
19 measures like bag limits and such, right, and you either need to  
20 somehow incorporate yourself into the FMP that's already managing  
21 this stock up the east Atlantic side or we have to separate it for  
22 management purposes, and we need all the things that go along with  
23 managing a stock, right, like stock status, criteria, ACLs, AMs,  
24 all of that.

25  
26 It's not just a matter of, yes, we want to put in a two-fish bag  
27 limit, right, and you're actually developing the full management  
28 plan, or you're incorporating somehow being involved in the  
29 Atlantic management plan. Thanks.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Thank you. Okay. Any other comments, questions,  
32 discussion points for wahoo? Yes, Dr. Sweetman.

33  
34 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I guess, just to Mara's point, and to get some of  
35 the stuff on the record, I would advocate for this stock is  
36 effectively managed by the South Atlantic Council, and the other  
37 east coast councils, as well as the states where there's  
38 regulations in place.

39  
40 The only point that I was getting at, relative to the other states,  
41 is if there was an idea that the states themselves would want to  
42 take on some additional conservation measures, and not necessarily  
43 saying it's warranted, but just saying that that is another  
44 opportunity there, but I do think that it is effectively managed  
45 where it's currently in place.

46

1 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay. Thank you very much. Do we need a motion,  
2 Dr. Simmons, or --

3  
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't know  
5 if you want to get some public comment, but, at Full Council, we  
6 probably should circle back to this and have some type of formal  
7 path forward, that we can write back to the sanctuary, or however  
8 it pans out, but just some type of formal process by Full Council.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN BANKS:** Okay, and so, if it's the will of the committee,  
11 we'll wait for a motion, or any kind of final decision, after  
12 public comment. Do I see any objections to that? If not, there  
13 was no other business put on the agenda prior, and so I will yield  
14 the time, Mr. Chair.

15  
16 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on November 4, 2024.)

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18 - - -