

GULF COUNCIL

306<sup>TH</sup> MEETING

FULL COUNCIL SESSION

Hilton Palacio Riverwalk San Antonio, Texas & Virtual

August 25-28, 2025

**VOTING MEMBERS**

J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana  
 Michael Allen.....Florida  
 Kevin Anson (designee for Alabama State Representative)...Alabama  
 Brenda Ballard.....Texas  
 Kesley Banks.....Texas  
 Billy Broussard.....Louisiana  
 Troy Frady.....Alabama  
 Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas  
 John Marquez.....Mississippi  
 Jason Osborne.....Mississippi  
 Anthony Overton.....Alabama  
 John Sanchez.....Florida  
 Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana  
 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi  
 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS  
 C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida  
 Ed Walker.....Florida

**NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

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

**STAFF**

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

**OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

1 Billy Archer.....Panama City, FL  
 2 Eric Brazer.....Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance  
 3 Rick Burris.....MS  
 4 Les Casterline.....TX  
 5 Scott Daggett.....Madeira Beach, FL  
 6 Jason Delacruz.....FL  
 7 Joshua Ellender.....LA  
 8 Richard Fischer.....LA  
 9 Jim Green.....Galveston, TX  
 10 Buddy Guindon.....Galveston, TX  
 11 Martha Guyas.....ASA, FL  
 12 Ken Haddad.....ASA, FL  
 13 Frank Helies.....NOAA  
 14 Scott Hickman.....Galveston, TX  
 15 Rachal Hisler.....TX  
 16 Chris Horton.....Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation  
 17 Dylan Hubbard.....FL  
 18 Jimmy Hull.....SAFMC  
 19 Mike Jennings.....Freeport, TX  
 20 Jennifer Lee.....NOAA  
 21 Randy Lauser.....Madeira Beach, FL  
 22 Brian Lewis.....Clearwater, FL  
 23 Lawrence Marino.....LA  
 24 Dennis Parker.....Rockport, TX  
 25 Kelia Paul.....Panama City, FL  
 26 Nathan Putman.....LGL, TX  
 27 Ashford Rosenberg.....Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance  
 28 Ted Venker.....CCA  
 29 Matt Walia.....NOAA OLE  
 30 John Walter.....SEFSC  
 31 Jaime Weisel-Wilson.....Surfside, TX  
 32 Bob Zales.....Panama City, FL  
 33 Jim Zurbrick.....Steinhatchee, FL  
 34  
 35

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2  
3 [PAGE 91](#): Motion to approve the final 2025 budget as written. [The](#)  
4 [motion carried on page 91](#).

5  
6 [PAGE 92](#): Motion to accept the proposed changes to the SOPPs. [The](#)  
7 [motion carried on page 92](#).

8  
9 [PAGE 92](#): Motion to accept the proposed changes to the  
10 administrative handbook. [The motion carried on page 92](#).

11  
12 [PAGE 94](#): Motion to request SEFSC provide a prioritized list of  
13 state-led items and also provide a prioritized list of items the  
14 SEFSC are no longer able to complete due to recent staffing  
15 shortfalls. [The motion carried on page 95](#).

16  
17 [PAGE 96](#): Motion to request that the SEDAR Steering Committee  
18 considers FWC/USF conduct stock assessments for gag and red  
19 grouper, replacing yellowtail and mutton snapper on the proposed  
20 SEDAR assessment schedule. Gag grouper will start in 2026  
21 following completion of hogfish assessment. Red grouper would  
22 start in 2028. [The motion carried on page 98](#).

23  
24 [PAGE 103](#): Motion that the council request the SEFSC conduct an  
25 interim analysis for greater amberjack considering G-FISHER and  
26 other relevant indices. [The motion carried on page 103](#).

27  
28 [PAGE 105](#): Motion to modify the language of Option 3 as follows:  
29 Option 3: Create a federal limited access permit for commercial  
30 shrimp vessels in the Gulf. To be eligible for a commercial shrimp  
31 vessel permit under the limited access system, vessels must have  
32 a valid or renewable federal Gulf commercial shrimp vessel permit  
33 on October 26, 2026. Federal Gulf commercial shrimp vessel permits  
34 would need to be renewed every year, and all previous renewal,  
35 transfer, and reporting requirements would still be in effect.  
36 Reviews of the limited access permit will occur ten years after  
37 implementation of this amendment or as otherwise deemed necessary  
38 by the council. [The motion carried on page 106](#).

39  
40 [PAGE 106](#): Motion to make Option 3 the preferred option. [The](#)  
41 [motion carried on page 106](#).

42  
43 [PAGE 107](#): Motion to populate and convene a new working group  
44 comprised of shrimp harvesting sector representatives, NMFS staff,  
45 council staff, SSC member, researchers, and others to identify  
46 workable solutions that aim to reduce interactions with smalltooth  
47 sawfish and giant manta ray in the Gulf federal shrimp trawl  
48 fishery. This new working group should be formed by the council

1 chair, Shrimp Committee chair, Regional Administrator, and  
2 executive director with no more than fifteen members. [The motion](#)  
3 [carried on page 113.](#)

4  
5 [PAGE 117](#): Motion to direct staff to write a letter pursuant to  
6 E.O. 14276 highlighting the council's recommendations below:  
7 explore requirements for active participation and permits for  
8 individual fishing quota (IFQ) holders; consider replacing the  
9 provisions of the DESCEND Act; consider removing low-priority  
10 species from fishery management plans. [The motion carried on page](#)  
11 [119.](#)

12  
13 [PAGE 121](#): Motion to write a letter to the USCG requesting they  
14 certify Starlink as an acceptable satellite communication device  
15 as soon as possible. [The motion carried on page 122.](#)

16  
17 [PAGE 123](#): Motion to approve the Abbreviated Framework Action:  
18 Modifications to the Federal For-Hire Red Snapper Fishing Season  
19 and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review  
20 and implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and  
21 appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary  
22 changes to the document. The Council Chair is given the authority  
23 to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and  
24 appropriate. [The motion carried on page 125.](#)

25  
26 [PAGE 128](#): Motion to approve Draft Reef Fish Amendment 58B:  
27 Modifications to Deep-water Grouper Management Measures and that  
28 it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and  
29 implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and  
30 appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary  
31 changes to the document. The Council Chair is given the authority  
32 to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and  
33 appropriate. [The motion carried on page 131.](#)

34  
35 [PAGE 136](#): Motion to request a presentation that explores the use  
36 of a mandatory reporting system for the recreational sector of the  
37 deepwater grouper fishery. [The motion carried on page 139.](#)

38  
39 [PAGE 139](#): Motion in Action 1 to add the alternatives from the  
40 Considered but Rejected section of the document. Additionally, to  
41 develop options for setting share caps for the new complexes. [The](#)  
42 [motion carried on page 145.](#)

43  
44 [PAGE 145](#): Motion in Action 2 to make Alternative 1 the preferred.  
45 [The motion carried on page 146.](#)

46  
47 [PAGE 146](#): Motion in Action 3 to make Alternative 2 the preferred.  
48 [The motion carried on page 146.](#)

1  
2 [PAGE 147](#): Motion to move Action 2 to Considered but Rejected.  
3 [The motion carried on page 151.](#)  
4

5 [PAGE 151](#): Motion in Action 4 to modify Alternative 3 as follows:  
6 Alternative 3: A post-season recreational AM would be implemented  
7 for the black grouper complex if the recreational ACL and the black  
8 grouper complex ACL are exceeded. In the year following an  
9 overage, NMFS would close the recreational black grouper complex  
10 to harvest when the recreational ACL is met or is projected to be  
11 met, unless NMFS determines based upon the best scientific  
12 information available (BSIA) that closure of the recreational  
13 fishing season is unnecessary. [The motion carried on page 151.](#)  
14

15 [PAGE 152](#): Motion to move Alternative 2 in Action 4 to Considered  
16 but Rejected. [The motion carried on page 153.](#)  
17

18 [PAGE 154](#): Motion in Action 4 to add a new alternative as follows:  
19 For the recreational sector, if the average recreational black  
20 grouper complex landings exceed the average recreational ACL, and  
21 the average black grouper complex landings exceed the average black  
22 grouper complex ACL over a three-year moving period, the Regional  
23 Administrator would reduce the duration of the recreational season  
24 by the amount projected such that the recreational ACL is not  
25 exceeded during the following fishing year unless NMFS determines  
26 based upon the best scientific information available (BSIA) that  
27 no adjustment to the recreational fishing season is necessary.  
28 [The motion carried on page 154.](#)  
29

30 [PAGE 154](#): Motion in Action 5 to make Alternative 2 the preferred.  
31 [The motion carried on page 155.](#)  
32

33 [PAGE 157](#): Motion in Action 6, in Alternative 2, to make Option 2b  
34 the preferred. [The motion carried on page 159.](#)  
35

36 [PAGE 159](#): Motion in Action 7 to make Alternative 2 the preferred.  
37 [The motion carried on page 159.](#)  
38

39 [PAGE 159](#): Motion in Action 8.2 to modify Alternative 2 as follows:  
40 Alternative 2: If recreational scamp complex landings exceed the  
41 complex recreational ACL in a fishing year, and the stock complex  
42 is overfished, NMFS would reduce the recreational ACL and ACT for  
43 the following fishing year by the amount of the ACL overage in the  
44 prior fishing year, unless the best scientific information  
45 available determines that a greater, lesser, or no overage  
46 adjustment is necessary. [The motion carried on page 160.](#)  
47

48 [PAGE 162](#): Motion in In Action 1 to modify Alternative 3 as follows:

1 Alternative 3: Revise the MSY proxy and catch limits for red  
2 grouper based on the results of SEDAR 88 and recommendations of  
3 the Gulf Council's SSC using a three-year constant-catch scenario.  
4 The OFL and ABC for red grouper would be set based on an MSY proxy  
5 of the yield when fishing at F 40 percent SPR and the yield when  
6 fishing at 75 percent of the FMSY proxy, respectively. The OFL  
7 and ABC are derived, in part, using SRFS data for private  
8 recreational vessels. The total ACL is set at 80 percent of the  
9 ABC in 2026, 90 percent of the ABC in 2027, and 100 percent of the  
10 ABC in 2028 and subsequent years. The OFL, ABC, and total ACL in  
11 million pounds gutted weight are as follows: (table updated) OFL  
12 10.64 million pounds gutted weight; ABC 8.28 million pounds  
13 gutted weight; total ACL in 2026 6.62 million pounds gutted weight;  
14 total ACL in 2027 7.45 million pounds gutted weight. [The motion  
15 carried on page 163.](#)

16  
17 [PAGE 163](#): Motion In Action 1 to add an Alternative 4 where the  
18 total ACL is set at 90 percent of the ABC. [The motion failed on  
19 page 164.](#)

20  
21 [PAGE 164](#): Motion in Action 1 to make Alternative 3 the preferred.  
22 [The motion carried on page 165.](#)

23  
24 [PAGE 165](#): Motion in Action 3 to make Alternative 2 the preferred.  
25 [The motion carried on page 166.](#)

26  
27 [PAGE 168](#): Motion to direct staff to develop a new reef fish  
28 amendment that establishes a pilot program for setting aside a  
29 portion of the red grouper commercial quota. The amendment should  
30 consider, but not be limited to, alternative set-aside amounts,  
31 criteria for qualifying for set-aside allocation, restrictions on  
32 transferability, and methods for distributing set-aside  
33 allocation. The council's goal is to take final action in April  
34 2026, with a target pilot program start date of early 2027. [The  
35 motion carried on page 169.](#)

36  
37 [PAGE 170](#): Motion in Action 2 to select Alternative 2 as the  
38 preferred. [The motion carried on page 170.](#)

39  
40 [PAGE 181](#): Motion: in Action 1 to move Alternative 4 to Considered  
41 but Rejected. [The motion carried on page 182.](#)

42  
43 [PAGE 183](#): Motion to direct staff to draft an abbreviated framework  
44 action to continue the measures in the DESCEND Act in the Gulf,  
45 with the goal of taking final action in November 2025. [The motion  
46 carried on page 183.](#)

47  
48 [PAGE 185](#): Motion that the council draft and transmit a letter to

1 the NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator expressing the  
2 council's concern that the agency has not yet finalized the  
3 rulemaking for greater amberjack management measures in federal  
4 waters of the Gulf of America, despite requirements under the  
5 Magnuson-Stevens Act to implement accountability measures when  
6 catch limits are exceeded. The letter should inquire about: (1)  
7 the reason for the delay in finalizing the rule, (2) the expected  
8 timeline for publication and implementation, and (3) how NOAA  
9 Fisheries intends to ensure compliance with the accountability  
10 measure requirements that mandate adjustments to prevent  
11 overfishing, account for overages and ensure continued progress on  
12 rebuilding. [The motion carried on page 189.](#)

13  
14 [PAGE 193](#): Motion to request the state directors to report their  
15 greater amberjack private recreational landings in their state  
16 survey reporting units when they report their private recreational  
17 red snapper landings during the November and April council  
18 meetings, with NMFS staff providing greater amberjack private  
19 recreational landings in MRIP-FES units, along with federal  
20 charter/for-hire and headboat landings. The November 2025 council  
21 meeting would comprise September and October 2024 landings data.  
22 The April 2026 council meeting would comprise September and October  
23 2025 landings data. [The motion carried on page 194.](#)

24  
25 [PAGE 196](#): Motion to remove Number 17 from the Action Schedule.  
26 Number 17 is spatial area closures for gag and other groupers.  
27 [The motion carried on page 197.](#)

28  
29 - - -  
30

1 The Full Council of the Gulf Council convened at the Hilton Palacio  
2 Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas on Monday morning, August 25, 2025,  
3 and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

4  
5 **INDUCTION OF NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS**  
6

7 **CHAIRMAN J.D. DUGAS:** Okay. Good morning, folks, and welcome to  
8 San Antonio for a full council meeting. Before we get started, I  
9 would like to welcome and introduce our three new council members,  
10 and, starting in Texas, it will be Ms. Brenda Ballard. From  
11 Mississippi, Mr. Johnny Marquez, and, from Florida, Dr. Mike Allen.  
12 Welcome, and, if you all have any questions or concerns, fellow  
13 council members can probably assist. From there, I will hand it  
14 over to Mr. Strelcheck.

15  
16 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Great, and if the new council members could  
17 join me over here, upfront, I would appreciate it.

18  
19 (Whereupon, the new council members were inducted.)  
20

21 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So that's probably the most awkward part of your  
22 whole membership on the council. I just wanted to say, on behalf  
23 of the Fisheries Service, thank you for your interest in serving  
24 on the council, your willingness to serve on the council.

25  
26 It takes away time from your work, your businesses, your family,  
27 and it's a large commitment, and I just appreciate the seriousness  
28 by which you take it, and so thank you, and I look forward to  
29 working with you.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Okay. We're going to  
32 move right into the agenda, and I'm going to hand it over to  
33 General Spraggins to walk us through the Administrative/Budget  
34 Committee.

35  
36 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed on August 25, 2025.)  
37

38 - - -

39  
40 August 27, 2025

41  
42 **WEDNESDAY MORNING SESSION**  
43

44 - - -

45  
46 The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at the Hilton  
47 Palacio Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas on Wednesday morning,  
48 August 27, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

1  
2 **CALL TO ORDER, ANNOUNCEMENTS, AND INTRODUCTIONS**  
3

4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We're going to get started in Full Council.  
5 Welcome to the 306<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Gulf Council. My name is J.D.  
6 Dugas, chair of the council. Please place your cell phone or  
7 similar device on silent or vibrating mode. For the benefit of  
8 all, we ask that private conversations take place outside the  
9 meeting room. Additionally, alcoholic beverages are not permitted  
10 in the meeting room.

11  
12 The Gulf Council is one of eight regional councils established in  
13 1976 by the Fishery Conservation and Management Act, known as the  
14 Magnuson-Stevens Act. Our purpose is to serve as a deliberative  
15 body to advise the Secretary of Commerce on fishery management  
16 measures in federal waters of the Gulf of America, ensuring  
17 sustainable fishery 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 fisheries managers from  
22 each state and the Regional Administrator from NOAA's Southeast  
23 Fisheries Service. Several non-voting members also participate.

24  
25 Public input is essential to our deliberative process. We welcome  
26 both oral and written comments throughout the process. Virtual  
27 attendees wishing to speak during public comment must register  
28 online. In-person participants should sign in at the registration  
29 kiosk at the back of the room. Only one registration per person  
30 is allowed. Public comment may conclude before the scheduled time  
31 if all registered participants have spoken.

32  
33 This meeting is being digitally recorded for the public record.  
34 As a courtesy, I ask that all participants seated at the table  
35 introduce themselves, beginning on the right left.

36  
37 **DR. KESLEY BANKS:** Kesley Banks, Texas.

38  
39 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** Dakus Geeslin, Texas Parks and Wildlife  
40 Department.

41  
42 **MS. BRENDA BALLARD:** Brenda Ballard, Texas.

43  
44 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** C.J. Sweetman, Florida Fish and Wildlife  
45 Conservation Commission.

46  
47 **MR. ED WALKER:** Ed Walker, Florida.  
48

1 **DR. MIKE ALLEN:** Mike Allen, Florida.  
2  
3 **MR. JOHN SANCHEZ:** John Sanchez, Florida.  
4  
5 **MR. TROY FRADY:** Troy Frady, Alabama.  
6  
7 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Kevin Anson, Alabama Department of Conservation  
8 and Natural Resources.  
9  
10 **DR. ANTHONY OVERTON:** Anthony Overton, Alabama.  
11  
12 **LT. JACKSON MORTON:** Lt. Jackson Morton, United States Coast Guard.  
13  
14 **MR. JIMMY HULL:** Jimmy Hull, South Atlantic Council liaison.  
15  
16 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Mara Levy, NOAA Office of General Counsel.  
17  
18 **MR. FRANK HELIES:** Frank Helies, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional  
19 Office.  
20  
21 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast  
22 Regional Office.  
23  
24 **DR. JOHN WALTER:** John Walter, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Fisheries  
25 Science Center.  
26  
27 **MR. DAVE DONALDSON:** Dave Donaldson, Gulf States Marine Fisheries  
28 Commission.  
29  
30 **MR. JOHNNY MARQUEZ:** Johnny Marquez, Mississippi.  
31  
32 **MR. RICK BURRIS:** Rick Burris, Mississippi Department of Marine  
33 Resources.  
34  
35 **MR. BILLY BROUSSARD:** Billy Broussard, Louisiana.  
36  
37 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** Chris Schieble, Louisiana Department of  
38 Wildlife and Fisheries.  
39  
40 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Carrie Simmons, council staff.  
41

42 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**  
43

44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you all, and welcome to the new  
45 council members. The first item up on the agenda is the Adoption  
46 of the Agenda. Is there any additions to add to the agenda? Dr.  
47 Simmons.  
48

1 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Could we just  
2 add a brief overview of the anonymous voicemail box, talk about  
3 that with the council, how that pilot is going, please.  
4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, ma'am. Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Noted. Is  
6 there any other additions to the agenda? Not seeing any, can I  
7 get a motion to approve the agenda? Dr. Banks, and it's seconded  
8 by Dr. Sweetman.  
9

10 Next up is the Approval of the Minutes. Are there any edits or  
11 changes to the minutes? Not seeing any, can I get a motion to  
12 approve the minutes as written? Dr. Sweetman, and seconded by Dr.  
13 Allen. We're going to work down the agenda. Next up will be Item  
14 III, our Supporting Agencies Updates, and we'll start with the  
15 South Atlantic Council and Mr. Hull.  
16

17 **SUPPORTING AGENCIES UPDATES**  
18 **SOUTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL LIAISON**  
19

20 **MR. HULL:** Council leadership, thank you for inviting me here, and  
21 for your friendly hospitality. Jimmy Hull, and I occupy the  
22 Florida commercial seat on the South Atlantic Council, and I'm  
23 here to deliver the South Atlantic Council update liaison report  
24 to you.  
25

26 The South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council met in Cape  
27 Canaveral, Florida on June 9<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Following  
28 is a summary of the salient discussions. Executive orders,  
29 Executive Order 14276, Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness,  
30 requests that the regional fishery management councils provide  
31 updates to their 2020 responses to Executive Order 13921 to reduce  
32 burdens on domestic fishing and increase production.  
33

34 National Marine Fisheries Service has established a deadline of  
35 September 30, 2025 for councils to respond. The council briefly  
36 discussed items to include in the response to the executive order  
37 and directed staff to produce informational material to post on  
38 the council's website and solicit public input. The council also  
39 intends to convene advisory panels to gather their  
40 recommendations. Staff will prepare a draft response for the  
41 council to review and finalize at the September meeting.  
42

43 The council directed that the following items be included in the  
44 response: first, remove the commercial snapper grouper two-for-  
45 one permit provision; remove species from the snapper grouper  
46 fisheries management plan that are not in need of federal  
47 management; consider actions the council can take to address shark  
48 depredation; consider shifting management of spiny lobster to the

1 State of Florida; explore use of exempted fishing permits to manage  
2 red snapper and black sea bass; continue to develop an amendment  
3 to allow access to a portion of the Oculina Habitat Area of  
4 Particular Concern to the rock shrimp fishery; and, finally,  
5 explore how the council can support improvements to habitat for  
6 managed species in Florida.

7  
8 For-hire reporting improvement amendment, the council paused work  
9 on this amendment to focus on actions that are deregulatory, in  
10 accordance with the recent executive orders. The amendment remains  
11 in the council's workplan, but its timeline of development is  
12 uncertain.

13  
14 South Atlantic headboats, since June 2024, in response to public  
15 input, the council has been gathering information to consider  
16 modifying species vessel limits for headboats. At its June 2025  
17 meeting, the council narrowed this consideration to three species  
18 in the snapper grouper fisheries management unit, black grouper,  
19 gag grouper, and snowy grouper, and will continue discussion of  
20 modifying headboat vessel limits for these species at its March  
21 2026 meeting.

22  
23 Mackerel and cobia, in 2024, the council hosted a series of sixteen  
24 in-person and six virtual port meetings along the Atlantic coast,  
25 where attendees discussed their perspectives with other fisheries  
26 participants and local council members. In March 2025, council  
27 staff reviewed the draft report and high-level themes from this  
28 effort. The council requested detailed information on a suite of  
29 management options to be brought to the June 2025 meeting.

30  
31 Council staff presented this information in addition to a refresher  
32 on the results of SEDAR 78 for Atlantic Spanish mackerel. The  
33 council opted to postpone work on adjusting catch levels for  
34 Atlantic Spanish mackerel until the results of the MRIP-FES pilot  
35 study are received and directed staff to work with the Southeast  
36 Fisheries Science Center to determine if the next Atlantic Spanish  
37 mackerel assessment can occur sooner in the SEDAR schedule.

38  
39 In addition, council staff will work to look at potential port  
40 meeting response actions as regulatory or deregulatory, to address  
41 the recent executive order mandates.

42  
43 Coral and shrimp, the council approved modifications to the purpose  
44 and need and selected a preferred alternative for the amendment,  
45 which proposes to establish a shrimp fishery access area along the  
46 northern extension of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular  
47 Concern. An in-person public hearing in north or central Florida  
48 will be held this summer, as well as hearings via webinar.

1  
2 Snapper and grouper commercial fishery management, the Commercial  
3 Snapper Grouper Subcommittee reviewed draft actions based on  
4 previous discussions and directed staff to include the actions  
5 listed below in Amendment 60 and solicit feedback from the public.  
6

7 First, revise the two-for-one snapper grouper commercial unlimited  
8 permit policy and revise the requirements to acquire or retain a  
9 snapper grouper commercial unlimited permit. Establish a  
10 framework for dynamic trip limits that vary throughout the season  
11 based on the tracked catch and the time remaining in the season.  
12 Establish a non-target or out-of-season allowance for harvest. In  
13 addition, the council wants to explore consideration of replacing  
14 gear onboard restrictions with stowage requirements and multi-day  
15 trip limits for a subset of snapper grouper species.  
16

17 Public scoping will be conducted ahead of the next subcommittee  
18 meeting, which will be held in conjunction with the council's  
19 September 2025 meeting.  
20

21 Innovation plan for the snapper grouper fishery, an innovation  
22 plan was introduced that provides a potential framework for future  
23 discussions towards adapting to changes in the National Marine  
24 Fisheries Service and maximizing commercial and recreational goals  
25 through innovative and comprehensive management in the snapper  
26 grouper fishery. The council intends to engage in further  
27 discussions on this topic at upcoming meetings.  
28

29 Snapper grouper management unit revisions, the council initiated  
30 a plan amendment to modify the number of species managed under the  
31 Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. It was determined that  
32 an evaluation is needed to see if seventeen species currently  
33 included in the management unit should remain, be removed, or be  
34 designated as ecosystem component species.  
35

36 Since some state-level regulations for these species, particularly  
37 in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, are currently tied  
38 to federal regulations, the council will review current mechanisms  
39 in place at the state level in more detail at the September 2025  
40 meeting.  
41

42 Black sea bass, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center presented  
43 results of the SEDAR 76 update stock assessment of black sea bass,  
44 which suggests that the stock in the South Atlantic is overfished  
45 and is experiencing overfishing. The SSC's review of the  
46 assessment noted several uncertainties in the information used to  
47 develop catch level recommendations, but, given the notable  
48 decline in abundance of black sea bass in the South Atlantic, the

1 council did not want to wait until the issues with the stock  
2 assessment were resolved to initiate management action.

3  
4 Therefore, the council intends to begin a framework amendment to  
5 lower black sea bass catch levels, using average landings from  
6 2019 to 2023, for each sector. In addition, the council will  
7 explore changes to size limits, a reduction in the recreational  
8 bag limit, and a spawning season closure for both sectors.  
9 Meanwhile, the council requested that the SSC reevaluate its  
10 recommendations as soon as possible and that an additional external  
11 peer review of the stock assessment be considered.

12  
13 Private recreational permit and education requirements, Amendment  
14 46, the council paused work on this amendment to focus on actions  
15 that are deregulatory, in accordance with the recent executive  
16 orders. The amendment remains on the council's workplan, but its  
17 timeline of development is uncertain.

18  
19 Atlantic blueline tilefish, in spring 2025, the SSC reviewed the  
20 blueline tilefish stock assessment and supported a data-limited  
21 approach based on average catch to establish the ABC for areas  
22 north and south of Hatteras, North Carolina.

23  
24 For the region north of Cape Hatteras, the SSC recommended  
25 incorporating updated data from the South Atlantic Deepwater  
26 Longline Survey to inform the allocation of the ABC. This resulted  
27 in 70 percent of the northern ABC being allocated to the Mid-  
28 Atlantic and 30 percent to the South Atlantic.

29  
30 The council was concerned about potential reductions of catch in  
31 the South Atlantic region and questioned the apportionment  
32 approach. Since a management response is not immediately required  
33 for the stock, the council will request discussions with the Mid-  
34 Atlantic region to explore alternative ways to divide the ABC,  
35 noting that developing an approach to address jurisdictional  
36 allocations will soon be necessary, as species distributions  
37 change. That concludes my report.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Hull. Do we have any questions  
40 for Mr. Hull? Mr. Walker.

41  
42 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Mr. Hull. I wondered if you could provide  
43 me a little more information on the discussions on modifying the  
44 vessel limits on the headboats. I'm assuming that would mean like  
45 not one for everybody on the boat, or what? Can you fill me in a  
46 little bit on that?

47  
48 **MR. HULL:** Yes, I can, and so we've heard a lot from the headboat

1 fleet about how the vessel limits are not workable under their  
2 conditions of multi passengers, and so most of the vessel  
3 requirements are geared towards a six-pack boat, and so I think  
4 the idea that we're heading towards is using the six-pack number  
5 as a scaler to the headboat application of multi-passenger, and  
6 apply the vessel limit that way. That's not for certain yet, but  
7 that seems to be the way we're going.

8  
9 **MR. WALKER:** Interesting. Thank you.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any other questions for Mr. Hull? I  
12 have one for you, Mr. Hull, and maybe it could be for Andy, or it  
13 could be maybe for C.J., and not to put either one of you on the  
14 spot, but you mentioned the consideration of shifting management  
15 of spiny lobster to the state of Florida. Can we -- Can you  
16 elaborate a little bit more on that, or what's the thought process  
17 there, because, if that would happen, it would affect us as well,  
18 right? I don't know if it's C.J.

19  
20 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and this was one of those conversations about  
21 the executive order, obviously, right, and the conversation around  
22 the table for that fishery, and we've had similar conversations  
23 here, and, you know, this was brought up at our last council  
24 meeting, as we're moving through this process, and, you know, the  
25 recreational data is all collected from the State of Florida.

26  
27 We do align regulations, obviously, close coordination with the  
28 councils along those lines, and, quite frankly, I mean, it's one  
29 of those -- I think we'll dive into this as we get into the  
30 executive order discussion, but about fisheries that the council  
31 really doesn't do much with in the first place, and whether that  
32 is really needed.

33  
34 From my understanding, and feel free to correct me if I'm wrong,  
35 Andy, but the reason why spiny lobster, despite, you know, not too  
36 much action going on on either council, is included as a federally-  
37 managed fishery is relative to import size limits, and things along  
38 those lines, and we think that it's not really needed at this  
39 point, but Andy's predecessor, that was -- He was -- That was  
40 important to him, and that's why we have an FMP there.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Strelcheck.

43  
44 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I think C.J. has captured it well, and so this  
45 is, obviously, one of the ideas floated in response to the  
46 executive orders, and, you know, something we're open to looking  
47 into. As C.J. pointed out, there's some import size restrictions,  
48 that the state may not be able to impose, that could be important

1 for managing spiny lobster.

2  
3 There's also some other federal regulations, with area closures  
4 for spiny lobster in federal waters, and, you know, other things  
5 that potentially could be extended to state jurisdiction, but we  
6 want to look at, kind of holistically, the management carefully.  
7 If we're going to turn it over to the State of Florida, what  
8 restrictions or things may go away, and how does that impact the  
9 overall management of spiny lobster.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for the information, Mr. Strelcheck.  
12 Do we have any other questions for Mr. Hull? Not seeing any, thank  
13 you again, Mr. Hull. Moving down the list to Texas law enforcement  
14 efforts, what I would like to do is turn it over to our colleague,  
15 Dakus, at this moment.

16  
17 **TEXAS LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS**

18  
19 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before I introduce some of  
20 our law enforcement team, I just want to brag on them a minute.  
21 You know, in Texas, we're extremely proud people. I was reminded  
22 of this, our long-standing history, as I went over to the Alamo  
23 last night, and walked over, you know, a half-mile, and I encourage  
24 everyone to do that while they're here.

25  
26 For us Texans, it means a lot, and I just wanted to, you know,  
27 share some of the pride, not only from, you know, those of us that  
28 work together within the department, but as fellow Texans. As  
29 many of you know, we experienced a horrible flooding event here on  
30 July 4<sup>th</sup>. Our governor, acting extremely quickly, sent in a team  
31 of multiple agencies, and at the top of that list was our Texas  
32 game wardens.

33  
34 They're the first onsite, first on scene, and some of the last to  
35 leave. Ron, Colonel Ron Vanderoots, gave an update to our  
36 commission last week that was just incredibly moving. He described  
37 hundreds, hundreds, of rescues, via overland, getting into -- Some  
38 of the first folks to get into Camp Mystic, that youth camp where  
39 many of the young girls lost their lives.

40  
41 They conducted several aerial rescues, via helicopter, swift water  
42 rescues, and, talking to Carmen Rickle when she got back, I just  
43 -- It was profound, the impact that some of those efforts had on  
44 our people, and so I did want to just acknowledge just how  
45 extremely proud I am, as one of your friends, one of your  
46 colleagues, but as one of your fellow Texans, and just how moved  
47 I am, and, you know, one of our previous leaders, and we all know  
48 him, Carter Smith, used to say, during the darkest of times, our

1 people shine the brightest, and that was just a shining example of  
2 those rescue efforts that you all displayed to our folks that were  
3 impacted, and will continue to be impacted, by that flood.

4  
5 Before I introduce you all, I just wanted to give you a tip of the  
6 cap again, and just let you know how moved and proud of you I am.  
7 Today we've got the top of the top here, and we've got Colonel Ron  
8 Vanderroos, and he's our law enforcement division director, and  
9 we've got Lieutenant Colonel Ben Baker also here, and both of them  
10 have an office there at headquarters in Austin. Our Assistant  
11 Commander of Fisheries Enforcement, Les Casterline, and you all  
12 know him, he'll be giving the presentation.

13  
14 Our Lieutenant of Fisheries Enforcement, Carmen Rickle, is here,  
15 and one of our local wardens even, Warden Kathleen Schumann. I'm  
16 going to call you out, if you're going to -- Would you all stand  
17 up for me, and just wave to the folks? Thanks again, you all.  
18 I'm proud to serve with you. I'll stop and turn it over to Les  
19 Casterline. Thanks, Les.

20  
21 **LT. LES CASTERLINE:** Mr. Chairman, Madam Vice Chairman, council  
22 members, staff, good morning. I'm glad to be here with you today,  
23 and I appreciate the opportunity to talk about some of our  
24 enforcement efforts related to federal fisheries here in Texas.

25  
26 Here in Texas, and, just as Dakus had mentioned, for the record,  
27 my name is Les Casterline, Assistant Commander of Fisheries  
28 Enforcement for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. In Texas,  
29 we have 367 miles of coastline, of which we hold multiple  
30 priorities with NOAA's OLE, in which we perform enforcement in  
31 both outside and inside waters along that 367 miles of coastline.

32  
33 Just to give you an idea of what it takes to do so, we have two  
34 coastal law enforcement regions, Region 4, which is in the upper  
35 Texas coast, and Region 8, which is in the lower Texas coast. At  
36 any point in time throughout the year, in combined efforts, you'll  
37 have the use of over a hundred Texas game wardens doing this  
38 enforcement, and multiple priorities, which I'll go over with you  
39 in here in a few minutes, utilizing nearshore, mid-range, and long-  
40 range vessels.

41  
42 Our nearshore vessels, which are more of your single-engine center  
43 console vessels, and we use closer to shore mid-range vessels, and  
44 that would be your probably twenty-eight-plus-foot twin-engine  
45 vessels, so we have the capabilities to work those mid-range  
46 offshore waters, and we also have, currently, two long-range  
47 vessels, one in the southern coast and one on the northern coast.  
48 We've got a sixty-five-foot Breaux Bay Craft, out of Galveston,

1 and, out of Corpus Christi, we have an eighty-foot All-American  
2 catamaran, which we were fortunate to get through the Texas  
3 legislature a few years back.

4  
5 Currently, for the 2024 and 2025 joint enforcement agreement, which  
6 we hold cooperatively with the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement,  
7 we're made up of multiple priorities which we focus on. First, we  
8 have our general enforcement, and so to give you an idea of what  
9 "general" means, that's where we look into things such as coastal  
10 migratory pelagic species, as well as our HMS species.

11  
12 We have hours dedicated for both mid-range patrol, which this year  
13 we have 108, and long-range patrol, which we have forty. These  
14 particular patrols concentrate on federal waters outside of state  
15 waters along the entire Texas coast.

16  
17 Next, moving on, we also have a priority where we're enforcing TED  
18 regulations on our shrimp fleets. This priority is not only  
19 enforced in federal waters, but also in our offshore waters in the  
20 Gulf of Mexico, as well as our inshore waters here in Texas, where  
21 we have, currently for this current year, which we're finishing  
22 up, 400 hours of nearshore patrols, seventy-two hours of mid-range  
23 patrols, and 150 hours of long-range patrols. These are also  
24 carried out up and down the coast, from the Texas-Mexico border  
25 all the way to the Louisiana border.

26  
27 Moving on, next, we have our reef fish priority. This is, once  
28 again, a federal waters patrol priority, where we utilize mid-  
29 range vessels for our ninety hours of mid-range patrols, and our  
30 long-range vessels for an additional forty hours of long-range  
31 patrols dedicated to reef fish.

32  
33 Moving on, we also have a couple of dockside efforts that we do,  
34 one of which is enforcing the IFQ regulations. We receive the  
35 landing notifications when they come in, the three-hour  
36 notifications, and those are dispatched out to local game wardens,  
37 depending on the area in which the landings have occurred, and  
38 then those game wardens will respond, in most cases, to observe  
39 these offloads at the dock.

40  
41 This year, we've got ninety-nine hours of effort dedicated to that  
42 in our JEA contract, and the majority of these just occur on the  
43 upper Texas coast. It's not that we don't have many, or don't  
44 have any, on the lower Texas coast, but you will see, as you move  
45 on the upper coast, a higher concentration of landings from our  
46 IFQ vessels.

47  
48 Moving on, one of our newer priorities, and it's getting some age

1 on it now, is our sanctuary enforcement. This was brought up as  
2 a discussion in part of the meeting, talking about enforcement and  
3 our efforts getting out to the Flower Garden Banks. This is an  
4 effort that's mainly carried out by ourselves at Parks and Wildlife  
5 and our partners with the U.S. Coast Guard.

6  
7 This is, obviously, a long-range patrol. We utilize our eighty-  
8 foot long-range vessel for these patrols. This year, we had  
9 thirty-six hours specifically dedicated for the Flower Gardens  
10 patrols. I can tell you that some of the discussions that are  
11 going on related to the Flower Gardens patrols are maybe a little  
12 bit more coordinated effort with our partners at the Coast Guard.

13  
14 We feel that, if we can maximize our effectiveness and efficiency,  
15 if we leverage some of their air assets and patrols, and, just to  
16 give you an idea, if they fly it, and there's no vessels out there,  
17 there's no reason to waste these hours driving out there to patrol  
18 an empty bank out there, and so we can better prioritize those  
19 hours to when we do know that there's vessels out there.

20  
21 It's not that we won't spin up and have a patrol planned, but we'll  
22 probably coordinate with them, to see if we can have some  
23 overflights, and we may stand that patrol down if there's no reason  
24 to deploy to the Flower Gardens, and so I think that will make it  
25 more effective and efficient for those few hours that we have.

26  
27 Moving on to our next priority, which is our newest of our  
28 priorities, and it's kind of a catch phrase that a lot of people  
29 are hearing, that's new in a lot of the discussions, is IUU, or  
30 illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

31  
32 What we do in this fishery is the dockside inspection at our ports  
33 of entry, cooperatively with our federal partners, and not only  
34 NOAA OLE, but you'll also see us working connecting with U.S.  
35 Customs. Obviously, these are going to be their facilities.

36  
37 We'll be working with our Food and Drug Administration, the Fish  
38 and Wildlife, and other federal agencies that have specific efforts  
39 that they're conducting with us when we're looking into this.  
40 We're checking paperwork and making sure that the imports that are  
41 coming in are what they say that they are on paper, and so we're  
42 looking at labeling violations, paperwork violations, looking at  
43 any species that might have some sort of sanctions, or action that  
44 has been taken, and maybe they're not being allowed into the  
45 country from -- Either period or from certain countries.

46  
47 Those efforts have been very beneficial to us. I will say that -  
48 - You know, this year, we had 300 hours. This has been an effort

1 that has really caught on in Texas, because, when we started really  
2 working with OLE to initiate this priority, we started finding  
3 some violations that were very concerning to us, that may have not  
4 been federally regulated, in the instance and in the way that they  
5 were occurring, but very important for public health and safety.  
6

7 As you'll see from some of the pictures here, on the left, what  
8 that is is basically a clear ice bag. That's raw oysters that are  
9 being brought across from Mexico. In most cases, they're coming  
10 across through the non-commercial lanes of traffic. Why are they  
11 doing that? Because the FDA has inspectors at the ports of entry,  
12 and, if they claim commercial activity, and they bring those in,  
13 they get flagged to go for an inspection.  
14

15 There's no proper labeling on these. These are more than likely  
16 not coming from an approved harvest area, and so there's a high  
17 risk of public health issues that could occur due to these oysters  
18 coming in.  
19

20 What they're doing is they're smuggling these oysters in vehicles,  
21 sometimes in the trunk, without refrigeration, and in different  
22 manners to bring these oysters in. They're ending up in our  
23 markets, and in our restaurants, and we have taken state dollars,  
24 to add on to what we're utilizing at the POEs that are given to us  
25 by NOAA, to enhance this enforcement, because we feel that this is  
26 a very important effort that needs to occur, as it not only deals  
27 with the resource, but with public health and safety.  
28

29 Just to kind of give a recap of the actual JEA enforcement  
30 priorities that we have, because this is the last one that we  
31 actually have, we -- In these enforcements, we do referrals to  
32 NOAA on certain federal case packages, either cases that occur  
33 that are caught in federal waters or federal violations that occur  
34 in Texas that are more egregious violations, and we'll refer those  
35 to NOAA.  
36

37 So far, as of yesterday, we've received at headquarters, because  
38 we forward those directly for our officers, twenty case referrals  
39 that have gone to NOAA OLE this year. In addition to that, just  
40 to let you know, within state waters, we have multiple priorities  
41 in which we have adopted state regulations. IFQ, TEDs, bycatch  
42 reduction devices, we've mirrored regulations with the federal  
43 government.  
44

45 Also, we've enacted an importation regulation, where, if somebody  
46 imports a product, aquatic resource, from the EEZ, that was taken  
47 in violation of federal regulations, that's also a violation of  
48 state law, and so these twenty referrals are in addition to any of

1 the state violations that we've uncovered through the years.

2  
3 In addition to our priorities, just another subject that there's  
4 usually a lot of questions and interest in here at the Gulf Council  
5 is IUU fishing. There's not a current priority dedicated to IUU  
6 fishing in our state and federal waters, but we do usually try to  
7 give you an update. Just in south Texas, and along the Texas-  
8 Mexico border, this is an issue for us, not only in the Gulf, but  
9 in the rivers and our border lakes.

10  
11 This is an issue that game wardens deal with day in and day out,  
12 and we put a lot of effort into addressing this, because of the  
13 destruction that it causes to our fisheries.

14  
15 Some of the pictures here, you will see that -- In the left there,  
16 you see blue crab traps. That's not something that you all  
17 commonly hear us talk about. You'll hear us talk about gillnetting  
18 and longlining. What's significant about that is blue crabs are  
19 actually a species that are listed in the Seafood Import Monitoring  
20 Program as one of the thirteen priority species that we're actually  
21 trying to give extra oversight to, when they're importing those  
22 products into the state, with other species like shrimp, blue crab,  
23 and sharks, and other species like that.

24  
25 You'll see, whether it's gillnetting on the river in the Gulf,  
26 crab traps, or longline in the Gulf of Mexico, this is a huge issue  
27 that we still battle down in south Texas every day, and, just to  
28 give you an idea for this year, we had seized 6,400 feet of gillnet,  
29 and this is just in coastal waters, and 27,640 feet of longline in  
30 the Gulf of Mexico.

31  
32 Those lines are being set in south Texas, anywhere from the Texas-  
33 Mexico border to north of Port Mansfield, Texas, which is a pretty  
34 big area of water, out to as far as thirty to fifty miles offshore,  
35 and so I will say that something to highlight for this issue is  
36 we've been fortunate enough to be awarded a project, a NRDA  
37 project, dealing with sea turtle restoration.

38  
39 We're in the process of building two new long-range vessels that  
40 will be placed in south Texas. They will also come with five  
41 years' worth of funding for additional fuel to patrol the area  
42 south of Corpus Christi to the Texas-Mexico border for IUU fishing.

43  
44 Specifically, these vessels, because of their interaction with sea  
45 turtles, and we've had quite a few strandings, where the longline  
46 and the gillnets have had interactions and caused mortality of  
47 multiple sea turtles in these areas, and so we're very appreciative  
48 of that, very appreciative of our partners, state and federal

1 partners.

2

3 I know that even some of the agencies that are probably in here  
4 today probably commented or worked on that project, as it was being  
5 approved, and so thank you very much for any efforts that you all  
6 had towards getting that approved.

7

8 Just a couple of things, just to be notable, the things that are  
9 going to assist us moving forward, as far as the JEA, this year we  
10 were awarded, and are currently building, one new nearshore vessel  
11 that will be deployed down to south Texas. We should be receiving  
12 that after the first of the year.

13

14 The two new NRDA vessels I mentioned will be going to south Texas.  
15 You'll see those in south Texas, as well as, which this will be a  
16 huge enhancement for our efforts, the legislature, over the past  
17 few years, has assisted us in kind of building out our air fleet.

18

19 We've already got our two A-star helicopters, but we're also in  
20 the middle of building two Cessna Grand Caravans, that we should  
21 be receiving in the next few months, and we hope to use those to  
22 help better target effort in the Gulf, so that we can be more  
23 effective, and efficient, in how we place our patrols out, and be  
24 directed more where the fleet is at, instead of the search pattern  
25 out in the Gulf. I think it's going to be very beneficial. I  
26 appreciate everybody that's involved in helping us get this  
27 equipment. Mr. Chairman, unless anybody has any questions, that's  
28 all I have for my presentation.

29

30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Lt. Casterline. Do we have any  
31 questions? Not seeing any, Les, thank you for being here, and  
32 your team, and your efforts. Thank you.

33

34 **LT. CASTERLINE:** Thank you. You all have a great day.

35

36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Les, we have a question from Dr. Simmons.

37

38 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Not a question, but I just wanted to  
39 say thank you again, Lt. Casterline, to you and your team, for all  
40 the coordination leading up to this meeting. I mean, we always  
41 work well together, but there was a lot of coordination before  
42 this meeting, and I really appreciate it.

43

44 **LT. CASTERLINE:** No problem at all. We're happy to help.

45

46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Okay. I would like to get one more  
47 report done before we break for lunch, and it would be Mr. Walia,  
48 with NOAA Office of Law Enforcement.

1  
2 **MS. BERNADINE ROY:** Mr. Walia, are you online and able to speak?  
3 If you're speaking, we can't hear you, Mr. Walia.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Mr. Walia, we cannot --

6  
7 **MR. MATT WALIA:** Can you hear me now?

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Now we can hear you, Mr. Walia.

10  
11 **MR. WALIA:** All right. Apologies about that. I was talking, and  
12 I'm not sure what's going on with connection. Am I coming through  
13 okay?

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir. Go ahead.

16  
17 **NOAA OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT (OLE) REPORT**

18  
19 **MR. WALIA:** All right. I appreciate it, Mr. Chair, and so my name  
20 is Matt Walia, Compliance Liaison with NOAA Office of Law  
21 Enforcement. I'm going to give you some updates on kind of what  
22 we've had going on. I did attach, in the briefing book, our most  
23 recent council report, and so this has some updates from that, as  
24 it pertains to the Gulf and some other stuff we've been doing.

25  
26 Just to kind of add on, I appreciate all the effort and work you  
27 just heard from Assistant Commander Casterline. I just wanted to  
28 give some updates too, for some of the new council members, when  
29 the sanctuary came up, so everyone knows what our capabilities  
30 are.

31  
32 We are happy to say, with the current Gulf states, we have JEA  
33 renewed on all the state partners. In Texas, actually, they start  
34 their new annual requirements next week, and, in those priorities,  
35 one of them is for the sanctuary, for the Garden, and so we've  
36 been able to allocate seventy long-range patrol hours for that, to  
37 help out with that.

38  
39 We also coordinate pretty closely with the U.S. Coast Guard ATC  
40 Mobile sector. We do flyovers with them. We've made cases that  
41 way, monitoring the Flower Gardens, and, of course, VMS, for those  
42 boats that do have it, and so we have made cases on folks that are  
43 anchoring or bottom longlining within the sanctuary, and so, if  
44 any new regs are made down the road, as far as wahoo, those would  
45 be the avenues that we would coordinate to get that out.

46  
47 Especially for some of the new council members, I just wanted to  
48 touch on this, the IUU enforcement. It's a big focus of work that

1 we've been doing nationwide and here across the Southeast. There's  
2 a whole program and office set up. We have the Office of  
3 International Affairs Trade and Commerce that we work with for  
4 SIMP. You hear that a lot, and that's Seafood Import Monitoring  
5 Program.

6  
7 You heard some of that background too that Texas is doing, and  
8 that is us focusing on the ports of entry, and so that's whether  
9 it's coming in land-based, at airports, and at container ships at  
10 major seaports, and we're watching what is coming in, and,  
11 essentially, there's a list of species, and there's a lot of  
12 accountability.

13  
14 We want to be able to trace when it comes in, back to the point of  
15 harvest, whether it's commercially caught or the production, if  
16 it's aquacultured, and so there's a lot of paperwork that gets  
17 involved in there. We work with a slew of agencies, federal  
18 partners and state partners, on that too, and they all have their  
19 purview that they follow.

20  
21 For example, FTA will look at chemicals and food safety coming in.  
22 We work with CBP, but there's a lot of work that goes into it.  
23 Our folks are getting into the reefer containers, and we're pulling  
24 apart seafood. We're taking DNA plugs, to make sure that the  
25 species are properly what they say they are, and so there's a lot  
26 of verifying paperwork too, to make sure it's traceable, and so  
27 it's a lot of efforts, a lot of coordination with agencies.

28  
29 Just some examples, we recently, this past quarter, worked with  
30 Alabama, out of Mobile. We worked with AMRD and inspected over  
31 33,000 pounds of Indonesian imported shrimp, and so that's one  
32 example of us going through one of these patrols that we would do.

33  
34 Then, as you see here in the graph, what I wanted to put is there's  
35 a new IUU section, that I put in the council report, to try to  
36 show overall what we're targeting, and what species, and what  
37 country they're coming into, and so please check that out, but  
38 this just shows a lot of seaport activity, and that involves all  
39 the reefers I just mentioned, but also land-based, right, and so  
40 everywhere this is coming.

41  
42 That picture on the left is us actually working with Texas Parks  
43 and CBP on the ports of entry along the Texas-Mexico border. That  
44 was for IUU National Day. We got some posts out showing our  
45 inspections, and what we're doing, and so we've got some really  
46 good coordination that way going on, and the airports are a new  
47 one.

1 We've been working at major commercial airports, regional ones, at  
2 the Orlando and Houston airport, but this is even breaking down to  
3 regional airports, where there's a lot of folks coming in from out  
4 of country, bringing in some personal consumption products, and  
5 we're working with our partners to make sure that what they're  
6 bringing in is allowed in.

7  
8 As far as our JEA enforcement, we've talked about how critical  
9 that is. I mean, that's a force multiplier. We rely on that to  
10 help get the work done and enforce federal fisheries across the  
11 board. This is for all our partners. This past quarter, you see  
12 we had eighty-two overall referrals. The numbers are below for  
13 our partners.

14  
15 This this past round, we got some referrals from Florida, Texas,  
16 and the Coast Guard. Florida was a mixed bag across the board of  
17 different violations and laws and regs, from the sanctuary to  
18 Magnuson. Texas, we did -- You heard Les Casterline talk about  
19 their overall numbers this past year, this past quarter, and that's  
20 why that you see the difference in numbers that were stated there.  
21 This is just from April to June, but those were a variety.

22  
23 We had some HMS no permits on recreational. We had folks keeping  
24 red snapper during the closed season. There's some shrimp  
25 violations, and so we're seeing an across-the-board spectrum in  
26 getting those cases over to us, and the same with Coast Guard as  
27 well. Those are those are mostly TED boardings, TED and BRD  
28 boardings.

29  
30 What I want to highlight here is some recent ops and cases that  
31 we've had going on, to kind of harp on this focus and partnership,  
32 and so, when the recreational red snapper opened up earlier this  
33 summer, we did a lot of concentrated efforts with our partners, in  
34 the areas where we could.

35  
36 Texas alone, one of our agents -- This was out of Palacios, Texas,  
37 but we did some joint patrols at the opening of the season, and  
38 you see made some pretty good contact with folks, making sure  
39 everyone is doing what they're supposed to do out there. Louisiana  
40 was a really big effort we had as well, working with Department of  
41 Wildlife there, and as we got -- We were also focusing on charters.  
42 There was an HMS tournament, and the Billfish Classic was going on  
43 as well, and so that picture is up there. We even boarded some  
44 shrimpers, but we had joint patrols and crews everywhere from  
45 Morgan City, Grand Isle, Venice.

46  
47 They still got a lot of boardings done. The weather was really  
48 snotty, and so it was hard to go offshore, but it was a good effort

1 to try to focus on that of effort of where folks are, and, in  
2 Florida, that was also the same thing there. You see, we did a  
3 lot of effort, and this is mostly in the Panhandle, that we  
4 concentrated when the red snapper opened up here.

5  
6 We even made some charter cases, and so there was some off of Santa  
7 Rosa Island, that were around eleven nautical miles, that some  
8 folks did not have a federal permit to do that. Two of them were  
9 around a \$7,000 Notice of Violation and Assessment, and so that's  
10 us working with our Office of General Counsel enforcement partners  
11 to pursue those cases civilly, and so we were able to make those  
12 cases.

13  
14 The captains admitted that they were on a charter. They did not  
15 have a permit. They either didn't know they were out in federal  
16 waters, or they did and they just kind of rolled the dice and did  
17 it, and so we were able to make those cases, and, working with  
18 FWC, we also went out to Madison-Swanson, and we came across quite  
19 a number, or a handful, of boats that were out there fishing as  
20 well, and so we were able to get around the area. That's come up  
21 on topic before, about Madison-Swanson enforcement, and so I just  
22 want to note that.

23  
24 Some notable cases that are kind of interesting, and I want to  
25 show kind of our cooperation, and I give kudos to our investigators  
26 and everyone that's been able to get this off. There was a recent  
27 marine mammal case. It was on the west coast of Florida. It was  
28 a tour boat operator, and we come across that. These are kind of  
29 difficult cases to prove and get a resolution on, because our point  
30 is we have to show that someone intentionally altered the behavior  
31 of marine mammals when they're approaching a vessel.

32  
33 In this case, the tour boat operator did intentionally alter the  
34 behavior. We were able to prove that, and he ended up striking  
35 and killing. This is a before shot, but he ended up running over  
36 the dolphin, and, unfortunately, it was a fatality. This case was  
37 made with the public's help, and so all the passengers onboard  
38 were actually able to piece together statements, videos, and photos  
39 before, during, and after the strike occurred, and the captain  
40 even admitted it.

41  
42 He said, hey, we see dolphins, and we're going to spin up, and we  
43 went up on wake on purpose, and we want to see what they do. If  
44 they follow us, great. If not, we go on our way, and so, right  
45 there, he talks about altering their behavior of how he operated  
46 the vessel, and that ended up being an \$8,000 NOVA that General  
47 Counsel got out to that one, and so that was for harassment and  
48 the take there.

1  
2 The sanctuary, this is more down in the Keys, and I mentioned the  
3 Flower Gardens, but most of this is down in the Keys sanctuary.  
4 We've seen an uptick in state referrals. We've been getting some  
5 really good stuff over from Florida, of them making cases, and  
6 some have been for charters as well.

7  
8 A lot of folks fishing in the SPAs, or ecological reserves, when  
9 they shouldn't be. That far picture on the right, there was a  
10 boat that was in a SPA tied up and fishing. They didn't have a  
11 cutting board, or they didn't have a measuring board. They were  
12 using a cutting board as their measuring tool, with no increments  
13 on it, and so that's how they were going to figure out if the fish  
14 was legal or not, and they were still fishing when the officer  
15 came up on them, and so just ignorance. They didn't know where  
16 they were. It was clear that they were in Coffins SPA, that they  
17 knew where they were afterwards, and so that ended up being a  
18 \$1,250 NOVA.

19  
20 The picture on the left, that was someone that had twenty  
21 prohibited fish in the ecological reserve down in the Tortugas,  
22 and so just a lot of folks that either don't know where they are,  
23 and it's confusing. We try to do outreach as well. We let them  
24 know that there's an app out there for the sanctuary, and they can  
25 figure out where the boundaries are and know better for next time  
26 as well.

27  
28 These are some general reminders. We just wanted to put up the  
29 for-hire season. You know, that's open until September 16<sup>th</sup>. Just,  
30 folks, know your boundaries. Know your state lines. Like I  
31 mentioned, some of those other cases in the Panhandle of Florida,  
32 that was at around eleven nautical miles, and so it doesn't matter  
33 if you catch fish in state waters. Once you come across in federal  
34 waters there, and you're a charter, you need to have that federal  
35 permit, and show that, and so it's always the more restrictive,  
36 and so just be aware, in general, where you are, what you're doing,  
37 what the regs are.

38  
39 IFQ compliance, we've had a slew of things coming across, and so  
40 one thing we've been doing internal is we've been hosting some JEA  
41 trainings with state officers. We just completed one for FWC. It  
42 was pretty successful.

43  
44 We're getting an increase in case referrals coming our way, because  
45 folks are understanding, when it's new officers getting onboard,  
46 what the program is, what they should be looking for, what they  
47 should refer over to us, and we're seeing a handful of boats that  
48 are landing early.

1  
2 Just a general reminder, you know, through the notification, that  
3 you have to land when you say you are, and not coming in early, or  
4 then send a subsequent notice. We've had a lot of offload issues  
5 that we've been seeing across the board, too. There's been issues  
6 of people taking -- Keeping crew fish, and not doing a full offload  
7 of IFQ species. That's not allowed. All IFQ species have to get  
8 offloaded, and accounted for, and go through the dealer. There's  
9 no taking some of those home on the side.

10  
11 We've had hidden fillets. That picture on the top-right is a boat  
12 that landed early in the IFQ fishery, and they also had over fifty  
13 lane and red snapper while the season was closed, and so that ended  
14 up being a nearly \$6,000 NOVA that they got, and so just a reminder  
15 to the IFQ fleet of what to do, how to best do it, and then you  
16 see the rec gag. You do have an opportunity coming up here. The  
17 short season is coming up here.

18  
19 I did highlight a lot of different things going on, and cases made,  
20 but I do want to note, overall, we're seeing really good compliance  
21 across the fleets, and across the sectors. In the Gulf alone, out  
22 of all the incidents we've created in our case management system,  
23 nearly 50 percent are compliant, and so those are folks -- That's  
24 our folks on the ground doing inspections, going to the boats.

25  
26 People know what they're doing, and so we're seeing a lot of good  
27 stuff out there. There's always a few cases that outlie there,  
28 but I would say, overall, we're getting really good compliance on  
29 that, and so just kudos to all our folks in working with industry  
30 and getting the education across, so everyone knows what to do and  
31 how to do it the right way.

32  
33 With that, the next slide, we just always want to put up our toll-  
34 free number. If there's any tips, concerns, send them our way.  
35 We'll do what we can, you know, and respond to those and get back  
36 to you. My contact info, and I'm always available as well, or a  
37 local officer is, and so I'm happy to take any questions, if there  
38 are, and we appreciate your time, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We do. Dr. Sweetman.

41  
42 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks for the presentation, Matt, and so I've got  
43 a question about the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, and  
44 just some general confusion I'm hearing from people down there,  
45 and so, obviously, the proposed rule was vetoed in state waters,  
46 but things went in effect in federal waters, and I know these  
47 areas, whether they're transit only, all the regulations  
48 associated with them, they're not marked yet.

1  
2 I'm just -- I'm curious how many issues that you are seeing, if  
3 any at all, and then how you guys would be going about trying to  
4 enforce these things. I just think a lot of people don't even  
5 know that some of these regulations are in place already.  
6

7 **MR. WALIA:** I appreciate that question, C.J. I think it's kind of  
8 twofold, and so we just had our mini-season effort. I didn't  
9 include that in this report. That would be in our next one, but,  
10 overall, we didn't really come across that during the mini-season.  
11 It was just more a lack of knowledge. It was a lot of folks coming  
12 down from out of town, up from Miami, that didn't understand what  
13 the buoys mean, where the closures are, and so that's where we  
14 would show them the sanctuary app, what to do and where to go.  
15

16 As far as with the blueprint, and where we stand with that, there  
17 is some confusion. I will say there's an upcoming sanctuary  
18 meeting that's coming up, and we're going to have a law enforcement  
19 section on that, and so that will be one of the discussion points  
20 to talk about moving forward, how best to work with the sanctuary  
21 folks and get that word off, because, yes, I don't think we're  
22 there yet with everyone, of what to do and how to best get that  
23 out to the public, because it can get confusing, and so I would  
24 say stay tuned, and September 9, I believe, is that meeting, and  
25 so there should be some more stuff after that, moving forward.  
26

27 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Matt.  
28

29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any other questions for Mr. Walia?  
30 Not seeing any, thank you again, Mr. Walia, for your presentation.  
31

32 **MR. WALIA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.  
33

34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I would like to take a break for lunch, and we'll  
35 come back at one o'clock.  
36

37 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on August 27, 2025.)  
38

39 - - -  
40

41 August 27, 2025  
42

43 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION  
44

45 - - -  
46

47 The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at the Hilton  
48 Palacio Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas on Wednesday afternoon,  
49

1 August 27, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We'll go back to supporting agencies later. What  
4 we're going to do now is, before we get into public comment, we're  
5 going to have Ms. Muehlstein give us a presentation on the  
6 anonymous voicemail.

7  
8 **DISCUSSION OF ANONYMOUS VOICE MAILBOX**  
9

10 **MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN:** Thank you. So, hi, council. I think most  
11 of you remember that, at a previous meeting, we sort of discussed  
12 and pitched the idea of launching an anonymous voicemail public  
13 comment service, and so we were able to launch that service sort  
14 of mid-June this year, and so what I would like to do, for just a  
15 couple minutes is, first, I was going to go over a summary of the  
16 comments that we received, and then I would really appreciate a  
17 little bit of guidance.

18  
19 At this point, we have not released the full text of all the  
20 comments, and so, once I give you guys the comment summary, I'll  
21 sort of lead you into a discussion about what we should do moving  
22 forward with that full text of comments.

23  
24 Okay. Without further ado, we received a whopping fifty-nine  
25 voicemail comments, and that actually exceeded my personal  
26 expectations, and so I'm very happy about that. I will sort of  
27 just add that those comments, the quality of those comments, I was  
28 not expecting it to be such high-quality, poignant comments. I  
29 think that we all sort of expected that a number of those comments  
30 would be sort of mean-natured, and maybe not relevant, and the  
31 truth is that like 95 percent of the comments that we got were  
32 really substantive and impressive, and so I just -- I want to start  
33 with that.

34  
35 I have broken down sort of the comments that we got into different  
36 categories, and I'll just very briefly give you a summary of what  
37 we heard in those fifty-nine voicemails.

38  
39 So, first, not surprisingly, we heard a lot of feedback on the  
40 individual phishing quota program, right, and we heard that the  
41 program is the worst thing that's ever happened to the fishery in  
42 the Gulf. We heard that a few people in that fishery hold the  
43 rest of the fishery hostage. We heard that lease prices are too  
44 high and that the social dynamics of the system are unfair.

45  
46 We also heard that investors in the IFQ program have driven  
47 fishermen out of business and that quota increases should go to  
48 active fishermen. We heard that the IFQ program drives up the

1 cost to consumers and that over-regulation and share prices are  
2 driving people out of business.

3  
4 We also heard that the lack of access to red snapper quota is  
5 increasing discards in the fishery. We heard that the commercial  
6 industry is dying because of the cost of all the regulations  
7 associated with the IFQ program. We heard that the Shareholders  
8 Alliance has too much control over the fishery. We heard that it  
9 is impossible to find captain and crew, because the profit margins  
10 are too small under the program.

11  
12 We also heard that fishermen get blackballed if they speak against  
13 the program, or the big shareholders, and that they can't get quota  
14 to fish for doing so publicly.

15  
16 We did hear comments also about red grouper. We heard a lot of  
17 those comments, and they essentially said that red grouper annual  
18 catch limit should be increased, right, sort of agreeing with that  
19 framework action that was put into place in June.

20  
21 We also heard that commercial fishermen need more red grouper quota  
22 in order to decrease the lease price and keep them fishing for  
23 something. We heard, regarding deepwater grouper, that charters  
24 out of Louisiana are catching too many deepwater groupers without  
25 any accountability and that they are decimating the deepwater  
26 grouper populations.

27  
28 We also heard feedback on the executive orders. We heard that the  
29 council should double the red snapper quota, that you should open  
30 closed fishing areas, that you should not require observers on  
31 commercial vessels, that you should not require VMS, and that you  
32 should not require hail-in or hail-out, and also that you should  
33 remove IFQ programs to satisfy the executive orders.

34  
35 We also heard a number of other comments pertaining to red snapper,  
36 which is that charter vessels are taking too many red snapper and  
37 should have smaller vessel-based possession limits. We heard that  
38 private red snapper possession limits should be increased and that  
39 the season should be shorter, because the cost of fuel and distance  
40 to catch them makes it hard for just two fish.

41  
42 We heard that the red snapper quota should be higher, and we heard  
43 that state management of red snapper had caused a decline in the  
44 fishery, and you have to fish farther out to find your fish these  
45 days.

46  
47 Regarding king mackerel, we heard that the kingfish stock is in  
48 trouble and that the bag limit should be dropped to one fish per

1 person, or even to one fish per vessel, and then, on gag, we heard  
2 that there's too many gag in the Gulf, that the gag discards are  
3 a problem, because the quota isn't high enough, and that the gag  
4 quota should be higher.

5  
6 Then we heard a number of sort of more miscellaneous comments about  
7 commercial fishing. We heard that the commercial fleet should be  
8 fishing further than sixty miles from shore. We heard that  
9 longlining should be restricted to the same depth across the Gulf,  
10 without an exception for Florida, and that allowing fishing near  
11 to shore in Florida harms the stocks that we're already concerned  
12 about. We heard that commercial fishermen don't need VMS and that  
13 they are treated like criminals. We also heard that there is too  
14 much commercial fishing and that trawling should not be allowed in  
15 the Gulf.

16  
17 Finally, we heard a number of just miscellaneous questions, or I  
18 mean comments, and I'm sorry. We heard that more habitat is  
19 necessary, that snapper and amberjack season should be open for  
20 citizens over sixty-five, because somebody in that age bracket  
21 needs to choose their days wisely, as to not get beat up in rough  
22 weather.

23  
24 We heard that sand trout, or silver trout, should have limits,  
25 because people take too many. We heard that recreational fishing  
26 brings more money to the states, but the seasons are always too  
27 short.

28  
29 We heard that we should let recreational fishermen fish for grouper  
30 in the winter. We heard that the charter industry should be  
31 reporting their harvest, and that charter captains should be given  
32 incentives in order to provide their data.

33  
34 We heard that you should have to buy permits off -- You shouldn't  
35 have to buy permits off of somebody that already owns them, that  
36 the government should be benefiting from those permit fees, and  
37 not private owners. Then we also heard that the council is hosting  
38 a meeting too far away from the coast, so that only shareholders  
39 can show up. I'm happy to pause here, or I can sort of launch  
40 right into the next step. That's up to you, Mr. Chair. Any  
41 questions?

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any questions for Emily? You can  
44 proceed, Emily.

45  
46 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Okay, and so what you will notice is this comment  
47 summary is -- If you look at your meeting materials on our website,  
48 under the public testimony section, there is a button that will

1 show you not only the written general comments that we usually  
2 get, but this summary of anonymous voicemail comments. Now, we  
3 debated, sort of in our office, whether or not we should just go  
4 ahead and release the full text of the comments.

5  
6 What I will say is that the people who transcribe these voicemails  
7 were told specifically to redact any personally identifying  
8 information, and so there's a couple of things I would like you to  
9 consider here as to whether or not we want to publish the full  
10 text of these comments, right, rather than just a summary.

11  
12 One thing is that, without reading the full text, you definitely  
13 lose some of the context of the full comments, right, and so I do  
14 my best to do these summaries, but, you know, just I want you to  
15 know that that is just a summary, and there is some context that  
16 is lost when I do that translation.

17  
18 There is no PII, like personally identifying information, in any  
19 of these comments. However, as it stands, some of the comments do  
20 narrow the scope of who might be the one that left the message,  
21 right, and so it might be somebody that identifies which port they  
22 fish out of, or which fish house they fish for, and so, if you do  
23 release the full text of them, then, you know, we can either do  
24 that as-is or I can sort of redact sort of any of that information  
25 that might lead to narrowing the scope of who this might be, in  
26 order to protect anonymity.

27  
28 Some council members and stakeholders are directly named. As you  
29 saw in my summary, I did call out an organization. However, there  
30 are individuals and a couple of comments, J.D., that have been  
31 called out, you know, personally, and I don't think they're  
32 personally offensive comments, but they certainly do exist.

33  
34 Like we didn't -- You know, we didn't stop anybody from saying  
35 J.D. is a great chairman on that, on the voicemail, and so I do  
36 want to make you aware that, in certain cases, that also exists,  
37 where an individual is named. Also, an individual stakeholder was  
38 also named, and so, you know, I would like your guidance on if we  
39 should release the full text comments, if I should release them  
40 with information redacted that might call out an individual, or  
41 might sort of narrow down the scope of who it is, and so -- Or we  
42 can simply work off of you guys still just looking at these  
43 summaries, but I would like some guidance, rather than doing it  
44 myself.

45  
46 As you consider this, I would also like you to think about how  
47 releasing the full text of comments may or may not influence future  
48 commenters, right? Is that going to make people feel less

1 protected, or is that going to make them feel more honored, because  
2 their entire comment got put forth, and so that's up to you guys.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Emily. I have two hands up, Mr. Walker  
5 and Mr. Schieble.

6  
7 **MR. WALKER:** Thanks, Emily. That really worked out better than I  
8 think most of us expected, and so I'm encouraged by that, and my  
9 opinion would be, first of all, are we required to publish any of  
10 this?

11  
12 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** So no, and it is FOIA-able.

13  
14 **MR. WALKER:** Okay.

15  
16 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** So, even if we don't publish it, if somebody  
17 really wanted it, I believe they would be able to go through that  
18 process of getting it.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Walker, if I can stop you for a minute and  
21 let Ms. Levy speak to that.

22  
23 **MS. LEVY:** So I guess I agree that you're not legally required to  
24 publish it, but it is correct that, if someone requested the full  
25 transcript, via FOIA, we would release it. We would not redact  
26 anything in there that is not PII. I don't really think it's  
27 appropriate to redact it.

28  
29 We already make it anonymous. People can say what they want or  
30 don't want. To me, it's the same as writing a comment, which we  
31 provide verbatim, in full, on the council website. The only  
32 difference is we're writing it for them, and so I guess I would  
33 encourage you to post it like you would post any other comments,  
34 and people say what they want to say. If they don't want to be  
35 specific, they don't have to be specific, but I guess just making  
36 it clear that, if someone asked for them, we would likely release  
37 them in full.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. Mr. Walker.

40  
41 **MR. WALKER:** So I would disagree with that, as far as just putting  
42 them up like regular comments, because, as you can see by these  
43 comments, these are not the comments we usually get. These are  
44 different, to me anyways, in that some of the people that have  
45 been reluctant to comment have done so here, I think, and so, yes,  
46 I suppose you can FOIA just about anything, but I would -- My vote  
47 would be to not publish it, and for the reasons that you gave,  
48 that just a person that was thinking about making a maybe a

1 sensitive comment, if he sees that it's going to be published, he  
2 might just not send that in at all.

3  
4 I'm afraid it might scare off some people, if they see that they're  
5 being published, even without names, and so I would say just don't  
6 publish them, and, if someone wants to FOIA them, they can.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walker. Mr. Schieble.

9  
10 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** This is a quick one. I think I missed it, and I  
11 apologize, but what's the timeframe for those fifty-nine comments?  
12 Is that since our meeting in June that these have come up, or since  
13 April?

14  
15 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** We published the press release and started the  
16 program on June 12, and then I cut off comments last Tuesday, like  
17 I do for all public comment, the Tuesday before each council  
18 meeting.

19  
20 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So do you think, just I guess your opinion on  
21 looking at them, and did a lot of them come in all at once, or did  
22 they sort of come in straggled throughout that time period?

23  
24 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** So that's a very interesting question, and Dr.  
25 Froeschke and I sort of were mapping the timing, and that is  
26 included in the full text of it. We were mapping the timing. I  
27 also mapped it against our social media posts, to see if there was  
28 some logic on like when people were doing it.

29  
30 It was almost evenly spread out, with some pulses, but there was  
31 no relationship to the announcements that came directly from us,  
32 which was also very interesting, and so it feels like this is a  
33 word-of-mouth type of news that is spreading, since it's not like  
34 these pulses that come when we post it or do anything like that.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Emily. Dr. Sweetman.

37  
38 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I agree with Mr.  
39 Walker. I think part of the reason why we're getting these  
40 comments is because it is anonymous, and so kind of throwing  
41 anything that just could be an indicator of who this person might  
42 be, or who they're affiliated with, I think that kind of defeats  
43 the purpose, even though I would love to see that comment about  
44 our illustrious chair.

45  
46 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** So I guess I see three potential paths forward,  
47 right, is we can just leave it with the summary, we could publish  
48 the full text, as Mara says is, you know, possible and legal, or

1 you can sort of -- We can take the license to redact to some of  
2 that information, knowing that still it is FOIA-able, but maybe  
3 then it would let people -- Like so, if somebody said that they  
4 were from Orange Beach, Alabama, I could redact it, so that it  
5 said that they were from Alabama, right, and so I can remove one  
6 layer of, you know, personal information, and still allow for those  
7 full-text comments as well, and so I think there's sort of three  
8 roads. There's like there's the all, the nothing, and then the  
9 sort of the middle ground that you could consider.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Banks.

12  
13 **DR. BANKS:** So I'm kind of in favor of whichever one allows this  
14 table to see the context, because I think, while this is a great  
15 summary, this does not encompass everything that those individuals  
16 said, and so I don't know if it needs to be the middle ground,  
17 where it's redacted, or if this table can get the unredacted, minus  
18 the PII, but I would like to see some of these. I am intrigued,  
19 and I know they didn't call you for four words, and so that's kind  
20 of where I'm at.

21  
22 I think this table, as we make deliberations, deserves those  
23 comments, and I don't know how we see the context, with publishing,  
24 or maybe we get it like we get closed session documents, and I'm  
25 not sure.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. I'm going to take two more  
28 comments from council members, and then we're going to move on to  
29 public comment, and circle back maybe tomorrow, and let council  
30 members think about this, process it, and make a decision by  
31 tomorrow, and so I have Mr. Walker next.

32  
33 **MR. WALKER:** Okay. I'll make it quick. I think, if even redacted  
34 comments are available, somebody that felt threatened by it might  
35 be more encouraged to issue a Freedom of Information request, and  
36 so, if there's a sentence that says this person is a bad person,  
37 or whatever, then that may kick off the request to see it, and so,  
38 by not having that available out there, I think it would be better.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walker. Ms. Ballard.

41  
42 **MS. BALLARD:** I have a question for you, Emily. It's just  
43 anonymous, and like what were the specifications? Like what did  
44 we notify them was going to happen with their voicemail, so that  
45 we make sure we're following that, whatever we told them we were  
46 going to do, and then what is the concept of transparency, because  
47 I know that's what we get a lot of, a lot of requests for being  
48 transparent, and I don't want to overdo it, but so that's, again,

1 with the middle ground, and maybe at least let us know what was  
2 said, and publish maybe your summary.

3  
4 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** So the exact language that was included in the  
5 release, and that I have reiterated over time, was that anybody  
6 can call and leave a three-minute voicemail with their input on  
7 fisheries issues without needing to provide their name or personal  
8 information.

9  
10 To ensure complete anonymity, voicemail transcriptions will be  
11 provided to the Gulf Council, and no call log or audio recordings  
12 will be retained, and so I do know that the transcriptions will be  
13 provided, but I -- You know, I think it still begs the question.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Geeslin.

16  
17 **MR. GEESLIN:** Emily, I appreciate the effort that's gone into this.  
18 I see a lot of value. Just in terms of what -- As someone that is  
19 FOIA-ed on a regular basis, all it's going to take is one or two  
20 individuals filing a FOIA on some recurring interval, and putting  
21 those up on a forum, a website, and so essentially you're going to  
22 have a duplicate.

23  
24 If you don't put it all out there, somebody is going to do that,  
25 and create that for you, and so I would kind of maybe suggest  
26 taking the path of least resistance here, and that is less resource  
27 intensive for you and the team, because it's going to happen  
28 anyways.

29  
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Geeslin, for your comments. I  
31 would say we think about it, as council members, overnight, and  
32 regroup again tomorrow, and give Emily some guidance before we  
33 leave here. We'll move into public comment now.

34  
35 Good afternoon, everyone. Public input is a vital part of the  
36 council's deliberative process and comments, both oral and  
37 written, are accepted and considered by the council throughout the  
38 process.

39  
40 The Sustainable Fisheries Act requires that all statements include  
41 a brief description of the background and interests of the persons  
42 in the subject of the statement. All written information shall  
43 include a statement of the source and date of such information.  
44 Oral or written communications provided to the council, its  
45 members, or its staff that relate to matters within the council's  
46 purview are public in nature.

47  
48 Please give any written comments to staff, as all written comments

1 will be posted on the council's website for viewing by council  
2 members and the public, and will be maintained by the council as  
3 part of the permanent record. Knowingly and willfully submitting  
4 false information to the council is a violation of federal law.  
5

6 We will welcome public comment from in-person and virtual  
7 attendees. Anyone joining us virtually that wishes to speak during  
8 public comment should have already registered online. Virtual  
9 participants that are registered to comment should ensure that  
10 they are registered for the webinar under the same name they used  
11 to register to speak. In-person attendees wishing to speak during  
12 public comment should sign in at the registration kiosk located in  
13 the back of the meeting room.  
14

15 We accept only one registration per person. Each speaker is  
16 allowed three minutes for their testimony. Please note the timer  
17 lights on the podium or on the webinar. They will be green for  
18 the first two minutes and will blink yellow for the final minute  
19 of testimony. At three minutes, the red light will appear, and a  
20 buzzer may be enacted. Time allowed to dignitaries providing  
21 testimony is extended at the discretion of the chair.  
22

23 If you have a cell phone or similar device, we ask that you keep  
24 them on silent or vibrating mode during the meeting. Also, for  
25 all to be able to hear the proceedings, we ask that you have any  
26 private conversations outside the meeting room. Please note public  
27 comment may end before the published agenda time if all registered  
28 in-person and virtual participants have completed their comment,  
29 and so we'll rotate between virtual and in the room, but we'll  
30 start off with Mr. Lawrence Marino first.  
31

### 32 PUBLIC COMMENT

33  
34 **MR. LAWRENCE MARINO:** Good afternoon. My name is Larry Marino,  
35 and I'm here on behalf of Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrell.  
36 Regarding Amendment 58B for deepwater grouper, as to sector  
37 allocations under Action 2, Mara asked yesterday what's the  
38 justification for Preferred Alternative 3 allocating 10.21 percent  
39 to rec and 89.79 percent to commercial.  
40

41 Well, over the time series used, the rec sector had no quota, but  
42 was averaging catching an average of 10.21 percent of the complex  
43 quota. The commercial sector had a 96.5 percent quota, but wasn't  
44 catching it. In fact, they were catching less than 89.79 percent,  
45 since the complex quota was never exceeded, and so the Preferred  
46 Alternative 3 allocations are what rec was catching, and more than  
47 commercial was catching, and so that's fair and reasonable,  
48 certainly as to rec, and, as to commercial, if anything, it's

1 granted more than their catch history actually shows.

2  
3 As to the accountability measures in Action 3, there seemed to be  
4 some question about basing them on a moving three-year average of  
5 catch versus a moving three-year average of quota.

6  
7 Given the data uncertainty in this fishery, the idea of a three-  
8 year moving average obviously makes sense. It's not exactly clear  
9 what the concern is, though my guess is it's the potential for  
10 exceeding the quota in any one year without triggering an  
11 accountability measure, but you're deciding what accountability  
12 measures should be put in place.

13  
14 Under 50 CFR 600.310(g)(3) which is the National Standard 1  
15 regulation, if an ACL was exceeded, AMs must be implemented as  
16 soon as possible to correct the operational issue that caused the  
17 ACL overage, as well as any biological consequences to the stock  
18 or stock complex resulting from the overage when it is known.

19  
20 With all the data uncertainty here, you really don't even know if  
21 there is an exceedance, much less whether there's an operational  
22 issue causing it, versus a statistical one, or any biological  
23 consequences of an exceedance that might not even exist.

24  
25 Section 310(b)(3) requires councils to consider uncertainty when  
26 specifying AMs. 310(e)(2) allows using a multiyear approach to  
27 determining overfishing status, while 310(g)(7) says, if AMs are  
28 based on multiyear average data, the performance standard is based  
29 on a comparison of the average catch to the average ACL, and so  
30 AMs clearly can be based on multiyear averages.

31  
32 Finally, Section 310(h)(2) grants flexibility to provide  
33 alternative approaches to regulatory requirements. Admittedly,  
34 this is in limited circumstances, but this provides yet another  
35 basis for the three-year moving average where there's good reason,  
36 as there is here.

37  
38 Regarding Amendment 62, Mr. Strelcheck's motion to establish a  
39 commercial quota set-aside for red grouper allocation is  
40 excellent. This would enable distribution of annual allocation,  
41 at least as to the set-aside portion. AG Murrell and others have  
42 encouraged exactly this type of solution for years, and doing it  
43 as a set-aside is a creative way to implement it.

44  
45 With the pending quota increase, now is the least impactful time  
46 to put a set-aside in place. This proposal is for a pilot program,  
47 and so it could be used to develop the means and methods to  
48 accomplish the goals of set-asides in general and demonstrate the

1 viability to do that. In other words, it's a proof of concept  
2 while working out the kinks.

3  
4 The goals should be made clear, including directing the allocation  
5 to actual fishermen, those who not only can, but do fish. This  
6 can be done by requiring a permit, IFQ account, vessel account,  
7 and reported landings in recent years. Having some landings in  
8 the previous two seasons seems like a good basis, and precluding  
9 re-allocation is a good measure to ensure that this is actually  
10 what happens.

11  
12 Other goals include addressing inequities in the distribution of  
13 the right to fish, so smaller commercial fishermen can achieve  
14 economic viability. This can be done by limiting allocations to  
15 those with no shares, or shares below an economically viable  
16 amount, possibly expressed in pounds rather than percentages,  
17 because that seems to be the way this is thought of.

18  
19 The problem of sharecropping is wrapped up in these other two  
20 goals, and it would be at least mitigated by addressing them. The  
21 problem of blackballing requires further that the distribution of  
22 the allocation be decided objectively, and not by those who control  
23 the rest of the quota. Transparency in decision-making,  
24 objectivity of the decision-maker, and objectiveness of the rules  
25 for this decision will be key.

26  
27 Appointing an objective body to make these decisions, such as one  
28 composed by designees of the Fisheries Service and the state  
29 administrators, and basing them on objective minimum requirements,  
30 seems well-suited to accomplish this.

31  
32 The proposal was for a three-year sunset, and so, if further action  
33 isn't taken, the set-aside would simply stop being set aside, and  
34 it would be distributed at that time. The benefit of doing the  
35 set-aside now is that it would come from an increase in quota. It  
36 would be more difficult to do that later, after the shareholders  
37 receive the increase, and so it will be important to monitor this  
38 and extend, or make it permanent, before it sunsets, if it is as  
39 successful as it can and should be.

40  
41 Moving on to the IFQ marketplace, that's another great idea. One  
42 improvement to consider though would be to make the buyers and  
43 sellers anonymous from each other, so as to impede blackballing.

44  
45 Finally, redoing the DESCEND Act as a council action, this is  
46 another great idea, and it should be done, if at all possible,  
47 before the Act sunsets. My understanding is that the abbreviated  
48 framework action format is appropriate for gear requirements like

1 this, particularly since the necessary regulations are already in  
2 place at section 622.30, and they simply need the sunset provision  
3 to be deleted.

4  
5 It's literally not a new requirement. It's an existing one, and,  
6 while it was statutorily required previously, and would now be  
7 required under the management plan, it's the same requirement.

8  
9 Like the Supreme Court announcement recently, or, well, recently  
10 announced and lambasting agency and judicial overinterpretation of  
11 environmental impact statement procedure requirements as having  
12 improperly paralyzed agency action, Magnuson procedural  
13 requirements do have to be obeyed, but they should be interpreted  
14 so as to move actions forward timely, wherever possible. This  
15 proposed action is exactly the type of action that should be moved  
16 forward quickly. Thank you.

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

20 **MR. MARINO:** Thank you.  
21

22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Not seeing any, thank you, Lawrence. Next up  
23 will be Mr. Dylan Hubbard, followed by Brian Lewis.  
24

25 **MR. DYLAN HUBBARD:** Thank you. Captain Dylan Hubbard from  
26 Hubbard's Marina, central-west Florida, and also an appointee to  
27 our Tourist Development Council for Pinellas County.  
28

29 As far as mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper, I really would  
30 urge the council to think about trying to push for the largest  
31 possible quota for the Gulf in this document, this joint document,  
32 as we are seeing a huge, huge expansion of mutton snapper spatially  
33 through way far north along Florida's coast. We're seeing mutton  
34 snapper more consistently now than I have ever seen in my lifetime.  
35 It's impressive.

36  
37 The numbers and the average size have really, really skyrocketed,  
38 and I feel like I'm up here talking about this a lot. With lane  
39 snapper. we saw this happen. We've seen this happen with  
40 yellowtail snapper, and now we're seeing it with mutton snapper,  
41 and we're starting to see it with black grouper as well, and so we  
42 see this really big shift of these mostly southern species working  
43 their way more into central, and even up through the north  
44 peninsular Florida. I would just encourage the council to think  
45 about that, as we move through this joint document, and try to  
46 prevent problems down the road for us in the Gulf.  
47

48 As far as red grouper is concerned, it might come to no one's

1 surprise that I strongly encourage, in Action 3, Alternative 2, to  
2 remove that twenty-fathom closure.

3  
4 I know we've talked about it, and I hope we can pick preferreds,  
5 and I would also like to encourage the council to ensure that we  
6 move quickly on this document.

7  
8 I really appreciate Andy's inventive motions with the recreational  
9 initiative recently, and then this one you proposed at this  
10 meeting. I think it's very thoughtful, and I think it comes from  
11 a great place. It's not my industry, and so I'm not going to  
12 comment on it specifically, but my concern with it is it slows  
13 down a document.

14  
15 Anytime IFQ stuff gets introduced to a document, and we've already  
16 seen how slow things have gone at Headquarters, and we really need  
17 this red grouper document to move quickly through rulemaking and  
18 implementation, and so I'm a little concerned about that.

19  
20 Deepwater grouper stuff, I think we need to work as best we can to  
21 provide the most flexibility possible to our recreational  
22 fishermen. With these high PSEs, that alternative, or that action,  
23 talking about recreational accountability measures, some sort of  
24 flexibility there, and this three-year average idea I think is  
25 really interesting, and I think it would help to get to a root  
26 issue that we have.

27  
28 Also, on that same line, I would support an EFP, or whatever we  
29 can, to explore the idea that Mr. Sanchez brought up, some sort of  
30 HMS-like permit, some sort of electronic monitoring component. I  
31 think this is our chance to explore some of the stuff that we've  
32 been talking about, some of these issues that face our private  
33 recreational fishery, and so I think exploring some sort of  
34 mandatory permit, and exploring some sort of self-reported data,  
35 especially with such a small universe of anglers, and we're not  
36 talking a lot about a lot of people.

37  
38 I don't think the dockside intercepts would have to be that high.  
39 I think this is an opportunity for us to explore something unique  
40 and out-of-the-box, and I don't want to see it wasted.

41  
42 Scamp grouper, the shallow water grouper stuff, in scamp, we really  
43 need the longest possible recreational season. That is a very  
44 recreationally-important species, and there's a lot of contention  
45 there, I think, and so, scamp specifically, in my mind, and I wish  
46 I was a little bit more involved on the data workshop for that  
47 species, because I think a lot of the issue is coming from the  
48 change in that MSY proxy, and then the concern over the low numbers

1 of recruits, and a lot of those recruits are there, and they're  
2 just in deeper water, where that study didn't occur.

3  
4 A lot of that data for the scamp assessment came from the gag study  
5 that was going on and focused in 200, 300, 400 foot of water.  
6 Those baby scamp, those recruits, are in 400, 500, 600 foot. They  
7 just weren't captured in that data, and so I would encourage the  
8 council to think about that too as we move forward trying to get  
9 that updated science.

10  
11 Also, I would encourage the council to bring back the SEFHIER  
12 discussion. It was off the workplan, because the June meeting got  
13 abbreviated, and it wasn't on this meeting's agenda. I'm really  
14 hoping it's at the top of our November meeting agenda.

15  
16 The OLE presentation, I was really, really frustrated by the OLE  
17 presentation news. I'm not frustrated with OLE. I'm frustrated  
18 with where we are today, and it honestly disenfranchises me a  
19 little bit, because of the fact that Mr. Walia talked about how a  
20 case was made on a charter vessel in federal waters without a  
21 permit, and that case takes a lot of work, takes a lot of tax  
22 dollars, takes a lot of effort.

23  
24 There's not a lot of enforcement. They're already underfunded.  
25 There's not enough of them on the water, and they finally make a  
26 case against a vessel operating in the EEZ without a federal  
27 permit, and the fine is \$7,000? That's a joke. Our permits are  
28 \$35,000, and so I can operate illegally, and get caught three  
29 times, and still not spend as much money as if I went out and  
30 operated legally?

31  
32 I mean, what are we doing at this table? You guys are wasting a  
33 week of your life to make these rules, when you can go out and  
34 break those rules and get a slap on your wrist, and it's a little  
35 frustrating, and, also, I would encourage the council to look at  
36 not only that, but also some of these illegal or undersized fish.

37  
38 You get caught with an out-of-season or undersized fish, and these  
39 penalties are small. I mean, we're looking at boats now, and these  
40 boats are a quarter-of-a-million dollars. They've got \$100,000 in  
41 engines on the back, and you're towing it behind a \$100,000 truck,  
42 and you spend a couple hundred dollars, or a thousand dollars, in  
43 fuel to go offshore, and why not keep a few undersized and out-  
44 of-season fish? If you happen to get caught, you're only going to  
45 get a couple-thousand-dollar fine. That's nothing. Keep on doing  
46 it. We're incentivizing people not to follow the rules, and it's  
47 just really, really getting frustrating for me.

48

1 Amberjack, another little frustrating thing, and this amberjack  
2 thing is -- We don't know which way is up, and I understand it's  
3 not the council's problem. It's not the fault of our SERO partners  
4 at the table either. It's just really frustrating, from a business  
5 owner's perspective. You don't know how to answer your clients.

6  
7 From a recreational angler's perspective, you don't know if you're  
8 going to be able to fish or not. It just really stinks that  
9 there's a federal law, MSA, and it's the reason we're all here,  
10 that says we have to follow it, and now it's being ignored,  
11 essentially, and that's all I've got. Thank you.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Hubbard. We have a question  
14 for Mr. Sanchez.

15  
16 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Hi, Dylan. For many years, you came up, and you did  
17 a good job of really advocating and trying to educate the public  
18 on descending devices. You were using your very visible platform  
19 in your area to do that, and, you know, that was fantastic. I  
20 just wanted to ask you, and how do you feel about the DESCEND Act  
21 and what we're talking about here?

22  
23 **MR. HUBBARD:** I personally think descending devices are a great  
24 thing for recreational anglers, and I think the DESCEND Act  
25 empowers the good people over at Return 'Em Right, and I think we  
26 need to really work hard on continuing it. I think it should be  
27 a big effort.

28  
29 I'm a little frustrated, because I don't want Dr. Sweetman to break  
30 my record getting rules passed through this council quickly, but,  
31 if you can finalize it by November, that would be cool. I think  
32 it's important, and descending devices help a lot for recreational  
33 fishermen, people who don't know where to stick that venting tool,  
34 or people who do it indiscriminately, and it can cause more damage.

35  
36 The descending device really kind of makes it easy for anybody, is  
37 a nice way to say it, and we use them quite a bit. We don't use  
38 them all the time, especially in high-volume areas. It makes it  
39 difficult to be a requirement.

40  
41 I believe fully that it should be a requirement to be rigged and  
42 ready, as long as we have the option to have that venting tool in  
43 place as well, and the DESCEND Act does that, and so I think  
44 reinstating that would be wise. Thank you.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have another question from Mr. Strelcheck.

47  
48 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Dylan, for being here. With regard to

1 red grouper, going back to the ABC, you've heard the discussion  
2 around the table about maybe concerns that we're jumping too  
3 quickly, in terms of setting it, the catch limit, higher. We have  
4 three options right now before us, to set the catch limit equal to  
5 the ABC, 90 percent of the ABC, or the Sanchez approach of kind of  
6 incrementally increasing. Do you have any thoughts on, you know,  
7 where we should look for an alternative?  
8

9 **MR. HUBBARD:** Thank you for the question, and I should have put it  
10 in my comments. Personally, I really don't care, when it comes to  
11 quota. I'm a recreational fisherman. I care about access, and so  
12 as long as it -- Whatever you decide, whatever quota you decide,  
13 as long as it gets me that projected no closure, I'm good with it,  
14 and so that step-down approach -- The 70 percent was a concern,  
15 and, Dr. Sweetman, I appreciate your comments in committee and  
16 getting that pulled out.  
17

18 That step-down now prevents a closure, or should prevent a closure,  
19 and so I'm good with that one. The 90 percent one that was  
20 proffered up as well, and no closure, and so I'm really good with  
21 anything that doesn't have a closure.  
22

23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Not seeing any other questions, thank you,  
24 Dylan. Next up is Mr. Brian Lewis online.  
25

26 **MR. BRIAN LEWIS:** Good afternoon. Can everybody hear me okay?  
27

28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, sir. We can hear you.  
29

30 **MR. LEWIS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair, council, and staff.  
31 Brian Lewis here. I own a fishing vessel, Trip Limit, out of  
32 Clearwater Beach, Florida. We fish for Frenchy's Seafood. We are  
33 stakeholder in the IFQ program.  
34

35 I want to talk about, first and foremost, on the water what we're  
36 seeing. The red grouper fishery for us, we're a bandit rod-and-  
37 reel fishery, okay, and our fishing vessels average in about 800  
38 pounds of red grouper on a seven-day trip, okay, and we're  
39 averaging about that in red snapper per trip.  
40

41 I'm a little concerned about -- I just got given all this red  
42 grouper, which I probably won't even be able to land, because I  
43 want to know where they exist at, and, if somebody could show me,  
44 I'll go catch them, but, in the meantime, I'm also concerned about  
45 this Amendment 62, and another increase that may occur at some  
46 point, and where are those fish going to be, and, what we went  
47 through before, I think we need to be really cautious here on our  
48 options we're choosing, and so that's my first concern.

1  
2 The next concern I want to talk about is the shark. My fishing  
3 vessel, and many others, and I talk to many other fishermen, and  
4 we are losing so many fish to sharks. It's incredible, okay, and  
5 there's no way to even count the number of fish that we're even  
6 losing to these predators.

7  
8 We need to figure out a way to harvest shark again in some way,  
9 some format, so that we can try to manage this population, because  
10 the charter guys are telling me they're losing fish, and their  
11 discards are getting ate by these sharks, and we don't even have  
12 any real idea as to what we're really losing here to our fishery.  
13 We need -- I know the Gulf Council does not manage it, but we need  
14 to ring a bell here, okay?

15  
16 The next thing that I would like to talk about is the marketplace.  
17 I think it's a great idea, okay, and the fishermen need working  
18 capital. Maybe this is one step closer to getting banks to  
19 recognize our IFQ is a tangible asset that we can try to utilize  
20 it to get money to purchase IFQ, and so thank you for getting this  
21 going.

22  
23 Last, but not least, I am a one of the panel members on the IFQ Ad  
24 Hoc Advisory Panel, and I would like to see if there's a  
25 possibility that we can reconvene and talk about these amendments,  
26 and these increases, that we're bringing to the table. That's all  
27 I've got, and I'm open to any questions you may have.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Lewis, for your comments. Do we  
30 have any questions? Not seeing any, Mr. Lewis, thank you again.  
31 Next up is Captain Zales.

32  
33 **MR. BOB ZALES, II:** Bob Zales II, Executive Director of  
34 Southeastern Fisheries. I'm not going to say a lot about  
35 deepwater, because you all have my email that we sent in. I will  
36 tell you this, that, at Greg Abrams Seafood right now, they have  
37 five boats, out of the total of whatever there are, which is not  
38 very many more, fishing yellowedge.

39  
40 So far this year, they've landed 171,000 pounds of yellowedge, and  
41 that's through yesterday, and so that tells you what that is, and,  
42 when you look at the document, deep into it, you see, and I was  
43 surprised, and you see permits, dealer permits, and all this kind  
44 of stuff, and apparently Panama City is way up high in all of that,  
45 where all these people operate from, and so the economic impact by  
46 this amendment is going to be severe on the boats out of Panama  
47 City and the dealers out of Panama City.

48

1 The key problem that I have with this is you're looking at reducing  
2 the overall quota by 50 percent. Depending on what alternative  
3 you choose for the recreational allocation, you're going to reduce  
4 the commercial quota from another 3 to 6 percent.  
5  
6 Inherently, you all have, and no disrespect to the council, but we  
7 have begged and pleaded for a data program, so that the rec sector  
8 can have accountability. In this fishery, you clearly have none.  
9 Twelve out of fifteen years, you're at over 50 percent PSE.  
10  
11 You also have an opportunity now, and I think Dylan touched on it,  
12 is to create a permit, particularly for deepwater. If you're going  
13 to fish them, get a permit, and be required to report, so we've  
14 got a handle on what's going on with that, because, right now,  
15 you're taking fish away from an accountable sector, the commercial  
16 side, and giving it to the unaccountable sector, the rec side, and  
17 you all have heard me, and I told you that we're begging.  
18  
19 We're willing to work any way we can with the rec sector to try to  
20 develop a program, because the discard that's coming from there,  
21 that's assumed, is affecting stock assessments. It's affecting  
22 the quotas. We're all losing fish, and so, if we can get a handle  
23 on that data, we'll all be better off.  
24  
25 On red grouper, you need to fast-track that amendment. We really  
26 want to see the allocation shift put close back to where it was  
27 before 53 was put into place on the amendment for the rec side.  
28 We support Action 2, Alternative 2, because the years in that  
29 section mirror the years that were used in 53.  
30  
31 Now I'll get into -- You were going to let me talk a little bit  
32 more about the communication issue. We appreciate you all  
33 recommending sending a letter. What this has done is this has  
34 really given you all an education on how not just the commercial  
35 fishery, but the passenger vessel fishery is affected by the  
36 regulatory process in this country.  
37  
38 You all are just one component that provides a burden to all these  
39 fisheries. You've got FCC, and you've got Coast Guard, and you've  
40 got with the immigration issue, and you've got Department of  
41 Immigration. All these people affect this. Now, on the  
42 communication side, to get a safety inspection on a commercial  
43 vessel, or on a COI passenger vessel, the FCC requires a radio  
44 safety certificate.  
45  
46 That certificate has to be renewed every ten years. You have to  
47 pay a radio man to come in and check all your equipment out. They  
48 have to have that. The Starlink system, that's a brand. What

1 we're really looking at doing is trying to get a web-based system  
2 approved as an approved device, because that system gives you the  
3 ability to have Wi-Fi on a boat, a thousand miles offshore, just  
4 like you have at your home.

5  
6 Your cell phone, you have two ways to talk on it. You have cell  
7 service with bars, and you have internet service, with a little  
8 thing with the lines in it, and it provides that, and so you have  
9 solid communication. Pretty much everybody that I've talked to at  
10 the Coast Guard, and I've talked to a lot of them from here at the  
11 headquarters, all agree that this is a great system.

12  
13 It just has to go through the process. The problem is the current  
14 regulations are antique. They go way back. They haven't kept up  
15 with technology, and we're asking to have the Coast Guard look at  
16 approving this, to issue what they do, and they do this all the  
17 time, issue policy letters, to straighten out regulations until  
18 rulemaking can be completed, and so we're asking for that to be  
19 done, and, in the meantime, we're also talking to legislators.

20  
21 We're preparing legislators. If we can't get this done by the  
22 agency, we're going to Congress to get legislation, and so your  
23 letter will help us.

24  
25 I also sent the same thing to the South Atlantic Council. They're  
26 going to discuss this next month, and so hopefully we'll get both  
27 councils on the same page. They're getting the word that this is  
28 really needed, and it really works good. It's all about safety,  
29 and that's what it provides. Thank you.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Zales. Do we have any  
32 questions? Not seeing any, thank you again. Next up is Randy  
33 Louser, online, and he will be followed by Mr. Chris Horton.

34  
35 **MR. RANDY LAUSER:** Hello. Can you hear me?

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, Randy, we can hear you. Go ahead.

38  
39 **MR. LAUSER:** Good afternoon, council. Randy Louser, down here at  
40 Johns Pass, Madeira Beach, Florida. I'm just commenting on this  
41 Amendment 62 here, the commercial quota set-aside for red grouper  
42 allocation. I'm all for it. We need to bring the IFQ system back  
43 to the fishermen. It just got way out of hand.

44  
45 It was great for the first five years, and then, after it went  
46 public, it just -- It fell apart on us. There's fishermen that  
47 have no control over it, and we need to bring it back to the  
48 fishermen, and we have a lot of new blood around our dock, young

1 kids, captains, and they would make them really happy to get going,  
2 because they're taking over a lot of a lot of captains jobs down  
3 there, and just to keep this fishery going, and so I just wanted  
4 to iterate that to you all, and I want to second Brian's comment  
5 on the shark population.

6  
7 They're just -- That's out of hand, too. There's no population  
8 control. You know, we've got population control on deer and pigs  
9 and bear, and then none on the shark, and that population has just  
10 exploded, and so thank you very much. Have a good day.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Louser. Do we have any questions?  
13 Not seeing any, next up is Mr. Chris Horton, and he'll be followed  
14 by Scott Daggett.

15  
16 **MR. CHRIS HORTON:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the  
17 council. My name is Chris Horton. I'm the Senior Director of  
18 Fisheries Policy for the Congressional Sportsman's Foundation, and  
19 just a couple of quick things today.

20  
21 Amendment 58B, we support all the preferred alternatives that this  
22 council has chosen at this point, particularly Action 2,  
23 Alternative 3, that sets the recreational ACL around 10 percent,  
24 as that's closer to the true percentage of what anglers have been  
25 landing, with the advancement of technologies and the ability for  
26 recreational anglers to be able to access that fishery themselves.  
27 It's been going on for some time now, and that reflects more  
28 accurately where we are with that fishery, and it's only going to  
29 continue to grow.

30  
31 Obviously, from the DESCEND Act perspective, we strongly support  
32 preventing a lapse in the requirement for a descending device or  
33 venting tool, and I want to thank C.J. for his motion yesterday.

34  
35 The incredible work done by Return 'Em Right has educated thousands  
36 of anglers, and put descending devices in their hands, and we've  
37 made some significant progress toward reducing discards in the  
38 Gulf of Mexico, or Gulf of America, and so it's time that we -- We  
39 need to make sure that we continue that.

40  
41 My good friend Mr. Zales, just a minute ago -- The recreational  
42 sector is often accused of being unaccountable, which is an  
43 inappropriate misnomer. I mean, we fish to the seasons and the  
44 bag limits that are given to us, and, even in this case, where  
45 we're asking to continue a regulation, an additional regulation,  
46 on us to require descending devices, it's just baffling that we're  
47 kind of -- That we've arrived at this point.

1 The reason that there is a sunset in the DESCEND Act is because  
2 the intent all along, from Congress, was for this council to  
3 implement permanent long-term regulations to this effect, yet here  
4 we are, and we're facing a lapse, and so we urge you to hopefully  
5 be able to get this done on the abbreviated timeframe, or  
6 framework, but, if not, we're fully prepared, and members of  
7 Congress are prepared to step in again, if we need to.

8  
9 Then, finally, the last thing I'll continue to say, as I usually  
10 do up here, is we really encourage you to continue moving forward  
11 to move recreationally-important species under state management,  
12 and beginning with greater amberjack, and so thank you for your  
13 time.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Horton. We have a question for  
16 Mr. Sanchez.

17  
18 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Not a question, but I just want to thank you for the  
19 social last night.

20  
21 **MR. HORTON:** Well, that was all CCA, but it was great to spend  
22 some time with you there. Thank you, all.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Chris, we have one more question from Dr. Allen.

25  
26 **DR. ALLEN:** Chris, I'm just interested in your comments on -- We've  
27 talked about deepwater grouper here, and the problems with getting  
28 the landings data from the rec side, and I just wonder about your  
29 thoughts about some kind of a reporting system for deepwater  
30 grouper for recreational anglers.

31  
32 **MR. HORTON:** I think, if you had have asked us that ten or fifteen  
33 years ago, we probably would have been really hesitant of what  
34 does that mean for us in the future, and are we going to fish tags,  
35 which is not something we support. However, looking at the success  
36 on the red snapper side of the states with mandatory reporting  
37 programs, and like I fish out of Alabama. That's my home waters.  
38 Snapper Check is great program. It takes thirty seconds to report  
39 it, to report the catch.

40  
41 I think the key, from a recreational perspective, to get the most  
42 participation, is that whatever reporting system that comes up,  
43 and I'm not opposed to it, because, again, this is a -- It's not  
44 like red snapper, with a high ACL, and we're dealing with a low-  
45 ACL species. Certainly we're open to do requiring reporting. That  
46 just makes sense in that case.

47  
48 Florida has got a great example of that with Goliath grouper right

1 now. Certainly we're open to that, but I think the key for angler  
2 acceptance is that it has to be through a state program. It can't  
3 be a federal blanket-type program. It needs to be something  
4 through the states.

5  
6 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you very much.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Horton. Next up is Mr. Scott  
9 Daggett online, and he will be followed by Mr. Ken Hadden.

10  
11 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** I have Mr. Daggett on the phone, and I'm going to  
12 hold him up to the mic. Go ahead, Scott.

13  
14 **MR. SCOTT DAGGETT:** Good afternoon. My name is Scott Daggett,  
15 owner-operator out of Madeira Beach, and I would like to say what  
16 you guys are doing with the yellowedge, before I get onto the red  
17 grouper, is a good thing, because that quota needs to be cut. You  
18 can hardly catch fish out there anymore, but, under the red grouper  
19 and this Amendment 62, I think you guys are headed down the right  
20 path.

21  
22 I own shares, and my problem with this is -- I don't know why you  
23 guys don't go by catch history to distribute these shares, which  
24 would make it more fairly over the whole, the whole fishery itself.  
25 If you're in the fishery, and you catch fish, you would get shares,  
26 instead of this holding shares to the side and giving them to  
27 shareholders. Anybody new in this business doesn't own shares,  
28 and so all you're doing is enriching the rich already. You should  
29 go by the catch history, and elevate the whole industry, instead  
30 of elevating only to people who own shares.

31  
32 Just one more thing, in closing here, is what you guys have done  
33 already has helped the fishermen out immensely this year. At the  
34 beginning of the year, we were paying anywhere from \$1.75 to \$2.25  
35 for red grouper. After the increase, the price has gone down.  
36 I've seen as low as thirty-five cents now for leasing red grouper,  
37 and I'm imagining, at the first of the year, it'll be even less,  
38 and so I appreciate that.

39  
40 Once again, if you're going to do this fairly, you should go by  
41 catch history. Those are the people who are involved in the  
42 industry, and not people sitting on the sideline holding shares.  
43 Thank you for your time. I appreciate it.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Scott. Do we have any questions? Not  
46 seeing any, thank you, Scott. Next up, Mr. Ken Haddad.

47  
48 **MR. KEN HADDAD:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and council members. I

1 first want to welcome new Council Member Ballard and Marquez and  
2 Frady. For Amendment 58B, we support all the preferred  
3 alternatives. Preferred Action 2, Alternative 3 is the only one  
4 that addresses the recent catch in the fishery that has occurred,  
5 and it most accurately reflects, I think, the fishing efforts.

6  
7 This alternative reflects an unbiased view of recent landings,  
8 even with IFQs in place, because neither the commercial quota nor  
9 total quota was approached during that time period, and this --  
10 I'm basing this on Tables 1.1.2 and 3. This alternative also  
11 provides the least likelihood for the recreational community to  
12 exceed our ACL.

13  
14 Action 3, Preferred Alternative 4 provides the most flexible  
15 approach to AMs when dealing with these large PSE swings in annual  
16 landings. This sliding average provides a flexible management  
17 approach that may prevent the untenable management swings that  
18 would certainly occur without this averaging. For 58A, the other  
19 shallow-water grouper, we're fine with the current directions and  
20 alternatives in the document.

21  
22 Amendment 62, red grouper, we're generally satisfied with a range  
23 of alternatives. We specifically support Action 2, Alternative 2,  
24 because this is a direct conversion of the time series, as was  
25 done in Amendment 53, and this alternative essentially keeps  
26 everything the same and just converts the allocation in FES-based  
27 53 to the SFRS-based in 62.

28  
29 We would like we certainly would like to keep the old 53  
30 allocation, but we've been consistent in not asking -- In asking  
31 for the conversion to be direct in those time series. We are okay  
32 with a phased-in increase if it starts at 80 percent. We prefer  
33 to get it all at once, but, if that's the feeling, is phased-in,  
34 we would like to see that start not at 70 percent.

35  
36 I don't think we're good with the 10 percent buffer off the top,  
37 because that takes those fish away, even if they're available until  
38 the next assessment, and then we don't oppose exploring some sort  
39 of pilot reporting system for deepwater grouper. I think there's  
40 a lot of challenges to it, but it's certainly worth taking a hard  
41 look. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Haddad. Do we have any questions?  
44 Not seeing any, Ken, thank you. Next up online is Jamie Wilson.

45  
46 **MS. JAIME WEISEL-WILSON:** Hello. My name is Jaime Wiesel-Wilson.  
47 I'm out of Surfside, Texas. The older generation told me that my  
48 words would fall on deaf ears, and so I'm hoping that at least

1 some of my words will be heard with my time spent with you today.  
2  
3 My first concern is amberjack. Here in Texas, we come from a small  
4 place. Surfside is a small little place with a lot of -- A small  
5 community that builds their livelihoods off of fishing.  
6  
7 I know that the few charter companies that I work for have already  
8 accepted deposits and booked out for the month. In the event that  
9 amberjack is not announced, unfortunately, we will lose a lot of  
10 money. We will have to turn around and refund all those deposits.  
11  
12 I urge that we consider and look at setting announcement parameters  
13 to help businesses, in the future, who are trying to make a living  
14 off of fishing. Also, announcing like an announcement date for  
15 the season, having it coming in a more timely fashion, and/or  
16 manner, so we don't look bad, as business owners, and as business  
17 runners and as captains. Our customers have to trust us at the  
18 dock, at the wheel, and out to sea, and, if we can't even figure  
19 out what we're going to have for a season, what are we going to  
20 do?  
21  
22 My second subject matter is kingfish. Somebody spoke on it  
23 earlier, and I apologize for not remembering your name. I do agree  
24 and came here to speak about the kingfish limit. I am on a  
25 professional king fishing team. We used to travel across the Gulf.  
26 We got a bigger boat, and we can't afford to do that now, but we  
27 have seen a huge decline in kingfish out front in Texas.  
28  
29 I do not think the captain and crew limits are necessary. We do  
30 get kingfish blitzes every now and again, and it's amazing, but,  
31 to preserve the species, I do think it should be considered  
32 lowering it.  
33  
34 The red snapper assessments I think are done on less capable  
35 vessels. Technology has made huge advances in the time past, and,  
36 when the snapper assessments were made in the past years, they  
37 were done on less capable vessels, with less aggressive captains  
38 and crews, meaning they weren't as mad as the fish, and they were  
39 done in a more reserved fishing manner, because of those onboard  
40 and fear of them stealing their spots and location, on account of  
41 the -- Sorry, and I'm reading my notes, and fishing locations, on  
42 account of observers being onboard.  
43  
44 I feel strongly that, if you're going to observe snapper numbers,  
45 that it should be considered -- Or it should be done on a faster  
46 boat, like normal recreational and charters are running now, and  
47 then my last comment is stricter fines on poachers, and then  
48 snapper commercial fishermen fishing upwards, up to fifty miles

1 out, because they're diminishing the charter fleet inshore.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Wilson, for your comments. Do we  
4 have any questions? We have a question for Mr. Geeslin.

5  
6 **MR. GEESLIN:** Thank you, Jaime. Dakus Geeslin, from Texas, here.  
7 I know the sooner the better, as far as a season determination for  
8 amberjack, but have you got an idea of when kind of the drop-dead  
9 season announcement, in your mind, would be, when that ideal  
10 timeframe would be?

11  
12 **MS. WEISEL-WILSON:** At least two to three weeks, respectively, and  
13 like we have customers who depend on us, and we take deposits, and  
14 so everything in the business world is done at a two-week window.  
15 Three weeks would be greater, but just enough time to recoup some  
16 of the financial damage that we're going to have to give back to  
17 them. That's a lot of money to refund.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Wilson, for your comments. Next  
20 up is Ms. Keila Paul, and she'll followed by David Johnson online.

21  
22 **MS. KELIA PAUL:** Good afternoon, council. My name is Keila Paul.  
23 I own two dually-permanent vessels out of Panama City Beach, and  
24 I'm the President of the Panama City Boatman's Association.

25  
26 I want to start by -- I've heard some comments, and there was a  
27 motion in April, and I want to make sure I'm 100 percent clear  
28 that we want to remain as a charter fishing fleet underneath the  
29 purview of this council, and we do not want state management. In  
30 fact, we support further exploration of separation of our sector  
31 from the recreational sector for gag grouper, red grouper,  
32 amberjack, and triggerfish.

33  
34 Nobody else has mentioned it, but I'm going to. Red snapper. We  
35 stood at this podium, three years ago in Corpus Christi, and asked  
36 to not get the increase that we were slated to get. We were  
37 already seeing a decline in the stock, and we were concerned that  
38 the more quota and days would push us even further into decline,  
39 and, unfortunately, that's where we are.

40  
41 I'm on the docks of my marina ten to twelve hours every day, and  
42 so I have a unique ability to see every fish that hits my dock,  
43 and what we're seeing is sixteen-inch fish on twelve-hour trips,  
44 and not limits, and I'm talking thirty-year veterans and not, you  
45 know, the little small brand-new to the to the fishery boats, and  
46 it's concerning.

47  
48 Sometimes on the shorter trips they'll have a handful of snapper,

1 if any. It's more of an impact, honestly, to see someone that  
2 actually catches a limit or has any snapper with size to them.  
3 The season is too long for both the charter-for-hire as well as  
4 the recreational sector. If we don't get a handle on this, the  
5 stock is going to continue to suffer.

6  
7 We want to see SEFHIER stood back up. I know that there were  
8 reasons that it was taken off, like Dylan said, and so I want to  
9 make sure that that is still on this council's, you know, to-do  
10 list, a high priority. We want to be able to give that data to  
11 you guys.

12  
13 Amberjack, we've all booked trips on the information that this  
14 season would be open. The closure being stuck in review is  
15 impacting our ability to do business. We sell opportunity. When  
16 we do sell a trip, based on that opportunity, and then we have to  
17 walk that back to our customers, it impacts our integrity as a  
18 business, and as an industry. We do understand that the status is  
19 out of the control of this council, but we do request that we get  
20 a minimum of a five-day closure, as the commercial sector gets.  
21 The amount of time the status of this season has been in limbo is  
22 unacceptable.

23  
24 We do fully support the continuation of the DESCEND Act and making  
25 sure that it does not lapse. For Amendment 62, we support the  
26 commonsense approach to the phase-in, but do not support a  
27 recreational season closure. We also support the twenty-fathom  
28 closure.

29  
30 For the potential set-aside that Mr. Strelcheck proposed, as an  
31 association, we don't have an official opinion. We're various  
32 stakeholders, but, personally, I like this approach, and I would  
33 like to see it explored further, as long as it doesn't delay the  
34 rulemaking. I'm also the Vice Chair of the IFQ AP, and I would  
35 agree with Captain Lewis that I would like to see it reconvened to  
36 be able to discuss these issues. Thank you for your time.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Paul. Do we have any questions?  
39 Mr. Strelcheck.

40  
41 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Just thanks for being here, and for your  
42 testimony. Just for clarification, you said I think you support  
43 the closure. I believe you meant support of removing the closure,  
44 the twenty-fathom closure?

45  
46 **MS. PAUL:** Yes. Sorry, and that was -- Yes, and thank you.

47  
48 **MR. STRELCHECK:** All right. Thank you.

1  
2 **MS. PAUL:** Sometimes my words get too fast. Thank you.  
3

4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions? Not seeing any, thank you.  
5 Next up online is Mr. David Johnson, and he will be followed by  
6 Mr. Josh Ellender.  
7

8 **MS. ROY:** Mr. Chair, he has dropped off of the webinar.  
9

10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Bernie. We'll move on to Mr. Joshua  
11 Ellender, and next up will be Richard Young online.  
12

13 **MR. JOSHUA ELLENDER:** Good afternoon. How are you all today? My  
14 name's Joshua Ellender, from Louisiana, and Chairman of the Board  
15 of Directors for the Louisiana Charter Boat Association, and I  
16 also own Ellender Charters.  
17

18 I'm here to provide support for state management, us moving towards  
19 it in all aspects, all species. I know that's a long road, but I  
20 am definitely in support of that, with the option for each state  
21 to decide whether or not they want sector separation. I don't  
22 think another state should have the authority to decide that for  
23 another state.  
24

25 The system we have right now is not fair and equitable for  
26 everyone. I had a conversation with a gentleman last night about  
27 that, and I thought about that a lot last night. Some get the  
28 benefit more than others, but it really isn't fair across-the-  
29 board, and so I think the best way to attack this is to actually  
30 go to state management, and let the states decide what they want,  
31 or what they don't want.  
32

33 Greater amberjack is a fine example of this right now. You know,  
34 just coming into -- We had a roughly 217 percent overage, and we're  
35 going to have a closure. We don't know when that is, but we are  
36 going to have one, but, you know, just to give you an example,  
37 Louisiana, the state, caught 355 total amberjack.  
38

39 With the fifty-one-pound average that we have, we landed 18,000  
40 pounds, you know, and so are we overfishing? Are we doing a  
41 disservice to our area? No, you know, and so why should we be  
42 penalized for that?  
43

44 Going to the next thing, I support removing the twenty-fathom  
45 closure. As far as Amendment 58B, I support Action 2, Preferred  
46 Alternative 3. I also support Action 3, Preferred alternative 4.  
47 I also support the angler's almanac pilot program, or something  
48 similar to that. I think that would be great, to have some kind

1 of reporting program. Let's see.

2  
3 I also support moving the charter-for-hire red snapper season to  
4 the Friday before Memorial Day Weekend, or any time earlier than  
5 that. Once again, if we had state management, we could decide by  
6 the states.

7  
8 Amendment 58A, I support Action 6, Alternative 2, Option 2b. I  
9 support Action 7, Alternative 2. I support Action 8.1, Alternative  
10 3. We just want the longest season possible, and, in Action 8.2,  
11 I would also like to consider an average approach, spread out over  
12 a three-year span, as stated in 58B. I think that's a great  
13 approach, to where, if you do have one overage one year, and you  
14 fall short the next year, they can kind of average themselves out,  
15 where you're not penalized immediately after, and that's it.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Ellender. Do we have any  
18 questions? I'm not seeing any. I have one for you, Josh. You  
19 touched on amberjack a little bit, but my question to you is --  
20 You spend a lot of time on the water, as a charter captain, and I  
21 know your area, but are you seeing any increase or decline in the  
22 amberjack biomass where you are?

23  
24 **MR. ELLENDER:** If anything, it's an increase. I mean we've always  
25 had the numbers. We may have had a little bit of decrease in there  
26 over the years, but, for the most part, they've always been  
27 plentiful. Now, you might have to just move areas, to where -- Go  
28 a little bit deeper, or just move to areas where they're not hit  
29 as hard, but they're still plentiful, and they're -- It's hard not  
30 to catch them, and put it that way.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Any other questions? I'm not seeing  
33 any. Next up will be Mr. Jim Zurbrick.

34  
35 **MR. JIM ZURBRICK:** Jim Zurbrick, from Steinhatchee, Florida, home  
36 of three hurricanes in a twelve-month period. What a way to get  
37 put on the map. I appreciate you allowing me to speak today.

38  
39 For a long time now, for three years since I've had cameras, I've  
40 been up here showing my data. I have cameras, and so I can document  
41 every fish I caught, every discard, my mammal interaction, all of  
42 it, and I have to go through this, but I only fished twenty-two  
43 trips in nineteen months, because we had the Hurricane Adelia back  
44 in 2023, and so I had over 5,000 red snapper, individual red  
45 snapper, and I discarded sixty-eight.

46  
47 Now, if I was a recreational fisherman, my discard number would be  
48 35,000. Not all of them are going to be dead discards, obviously,

1 but it's just how different the fishery is. Nobody wants a  
2 thirteen-inch commercial snapper, but I do, because I get paid the  
3 same for a thirteen-inch red snapper as I do for a twenty-five-  
4 inch, and so there's no incentive.

5  
6 Part of the problem with the recreational fishery is bigger is  
7 better. We have these tournaments, and you wouldn't believe what  
8 goes on in a small place like Steinhatchee, when everybody comes  
9 over to get into the fishing tournaments, and a lot of good things  
10 are done from the revenue. You've got Hooked on Heroes, and the  
11 Boys and Girls Clubs out of, you know, even as far as Jacksonville,  
12 but the smaller doesn't win anything, okay, and so I can prove  
13 what I caught.

14  
15 I'm huge on accountability, and believe me -- I've got five guys  
16 that I buy their fish. I'm a dealer in town, and, four months  
17 ago, I sold my boat. For thirty-two years I had the Jolly Rogers,  
18 and now I'm a has-been, right, but I plan on getting another boat,  
19 and so I'm trying to talk my guys into somebody putting the cameras  
20 on, so they can get up here and take over, you know, what I've  
21 been doing.

22  
23 I support -- On Amendment 58, personally, and I hate to say I  
24 support the 10 percent, but I would support the 10 percent rec if  
25 the accountability was in place that we could actually count, or  
26 really get close, to a good accurate -- Right now, it's a guess,  
27 and so it's not the best available data. It's the best guess at  
28 data.

29  
30 We've got to cut the quota in half, and the commercial sector is  
31 not catching it. The rec sector is, and I know it's an ever-  
32 growing rec sector, and so I was thinking I was much more of  
33 supporting the 6 percent increase, and doing a one-year, and, the  
34 three-year revolving, if that's the best we can do, and if it takes  
35 that long to get a program into place for a mandatory -- Mandatory,  
36 and everybody hates that word, but that's the only way you  
37 accurately, or even get close, to counting your fish.

38  
39 SEFHIER, as a commercial guy, I don't know how important it is for  
40 the charter guys. They want to document what they caught, and  
41 they want to give you good data, but, right now, it's an open-  
42 ended -- Nobody does nobody even has a call-out or call-in, and at  
43 least let's get back to that part of it, and so my time is up, and  
44 I thank you.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Zurbrick. Do we have any  
47 questions? I'm not seeing any. Next up is Ms. Rachal Hisler,  
48 followed by Scott Hickman online.

1  
2 **MS. RACHAL HISLER:** Good afternoon, council, and we're so happy to  
3 have you here in Texas, my home state. I'm Rachal Hisler, and I'm  
4 representing my commercial fishing family from Double Bayou,  
5 Texas.

6  
7 Today, I thought it was funny that Kelia brought up Corpus Christi,  
8 because that's kind of what I wanted to talk about to you, because  
9 I remember vividly that meeting, because it was the first council  
10 meeting that I ever attended, a few years ago, and they were  
11 working on a bridge there, and I talked about the fact that, when  
12 you're building a bridge you start from both sides, and you meet  
13 somewhere in the middle.

14  
15 Well, recently, that bridge was completed, and I'll actually be  
16 headed down that way in a couple of weeks for a meeting, and so  
17 I'm going to get to go over the bridge, and experience it, and I'm  
18 really looking forward to it, but that brings me to something that  
19 I want to talk about from this meeting, and that is yesterday,  
20 when you all were going over the suggestions for the letter to the  
21 administration regarding the EOs for seafood.

22  
23 One of the things that you all proposed leaving off of the letter  
24 is something that was really disheartening to me, and that was  
25 asking for a more fair and balanced council. As a member of the  
26 Reef Fish AP, I did participate in that hearing, and that was  
27 something that was certainly talked about there, but I believe  
28 that I did listen in on every other meeting that was held on these  
29 EOs, and I want to say that, in every one of those meetings, that  
30 was a topic that that was brought up.

31  
32 While I understand that it may be considered punching above your  
33 weight class as a council, since you all do not get to decide that,  
34 someone yesterday did say shoot for the stars.

35  
36 Well, I think this is a great opportunity to shoot for the stars,  
37 because, although we cannot direct a governor who to choose for  
38 that list, and we can't tell the Secretary of Commerce who he's  
39 going to choose, I think they're looking to you all for guidance.  
40 They want to hear from you, and this is an opportunity where you  
41 could give some really good input, and, even if they don't listen,  
42 I would also like to say that it's a great opportunity to extend  
43 some goodwill to the commercial folks, who are also represented by  
44 this council, because it is, right now, a super majority of  
45 recreational folks on the council.

46  
47 I'm not against recreational people. I hope that we can all work  
48 together to prosecute this fishery in the best way possible, that

1 benefits the most people, because I do think we do have enough  
2 fish in this body of water to meet the needs of the people who  
3 want to enjoy this fishery, and so I respectfully urge you that,  
4 in your consideration on that letter, that you would add something  
5 to that effect on the letter to the administration, and thank you  
6 so much, and I hope you enjoy the rest of your time here in Texas  
7 with us.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Hisler. Do we have any questions?  
10 Not seeing any, thank you, Rachel.

11  
12 **MS. HISLER:** Thank you.

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next up is Captain Scott Hickman on the line.

15  
16 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** All right. I have Scott on the phone. Scott, go  
17 ahead.

18  
19 **MR. SCOTT HICKMAN:** Thank you, Emily and ladies and gentlemen of  
20 the Gulf Council. It's been a while. I was actually going to  
21 drive in and see your smiling faces, and I wanted to gripe at Emily  
22 and Andy in person on this amberjack thing. The email cost me  
23 about a hundred phone calls of Starlink time, but I've been  
24 fishing, and it's been a really rough summer. June was terrible,  
25 and so we're playing catchup in Galveston, and trying to make as  
26 many trips as we can before everybody quits fishing for the fall.

27  
28 Amberjacks, there are lots of amberjacks in Texas. They're big.  
29 We're catching them on dead bait. It's probably the best I've  
30 seen in ten years. It's darn sure not going to hurt the fishery  
31 if it opens up.

32  
33 We look forward to an amberjack season. My guys need to make some  
34 time up after the June that we had. We do appreciate the extra  
35 fifteen days in September that are coming up. That's going to  
36 help us a lot. We do like the June 1 opener. We actually would  
37 like it even better if it was June 15, but, you know, CFA, and  
38 we've got our other friends on the other parts of the Gulf that  
39 like a June 1, and so we'll stick with the June 1 and supporting  
40 that.

41  
42 King mackerel, king mackerel continues to get worse every summer.  
43 I know some people in the eastern Gulf said that they've got a  
44 little increase of fish. We're not seeing it. You know, there's  
45 a couple little pockets that showed up here and there this summer,  
46 but it's getting worse every summer. I think there was one point  
47 in July that I landed more wahoo than I had kingfish, which I never  
48 thought I would have seen that happen.

1  
2 Cobia, I think I'm at six for the summer. I've said this over and  
3 over, that I catch usually 250 keepers a summer. Six is not a  
4 very good number. We're just not seeing the fish.

5  
6 Red snapper, inside of fifty miles, there are lots of small fish,  
7 but they're very, very plentiful. You get out in deeper water,  
8 and there's a lot of nice fish, and so the snapper fishery still  
9 seems to be doing pretty well, and so we've got snappers and  
10 amberjacks to catch, and we appreciate that.

11  
12 Data collection, all my guys, the majority, are running Starlink  
13 to our boats. It would be really easy to implement an app, like  
14 Randy Pausina presented this week, and we like his app. It  
15 wouldn't cost much.

16  
17 I know there's some folks who are saying, you know, be able to  
18 fund SEFHIER. I can remember all of us going to D.C., before  
19 SEFHIER, and beating the halls of Congress, and we got a nice round  
20 of funding for that program until the lawsuit on VMS.

21  
22 You know, it would be great if the agency would work with us a  
23 little closer, instead of a big, bloated program like we had last  
24 time. I think we know what we need, what would be great to have  
25 a good level of accountability with Amendment 40.

26  
27 Another thing on amberjacks is, if it does go to a regional  
28 management-type deal, east and west Gulf, like we do for king  
29 mackerel on the commercial side, I'm fine with that. I think, you  
30 know, an east-west split would be a good way to do greater  
31 amberjack, but, that being said, we've shown that Amendment 40 has  
32 worked really great for red snapper. It works good for our  
33 businesses.

34  
35 Charter fleets are different animals than the recreational fleet.  
36 We would want greater amberjack to be in Amendment 40 Gulf-wide.  
37 I think the charter boat industry is well suited to work out what  
38 we need, as far as seasons, for the whole industry, and so, that  
39 being said, let us go to Congress, and we'll get the funding.

40  
41 Let us work on what we think we need for the new SEFHIER 2.0.  
42 Starlink works great. An app like Pausina's app would work really  
43 good, based on LA Creel. LA Creel is the gold standard, and let's  
44 get to work. We appreciate everybody. I'm going to pop in tonight,  
45 and set through Full Council tomorrow, and we look forward to  
46 seeing all your smiling faces.

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

1  
2 **MR. HICKMAN:** Thank you.  
3

4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Not seeing any questions, Scott, and thanks. Next  
5 up will be Dennis Parker, followed by Ms. Martha Guyas.  
6

7 **MR. DENNIS PARKER:** Good afternoon. I'm Dennis Parker, from  
8 Rockport, Texas. I'm actually here representing my son and his  
9 wife. They've taken over the commercial snapper business from me,  
10 and he also runs Coastal Marine in Rockport.  
11

12 I asked him, if I come up, if there was anything he wanted to  
13 comment on, and he said sharks. Dad, go up and find out about  
14 sharks, and so I've had a lot of discussion with people, Bobby and  
15 other people, on what has happened in the sharks, and how come we  
16 have so many sharks now, and, as other people have talked about,  
17 it's just crazy how much they've exploded in our area of the Gulf.  
18

19 We have the fishing business that we see them, when we're offshore  
20 fishing, but we also run the boat business, and they're inshore.  
21 It's amazing how many people come in and say they can't catch a  
22 fish in Baffin Bay, or other places around Rockport, because the  
23 sharks eat them all, and so we're just asking the council, and I  
24 don't have control over it, but just give a voice back to the  
25 people that need to hear it, but we've got to do something about  
26 the sharks.  
27

28 We used to have some permits and some things in place, I  
29 understand, that kind of kept them under control, and they've all  
30 been closed down, and so the fish -- There are just too many, and  
31 they're just growing all the time. That's it.  
32

33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Parker. Do we have a question?  
34

35 **DR. BANKS:** Well, not so much a question, but I would recommend,  
36 Mr. Parker, that you also give this public comment to the HMS AP,  
37 that's next week, because they actually manage the sharks, and  
38 they would actually be very interested, because I know there's a  
39 few things that they are discussing that this would be very  
40 relevant for, and so thank you for your comment today, but I would  
41 also encourage you to give it next week as well.  
42

43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Parker. Next up is Ms. Martha  
44 Guyas, followed by Nathan Putnam.  
45

46 **MS. MARTHA GUYAS:** Good afternoon, everybody. Martha Guyas,  
47 representing the American Sportfishing Association. I'm going to  
48 talk about DESCEND. Hopefully you've all have seen our letter

1 that we sent before the meeting. Our ask was to move towards final  
2 action in November to remove the sunset on the regulations put in  
3 place to implement the DESCEND Act, and so we support the motion  
4 approved by the Reef Fish Committee yesterday. Thank you, C.J.,  
5 for introducing that.

6  
7 Taking final action to simply remove the sunset in November is the  
8 cleanest way to keep these regulations in place, which would help  
9 minimize lapse time, promote survival of released reef fish, and  
10 reduce confusion, and, from the fishermen's perspective, keeping  
11 an existing regulation on the books is not a new regulation. It's  
12 not an additional burden.

13  
14 I want to address a couple of the concerns that came up in the  
15 committee yesterday regarding the regulatory text that was put in  
16 place by NOAA Fisheries following the DESCEND Act passage. I will  
17 read it to you. It's in Section 622.30, Paragraph (c). It says  
18 that gear required by the DESCEND Act of 2020, for a person on a  
19 vessel to fish for Gulf reef fish in the EEZ, Gulf EEZ, a descending  
20 device or venting tool that is rigged and ready for use while  
21 fishing is occurring must be on the vessel. The requirements in  
22 this Paragraph (c) are effective until January 14, 2026.

23  
24 Then it does go on, like Mara said, to define descending device  
25 and venting tool. That's all good. The action that needs to happen  
26 here is just remove that sentence with the date. The requirement  
27 to have the tools onboard is clearly there. Nothing needs to  
28 happen with that. Just delete the sunset, and you can do it  
29 through an abbreviated framework.

30  
31 That process was last updated in Reef Fish Amendment 49, and it  
32 clearly states that reef fish gear restrictions fall under that,  
33 and so this is the fastest way to go, is an abbreviated framework.  
34 You can do it in one meeting.

35  
36 I'll mention one other thing. The benefit of the council taking  
37 action on DESCEND, as opposed to Congress, means that you all keep  
38 control over it, and so, as the science on barotrauma evolves, and  
39 we learn more about how to best use these devices, you could  
40 potentially change regulations to keep pace with that.

41  
42 If Congress steps in, and they move this forward, and they put  
43 this in place permanently, you guys can't do that anymore, and so  
44 just keep that in mind, and I thank you for your time.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Martha. Do we have any questions?  
47 I'm not seeing any. Next up is Mr. Nathan Putman, followed by  
48 Billy Archer.

1  
2 **DR. NATHAN PUTMAN:** Good afternoon. I am Nathan Putman, a  
3 scientist with LGL Ecological Research Associates, and I would  
4 like to voice my support for a collaborative shrimp-sawfish working  
5 group, as proposed by Councilman Sanchez.  
6

7 Fellow LGL scientist Taylor Beyea and I have been working along  
8 several different avenues with NOAA and the shrimp industry to  
9 come up with ways to better quantify sawfish interactions, reduce  
10 those interactions, and then understand how those interactions  
11 impact the sawfish population.  
12

13 We hosted a workshop in March of 2024, with representatives of the  
14 shrimping industry from each of the Gulf states, to generate ideas  
15 on how to reduce interactions with sawfish. There was a lot of  
16 support at that workshop for collecting data to better understand  
17 temporal and spatial risk of bycatch and communicating that to the  
18 industry.  
19

20 We've seen members of the shrimp industry already taking positive,  
21 voluntary steps that can address these issues, things like  
22 volunteering their vessels for the Early Adopter Program,  
23 contributing to research into increasing observer coverage, being  
24 supportive of the development of habitat models for sawfish, and  
25 being willing to contribute to cooperative research specific to  
26 sawfish.  
27

28 Our experience is that the shrimp industry can be proactive, and  
29 is eager to resolve these issues, so that they can continue to  
30 shrimp sustainably with sawfish. Our experience with NOAA is that  
31 they would like the shrimp industry to be able to do that too, and  
32 we, Taylor Beyea and myself, would be happy to participate in such  
33 a working group, if requested, and so thank you.  
34

35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Nathan. Do we have any questions?  
36 Not seeing any, thank you again. Next up is Mr. Billy Archer,  
37 followed by Eric Brazer.  
38

39 **MR. BILLY ARCHER:** Good afternoon, Council. My name is Billy  
40 Archer. I'm a third-generation fisherman from Panama City,  
41 Florida. Thank you for taking my public testimony. My concerns  
42 are with the deepwater grouper. Its accountability should have  
43 the highest concern.  
44

45 The recreational data is so bad that it shouldn't even be  
46 considered for management advice. Settling for bad data, because  
47 it's the only data, should go against the grain. I like Mr.  
48 Sanchez's ideas of a permit requirement, separate allocations,

1 some kind of app to get the information to the right people. Mr.  
2 Paucina's app might be the option, but you already have the NOAA  
3 highly migratory species online, and it could be a good option as  
4 well, as a starting point.

5  
6 As for red grouper, I'm glad to see SRFS data being used, versus  
7 the FES. Please be careful with what you do with the current stock  
8 assessment. Taking a cautious approach for now should be the best  
9 course of action. Again, Mr. Sanchez's idea of a phased-in  
10 approach, and a buffer, is also worth looking at.

11  
12 As for the set-asides, Andy and his staff have done a good job  
13 exploring this concept. While it's appealing, we need more time  
14 to explore the implication it will have on other shareholders that  
15 have been landing their quota and investing in the fishery, and so  
16 please keep Amendment 62 on the fast track, if possible.

17  
18 As for amberjack, it's going to cause some heartburn, but it's a  
19 bad situation. It's a death by a thousand cuts. While we all  
20 understand it's not Andy or the council's fault, the delays are  
21 really having -- These delays are really having a negative impact  
22 on our business, and I personally would like to see amberjack open.  
23 It is the best it's been in many years, and it should run at least  
24 as long as the mini-derby season for snapper and grouper. It would  
25 help offset the pressure of the rest of the species we are  
26 prosecuting.

27  
28 This situation should warrant the idea of an east-west Gulf split,  
29 bringing all the reef fish back into the sector separation  
30 conversation, which is long overdue.

31  
32 In closing, what I am personally experiencing off Panama City is  
33 this, a highly-stressed red snapper fishery, a very limited  
34 improvement of the gag and red grouper fishery, and a very robust  
35 amberjack fishery, the best it's been in several years. Lastly,  
36 Andy, you and Carrie and the staff are to be commended for what  
37 you are doing with all the hurdles that you are having to deal  
38 with. You all are doing a great job, and we appreciate you, your  
39 role in the public service sector, and who knows what the future  
40 holds, but I know who holds the future. Thank you.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Archer. We have a question from  
43 Captain Walker.

44  
45 **MR. ARCHER:** Okay.

46  
47 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, Captain Archer. I just thought I would  
48 ask your opinion. When we talk about an east-west split

1 consideration of regional amberjack, where would the line be in  
2 your mind?

3  
4 **MR. ARCHER:** The Mississippi River. I mean, that is fair.

5  
6 **MR. WALKER:** Any rationale for that, or that --

7  
8 **MR. ARCHER:** Well, I mean, that seems to be a good place, I mean,  
9 because you have Alabama, Mississippi and Alabama, on one side,  
10 and then Florida, and Texas and Louisiana on the other side, and  
11 they seem to be having a lot more interaction with amberjack over  
12 there than we have over here, but Florida catches, what, 75 percent  
13 of the amberjack? That is amazing.

14  
15 **MR. WALKER:** Thank you, sir.

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

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Do we have any other questions? Not  
20 seeing any, thank you. Next up is Mr. Eric Brazer, followed by  
21 Mr. Ted Venker.

22  
23 **MR. ERIC BRAZER:** Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Eric  
24 Brazer, Deputy Director, Gulf of America Reef Fish Shareholders  
25 Alliance. Thank you for the opportunity to comment. First off,  
26 I want to welcome Dr. Allen and Brenda and John. Thank you, guys,  
27 and we're looking forward to working with you.

28  
29 I'm just going to speak to three things here, and I'm going to  
30 refer you back to my letter for everything else. The first one is  
31 an easy one. The DESCEND Act, yes, in this specific case, we  
32 support fast-tracking this work and going final in November. Let's  
33 do it. It's a great program.

34  
35 For red grouper, our top priority continues to be final action in  
36 January. It's really important to get this implemented as soon as  
37 possible next year.

38  
39 Number two, I anticipate that we'll have a formal position on  
40 allocation in November, but, for now, we're leaning towards Action  
41 2, Alternative 3, in part because it's the alternative that gets  
42 the commercial sector closest to being made whole again after the  
43 reallocation in Amendment 53, and, therefore, it's the most fair  
44 option.

45  
46 Returning the most allocation to the commercial sector also  
47 maximizes conservation, because it's going to result in the lowest  
48 amount of recreational dead discards, the highest level of

1 certainty around what's being caught, and the lowest risk of  
2 overfishing.

3  
4 On the set-aside, you know, honestly, we really and truly  
5 appreciate Andy and team thinking outside the box and putting this  
6 together. It's really thoughtful. I would like to see it in a  
7 follow-on document, as opposed to Amendment 62, because of the  
8 timeline that I just mentioned, but also because we really need to  
9 give this due diligence.

10  
11 We really need to understand, you know, how we're going to define  
12 the universe of people that get access to this allocation, and  
13 why, and that's going to be a lengthy process, right, and we need  
14 to better understand the impacts on the existing red grouper  
15 fishermen that are effectively giving up some of their red grouper  
16 to capitalize this program, kind like Captain Archer said before  
17 me.

18  
19 You know, for instance, fishermen who catch all their allocation,  
20 so they would have to go out and lease more to make themselves  
21 whole again, and fishermen who bought shares, that are now  
22 effectively, in a sense, getting devalued, and fishermen who took  
23 on debt to go buy shares, and how this has impacts on their loan  
24 repayments and so there's a lot of work to do, and it's a really  
25 good idea, and let's give it its due diligence in its own separate  
26 document.

27  
28 Then, finally, deepwater, in Action 2, your preferred allocation,  
29 Alternative 3, does not promote conservation, and it's not fair  
30 and equitable. It maximizes the economic harm to the commercial  
31 industry. It maximizes risk of overfishing, and it maximizes  
32 uncertainty around fishery discards.

33  
34 Alternative 2 does the opposite. It minimizes economic harm to  
35 the commercial industry. It minimizes risk of overfishing. It  
36 minimizes uncertainty around fishery discards. It's expected to  
37 result in the least amount of discards, and so it provides maximum  
38 conservation benefit, and, also, just look at the history of  
39 fishermen comments on this. They do not support Alternative 3.  
40 The justification is there for Alternative 2, and so we ask you to  
41 change your preferred to Alternative 2.

42  
43 My last comment, Mr. Chair, and I'm wrapping up, and I've got to  
44 hit on PSEs again. You guys are making real decisions, that have  
45 real impacts, based on data that have been off by more than 50  
46 percent in twelve of the last fifteen years.

47  
48 We've seen nothing in this document to do better, and so I'll close

1 with an analogy. I usually don't like to do this, but it's like  
2 you're barreling down the highway, and your speedometer says you're  
3 going sixty, but you're just as likely that you're going thirty  
4 miles an hour as you are going ninety miles an hour, and so it's  
5 time to pump the brakes and do better. Thank you.  
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Brazer. Do we have any questions?  
8 Not seeing any, Eric, and thank you again. Next up is Mr. Ted  
9 Venker, followed by Mr. Jason Delacruz.

10  
11 **MR. TED VENKER:** Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Ted Venker,  
12 and I'm with the Coastal Conservation Association, and I'm just  
13 going to touch on a couple things lightly today. First off, I  
14 want to join several people here in welcoming you to Texas. I  
15 heard a report recently that said this state is adding about 40,000  
16 people a month, which is a lot, and it's even more incredible to  
17 think that so many people are willingly moving to a state with our  
18 heat and humidity.

19  
20 It makes you wonder if they're doing any research before they head  
21 here, but, nonetheless, we have a lot of people in this state, and  
22 it's a state that is legendary for not being overly fond of  
23 regulations of any kind, sometimes to unfortunate extremes, and  
24 even here, as Dakus said yesterday, we have a regulation requiring  
25 descending devices to be rigged and ready and used in state waters.

26  
27 We've got a lot of big boat guys, and kayakers, and everything in  
28 between, and we've not heard objections to this regulation in any  
29 way. Descending devices are something that anglers believe in and  
30 see as the way to be better stewards of the resource, and we've  
31 heard many times, in this council room and other council rooms,  
32 what a huge problem rec discards are.

33  
34 While that may be related to issues in the rec data program, this  
35 is an area where we can always do better. Anglers want to do  
36 better, and it's going to take all the tools. It's going to take  
37 clear regulations, enforcement, and education to make a  
38 difference, and so we appreciate the efforts here to continue the  
39 requirements of the DESCEND Act, and we wholeheartedly want to see  
40 that regulation remain in place.

41  
42 With regard to amberjack, clearly this is a difficult moment for  
43 NOAA and for businesses that depend on stability in fisheries.  
44 It's not ideal to be days away from the start of the season and  
45 not know what's going to happen, but we do appreciate the fact  
46 that the new NOAA leadership is taking the time to conduct a review  
47 and chart a path for this and other fisheries that may be victims  
48 of issues in the data system.

1  
2 As was noted yesterday, the independent amberjack count is due  
3 soon, and that will likely provide some new insight into the health  
4 of the population and into the viability of things like state  
5 management and regional management. It's unfortunate to come down  
6 to the wire like this, but hopefully the increased scrutiny will  
7 spur new ways to manage this fishery and keep things it from  
8 happening -- Keep things like this from happening again in the  
9 future.

10  
11 Finally, I do want to applaud the efforts of the Texas Game Wardens  
12 and the Coast Guard to address the IUU fishery in South Texas.  
13 That's a huge concern to Texans, for a lot of reasons, but I didn't  
14 realize until today that one of those reasons is to keep  
15 unrefrigerated, unregulated oysters as far away from us as  
16 possible. The picture of that gooey bag of warm oysters was truly  
17 alarming. It's just another reason to be grateful for the work  
18 that those men and women are out there doing, and so thank you to  
19 those guys, and thank you for the opportunity today to speak to  
20 you.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Venker. Do we have any questions?  
23 Mr. Sanchez.

24  
25 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I want to thank you for the hospitality last night.  
26 We appreciate it, and I incorrectly thanked Chris for the drink he  
27 bought me, which you paid for.

28  
29 **MR. VENKER:** I appreciate that, John. I'm glad you made it.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions? Not seeing any, thanks Ted.  
32 Next up is Mr. Jason Delacruz, followed by Mr. Jim Green.

33  
34 **MR. JASON DELACRUZ:** Good afternoon. I've been asked by a couple  
35 of council members, and I've actually went and talked to a couple  
36 of council members, about the multi-use in the deepwater and  
37 shallow-water complexes.

38  
39 That seems to be this magic thing to try to figure out, and I made  
40 comments to them, and kind of said I don't know, because I don't  
41 know how the levers are going to get pulled, but, as I've sat back  
42 and thought about it a lot in the last day, I think one of the  
43 things we need to figure out is can we use the black grouper that  
44 we're going to get allocated, which I don't think we utilize on a  
45 yearly basis, to land warsaw and kitty. I think that would be a  
46 really helpful thing to do.

47  
48 I don't know how that math works out with the stocks, but to me

1 that makes sense, because you're not going to see anybody  
2 utilizing, you know, scamp for anything but scamp. There's no  
3 reason to use scamp to land other deep, because you're cutting us  
4 right back to what we catch.

5  
6 Then, vice versa, in the deepwater, it's still the same scenario,  
7 and so, if those two have room for us to have some flexibility, I  
8 think that's the one flexibility measure built into this multi-  
9 species scenario that would actually make sense to me, and so, if  
10 the gap is there, and then, that way, if a guy is fishing for  
11 deepwater, and he has the excess quota -- I mean, we're talking  
12 about the guys that own their quota, and they have the opportunity  
13 to catch it, and I don't want to have those guys have to throw  
14 fish back.

15  
16 The truth of it is that, if you cut us too tight on shallow-water,  
17 that's the scamp, and nobody scamp fishes. They go fishing. They  
18 catch all the other things. All you're going to do is we're going  
19 to get in a position to discard scamps, and that needs to be the  
20 number-one thing. Let's not throw dead fish back in the water.

21  
22 That was the same thing when we did the amberjack seven-fish trip  
23 limit, and it's obviously going to have to drop back to five, but,  
24 even this year, I've had, I don't know, twenty trips, or thirty  
25 trips, with longline boats that kept two or three amberjack, and  
26 those were fish that would have been thrown back dead, and I think  
27 that's what our focus needs to be.

28  
29 That really is the thing. Everything else that we're talking about  
30 -- We need to get the red grouper amendment pushed through right  
31 away. Andy has got an idea, and I'm willing to talk about it, and  
32 I'm a really unique person to talk about it than anybody else. I  
33 would like to, but let's not slow that amendment down, because you  
34 will change the way the fabric of the first part of the year works  
35 for me life, and it's just too much. It will affect my fisherman  
36 too much, and so thank you.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Delacruz. Do we have any  
39 questions? I'm not seeing any. Thanks, Jason. Next up is Captain  
40 Green, followed by Ms. Ashford Rosenberg.

41  
42 **MR. JIM GREEN:** Hello. Captain Jim Green, President of the Destin  
43 Charter Boat Association and the Charter Fishermen's Association.  
44 Speaking on behalf of both organizations today, welcome to our new  
45 members, Dr. Allen, Ms. Ballard, and Mr. Marquez. Thank you all  
46 for dedicating your time to our fishery.

47  
48 On the framework action to modify the for-hire red snapper fishing

1 season, our organizations wanted a June 1 opening, but we  
2 understand that some of our fleets want, and need, that busy  
3 weekend holiday, and so we support final action being taken. We  
4 also support final action being taken on deepwater grouper, and we  
5 support the council's direction with that.

6  
7 On Reef Fish Amendment 58A and 62, both organizations defer to  
8 Captain Hubbard's testimony. We stand pretty much in lockstep  
9 with Dylan and his analysis of the grouper fishery.

10  
11 For-hire data collection, we would really like to see this back on  
12 the agenda, and get it passed, so that we can continue the process  
13 of working towards implementation. Please finish your part, so  
14 that our industry can work on getting it funded.

15  
16 Concerning the topic of this year's greater amberjack season, I  
17 really want to take a moment and thank this council and the  
18 Southeast Regional Office for doing their job. Andy, I would  
19 like to say you have done a great job exhibiting grace and  
20 eloquence during this tough time to be in your position. I don't  
21 know if I would have handled it quite so well. I might have got  
22 fired after this one, but you did great, and we support you, and  
23 thank you.

24  
25 You know, we all have disagreements, and some of our positions are  
26 not always favorable to others, but we always communicate, and we  
27 always show, at a minimum, the respect of hearing each other out,  
28 and just to be frank -- Sometimes just being frank with each other  
29 in all situations, and this sets a terrible precedent, one that  
30 flies in the face of a system that, while it has its flaws, has  
31 rebuilt dozens of species.

32  
33 The system is a proven track record of creating accountability,  
34 while providing enjoyment for millions of anglers, and it deserves  
35 to be adhered to and respected. We may not agree, and sometimes  
36 there are clashes between our groups, but we always communicate,  
37 and I thank this council and all the stakeholders for that, and I  
38 hope that, whatever this is, we don't have to experience anything  
39 like it again.

40  
41 With that, I've heard a lot of talk about regional management and  
42 state management, and, while our fleet always supports flushing  
43 out alternatives, there's some things that have to be considered,  
44 and we would like to point out the geographic location of our  
45 permits can create inequality within our permit holders, and so,  
46 as we're coming up with different methods, such as regional or  
47 state management, please consider having sector separation, so  
48 that, whatever mechanism is used, in whatever state or region, all

1 permit holders in the federal for-hire have equality. Thank you.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Green. I have a question from  
4 Captain Walker.

5  
6 **MR. WALKER:** Thanks, Captain Green. I'll ask you the same question  
7 as Captain Archer. Say the council were to consider regional  
8 management of amberjack, and where would you say the line should  
9 be there, the dividing line between, I guess, east and west?

10  
11 **MR. GREEN:** You know, we've had no fights in the red snapper  
12 fishery since Amendment 50 passed, or, actually, since Amendment  
13 50 started getting worked on, and I think that regional or state  
14 management is great for the anglers of those states.

15  
16 With that said, I think that the one reason why Amendment 50 passed  
17 was because the for-hire component was not a part of that, and I  
18 can just say that, if the for-hire component is part of a regional  
19 or state management program, there's a good chance that some legal  
20 action will be taken, because of those inequities that would fall  
21 upon somebody in the western Gulf, that holds the same permit I  
22 do, should not have more access, or less, than I do in the eastern  
23 Gulf, and so that was the whole premise of that. I was trying not  
24 to ruffle any feathers, but just kind of point that out.

25  
26 **MR. WALKER:** I think I'm more considering on the recreational side.  
27 I agree with what you're saying on the for-hire part of it, but,  
28 you know, if we're just going to entertain a discussion of the  
29 east and west Gulf, in my mind, I'm trying to think where would  
30 you think it would be appropriate to draw the line?

31  
32 **MR. GREEN:** Somewhere between Brownsville and Key West. Honestly,  
33 this is the Gulf of America. It's not the Gulf of the east or the  
34 west. It's not the Gulf of Florida or Gulf of Louisiana. It's  
35 managed as a whole. There's no fences out there.

36  
37 I really -- I mean, the river is really, I think, biologically,  
38 the one place that happens, you know, with the Mississippi dumping  
39 out, you know, and the counterclockwise movement, and the loop  
40 current, and I really think that the river is where you would find  
41 that divide, but I really -- You know, I didn't sign up for -- You  
42 signed up for that job, Ed. I think that you should come up with  
43 that.

44  
45 **MR. WALKER:** I appreciate that.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Green. Any other questions?  
48 Not seeing any, thank you. Next up is Ashford Rosenberg, followed

1 by Mr. Mike Jennings.

2  
3 **MR. ASHFORD ROSENBERG:** I think he's got something more important  
4 to say than me. Good afternoon, council. My name is Ashford  
5 Rosenberg. I'm the Director of Regional Policy and Special  
6 Projects for the Gulf of America Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance.

7  
8 I'm going to talk to you about something today that I've been  
9 hearing a lot come up at the council table, and it's a program  
10 that's near and dear to my heart, that I've spoken to many of you  
11 about, but, hearing the discussion around the executive order and  
12 the next generation, I want to talk to you about the next  
13 generation of commercial fishermen.

14  
15 The graying of the fleet is something that we hear a lot about.  
16 It is not just an issue in the Gulf. It's an issue across the  
17 country. It's really hard to pin down what the average age of a  
18 commercial fisherman is, but the most recent data that I could  
19 find, that was about ten years old, said the average age of  
20 commercial fishermen is fifty-five, and so that really highlights  
21 the need to bring the next generation into the fold and preserve  
22 the economic and cultural importance of this industry.

23  
24 I wanted to thank Dr. Sweetman and the Gulf Council for supporting  
25 and recommending that training programs and funding to support  
26 those be included in the letter to the Secretary of Commerce as  
27 part of the executive order.

28  
29 The Young Fishermen Development Act, that was a great first step  
30 in providing funding for young fishermen programs, and it has done  
31 amazing work in Alaska and the west coast and the South Atlantic  
32 and New England. We do hope that the next version of that act is  
33 passed by Congress, but we still have a lot of work to do, and so  
34 on to some specifics.

35  
36 Like I said, the Gulf Commercial Fishermen Program is something  
37 that was built by commercial fishermen in multiple fisheries across  
38 the Gulf. We came up with the concept actually six years ago,  
39 but, over the last twelve months, thanks to some amazing partners  
40 and support from Florida Sea Grant and Texas Sea Grant, some of  
41 whom who worked on this with me are in the room today, we were  
42 able to execute two pilots over the last twelve months, one in  
43 Galveston, Texas, and one in Madeira Beach, Florida, and we also  
44 had amazing support from fishermen and fishing businesses in both  
45 of those communities.

46  
47 Each session lasted five days and had five participants each. They  
48 were exposed to kind of -- You know, it was very entry level, and

1 so it was a bit of drinking from a fire hose, but we introduced  
2 them to how offloads work, and we gave them some basic financial  
3 training, and then we taught them how to tie on gear, and then we  
4 also exposed them to both the mandatory things that commercial  
5 fishermen have to do, like catch trip reports, you know, having  
6 VMS on the boats, as well as the voluntary things that many  
7 commercial fishermen do, like electronic monitoring and  
8 collaborative research, to ensure that their fisheries are  
9 sustainable and that our fisheries are sustainable, and, of course,  
10 they did get the opportunity to go out on a short commercial  
11 fishing trip.

12  
13 I am pleased to share with you today some of the background of  
14 these participants. They came from all walks of life. One came  
15 from as far as California. Some had a little bit of commercial  
16 fishing experience, and some had charter experience. Some had  
17 never stepped on a boat in their entire lives, and, of the ten  
18 participants between those two sessions, I can confirm that, today,  
19 four are still working on the water and in the industry. One is  
20 in North Carolina, two are in Texas, and one is actually in Alaska.  
21 I think I'm also most proud to promote a 100 percent success rate  
22 of sending people out to sea and no one getting seasick.

23  
24 We're really excited to keep this program going. We are in the  
25 very, very early stages of planning future sessions, and I welcome  
26 questions from the council, especially Dakus and C.J. I'm happy  
27 to sit down with you and give you some more detailed information  
28 about how the trainings in your state to-date have gone, but we're  
29 really excited about this, and I look forward to working with the  
30 communities, and with the Gulf Council, to keep these programs  
31 going.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ashford. Do we have any questions?  
34 Not seeing any.

35  
36 **MS. ROSENBERG:** Thank you.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you again. Next up is Captain Mike  
39 Jennings, followed by Richard Fisher.

40  
41 **MR. MIKE JENNINGS:** I'm Mike Jennings. I own and operate a  
42 federally-permitted charter boat and one reef fish mackerel  
43 commercial boat out of Freeport, Texas. I would like to start off  
44 by welcoming the new members. Thank you, all. Congratulations  
45 for your appointment. I guess congratulations should be in order,  
46 and not condolences, but I appreciate you all, and I look forward  
47 to working with you, and, if you haven't been here before, then  
48 welcome to our home in the great state of Texas. Enjoy it. It's

1 a great place.  
2  
3 I'll make it quick and short this morning. I would like for the  
4 council to kind of pick up a little discussion again on the SEFHIER  
5 program. It's kind of fallen off. We can put that -- We can  
6 implement that thing, and follow the court orders, and start  
7 building some data, rather than some guesswork, and I think it's  
8 past time that we start having some serious discussions about  
9 putting that thing back in place.  
10  
11 On the amberjack issue, agency, you all have done -- The SERO  
12 office, you all have done all you can do on that, and I think we  
13 know it. Things got out of hand on that, and you've heard enough  
14 of the complaining that there's no reason for me standing up here  
15 and doing it, or continuing those complaints today.  
16  
17 The one issue that I haven't heard a lot about on that is the idea  
18 of if we just sit on our hands on this deal, or if agency sits on  
19 its hands and lets this open, or doesn't open, or if it goes too  
20 long, the aspect of overfishing and what it's going to cost us  
21 next year.  
22  
23 Everybody is ready for it to open up, and open, because they made  
24 promises, but the fallout, or the what we have to pay back next  
25 year, may not be worth what we gain today, but, anyway, that's  
26 irrelevant at the moment, and we're going to see how that plays  
27 out.  
28  
29 I want to support the idea of the extension of the DESCEND Act,  
30 and there was some discussion yesterday about benefits of that, of  
31 those descending devices. I use them. We keep one rigged and  
32 ready.  
33  
34 As Dylan Hubbard said a while ago, I don't use it all the time,  
35 but I do fairly often, along with the venting tool, but I think,  
36 with the Return 'Em Right education video that they do, that maybe  
37 reaching out to them, and getting something in there that starts  
38 that video out, and I've watched it several times, and gone through  
39 it, but starts that video out with the benefits of descending  
40 devices, and then lead into the education side of it.  
41  
42 I see my yellow light flashing. I would like to see the council  
43 go ahead and take final action on moving the red snapper season  
44 forward to that holiday weekend in May. I think that will help  
45 some guys out. It's kind of irrelevant to my part of the coast.  
46 We'll take it or leave it. It doesn't hurt us or help us, but I  
47 know there's some parts of the fleet that it would really help on  
48 the charter boat side.

1  
2 Last, but not least, I would like to just say, watching social  
3 media right here, a big thank you to the Coast Guard. Some of the  
4 stuff you all have done recently in south Texas, and some of the  
5 longline interdictions and so forth, and you all seem to have  
6 ramped that up down there, and it's working, and so I appreciate  
7 you all down there. Thank you.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Jennings. Do we have any  
10 questions? Not seeing any, next up is Mr. Richard Fischer.

11  
12 **MR. RICHARD FISCHER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the  
13 council. Thank you all so much for allowing me to speak this  
14 afternoon. Richard Fischer, CEO of the Louisiana Charter Boat  
15 Association.

16  
17 I'll start with talking about this whole amberjack situation that  
18 we have. I'll echo Jim's comment from earlier. Great restraint,  
19 Andy. This is a tough situation. This is not the fault of anybody  
20 in this room. We've all done everything that we can, but I think  
21 it does kind of show us, in a big flashing light way, that whether  
22 it's the fault of the people in this room or not, and it's not,  
23 the system is broken, and looking for alternative paths,  
24 alternative ways to do things, that can separate ourselves from  
25 some of the politics, I think would be a very positive step, and  
26 you all know where I'm going with it next.

27  
28 State management, or regional management, is one of those  
29 potentially positive steps that we would love for the council to  
30 go ahead and consider, not only for amberjack, but also for other  
31 reef species. I would even love it if you all brought back up  
32 bringing in charter into red snapper, and so I would love to hear  
33 you all have all of those conversations as we continue to move  
34 forward.

35  
36 I wanted to address some of the fair and equability of a potential  
37 state or regional management approach, and I love the fact that  
38 we're already diving into the weeds, and it hasn't been presented  
39 yet, and so there's plenty of time later to get into those details,  
40 but, the way that we see it in Louisiana, the current system, the  
41 status quo, is neither fair nor equitable. You know, for reef  
42 fish permit holders in the eastern Gulf, they can take two and  
43 three trips a day. You can't do that in the western Gulf.

44  
45 They can fish almost twelve months a year. You can't do that in  
46 the western Gulf, with the windiness that we have there. The  
47 current system completely ignores biomass and pressure in regional  
48 ways across the Gulf, and so, you know, I don't think that this

1 council should use the threat of a lawsuit as a reason to not do  
2 something.

3  
4 I mean, you already know this. You all are going to get sued for  
5 just about anything you all do, and so I would hope that you all  
6 would not consider that as a potential way to look into alternative  
7 approaches, that being state or regional management.

8  
9 Moving on to red snapper and the start date for charter, we would  
10 support the preferred alternative of the Friday before Memorial  
11 Day. We also support no lags in descending devices and including  
12 the part of it to have it rigged and ready to go. We support  
13 Randy's potential app for a possible EFP. We'll see what you all  
14 have to say about that.

15  
16 The last thing, while I have a few more seconds, I wanted to make  
17 a quick comment about this wonderful place in San Antonio. This  
18 is a great city. We're right on the Riverwalk. It's a great place  
19 to be, but it's a few minutes after three o'clock. I'm last up.  
20 We're about to be done for the day. We're two hours from Corpus  
21 Christi, and we're four hours from Galveston. It's forty-dollars  
22 to park here.

23  
24 There's nothing wrong with the airport Holiday Inn, and there's  
25 nothing wrong with Galveston, Corpus Christi, or Houston, and I  
26 would like, in the future, if the council to put more impetus into  
27 let's maximize fishermen participation. Thank you, and I'm happy  
28 to take any questions.

29  
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Fischer. Do we have any questions?  
31 Not seeing any, Richard, thank you.

32  
33 **MR. FISCHER:** All right. Thank you, all.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. That's going to conclude our public comment  
36 today. I would like to take a break at this point. Let's come  
37 back at 3:30.

38  
39 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, folks. If we can make our way back to the  
42 table, we're going to get started. Okay, folks, and, if we can  
43 quiet down in the back, we're going to get started. Okay. Thank  
44 you.

45  
46 Just to let folks around the table know what the plan is, it is to  
47 knock out the Gulf States and Coast Guard reports, and Andy has a  
48 presentation he would like to share with us, and, if time remains,

1 I would like to knock out committee reports, and we would probably  
2 start with Admin and Budget. That's just a little information,  
3 and that's the path I think we're going to take this afternoon.  
4 We're going to start with Dave Donaldson and Gulf States.

#### 5 6 **GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION REPORT**

7  
8 **MR. DONALDSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the time to  
9 kind of update the council on some of the activities. The last  
10 several reports I've given had to do with the infrastructure  
11 improvement agreement that we have with NOAA Fisheries.

12  
13 Just as a recap, there's three main tasks to improve the state and  
14 commission data management systems, create a centralized database  
15 for the state recreational survey, or recreational data, at the  
16 commission, and then convene three workshops validating effort,  
17 looking at discard information, improving discard information, and  
18 developing standards in a warehouse.

19  
20 We have completed the three workshops for fishing effort, released  
21 catch information, and the data standards and warehouse. All three  
22 reports are available on the commission website.

23  
24 Another component of the agreement was some red snapper  
25 recreational research. We published a request for proposals late  
26 last year. The full proposals were due in February of this year.  
27 We received eleven proposals that equated to about \$14 million in  
28 research. We had seven-and-a-half million to fund that research,  
29 and so the steering committee selected seven of the projects, and  
30 those projects will begin in January of next year.

31  
32 The next two slides are the seven proposals, or projects, that  
33 were selected, and utilizing satellite imagery and different  
34 technologies, camera-based monitoring, for both effort as well as  
35 discards.

36  
37 At the bottom, there is a link to a press release that gives more  
38 detail about these seven projects, and so we're looking forward to  
39 beginning those, and we look forward to providing some updates to  
40 the council as we move forward with them and answer some of the  
41 questions about fishing effort and released catch.

42  
43 One of the issues is creating the centralized data warehouse at  
44 the commission. We had published an RFP for contract support. We  
45 selected TH Technologies to help build the system. Work began  
46 last month, and it has involved both state and federal partner  
47 input. We're developing a system to import, validate, and  
48 warehouse and disseminate the state recreational data, and it will

1 provide a more efficient and transparent method for accessing the  
2 data.

3  
4 In addition to those projects, we are continuing with the  
5 benchmarking of the Alabama and Mississippi creel surveys. You  
6 recall that, last year, Mississippi and Alabama tested the LA  
7 Creel effort survey methodology, and the results were very  
8 encouraging, and so, this year, we began benchmarking in those two  
9 states to implement the full LA Creel methodologies, both effort  
10 and dockside, alongside the MRIP survey.

11  
12 The states are currently doing analysis to see how things are  
13 going, and it's been very promising, but the results will help the  
14 states develop a calibration method for long-term implementations.

15  
16 The last thing I would like to talk about is the for-hire at-sea  
17 observer sampling. We currently have existing programs in Florida,  
18 Alabama, and Mississippi, through the Return 'Em Right program,  
19 but we are using a million dollars, with these funds, to expand it  
20 to Louisiana and Texas. We are targeting seventy-five offshore  
21 trips in each state, and we are focusing on red snapper and other  
22 reef fish, and data collection started in May and June of this  
23 year.

24  
25 We are identifying, counting, and measuring the releases,  
26 documenting the release practices, and documenting predator  
27 interactions and this and that, and so, to date, we have completed  
28 twenty-five trips in Texas. Louisiana has been more difficult,  
29 not because there's not a willingness to participate, but it's  
30 just it's been difficult to find vessels that have space.

31  
32 They're very busy, and they have paying customers, and we just  
33 haven't been able to get observers on in Louisiana, and so there's  
34 plenty of vessel owner-operators that volunteer, and want to  
35 participate, but just they have paying customers.

36  
37 The last slide, and, before we get to questions, I just will  
38 mention that our commission meeting is scheduled the week before  
39 the Gulf Council meeting, the week of October 27 through 30, in  
40 Biloxi, at the Golden Nugget, and so we will inundate the Nugget  
41 with the fisheries folks for two weeks, but, as always, everybody  
42 is welcome to attend and, with that, I will take any questions,  
43 Mr. Chairman.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Donaldson. It sounds like you'll  
46 be at the Nugget for two weeks in November. Good luck.

47  
48 **MR. DONALDSON:** I'm leaving my wallet at home.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any questions for Mr. Donaldson? Ms.  
3 Ballard.

4  
5 **MS. BALLARD:** For the for-hire observations, what area of Texas  
6 were they in?

7  
8 **MR. DONALDSON:** I don't know specifically, but we're targeting the  
9 entire coast. Dakus may know.

10  
11 **MR. GEESLIN:** Yes, we did. We targeted the entire coast, but we're  
12 certainly hitting some of the more used areas, like Galveston,  
13 Freeport, Corpus, Port Aransas, those areas where we know we have  
14 those larger contingents of charter-for-hire captains.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any other questions for Mr. Donaldson? Not seeing  
17 any, thank you, Dave. Moving on to the next report, Lt. Morton  
18 and the U.S. Coast Guard.

19  
20 **U.S. COAST GUARD REPORT**

21  
22 **LT. MORTON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. All right, and so good  
23 afternoon, everyone. Lt. Jackson Morton from the Coast Guard  
24 Heartland District. Like I said on Monday, we changed the name,  
25 but didn't change the mission. Everything stays the same.

26  
27 It's been a while since I touched on this, and we have some new  
28 council members, and so I figured I would include it. This is the  
29 Coast Guard Heartland District's area of responsibility.

30  
31 As you can see there, a lot of the interior of the country, the  
32 Mississippi and western rivers, but, for purposes of fisheries,  
33 we'll talk about our four coastal sectors, and you can see them at  
34 the bottom of the chart there. Sector Corpus Christi, Sector  
35 Houston/Galveston, Sector New Orleans, and the Sector Mobile.

36  
37 One little quirk we have in the Coast Guard is that, while the  
38 Coast Guard Heartland District covers most of the Gulf, we don't  
39 actually include the whole thing, and so, as you can see there, we  
40 have the Panhandle of Florida, out to the EEZ, but we do not have  
41 the Florida Peninsula and the west coast of Florida, and so that  
42 belongs to the Coast Guard's Southeast District, which used to be  
43 Coast Guard District 7, and so, for the purposes of the Heartland  
44 District, we're most of the Gulf, but not all of it.

45  
46 First, I want to hit on some of the Exclusive Economic Zone  
47 enforcement. You can see there the stats for the year. We're  
48 about a month out from the end of the fiscal year. As you can see

1 thus far for 2025, we have forty-five interdictions of lanchas,  
2 and that includes 15,409 pounds of red snapper that we were able  
3 to recover.

4  
5 Talking with some of the folks from Texas around, they can see  
6 that we are making the lancha mission a priority. We're sending  
7 a lot of assets down there to the maritime boundary line between  
8 the U.S. and Mexico there, and, in general, since the last council  
9 meeting, we saw kind of a little bit of surge of incursion  
10 detections, but, since then, greatly reduced, since like the late  
11 spring and early summer timeframe.

12  
13 For mission highlights, we started referring certain cases that we  
14 find with these interdictions for prosecution to the AUSA down  
15 there in Brownsville for the Lacey Act. Thus far, since April,  
16 we've done five such cases, and that includes twenty-one specific  
17 individuals that we've pulled off these vessels. Thus far, eleven  
18 have pled guilty, and we're waiting to hear back from what the  
19 other ten are going to do there.

20  
21 Just one mission highlight, some good cases that we had back on  
22 the 13 of June, we actually had a double interdiction, and that  
23 was in coordination between the Station South Padre Island and  
24 Coast Guard Cutter Daniel Tarr. They both interdicted a lancha,  
25 with four persons each, a total of 1,134 pounds of red snapper,  
26 and we referred all eight of those persons for prosecution. Then  
27 the same timeframe, the same day, we also got -- CBP got a case  
28 during that same day, but they referred it as well.

29  
30 Then, again, for new council members, if you weren't aware, this  
31 is kind of like the general profile of what a lancha vessel looks  
32 like. You can see it there on top-left. It's low to the water,  
33 and it's hard to detect, especially in rougher seas, and they carry  
34 a lot of deck space. As you can see, they've have coolers on  
35 there, and, when they run out of cooler spaces, they can load up  
36 the vessel itself.

37  
38 They're using longline gear, and so, while they're certainly  
39 targeting red snapper, HMS species, sharks, things of that nature,  
40 they'll catch them as well, and so you can see there that those  
41 are some of the pictures.

42  
43 Okay, and so that was our EEZ enforcement, more of our domestic  
44 fisheries side. Like I said, we have about a month left in the  
45 fiscal year. Thus far, we've done 405 boardings. You can see  
46 it's a little bit of a drop from last year, and even last year was  
47 a little bit of a drop from the year prior, but a lot of that can  
48 be attributed to much a more heavy emphasis on sending a lot of

1 our larger service assets over to the maritime boundary line.

2  
3 Our Coast Guard stations, and our smaller patrol boats, are having  
4 to take a larger share of the domestic fisheries mission. That  
5 doesn't mean we're ignoring it entirely, and we're still getting  
6 out there and doing some good work, and so five cases referred  
7 thus far, significant violations. The things we see most of the  
8 time out there, and I think Mr. Walia hit it in his presentation,  
9 but, a lot of times, it's turtle excluder devices and bycatch  
10 reduction devices, and we also saw some bag limit violations in  
11 the recreational sector for red snapper.

12  
13 Marine protected resources, still just one request for the year  
14 for a request for assistance. That was back in January, for the  
15 sea turtle stun with the cold snap over there in Texas, and we  
16 haven't had many this year, but, you know, we still remain  
17 committed to that, and so, if any agencies, or any member of the  
18 boating public, that needs to reach out, we're more than willing  
19 and able to help out with our endangered species and marine mammal  
20 protected species, and so I think that's the end of my slides, and  
21 I'll open it up for any questions.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Lt. Morton. Do we have any questions?  
24 I'm not seeing any, and thank you again. With that, I'm going to  
25 turn it over to Mr. Strelcheck.

26  
27 **DISCUSSION OF NEW COMPLEX SHARE DISTRIBUTION**

28  
29 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, J.D., and, Carrie, did we share the slides  
30 with -- Okay. Great. As the slides are coming up, recall, during  
31 the Reef Fish Committee, we were having a discussion about the new  
32 scamp and black grouper complexes, and one of the challenges that  
33 might present itself by using the same shareholdings that a person  
34 has at the time of that conversion of the old complexes to then  
35 distribute quota to the new complexes.

36  
37 Jessica Stephen is not here. She had to take another meeting, and  
38 so I am up to bat here to help out. I will not be able to answer  
39 all the details of the analysis, but what I had asked her to do is  
40 essentially go in and take a look at some real-world examples of  
41 fishermen that are operating with the program.

42  
43 She changed some of the numbers around, and so this isn't actually  
44 true actual data, but it is approximate for some of the people  
45 that have participating in the program, and so it gives you a sense  
46 of I think the complexity of distribution of shareholdings, and  
47 ultimately the resulting allocation.

1 The first example is a shareholder has a medium amount of shares,  
2 around 1 percent, and no black grouper landings, and so, in 2024,  
3 this person would have been allocated 5,200 pounds of shallow-  
4 water group allocation.

5  
6 You know, based on landings history, and, as I said, Jessica made  
7 up some of these numbers, but they landed 2,300 pounds, right, and  
8 so they didn't land their whole allocation, but, if we redistribute  
9 based on their percent shareholdings after Amendment 58A, you're  
10 going to see their scamp landings are going to go way down, which  
11 is expected, because we're cutting the catch limits and the amount  
12 of scamp that's going to be harvested, but they're going to get  
13 2,100 pounds of black grouper that they're not landing.

14  
15 That, to me either going to have to be dealt with through market  
16 conditions, right, and you're going to have to have people  
17 redistribute, and trading and selling, you know, black grouper and  
18 scamp quota, in order to get it back into the hands of the people  
19 that are using both of those, or we take a different approach,  
20 which is work through the amendment to try to figure out how do we  
21 distribute the shareholdings differently.

22  
23 Here's an example of someone only lands black grouper, right, and  
24 so this isn't as bad, right, but you have 1,800 pounds at the start  
25 of the year, and they landed about 850 pounds of black grouper,  
26 and they're going to get close to what they landed in black  
27 grouper, but they're going to also get scamp, you know, complex  
28 that they're not landing at this point, right, and so the  
29 distribution essentially is they're getting more scamp than they  
30 would be harvesting, and they're getting, you know, close to, but  
31 not fully back to the amount of black grouper that they landed.

32  
33 Then the third is an example of someone who is landing, I guess,  
34 both, you know, and so, once again, right, you have someone who is  
35 maybe landing both. This is a real-world example, and we've  
36 changed the numbers a little bit, but they've landed proportionally  
37 more scamp than black grouper, about a thousand pounds out of their  
38 1,600 pounds of allocation.

39  
40 We're going to, obviously, reduce their scamp landings, and the  
41 amount of allocation, because of the reduction in the catch limit,  
42 but then they're going to get substantially more black grouper  
43 than what they're landing currently, right, and so these are just  
44 three of many examples.

45  
46 We do, obviously, see, you know, scamp landings more prominent in  
47 the kind of central West Florida Shelf area, and black grouper  
48 landings more prominent, obviously, farther in southwest Florida,

1 with, obviously, some mixing of the two landings between those two  
2 areas, but, from my vantage point, I think it would be beneficial  
3 to kind of do some due diligence up front to look at how we could  
4 maybe address these shareholdings differently at the start of these  
5 new complexes, rather than letting the market conditions  
6 redistribute them, because I think there are going to be some  
7 pretty substantial shifts in allocation between these two  
8 complexes. Any questions?

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

11  
12 **MR. WALKER:** I agree. I think the market is going to have a hard  
13 time ironing this out, because -- I don't have the numbers in front  
14 of me, but I think a lot of black grouper doesn't get caught a  
15 lot, and so it's not like other species, where it's going to  
16 trickle into the hands of people who need it, because there's a  
17 lot of allocation that nobody essentially needs, and so that's an  
18 issue, and so, personally, I kind of like the idea here of digging  
19 in a little deeper and seeing if there's a better way to go at  
20 this than, you know, trying to let the market iron it out.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Diagne.

23  
24 **DR. ASSANE DIAGNE:** Yes, and maybe a question and a comment. When  
25 we look at the numbers here, and we talk about let's say a fisherman  
26 that lands, just as an example, no black grouper, and so it could  
27 very well be the case that that fisherman decided to lease their  
28 black grouper in 2024 as a business decision, and is doing  
29 something else, and wanting to come back to it later on.

30  
31 It seems to me that letting this be sorted by market forces, which  
32 is the system that we have, right, a market-based system, would be  
33 probably better, or very close to whatever we are going to do,  
34 because there are a lot of uncertainties in trying to move the  
35 fish to those who fish, really.

36  
37 I mean, for scamp, everybody is taking a haircut anyways, and, if  
38 we look at today, about 40 or 45 percent of the shallow-water  
39 grouper quota is caught, on average, every year, and so that is  
40 going to increase the percentage, because of the haircut everybody  
41 is taking, but it seems to me the cleaner approach is to just let  
42 fishermen work this through and land where they want to land,  
43 rather than us trying to pick, quote, unquote, winners and losers  
44 in this.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

47  
48 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so keep in mind that there's no black

1 grouper quota that exists right now, right, and so it's all other  
2 shallow-water grouper quotas, and so, you know, as I said, we're  
3 using these as examples. They're fairly close to kind of real  
4 world, and so the landings are actual, or close to actual,  
5 landings, and so they're going out and fishing for these species.  
6 That's what they, obviously, land.

7  
8 They could have leased their allocation. You're correct, Assane,  
9 but I think, as Captain Walker points out, right, there's going to  
10 be more black grouper allocation than what's being caught, or  
11 landed. Scamp allocation is going to become much lower, right, or  
12 the amount of quota, and it's going to become much more in demand,  
13 and I don't think -- I don't expect there's going to be a lot of  
14 trading of black grouper and scamp quota, or at least the prices  
15 are going to be markedly different between those two.

16  
17 So, you know, looking at things like, you know, recent landings  
18 history or other, you know, considerations that would be more in  
19 tune with kind of what's going on in the fishery now could help to  
20 -- It could help the market kind of sort this out, while also  
21 recognizing it's going to be imperfect, and there still might be  
22 some things that are going to have to be moved around within the  
23 market.

24  
25 I think, you know, as Captain Walker said, it's going to be very  
26 disruptive if we are giving people lots and lots of black grouper,  
27 and they're not harvesting that species, or lots and lots of scamp,  
28 and they're not harvesting scamp, and harvesting black grouper,  
29 and so trying to level that out beforehand would be advantageous.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. I have a few hands.  
32 Dr. Banks.

33  
34 **DR. BANKS:** Okay, and so I really appreciate this, because this  
35 helped me understand what you were talking about a couple days  
36 ago. I do have a question, in the sense that, if scamp is now  
37 going to be much more infrequent, or a much lower quota, how likely  
38 is it that black grouper is now going to become the target?

39  
40 I do understand that they are not everywhere, but what is the  
41 likelihood that black grouper is going to jump up in landings, and  
42 I see Jason Delacruz standing up in the back, and so if you don't  
43 mind him jumping -- I wouldn't normally ask that, but --

44  
45 **MR. DELACRUZ:** So you already saw it happen. When we cut gags way  
46 back, the guys changed what they were doing. They spent more time  
47 down south during the summer, and our black grouper landings went  
48 up, and so we've already done that, and so it's never going to

1 really get much more than it is now.

2

3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Jason. I have Dr. Simmons, and then  
4 Dr. Froeschke.

5

6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, I mean,  
7 to me, this just really highlights the fact that we do not have a  
8 good understanding of what's going on with the black grouper stock,  
9 and what we have in there, and are distributing, is probably not  
10 right, which makes me really nervous that we would then take that  
11 and consider redistributing it, and so I would just point that  
12 out, that we just -- We don't really have good science on black  
13 grouper, and now we're going to take that and redistribute it, and  
14 I don't know.

15

16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Froeschke.

17

18 **DR. FROESCHKE:** A couple of thoughts, and so there's three  
19 scenarios here, but if you figure -- Think two stocks, and two  
20 scenarios, there's one missing, and the scenario that's missing  
21 is, if you lease all your black grouper and your scamp, and so all  
22 your shallow-water grouper quota, for whatever reason, which is  
23 perfectly permissible under the program, you would stand to lose,  
24 under both of these, for doing something that's allowed.

25

26 The other part I'm struggling with though is the ACL for the black  
27 grouper, the quota, is 227,000 pounds. In 2024, the highest was  
28 39,000, and it's been averaging 30,000, and so it seems like  
29 there's going to be almost 200,000 pounds of floating around quota  
30 that would be easy to get, if you needed it, like through the  
31 marketplace or something, that we just saw, or something else, and  
32 so I guess I don't understand. I mean, it seems like the scamp is  
33 going to be difficult to get, regardless of what we might do.

34

35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck, to that, and then I have Mr.  
36 Walker.

37

38 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I'm not sure it would be fair to say scamp will  
39 be easy to get. I think what will happen is you're going to  
40 substantially drive up the price on leasing scamp, because you're  
41 going to have people that now have scamp, that aren't landing  
42 scamp, and they're going to, you know, be able to lease it,  
43 obviously, to those that essentially have been landing in recent  
44 years, but got under-allocated, in my view, the scamp that they  
45 were landing more recently.

46

47 You know, I'll just point out, and I mean, John said there's some  
48 scenarios missing, and there's probably dozens of scenarios we

1 could have actually run here, with all of the different types of  
2 vertical and horizontal business operations within the IFQ  
3 program, but I think the first one and the second example are  
4 really the ones that kind of drove home the point about, if you're  
5 really only specializing in harvesting one complex relative to the  
6 other, you're now going to be faced with getting quota for that  
7 complex that you're not likely to be targeting, and so you're going  
8 to have to either lease it, like John is pointing out, sell it,  
9 and, you know, redistribute that, to try to get more of the other  
10 complex, which is your target species.

11  
12 I know we, you know, have essentially different perspectives on  
13 let the market kind of settle things out, versus, you know, trying  
14 to handle this upfront with the council process, but, to me, I see  
15 just this as a real challenge for the industry, especially given  
16 the disparities in how that quota would be allocated.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Andy. I'm going to go to Captain  
19 Walker, and then I have Dr. Diagne.

20  
21 **MR. WALKER:** So John answered my question a little bit. I was  
22 going to ask, you know, what the landings are on black, versus  
23 what the quota is likely to be on black this time, and you said  
24 something to the effect of we're catching about 30,000 pounds of  
25 black, and we're looking at having 200,000 on the market,  
26 potentially, and so there will be virtually no lease value to black  
27 grouper.

28  
29 If there's 80 percent that's going uncaught, you know, that might  
30 be a 25 percent lease, but somebody will give it to you, if you  
31 need it, for free, and so that's one thing to keep in mind, how  
32 the lease market is not going to balance this one out, and scamp,  
33 realistically, scamp is going to be \$5.00 a pound to lease it,  
34 easy, because it pays -- The off-vessel price for scamp is about  
35 \$9.00 nowadays, the same as gag.

36  
37 The lease price is -- Well, gag is different, but, when it was  
38 kind of normal, it was \$5.00 for gag, and so big differences here,  
39 and I'm pretty sure that the market is not going to iron this one  
40 out in a decent way.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Dr. Diagne.

43  
44 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and it's just more of a comment. Like when we  
45 look at scenarios like this, you know, by default, these are  
46 static, because nothing is telling us that, you know, moving  
47 forward, folks are not going to adjust to their behavior, and,  
48 actually, that's what Mr. Delacruz talked about.

1  
2 It seems to me that, rather than using, I guess, a static method  
3 to make a redistribution of, you know, the shares here, we could  
4 rely on market forces, meaning the prices, by essence, are dynamic,  
5 and would incorporate new information as it becomes available, and  
6 so, between those two systems -- I mean, you know, I hear both  
7 sides of the argument, but it seems to me that using all the  
8 information in the real time, which is what prices would do, would  
9 tend to lead to a more satisfactory outcome than us making  
10 assumptions and using, you know, static scenarios to redistribute  
11 this. It's just a comment. Thanks.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Next, I have Dr. Sweetman, then Dr. Banks.

14  
15 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's a tricky one. I just  
16 want to point -- I mean, Carrie mentioned we don't have a lot of  
17 science on black grouper or anything like that. The black grouper  
18 MSE should be done in September, and so hopefully that will provide  
19 at least some insight as to how this might play out, and I don't  
20 think we're going to be finished with this document by that time,  
21 obviously, and so maybe there's an area where we can just have  
22 some more science to help inform kind of what this decision might  
23 be here.

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

26  
27 **DR. BANKS:** So I'm just going to put a couple of thoughts out  
28 there, and I appreciate Ed giving us leasing and share prices,  
29 because that's something that kind of made me think, and now we've  
30 got scamp that's going to go up in price, and black grouper that's  
31 going to go down, and so now we're telling people that technically  
32 own the same shares right now category that, hey, just because you  
33 landed scamp in the past, you get the expensive share category,  
34 and, because you landed black grouper in the past, you get the  
35 inexpensive share category, and you right now have the equal  
36 opportunity to land either of them for the same price. I'm just  
37 concerned about a couple of things there, with just some of our  
38 goals and the equity and fairness that we're supposed to be  
39 addressing in the IFQ program.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Dr. Banks. Captain Walker.

42  
43 **MR. WALKER:** Right. The only difference I would point out is you  
44 didn't have to ever land black, and you're getting black, on the  
45 way we're looking at it now. We're just splitting the scamp, and  
46 like I don't think I've ever landed black grouper and sold it, but  
47 I'm going to be given a bunch of black grouper that I absolutely  
48 don't need, whether I like it or not. I don't have to have any

1 catch history there. I'm going to be issued that under the current  
2 plan.

3  
4 **DR. BANKS:** To that point, right now, you also have the same  
5 chance, because you own shallow-water grouper, and so you get to  
6 pick what you want to land right now, and so, by giving the same  
7 percentage of each to you, you now get to pick still, and do you  
8 want to land scamp or black, or do you want to sell one or the  
9 other, even though you have no share history, or catch history.

10  
11 If you then decide, okay, I'm only getting 200 pounds of scamp,  
12 and so now I'm going to go try to fish for black grouper, because  
13 that's what I used to get, but I was now given the same amount of  
14 quota, and you still have that choice, is where my brain is. I  
15 may not be thinking about that properly, even though you don't  
16 have landings history, but you still have that choice, and  
17 everybody is getting the equal option in both, is really where I'm  
18 thinking.

19  
20 **MR. WALKER:** That's correct.

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

23  
24 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I mentioned, obviously, allocating based  
25 on landings history. That's one of any infinite number of methods,  
26 right, and so, to your point, Kesley, I mean, you could look at  
27 using some, you know, formula that uses basis of shareholdings  
28 currently, and landings history, to come up with these new  
29 allocations that distribute more, you know, toward the species  
30 that you're landing, but still allowing for some allocation to  
31 flow to both categories, and so I think that's my point here, is  
32 that, you know, I think we have a lot of options before us.

33  
34 Right now, the amendment only considers, whatever your shares are,  
35 you're going to get that percentage for both share categories, and  
36 maybe we should at least look a little bit more at this before we  
37 agree that that's the only decision we want to move forward with.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Do we have any other  
40 comments, concerns, questions for Andy? Dr. Simmons.

41  
42 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I guess,  
43 just thinking about the timing of this amendment, and, if the  
44 council chooses to add this consideration in 58A, I feel like this  
45 is going to continue to bog things down. Hopefully not, but we've  
46 been working on it for a long time. We did a stopgap measure, and  
47 now the science continues to get old for scamp, and so I just have  
48 a little bit of concern there, that maybe we can work through

1 tomorrow in Reef Fish.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

4  
5 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and Jessica has been proactive in actually  
6 developing a decision tool, just to be looking at these kind of  
7 very questions and issues, and so it's something that I don't think  
8 would dramatically slow us down. Yes, it complicates the amendment  
9 a little bit, but it's something she could have available for use  
10 by the IPT prior to November.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Andy. Anything else on this subject?  
13 Okay. Not seeing any, we'll move on the agenda. Mr. Burris, are  
14 you ready?

15  
16 **MR. BURRIS:** I'm ready.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Admin and Budget.

19  
20 **COMMITTEE REPORTS**  
21 **ADMINISTRATIVE/BUDGET COMMITTEE REPORT**

22  
23 **MR. BURRIS:** All right, and so this is the committee report for  
24 the Admin and Budget Committee, which met on August 25. General  
25 Spraggins was the chair. First off, the committee adopted the  
26 agenda, found in Tab G, Number 1, and the minutes, found in Tab G,  
27 Number 2, of the January 2025 meeting were approved as written.

28  
29 Next up was a presentation of the 2023-2024 audit report, found in  
30 Tab G, Number 4. Council staff provided a brief informational  
31 presentation of the results of the 2023-2024 biennial audit. The  
32 independent audit firm issued an unqualified opinion.

33  
34 Next up is the review of the final 2025 funded budget and  
35 activities. Staff presented the proposed final funded 2025 budget  
36 in Tab G, Number 5, which is a 1 percent reduction from 2024.  
37 Adjustments were made to account for year-to-date activities. This  
38 resulted in a reduction to meeting room costs and staff salaries.

39  
40 **The committee recommends, and also move, that the council approve**  
41 **the final 2025 budget as written.** The motion carried with no  
42 opposition.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Burris. We have a committee motion  
45 on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing**  
46 **any, is there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the**  
47 **motion carries.** Mr. Burris.

1 **MR. BURRIS:** A member of the committee asked if there has been any  
2 indication about the potential funding level for 2026. Staff  
3 stated that no guidance has been forthcoming, but that there may  
4 need to be some budgetary adjustments, due to the need to find new  
5 office space in 2026. A member commented that they hoped staff  
6 could locate space that would allow for continuing to hold meetings  
7 in the office, noting the savings that can be realized by hosting  
8 meetings in Tampa.

9  
10 Next up were updates to the SOPPS. Staff presented updates to the  
11 SOPPs in tracked changes in Tab G, Number 6. The changes included  
12 updates to the council name, logo, award number, and minor  
13 typographical corrections; Sections 2.7.3, Ecosystem Technical  
14 Committee; 4.1, Staffing; 4.3, Detail of Government Employees; and  
15 6.0, Financial Management, were updated to reflect current  
16 practices and improvements to strengthen fiscal policies.

17  
18 **The committee recommends, and I so move, that the council accept**  
19 **the proposed changes to the SOPS.** That motion carried with no  
20 opposition.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Burris. We have a committee motion  
23 on the board. Is there any discussion? **Not seeing any, is there**  
24 **any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.**  
25 Mr. Burris.

26  
27 **MR. BURRIS:** Next up were updates to the administrative handbook.  
28 Staff presented suggested updates to the administrative handbook  
29 in tracked changes in Tab G, Number 7.

30  
31 The changes included updates to the council name, logo, award  
32 number, and minor typographical corrections; Section 2.1,  
33 Staffing; 2.4, Timekeeping Procedures; 4.2, Sick Leave; and 5.3,  
34 Retirement Plan, were updated. These changes reflect current  
35 practices and update the post-retirement benefits with a more  
36 fiscally-responsible alternative that the council can utilize for  
37 future planning.

38  
39 **The committee recommends, and I so move, that the council accept**  
40 **the proposed changes to the administrative handbook.** That motion  
41 carried without opposition.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Burris. We have a committee motion  
44 on the board. Any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, any**  
45 **opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.**  
46 Mr. Burris.

47  
48 **MR. BURRIS:** Mr. Chair, that concludes my report.

1  
2 **CLOSED SESSION REPORT**  
3 **SEDAR COMMITTEE REPORT**  
4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Burris. Okay. I'm going to move  
6 into another committee report, and I'll do the closed session  
7 report quickly. Let's see.  
8

9 Full council closed session, August 25, 2025, the Full Council was  
10 convened in a closed session on the afternoon of August 25 to  
11 discuss the membership of the Standing Scientific and Statistical  
12 Committee, the SSC. Dr. Thomas Frazer was appointed to serve on  
13 the Standing SSC, and this concludes my report. Give me a few  
14 seconds to see if we're going to do another one. Okay. Give me  
15 a few moments, council members. Let's try to knock out SEDAR.  
16

17 The committee adopted the agenda, Tab I, Number 1, and approved  
18 the minutes, Tab I, Number 2, of the April 2024 meeting as written.  
19

20 SEDAR Steering Committee Summary Report, August 2025, Tab I, Number  
21 4, council staff reviewed the discussion and decisions made by the  
22 SEDAR Steering Committee at its August 2025 webinar meeting. A  
23 committee member was concerned about the effort and effects  
24 anticipated with incorporating updated MRIP effort calibrations in  
25 2026. A council member thought having scheduled check-in  
26 opportunities for the assessment technical teams would be useful  
27 for ensuring better participation by technical team members.  
28

29 Update on Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Tab I, Number 5, the  
30 Southeast Fisheries Science Center discussed the effects from the  
31 recent reduction in force experienced by NOAA Fisheries over the  
32 last several months. The Science Center has experienced a staffing  
33 reduction of over 30 percent, which has impacted the ability to  
34 provide services to councils, commissions, and the public.  
35

36 The Science Center is working to find all efficiencies it can,  
37 including using novel technologies to replace lost manpower, and  
38 will look to support from state partners wherever possible and  
39 appropriate, especially for port sampling. The Science Center  
40 noted that the assessment staffing team losses in the Gulf were  
41 minimal, but those remaining staff may need to be occasionally  
42 tasked to assessments in other regions.  
43

44 A committee member asked for a prioritized list from the Science  
45 Center for partnership needs to better address anticipated  
46 shortcomings. Another council member noted that the current data  
47 environment might require the SSCs to be more amenable to making  
48 management recommendations based on fewer indices at times,

1 especially between stock assessments and interim analysis.

2  
3 The committee member asked about anticipated effects to the  
4 timeliness of data availability. The Science Center replied that  
5 it thought index-based management procedures like interim analysis  
6 may need to be used more often than they are at present, and those  
7 would be expected to be timelier than a full stock assessment.

8  
9 A committee member thought the council would ultimately need to  
10 discuss the expected process changes in the council's risk  
11 tolerance associated with catch advice. Getting the data as close  
12 to real-time as possible should be a priority. Mr. Schieble.

13  
14 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So just a comment, I guess for clarity's sake, and  
15 so, when Dr. Walzer and I were talking about the prioritized list  
16 of contributions from the states, I don't think I was quite clear  
17 on what I was asking for in there.

18  
19 So, to me, it would include a list of priorities of things that  
20 you guys need from the states prioritized, but also include a list  
21 of things that, because of the current staffing issues, that you're  
22 not able to fulfill, so that we can look at that and see what else  
23 we could potentially ratchet in to assist with, or not be able to  
24 expect, and I don't know how we need to make a motion to clarify  
25 that. Is that needed, or is that just fine on the record like  
26 that?

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Walter.

29  
30 **DR. WALTER:** Our preference is that we get it in writing, exactly  
31 what it is. It's easier for us to track it and respond to it, and  
32 so if we could record that, and, you know, the council will then  
33 send a request. Thanks.

34  
35 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Okay, and so I'll make a motion that the Southeast  
36 Fisheries Science Center provide a list of prioritized needs for  
37 state contribution, and also include a list of prioritized items  
38 that recent staffing shortfalls have created for the need on the  
39 behalf of the Southeast Fisheries Science Center. How's that?

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Let's let Bernie catch up. It's Tab I, Number 5.  
42 Mr. Donaldson.

43  
44 **MR. DONALDSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Also during this discussion,  
45 it was mentioned that the commission could take a first crack at  
46 that, at looking at that list at their commission meeting, and  
47 then present it to the council. Is that -- I know we talked about  
48 it, but is -- Do you want us to do that, or -- It's not in the

1 report, and so I need some direction on that. If that's the case,  
2 then maybe we put it in the motion, too.

3

4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Dr. Simmons.

5

6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think  
7 staff was just unsure of how long this could take the center to  
8 get together, and then provide to you all, and if it could be done  
9 by the October meeting, and so I wasn't sure of that, but I think  
10 that would be ideal, at least to start that discussion.

11

12 We've heard different updates, and like say, for example, on the  
13 Southeast Headboat Program, and the lack of port samplers in the  
14 western Gulf, and so we know that is a deficit, but where does  
15 that fall in the long list of other deficits in priority, and so  
16 that's not super clear to us right now.

17

18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Walter.

19

20 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and I think we can get that by October, and  
21 provide some clarity on what those gaps are, and then you would  
22 want that for -- I know our staff do coordinate with your staff on  
23 like sampling targets and things like that, and I think now it  
24 just happens to be that we've got more gaps to fill, and more  
25 different things, and so I'm sure that Dave Gloeckner's team can  
26 work with your team on what those are. Thanks.

27

28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. We'll work to wordsmith  
29 this motion.

30

31 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Okay. **Bernie, we're going to edit here. "A list**  
32 **of prioritized state-led items", instead of the word**  
33 **"partnerships", and so replace "partnerships" with "led items".**  
34 Dr. Walter, does that work for you, within the context of what we  
35 were discussing?

36

37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Dr. Walter.

38

39 **DR. WALTER:** It's fine. There might be a little confusion, because  
40 whether -- There might be things that the states weren't leading,  
41 that we can't do, and so now the states need to lead, but, I mean,  
42 you know, it's not critical here. I think we get the intent here.

43

44 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I need a second.

45

46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, and we have a second by Mr. Broussard. Is  
47 there any further discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is**  
48 **there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion**

1 **carries.** Dr. Simmons.

2  
3 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so we would  
4 write this memo to the Science Center, and we would outline that  
5 we hope that they can get this together by the Gulf States  
6 Commission meeting in October, to start the discussion, or  
7 something like that.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Moving on to Review and Discussion of Gulf  
10 SEDAR Schedule, Tab I, Number 6, a committee member asked what  
11 reductions in assessment throughput have been experienced by the  
12 Gulf Council. Council staff replied that, to-date, reductions  
13 have been minimal. However, more negative impacts are expected  
14 for future assessments, due to reductions in staff and resources,  
15 in particular, the collection of robust data streams.

16  
17 Another committee member recommended removing assessments from  
18 mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper and replacing them with gag  
19 grouper in 2026 and red grouper in 2028. The committee member  
20 said these two species could be assessed by the University of South  
21 Florida's Center for Environmental Analysis, Synthesis, and  
22 Application (CEASA).

23  
24 A committee member thought it would be best to discuss changing  
25 the responsible analytical agency with the SEDAR Steering  
26 Committee before moving forward with such a change. Council staff  
27 noted that the council's SSC will review interim analysis for gag  
28 and red grouper in February of 2026, with the tilefish data triage  
29 for 2026 also conducted outside the SEDAR process.

30  
31 A committee member thought that moving gag and red grouper to the  
32 CEASA was a good start, but said the process was slow for  
33 throughput before, and is expected to be slower in the future,  
34 with staff and resource reductions. The committee member also  
35 lamented the delays with starting the greater amberjack stock  
36 assessment. Dr. Sweetman.

37  
38 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Sorry. Before we got into greater amberjack, I  
39 think that there was a discussion, during committee, about  
40 potentially wanting a motion, a formal motion, along these lines  
41 there, to kind of ultimately send a memo to the SEDAR Steering  
42 Committee, where they can review this. With that, Bernie, I send  
43 you a motion, and would you mind pulling it up, please? I'm just  
44 going to make one little tweak here. Instead of "request that  
45 FWC" -- Just a comment that they're both FWC and USF, and so  
46 FWC/USF.

47  
48 **Okay, and so my motion would be request that FWC/USF conduct stock**

1 assessments for gag and red grouper, replacing yellowtail and  
2 mutton snapper on the proposed SEDAR assessment list. Gag grouper  
3 will start in 2026, following completion of hogfish B assessment,  
4 and red grouper would start in 2028, and these, of course, would  
5 be operational assessments, and so, if this ultimately moves  
6 forward, my hope would be that the council could draft a memo, and  
7 send it over to the SEDAR Steering Committee, so they can discuss  
8 this item.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. We have a motion on the  
11 board. Is there a second for the motion? Captain Walker seconds.  
12 Discussion on the motion? Mr. Strelcheck.

13  
14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I guess, to clarify, C.J., are you  
15 requesting the SEDAR Steering Committee consider making this  
16 change?

17  
18 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I guess I would be -- You're right.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Walker.

21  
22 **MR. WALKER:** I just thought I would see if -- "A proposed SEDAR  
23 assessment list", could that say "proposed SEDAR assessment  
24 schedule"? I mean, we're talking about an order of things, right?  
25 I think maybe "schedule: would be a more appropriate word, if  
26 that's all right with Dr. Sweetman.

27  
28 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I think that's okay, and so, Bernie, it  
29 sounds like a couple changes here, and so put -- Instead of "list"  
30 at the end there, "schedule", and then, relative to what Andy said,  
31 "request that the SEDAR Steering Committee", right at the top,  
32 right after "request", "that the SEDAR Steering Committee  
33 considers", and I think that's okay.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Walker, are you okay with the changes made to  
36 the motion?

37  
38 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and that's great for me.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. The seconder is good. Dr. Walter.

41  
42 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and I just wanted to comment on -- I think the  
43 changes are actually good, because the SEDAR Steering Committee  
44 has to consider that, but I think they have to consider it amongst  
45 other things, but I'll just reiterate that having FWC, or USF,  
46 take on the assessment doesn't necessarily increase throughput,  
47 because of all the other data providers that have to provide data  
48 for that, and so it does have to be addressed along with those

1 data providers, who actually aren't here, but would be at the SEDAR  
2 Steering Committee, and I think we should work offline with FWC  
3 and USF about how that handoff might look, so that there's a fairly  
4 smooth transition of it, and so the SEDAR Steering Committee  
5 doesn't get, you know, concerns that it might not be smooth.

6  
7 I think that's something that we can work together to make those  
8 handoffs not be complicated, and ensure that all the data providers  
9 are onboard with that kind of a handoff, and so -- But then just  
10 with the caveat that there's a lot of things, ageing data,  
11 potential confidential data, other things that have to go into  
12 these, that may not necessarily make them more rapid, but I think  
13 these are certainly good starts here. Thanks.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Walter. Is there any other or  
16 more discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there any**  
17 **opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.**

18  
19 Moving on, the committee member also lamented the delays with  
20 starting the greater amberjack stock assessment. The Science  
21 Center reiterated the need to focus on key indices and not trying  
22 to always look at all available data, especially when the  
23 comparable results may be very similar.

24  
25 The Science Center added that, for greater amberjack, waiting for  
26 the data from the Great Amberjack Count was seen as essential, due  
27 to scope of that study. The committee discussed conducting an  
28 interim analysis for greater amberjack before 2028, when the stock  
29 assessment is expected to be completed.

30  
31 The Science Center will investigate the G-FISHER composite video  
32 index for appropriateness for such an analysis and report back at  
33 Full Council if this index can be -- Dr. Walter.

34  
35 **DR. WALTER:** Full Council? All right. Good. I thought that was  
36 the cue. Yes, and we've looked into that, and we are anticipating  
37 being able to do that interim in next year. Now, we'll look into  
38 both G-FISHER as well as other indices, because there are other  
39 indices that went into the stock assessment, but we do think, and  
40 are anticipating, being able to provide something in the interim,  
41 and so I've checked with staff, and that's a yes.

42  
43 I don't know that it needs a memo or not, and I think we've got  
44 it. We've got the request here. A memo would be good, if you  
45 want to provide that, and it locks it in.

46  
47 One comment here, just in terms of the report, is there is a  
48 response on -- After the member lamented the delays, then there is

1 a sentence that doesn't quite follow, and the reason for the delays  
2 was because we wanted to wait for the amberjack count, and so it  
3 might -- If I could request a replacing, or moving up, of that  
4 sentence that follows the lamentation of the delay with the  
5 rationale for a delay being because we need -- We really need that  
6 count for that assessment to really utilize the best information,  
7 and if I could ask for that editorial change. Okay. Thanks.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** No problem, Dr. Walter. Dr. Froeschke.

10  
11 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I just wondered if you guys discussed that, for  
12 example, the red grouper interim analysis, they chose not to make  
13 use of, because it was fairly distant. The interim analysis is  
14 fairly distant from the terminal year of the assessment, and, with  
15 the amberjack one, I believe that's further, and so is that going  
16 to be an issue?

17  
18 **DR. WALTER:** Well, I think there's some language there that -- In  
19 particular, not -- I think I did comment about we really need to  
20 avoid chasing perfection, and I think we're going to need to ask,  
21 of our SSCs, and of our collaborators, that sometimes good enough  
22 is probably better than not doing anything, and, in some cases,  
23 using the interim approaches might be much better than even if the  
24 assessment is old, and something needs to get updated, and so I  
25 think using our indices, and leaning on our indices, is something  
26 that we're --

27  
28 We are saying that's the investment the Science Center is making,  
29 and that's what we are leaning a lot of what we think the future  
30 of managing our stocks is going to be based on, and so we would  
31 say we want to lean on them more and more in the future, whether  
32 it's an assessment that's old or not, if things have changed in  
33 the population, the indices should pick them up, and we think we  
34 should be using them. Thanks.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have a list. Ryan, C.J., and Andy.

37  
38 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Dr. Walter, what other  
39 indices do you think might be considered for amberjack besides G-  
40 FISHER. You said you guys have talked about this some, and I'm  
41 curious, just because G-FISHER is the only fishery-independent  
42 survey that was used in SEDAR 70.

43  
44 **DR. WALTER:** Yes, and we've got a headboat index and a longline  
45 index, and I'll have to say that I have not had an in-depth  
46 conversation with our staff about that. I just looked at the  
47 assessment, and it used those two, and I think the process of  
48 developing the interim assessment for amberjack would have to look

1 at what would have been used in the past, and say, if they were  
2 used in the past, we need to find a reason to at least exclude  
3 them, and say maybe they no longer are useful, but we wouldn't  
4 want to say to categorically exclude them.

5  
6 Then we probably want to lean on G-FISHER, but, given that G-  
7 FISHER is a new index for amberjack, there's going to be a lot of  
8 considerations going into that, and so, to get to your point, we  
9 haven't ruled anything in or out.

10  
11 **MR. RINDONE:** Sure, and, just to that, for lane snapper, we've had  
12 discussions, at the SSC level, with walking away from the headboat  
13 index for that particular species, because of how robust the G-  
14 FISHER data are for lane snapper, and thinking that it would be  
15 good to take a look at that, but, thinking about headboat, and  
16 especially longline, and just their representativeness for greater  
17 amberjack for the stock as a whole, one of the reasons that we had  
18 reconsidered using just the NMFS bottom longline index for either  
19 red grouper or red snapper was how nearly eternally stable it is,  
20 because of how long it takes fish to grow into being selected by  
21 the longline index.

22  
23 Most of the targeting on many of our reef fish species happens  
24 before they're fully selected by the longline index, and so, just  
25 thinking about like the SSC's discussions, and maybe Dr. Allen  
26 wants to say something about that, about what he remembers, but it  
27 just -- It seems like both the headboat CPUE and the longline index  
28 would have marks against them, as far as them being preferred,  
29 just from a -- Just from what the data represent and how  
30 representative they are of the stock as a whole.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Dr. Sweetman. Go ahead,  
33 John.

34  
35 **DR. WALTER:** One thing is I think it's hard to speculate right now  
36 on here, and we would want to have that through the process, and  
37 have the SSC consider it. In some cases, if the request was to  
38 consider G-FISHER as appropriate, if it turns out G-FISHER is  
39 either unavailable or not appropriate, then we've got to work with  
40 what we've got, and I think that's the realization we're going to  
41 have to come to, that, again, sometimes we don't have the index we  
42 want, and we have to work with the index we've got, and that's  
43 probably going to be even more true going into the future, if for  
44 some reason G-FISHER doesn't get, or isn't particularly reliable  
45 for, some species, but that's going to be worked out in due course,  
46 and so, again, the comment is well noted, but we work with what  
47 we've got. Thanks.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

2  
3 **DR. SWEETMAN:** This is a question for you, Dr. Walther, and so you  
4 said we could get into this next year for an interim, just looking  
5 at these indices, and so would 2024 data at that time be available,  
6 within G-FISHER in particular?

7  
8 **DR. WALTER:** I believe it would have 2024 data. I believe it  
9 would. Now, some of that does rely on the G-FISHER crew being  
10 able to have read all of the video in time, and I can't -- There  
11 are a number of species that are on the list as priority for  
12 reading, but I believe it would go through 2024.

13  
14 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and, just to that point, I mean, I've already  
15 spoken with FWRI about this, and they -- In January, they would be  
16 able to produce that, and so I think we'd be in good shape there.

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

19  
20 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and this is a good conversation, and I guess  
21 I just want to emphasize -- I mean, there's a sea change happening  
22 here, based on Fisheries Service resources, right, and I think  
23 there's also an opportunity here for us to really carefully look  
24 at management.

25  
26 John was making the comment, and I don't disagree with it, because  
27 we've made the case with interim assessments, that, well, the  
28 assessment is so old that we're not going to update the index and  
29 use it, but the reality is we have really old data on amberjack,  
30 and some of these other assessments, and it's worth looking at  
31 some of these indices, and, to me, we're going to be better  
32 informed by something that matches up more in real time, with  
33 what's going on in the water, than an assessment that's five or  
34 six or seven years old, or however old some of these assessments  
35 are.

36  
37 I think we want to see how this plays out with amberjack, as an  
38 example, but I think there's an opportunity here as well to start  
39 thinking about these interim assessments, these more simplistic  
40 approaches, and utilizing them more readily.

41  
42 Then your question, C.J., about what data is going to be available,  
43 I think, at a minimum, 2024. You know, our hope is, as we move  
44 forward, you know, where we could actually have AI and others  
45 reading these videos, so we're not relying on manual review by  
46 personnel, and so, by the time the boat hits the dock, and maybe  
47 there's some QA/QC, but we could actually have information for key  
48 species very much in line with the year in which we're managing

1 them, and so more to come on that. Obviously, that's a lot of  
2 work still ahead, but I know the Science Center has been really  
3 focused on making those improvements.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have Mr. Anson.

6  
7 **MR. ANSON:** Just to expand a little bit about the comments from  
8 Dr. Walter and Mr. Strelcheck relative to the agency not being  
9 able to do many of the things we've done in the past, not being  
10 able to access some of the data streams, and so, in light of that,  
11 I'm just wondering if, during these discussions that come up for  
12 amberjack and future species, and trying to find, you know,  
13 fishery-independent data streams that would kind of fill the gap,  
14 so to speak, or might provide information that in the past has not  
15 been used, for whatever reason, but I'm just wondering, as we  
16 embark upon those types of discussions, is that we also look at  
17 potentially some of those data streams that have not been used in  
18 assessments, maybe because they just don't have a long history.

19  
20 I'm just speaking specifically to the fishery-independent survey  
21 that we've been conducting off Alabama, for example. You know, I  
22 know there's some differences in gears between G-FISHER and our  
23 ROV video that we take, but I'm just offering that up, that we  
24 might have to, you know, look a little bit differently at some of  
25 these things that may not have been used in the past, and so  
26 certainly we're open to having those discussions, and I can pass  
27 that on to Dr. Powers, and let him know that there might be a  
28 possibility to do that going forward.

29  
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Kevin. Dr. Allen.

31  
32 **DR. ALLEN:** I'll just make a general comment. I don't think here  
33 that we should try to identify exactly what indices should be used.  
34 I think that, based on the discussions here, it should be indices  
35 that are going to provide the most timely advice that the analysts  
36 believe is going to be an effective index of those species.

37  
38 If they were used in past assessments, I think they should be  
39 considered, unless the data are too old, and we can't get the data  
40 in time, and so I think we've got to balance the timeliness and  
41 whether the index is an appropriate one for that species, and so  
42 I just don't like the idea of taking any off the table here in  
43 this discussion.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Allen. Dr. Simmons.

46  
47 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so we've  
48 had a lot of discussion about amberjack, and the potential of the

1 Science Center and Florida being able to process the G-FISHER  
2 composite video, and potentially other fishery-independent indices  
3 that we could look at, and so I think, you know, we typically pass  
4 a motion, so that staff can write a memo requesting this, and so  
5 I think we've had a lot of discussion, and I would encourage the  
6 council to do this, because we've had a lot of folks come to the  
7 podium, you know, expressing frustration, essentially, about  
8 amberjack, and what's going to happen with the season, and just  
9 trying to get a handle on what's happening out there, and so I  
10 think it would be worth asking the center to do it, trying to get  
11 it in front of the SSC, and we would normally do that with a  
12 motion, to send you a memo.

13  
14 It could just be the council requests the Science Center conduct  
15 an interim analysis for greater amberjack considering G-FISHER and  
16 other relevant indices. Is that okay?

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Dr. Sweetman.

19  
20 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Ditto what Carrie said, Bernie, if we could put  
21 that as a motion.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and we'll give Bernie a moment to get the  
24 motion up on the board. Dr. Banks is going to second the motion.  
25 Dr. Sweetman, do you want to read your motion into the record?

26  
27 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Absolutely. **The motion is that the council requests**  
28 **that the Southeast Fisheries Science Center conduct an interim**  
29 **analysis for greater amberjack, considering G-FISHER and other**  
30 **relevant indices.**

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and we have a second by Dr. Banks. **Is there**  
33 **any further discussion on the motion? Not seeing any, the motion**  
34 **carries.** Okay. We'll move along.

35  
36 If this index can be considered for greater amberjack via an  
37 interim analysis, the council should consider passing a motion  
38 requesting the staff write a letter to the Science Center  
39 requesting this work.

40  
41 A committee member asked if it were possible to move responsibility  
42 of the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic  
43 Tunas, ICCAT, and/or Atlantic Highly Migratory Species assessments  
44 to another Atlantic science center to alleviate the burdens to the  
45 Science Center. The Science Center said such considerations are  
46 being discussed, with some past services being transferred to other  
47 partners, including ICCAT. Further, the Science Center ability to  
48 assess sharks is expected to be measurably diminished.

1  
2 There was no other business discussed, and this concludes my  
3 report, and we're going to adjourn for the day, and we'll see you  
4 at 8:30 in the morning.

5  
6 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed on August 27, 2025.)

7  
8 - - -

9  
10 August 28, 2025

11 THURSDAY MORNING SESSION

12  
13 - - -

14  
15  
16 The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at the Hilton  
17 Palacio Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas on Thursday morning, August  
18 28, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Good morning. Welcome back. We're going to get  
21 started, if we can quiet down the back. We're going to work on  
22 the agenda today in order, starting with Shrimp, and then  
23 Sustainable Fisheries, and then into Reef Fish. Mr. Schieble.

24  
25 **SHRIMP COMMITTEE REPORT**

26  
27 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, everyone. This  
28 is the Shrimp Committee report from August 27, 2025. The committee  
29 adopted the agenda, Tab D, Number 1, and the committee then  
30 approved the April 2025 meeting minutes, Tab D, Number 2.

31  
32 We worked on Draft Shrimp Amendment 19: Shrimp Permit Moratorium,  
33 Tab D, Number 4(a). Council staff reviewed the purpose and need  
34 statements and the options in Draft Shrimp Amendment 19. Council  
35 staff reminded the committee that, if either Option 2 or 3 were  
36 selected as preferred, the council could always remove the  
37 moratorium before the ten-year extension or remove the limited  
38 access permit program, or LAPP.

39  
40 A committee member noted concerns with the permanence of a LAPP,  
41 given potential future changes to the state of the Gulf shrimp  
42 industry, and stated that a trigger for reviews of that program in  
43 the Gulf shrimp industry may alleviate those concerns.

44  
45 A committee member noted that, with the Restoring American Seafood  
46 Competitiveness Executive Order, the council would need to make  
47 clear our rationale for either continuing a moratorium or creating  
48 a LAPP. He added that the minimum threshold number of Gulf shrimp

1 vessel permits, Shrimp Amendment 17B, should be reviewed, as that  
2 number is based on optimum yield and other criteria that are  
3 outdated.

4  
5 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to modify the language of**  
6 **Option 3 in the document as follows: Option 3 is create a federal**  
7 **limited access permit for commercial shrimp vessels in the Gulf.**  
8 **To be eligible for commercial shrimp vessel permit under the**  
9 **limited access system, vessels must have a valid or renewable**  
10 **federal Gulf commercial shrimp vessel permit on October 26, 2026.**  
11 **Federal Gulf commercial shrimp vessel permits would need to be**  
12 **renewed every year, and all previous renewal, transfer, and**  
13 **reporting requirements would still be in effect. Reviews of the**  
14 **limited access permit will occur ten years after the implementation**  
15 **of this amendment, or as otherwise deemed necessary by the council.**  
16 **A motion carried with no opposition and one absent. Mr. Chair we**  
17 **have a committee motion on the board.**

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you Mr. Schieble. Is there any discussion  
20 on the motion on the board? Mr. Walker.

21  
22 **MR. WALKER:** Just reading through it, would this mean that, if you  
23 go and -- Well, I guess it's limited access, and so you have to  
24 have a permit essentially now.

25  
26 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes.

27  
28 **MR. WALKER:** The October 26 date threw me off it. At almost first  
29 read, it sounded like if I went and bought one before October 21,  
30 but they're already unlimited access, and so never mind.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

33  
34 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Just a suggestion minor modification. Rather  
35 than saying "reviews of limited access permit will occur", I would  
36 suggest "would occur".

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Bernie is working on it. Mr. Schieble.

39  
40 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Mr. Strelcheck, so "would" or "could"?

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** It looks like Mr. Strelcheck prefers "would".

43  
44 **MR. STRELCHECK:** My attorney is advising to leave it as "will",  
45 and so we can leave it as "will", and I'm going to go get some  
46 more coffee.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Is there any more discussion on the motion?

1 **Not seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing**  
2 **any motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.

3  
4 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Next, the committee member  
5 inquired as to the number of Gulf shrimp moratorium permits  
6 transferred last year. Council staff responded that SERO staff  
7 will provide that information by Full Council.

8  
9 There's a footnote here at the bottom that goes along with this.  
10 It says eighty-seven Gulf shrimp moratorium permits were  
11 transferred in 2024, and fifty-seven permits were transferred in  
12 2023.

13  
14 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to make Option 3 the**  
15 **preferred option. Option 3 is create a federal limited access**  
16 **permit for commercial shrimp vessels in the Gulf. To be eligible**  
17 **for commercial shrimp vessel permit under the limited access**  
18 **system, vessels would have a valid or renewable federal Gulf**  
19 **commercial shrimp vessel permit on October 26, 2026. Federal Gulf**  
20 **commercial shrimp vessel permits would need to be renewed every**  
21 **year, and all previous renewal, transfer, and reporting**  
22 **requirements would still be in effect. Reviews of the limited**  
23 **access permit will occur at ten years after implementation of this**  
24 **amendment, or as otherwise deemed necessary by the council. That**  
25 **motion carried with one absent and one abstention.** Mr. Chair,  
26 that's a committee motion on the board.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. We have a committee  
29 motion on the board. Is there any discussion on the motion? **Not**  
30 **seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing**  
31 **any, the motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.

32  
33 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We then move to Protected  
34 Resources Bycatch in Shrimp Trawls: A Summary Review of Data for  
35 Reinitiation of Section 7 Consultation, Tab D, Number 5(a).

36  
37 Ms. Lee, from the Protected Resources Southeast Regional Office,  
38 reviewed Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation information  
39 about interactions, effects, and projected jeopardy analysis of  
40 the Gulf penaeid shrimp fishery on listed protected species like  
41 smalltooth sawfish and giant manta ray.

42  
43 A committee member asked about the estimated post-release  
44 mortality for sawfish caught in shrimp nets, noting that, in  
45 finfish, the mortality of releases where the fate is unknown is  
46 not often included in discard mortality calculations. Ms. Lee  
47 replied that information on disposition at release is used to  
48 better inform the fate of released sawfish.

1  
2 Another committee member asked how the bycatch was extrapolated.  
3 The Southeast Fisheries Science Center referred the committee to  
4 supporting documentation which detailed modeling and estimation of  
5 bycatch.

6  
7 Council staff noted that the SSC did not have adequate time to  
8 review the bycatch methodology during its May 2025 meeting. She  
9 also added that the Center for Independent Experts desk reviews on  
10 the bycatch methodology conducted also referenced management  
11 recommendations, which seemed absent feedback on the data  
12 available and how they might best be analyzed.

13  
14 A committee member asked whether there were any data in the manta  
15 ray interactions before 2018. Ms. Lee's reply did not refute the  
16 years of data, but she added that the review and methods were  
17 commensurate with other Section 7 analyses. She added that PR is  
18 working to incorporate SSC feedback on the population viability  
19 analysis for smalltooth sawfish.

20  
21 Another committee member recalled the SSC discussions highlighting  
22 a need to focus on collecting more data, more cooperative research,  
23 and better characterization of range expansion of sawfish  
24 northward in west Florida. The committee member stated a need for  
25 additional observer coverage and continued work to improve bycatch  
26 estimation methods.

27  
28 A committee member suggested convening a working group of shrimp  
29 industry representatives, Protected Resources staff, and gear  
30 experts to develop recommendations regarding these consultations.  
31 I'll pause here for a second, because there may be some discussion  
32 of that around the table.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Mr. Sanchez.

35  
36 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that. I wanted  
37 to make a motion, and I had staff -- I sent it in this morning, if  
38 we could pull that up and see if we could try to put together,  
39 populate, this working group, so that we can address the concerns  
40 at-hand with industry, and all the people that need to be at this  
41 table, and hopefully have a productive outcome. I would like to  
42 read that.

43  
44 **Populate and convene a new working group comprised of shrimp**  
45 **harvesting sector representatives, Protected Resources staff, and**  
46 **NMFS gear team staff to identify workable solutions that aim to**  
47 **reduce interactions with smalltooth sawfish and giant manta ray in**  
48 **the Gulf federal shrimp trawl fishery. The new working group**

1 **should be formed by the council chair, Shrimp Committee chair, and**  
2 **executive director, with no more than fifteen members.**

3  
4 I would like to give them latitude to figure out who all needs to  
5 be there. I think we know who kind of does, and fifteen members  
6 -- You know, let's just keep it workable. That's a ceiling. We  
7 don't have to go fifteen, if we don't need to.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez, and so we have a motion  
10 on the board. Do we have a second for the motion? Mr. Broussard.  
11 Any further discussion on the motion? Mr. Strelcheck.

12  
13 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So I like the direction you're going, John. My  
14 concern is mostly just the composition of the workgroup. I think  
15 there's going to be people from our Science Center that may want  
16 to be involved, or should be involved, and I think there's going  
17 to be people outside of NMFS, right, academics, or researchers,  
18 and so I would really like to kind of broaden the representation,  
19 if we could, if you're amenable to that.

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

22  
23 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I'm trying to keep it workable, but I am not opposed  
24 to what you're suggesting and so if you could elaborate on what  
25 you have in mind, and then we'll get council staff involved, and,  
26 you know, see if we can't get there.

27  
28 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I'm going to put Jenny Lee on the spot. Jenny,  
29 can you come up to the podium? She's our expert on this, but I  
30 guess my recommendation would be shrimp harvesting sector  
31 representatives, NMFS employees, kind of leaving it, you know,  
32 broad, academics, researchers, and I don't know, but others.  
33 Jenny.

34  
35 **MS. JENNIFER LEE:** Yes, and I actually think that sounds pretty  
36 good. I mean, we would definitely want the Science Center, the  
37 observer program representatives, and then one or two of the lead  
38 analysts, for example, who was engaged in the bycatch estimates  
39 and the PVA work, and so that would be important.

40  
41 Then, you know, for Protected Resources, we have, I guess, the  
42 species coordinator, and so you've got that Protected Resources  
43 Division, and, obviously, Sustainable Fisheries, and you need to  
44 have a rep, because, you know, they are the action agency  
45 representative on that side, and I wasn't sure whether -- How these  
46 work, in terms of you can -- Kind of like a council meeting, and  
47 invite someone to come to talk, or to present, to the committee,  
48 and we do have people engaged, like, for example, I know SSA has

1 worked with LGL, and, you know, maybe we would want to have them  
2 engaged. Those are just some broad thoughts.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So, Ms. Lee, I would like to give Dr. Simmons an  
5 opportunity to speak.

6  
7 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and  
8 so I guess I have some concerns with making this group too big.  
9 It's going to be really difficult to get anything done. I think  
10 what you're thinking about is, you know, providing all the  
11 information the academics have found is important, and so maybe we  
12 need like a workshop, but, to me, the working group needs to take  
13 all that information, and it should include some SSC members as  
14 well I think on here, to really think about how we're going to  
15 come up with a workable solution.

16  
17 I also think we need an objective of this group. We don't really  
18 have clear goals and objectives right now of what we're trying to  
19 achieve, and perhaps that will come out in the workshop, when we  
20 have all this information, but I think we still have a lot of  
21 unknowns, as far as how some of the bycatch estimates were done.

22  
23 I think maybe, once that's presented, people will feel more  
24 confident. It just needs to be maybe looked at in a public meeting,  
25 and so perhaps a workshop-type thing is needed before the working  
26 group, but, to me, the working group should be like the workhorse,  
27 to actually develop what the council is probably going to have to  
28 put in a potential amendment, in my mind.

29  
30 **MS. LEE:** Yes, and I do know we also talked about how it would  
31 make sense to have a parallel IPT to kind of help the workload  
32 aspect of it, and that may reduce the members too on the team here,  
33 if you had sort of the working group, you know, reviewing data,  
34 and making requests, and then maybe an IPT kind of in the typical  
35 sense that does -- You know, carries out what the council asks it  
36 to do, and maybe that would be a way to keep the working group  
37 more limited, but still have the multi-staff engagement that we're  
38 talking about.

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

41  
42 **MR. STRELCHECK:** To Carrie's point, with regard to kind of the  
43 purpose, so we were viewing this as kind of a two-pronged purpose,  
44 right, and so this workgroup would, one, review and synthesize  
45 information with regard to all the data, reports, scientific  
46 information, and, two, help us to develop an action plan, or  
47 recommendations, in terms of how we do reduce bycatch, obviously,  
48 in the shrimp fishery.

1  
2 I agree with Jenny. I think, to support the workgroup, we're  
3 probably going to want to have at least a small interdisciplinary  
4 planning team. I think, Carrie, you know, your comment about the  
5 group not being too big is certainly front and center, and timing  
6 of when this workgroup meets would be important as well, because  
7 we do need to move fairly quickly, given the new information.  
8

9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman, and then Mr. Schieble.

10  
11 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm definitely supportive of  
12 putting something together like this. I do also have concerns  
13 about making this too big, and I also agree with Dr. Simmons about  
14 having someone maybe from the SSC on this, and I do view this as  
15 kind of like a two-staged approach here, right, and like the SSC  
16 still needs to, you know, review the data inputs, and everything  
17 that's going on there, and I think that would be, obviously, coming  
18 before this group would kind of consider that, so we can work out  
19 any of the data concerns, or anything along those lines.  
20

21 I am supportive of having other people besides Protected Resources  
22 staff and NMFS gear team. I think -- Maybe, I mean, it could be  
23 accommodated, but, I mean, thinking just about sawfish, maybe  
24 someone from the Sawfish Recovery Team, or something like that,  
25 and I know that there's federal representatives on that, and that  
26 maybe could be accommodated there, but having those people that  
27 are actively engaged in current research, and what's going on  
28 there, I do think would be beneficial to the overall process there,  
29 but I also recognize that, when you start making this too big, it  
30 gets really complicated, and it might just stall things out, and  
31 so I don't want that to happen.  
32

33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Schieble.

34  
35 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Mr. Strelcheck, you mentioned timing on this, and,  
36 during the presentation, I think Ms. Lee mentioned, and I'll read  
37 it off of the slide, and it talked about, once re-initiated,  
38 default total time between initiation of formal consultation and  
39 completion of the final opinion is 135 days, and so I don't think  
40 we're going to have time for this working group to meet more than  
41 once, probably, right? That would be the expectation, and then  
42 report back to the council, and am I correct in that, or do you  
43 think we would have time for that? Maybe you could speak to that,  
44 Ms. Lee.  
45

46 **MS. LEE:** Thank you. Yes, and so the 135 is the -- You know, is  
47 the required timeframe, but it also says "and may be extended with  
48 mutual agreement", and so that's where I was explaining that, you

1 know, that we could -- We can decide that we want to extend that  
2 consultation to provide more time. The formal consultation  
3 regulations that are linked in the presentation do talk a little  
4 bit about that, about how it can be extended, and then sort of,  
5 you know, the collection and gathering of more data for the  
6 process, and so I think we have some flexibility.

7  
8 I think where we want to be cautious is we don't want to move so  
9 slowly that, as we're working on these analyses, depending on the  
10 outcomes, that we're pushing any potential action, and meeting our  
11 requirements under the Endangered Species Act, too far down the  
12 road.

13  
14 We have, you know, that obligation to avoid jeopardy, and to  
15 minimize bycatch, and that's, you know, all the time, basically,  
16 and so we're in the process, but we need to make sure we're  
17 providing a good record for moving forward and, in this interim  
18 process, making sure that, during the consultation period, we're  
19 not foreclosing any opportunities that would be beneficial for the  
20 species, and so it's really a balancing act.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Sanchez.

23  
24 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, to clarify, this is,  
25 obviously, a sincere attempt to try to arrive at a workable  
26 solution to address these interactions. We're going to do this,  
27 and, obviously, it's going to take time to populate, set up  
28 meetings, et cetera, et cetera, but I'm hoping you'll be  
29 considerate in the extension, because we are seriously trying to  
30 resolve this, and, I mean, as quickly as possible.

31  
32 I'm not opposed to this working group -- We put everybody together,  
33 and we can lock the door, and let's figure this out, I mean, and  
34 so I appreciate an extension might be needed, and hopefully will  
35 be considered.

36  
37 **MS. LEE:** Yes, and, I mean, we're graciously appreciative of that,  
38 the fact that, you know, I think this process, and policy directive  
39 that I talked about, you know, we are working through that. We're  
40 doing what the agency set up, and wanted to do, which is early  
41 engagement in the process, rather than us just -- NOAA Fisheries  
42 cranking out a BiOp and saying here it is, and deal with it, and  
43 so we are going through the process that we outlined.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Okay. We have a motion on the board.  
46 Is there any more discussion? Mr. Strelcheck.

47  
48 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so I'm going to try a friendly amendment

1 first, and so my recommendation is to state: Populate and convene  
2 a new working group comprised of shrimp harvesting sector  
3 representatives, NMFS staff, academics, and researchers, and  
4 others, leaving it open-ended, because this is going to be  
5 appointed by the council chair, and strike the up to "to identify".  
6

7 Then my other suggestion is to add the Regional Administrator to  
8 those that could appoint the workgroup, since NMFS is going to  
9 have personnel that would be added to this workgroup.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** While Bernie is working on that, Dr. Simmons.

12  
13 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I guess  
14 I'm not sure I understand the difference between researchers and  
15 academics, but we can get into that later offline. I would like  
16 to have a staff member on there, just one, at least. I mean, we're  
17 going to have to work all this out, you know, behind the scenes,  
18 and come back with a plan, and so --

19  
20 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, I put the "and others", just to leave it  
21 open-ended, so that, if we haven't thought of someone now, we can  
22 figure that out later.

23  
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** We need a council staff on there,  
25 Bernie. And council staff.

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

28  
29 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I would like to offer another further friendly  
30 amendment to have an SSC member on here as well.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck, and then Dr. Simmons.

33  
34 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I think, because researchers could be encompassing  
35 of academics, as well as academics being SSC members, I would be  
36 good with striking "academics", or removing it.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

39  
40 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I have a question. We're striking "NMFS gear team",  
41 but we also have "NMFS staff", and so does that cover that, because  
42 I'm thinking the gear team would be part of this discussion, to  
43 see if any potential -- If the industry comes up with any  
44 modifications or something to mitigate.

45  
46 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and 100 percent. You know, gear team, and  
47 Jenny mentioned the observer program. We have scientists that are  
48 doing bycatch analysis, and so determining who is going to be on

1 the workgroup, who is going to be presenting to the workgroup,  
2 will have to be figured out.  
3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.  
5  
6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I think I kind of said this before.  
7 I mean, I think some of the research that's being done -- Maybe  
8 you would have them present it, and I don't know that they  
9 necessarily have to be on the workgroup, but I agree that's  
10 something we could work on with you all and the Science Center to  
11 make that determination.  
12  
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Freeman.  
14  
15 **DR. MATT FREEMAN:** Mr. Strelcheck, just, as Bernie is modifying  
16 it, did you want "academics" retained or removed?  
17  
18 **MR. STRELCHECK:** We can remove it.  
19  
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. I'm going to circle back to Mr. Sanchez,  
21 who made the motion, and ask if you're okay with the friendly  
22 amendments here.  
23  
24 **MR. SANCHEZ:** It's quite different, but I'm okay.  
25  
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Would you want to read it into the record for us,  
27 Mr. Sanchez?  
28  
29 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, Mr. Chair. **Populate and convene a new working**  
30 **group comprised of shrimp harvesting sector representatives, NMFS**  
31 **staff, council staff, SSC member, researchers, and others to**  
32 **identify workable solutions that aim to reduce interactions with**  
33 **smalltooth sawfish and giant manta ray in the Gulf federal shrimp**  
34 **trawl fishery. This new working group should be formed by the**  
35 **council chair, Shrimp Committee chair, Regional Administrator, and**  
36 **executive director, with no more than fifteen members.**  
37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Is the seconder okay  
39 with the amendments? Mr. Broussard is good. Is there any further  
40 discussion on the motion? **Not seeing an, is there any opposition**  
41 **to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.  
42  
43 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The SSC will review shrimp  
44 bycatch estimation, as it relates to finfish, in October 2025.  
45 However, another committee member thought it necessary to get  
46 additional SSC feedback on the bycatch estimate extrapolation for  
47 smalltooth sawfish and manta ray, also.  
48

1 The Southeast Fisheries Science Center recommended developing a  
2 timeline of all items to be reviewed by the SSC, so they can ensure  
3 they can supply the materials in time. We had no other business,  
4 Mr. Chair, and this concludes my committee report.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Dr. Walter.

7  
8 **DR. WALTER:** Chair, on the last two items, I just wanted to get  
9 some clarity on when we might want to have those available. Since  
10 the October meeting seems very full already in its agenda, perhaps  
11 that would be an early 2026 SSC meeting, and I just wanted to ask  
12 that question, and get some clarity on the timing, on when we  
13 should target that being brought to an SSC meeting. We can work  
14 out the details of the materials, but I just wanted to have that  
15 conversation.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

18  
19 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I haven't had  
20 a chance to really talk to you yet about that, John. We may need  
21 to consider having a special kind of SSC meeting, that would happen  
22 perhaps before or in conjunction with the working group, because  
23 it seems to me that they're kind of related, except we use a  
24 finfish bycatch estimation for so many other species in our stock  
25 assessments, which I think we've been doing something slightly  
26 different as we go through that process.

27  
28 I just think we -- Right now, we have the finfish request in for  
29 the October meeting, but we don't have the protected resources on  
30 there yet, and so I don't know if that could be ready by October,  
31 and if we have time, and so could we get together and make that  
32 determination very soon?

33  
34 **DR. WALTER:** Sure, and we can definitely do that, maybe offline,  
35 and then see whether that fits in. Happy to do that. Thanks.

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Well, that will wrap up the Shrimp  
38 Committee report, and we will move on to Sustainable Fisheries,  
39 and Dr. Banks will lead us through that.

40  
41 **SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES COMMITTEE REPORT**

42  
43 **DR. BANKS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. The committee reordered the  
44 agenda, Tab E, Number 1, adopted the modified agenda, and approved  
45 the minutes, Tab E, Number 2, of the November 2024 meeting.

46  
47 Summary of Advisory Panel Recommendations on Executive Orders  
48 14276 and 14192, Tab E, Number 4, staff summarized Executive Orders

1 14276, Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness, and 14192,  
2 Unleashing Prosperity through Deregulation, and discussed the  
3 recommendations provided during a series of AP meetings and a  
4 public engagement session organized to gather input on the  
5 executive orders. Staff highlighted recommendations that fall  
6 under the council's purview.

7  
8 Organization and Prioritization of Recommendations on Executive  
9 Orders 14276 and 14192, staff noted that, in 2020, the council  
10 provided a list of items in response to Executive Order 13921,  
11 Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth.  
12 Staff discussed NOAA's directive letter to the councils to  
13 implement Executive Order 14276 and noted that the council's  
14 response letter must be submitted by September 30<sup>th</sup> of 2025.

15  
16 The council's letter should include a progress report on the  
17 council's actions proposed in its 2020 letter and an updated list  
18 of proposed council actions with a workplan and a schedule for  
19 implementation, and, if applicable, a list of recommendations  
20 outside the council purview. A second letter listing the council's  
21 recommendations relative to Executive Order 14192 will also be  
22 sent.

23  
24 For each executive order, the council discussed recommendations  
25 under the council's purview item-by-item and selected the  
26 recommendations that were appropriate for inclusion. The  
27 committee repeated the exercise for recommendations outside the  
28 council's purview.

29  
30 Recommendations selected by the committee are listed below. For  
31 Executive Order 14276, Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness,  
32 under the council's purview: work towards achieving balanced  
33 representation across all sectors of Gulf Council advisory panels;  
34 explore requirements for active participation and permits for  
35 individual fishing quota (IFQ) holders; explore creating a quota  
36 bank for allocation exchange in the IFQ program; explore  
37 streamlining reporting and compliance through digital systems  
38 (electronic reporting); reevaluate individual sea turtle gear  
39 requirements for commercial and for-hire fishermen; consider  
40 replacing the provisions of the DESCEND Act; consider removing  
41 low-priority species from fishery management units (e.g., cubera  
42 snapper, species in the jack complex other than greater amberjack,  
43 species in the midwater snapper complex other than queen snapper,  
44 and spiny lobster; evaluate the use of multiyear ACLs and  
45 accountability measures; consider carryover options for  
46 unharvested quota; consider eliminating or reducing crew size  
47 limits on dual-permitted vessels; consider eliminating did-not-  
48 fish reports; consider allowing the Gulf states to move pounds of

1 their individual recreational red snapper ACL between states while  
2 maintaining the total recreational private angling component  
3 annual catch limit; explore expanding regional or state management  
4 to other species or complexes; explore expanding sector separation  
5 to other species or complexes; consider mechanisms for allowing  
6 fish that experience depredation to be retained.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

9  
10 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I want to have a  
11 discussion about this. I mean, it was really great discussion  
12 that we had around the table during committee, and a lot of really,  
13 really good ideas here.

14  
15 What I do want to say is, right now, we've got fifteen items that  
16 are on this list, right, and each one of these is going to have to  
17 generate a workplan and a schedule for implementation, and, when  
18 you look at this here, that means we're going to have to  
19 reprioritize basically everything in here, and I feel like we've  
20 already gotten this down to the bare bones on the really, really  
21 important things that we're working on.

22  
23 Our previous executive order recommendations only had two items  
24 that we put forward on there, and I know we have to prioritize  
25 these things ultimately for passing on, and there are some really  
26 major things, really important things, on here, and just -- If we  
27 honed-in on this list a little bit, maybe to three or four items,  
28 something like that, and it doesn't preclude us from working on  
29 any other things that we do not select to move forward in this  
30 letter.

31  
32 I do have a thought here maybe that could help out with this,  
33 things that the council is already working on that meets the  
34 objectives of this executive order that, quite frankly, wouldn't  
35 be too burdensome from the already heavy workload that we have  
36 right now, and I'm going to make a couple of recommendations, and  
37 see where this falls amongst the council here.

38  
39 I mean, feel free, and we can have some discussion about it, but  
40 things that I would like to put forward here, and I'm open for  
41 discussion around the table, would be to explore requirements for  
42 active participation and permits for IFQ holders. Once again,  
43 something that is already on our workplan. Consider replacing  
44 provisions of the DESCEND Act, and there is widespread support,  
45 and I feel like we can move that one forward pretty quickly.

46  
47 Then probably a larger one, that will require, you know, some  
48 discussion around the table, but I think really, really meets the

1 order, and kind of goes towards what even some of the South  
2 Atlantic Council has been working on, would be consider removing  
3 some of these low-priority species from fishery management units.  
4

5 I think those all meet the objectives for what the executive order  
6 was going for. It does not create an absurd amount of work for  
7 this council, and for us to have to make some really hard decisions  
8 about what we would want to punt later on down the road here, and  
9 so I'm going to offer up those suggestions, and kind of see what  
10 the council thinks.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Dr. Banks.

13  
14 **DR. BANKS:** Yes, and I would like to say thank you, C.J. I 100  
15 percent agree. I even agree with those recommendations. I will  
16 just reiterate that this is a really good list that came out of  
17 that exercise, and something that we should keep, but maybe we go  
18 through this list outside of the executive order process, that  
19 allows us to put these in place, or work on these, around, as C.J.  
20 eloquently put, a very burdensome schedule already, and not  
21 necessarily knock down some of the stuff we've already deemed as  
22 a high priority.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. Do we have any further  
25 discussion on Dr. Sweetman's recommendation? I'll ask Dr. Simmons  
26 if we need a motion for it, but, Dr. Sweetman, I was going to ask  
27 you if you could repeat to the council the three you have interest  
28 in.

29  
30 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes. Absolutely, and so the three that I was  
31 talking about were that second bullet there to explore requirements  
32 for active participation and permits for IFQ holders, consider  
33 replacing the provisions of the DESCEND Act, and consider removing  
34 low-priority species from fishery management units. I might need  
35 some help with this motion here, but it would be to -- Dr. Banks.

36  
37 **DR. BANKS:** I was just going to say, in your motion, maybe we can  
38 remove some of the example species, and leave that open.

39  
40 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I absolutely agree. I don't want to be  
41 prescriptive here, and I think that those require some more  
42 discussion around the table. **The motion, more or less, would be**  
43 **to direct staff to write a letter pursuant to the requirements of**  
44 **the Executive Order 14276, Restoring American Seafood**  
45 **Competitiveness, highlighting the council's recommendations below.**  
46 It could use some wordsmithing, I'm sure.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Dr. Sweetman has a motion on the board,

1 and is offering some wordsmithing, and do we have a second? Dr.  
2 Banks seconds. Discussion, or a friendly amendment? Mr. Sanchez.  
3  
4 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Dr. Sweetman, I wanted to ask you, and, since we are  
5 already working on IFQ issues, and participation, do we need to  
6 include this here, as far as executive orders go? I mean, is there  
7 something else we could put in there that might be, I guess, more  
8 in line with the executive order, and maybe substitute that with  
9 something that there's an interest in doing that we aren't kind of  
10 already doing, maybe? We've already simplified the workplan down  
11 to three.  
12  
13 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and certainly like this is open for discussion  
14 around the table, right? Like I think my point here, though, John,  
15 is to not create this additional workload for us there, things  
16 that we are working on a bit. I would say, because that does meet  
17 the requirements and the goals for what the executive order is  
18 moving forward there, and certainly we could add some other things  
19 on here, John, but I would just be cognizant that what we do add,  
20 depending on if the council wants to add some other things,  
21 depending on the complexity, something else is going to have to be  
22 moved, and we've already gone through the process of trying to  
23 remove things that are more low-priority that the council is  
24 working on, and so everything that's kind of currently on our  
25 workplan is pretty important, and so just be cognizant of that, I  
26 guess I would offer.  
27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Any other comments or  
29 discussion on the motion? Dr. Froeschke.  
30  
31 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Maybe, just for my own edification, on the last  
32 one, why would it be  
33  
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, C.J.  
35  
36 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and that's fine, fishery management plan.  
37  
38 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Well, they are different. It might be correct how  
39 it is, but I just was trying to understand, because -- Somebody  
40 from the SERO is going to have to help me, but there's the fishery  
41 management unit, and my understanding is that's things that we  
42 still collect landings data and all that stuff, but it's not part  
43 of an FMP, and so, for example, I thought the species that we  
44 removed in 2011 are still part of the FMU, but are no longer in  
45 the FMP, and I just -- Is that not correct?  
46  
47 **MS. LEVY:** You can have things that might be not in an FMU, like  
48 an ecosystem-component-type species, right, and that wouldn't be

1 in the unit that you actually have ACLs and AMs for, but, if you  
2 take it out of the plan, it's out of the plan. It's not in a unit.  
3 It's totally out of the fishery management plan.

4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Dr. Sweetman.

6

7 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So I think my intent here, John, and maybe you can  
8 help me out, to figure out what is the appropriate language here,  
9 "units" or "plan", but, you know, species that we don't do anything  
10 with, or we have very little ability to implement regulations that  
11 would show any sort of meaningful impact, lack of data, and that's  
12 kind of my thought here and so, things that, you know, the council  
13 -- That could take up council time, but we don't do anything with  
14 it. So, just kicking them out, so to speak.

15

16 What that actually means, whether it's a unit or a plan, and I  
17 mean, I guess I would defer to you, but that's kind of what my  
18 intent is here.

19

20 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes, and I wasn't sure. I guess it was spiny  
21 lobster that was tripping me up, because it's a single-species  
22 FMP. I just didn't know, but it seems like we're good, and so I'm  
23 not going to worry about it.

24

25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.

26

27 **MS. LEVY:** I mean, I think you would be evaluating them under the  
28 criteria of whether they're going to be in the FMP, right, and so  
29 they're not in need of federal conservation, or conservation and  
30 management, and not federal, but they don't need to be in the FMP,  
31 but, I mean, you can put "consider removing low-priority species  
32 from the fishery management plan", and then, if you decide that  
33 you don't want to remove it, and you want to make it an ecosystem  
34 component or something, that's not going to limit you from doing  
35 that. You're just considering it.

36

37 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Okay, and so, Bernie, maybe we use the word "plan",  
38 instead of "units". Thank you, Mara, for that.

39

40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Bernie will make the change, and, Dr.  
41 Banks, are you okay as the seconder? The seconder is good. Any  
42 other discussion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition?**

43

44 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I'm just going to abstain, because it's a letter  
45 coming to the agency.

46

47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck abstains. **The motion carries.**  
48 Okay, Dr. Banks.

1  
2 **DR. BANKS:** All right. Moving on to those items that are outside  
3 the council's purview, domestic seafood competitiveness: suggest  
4 the implementation of tariffs, quotas, and bans on seafood imports  
5 from countries that use forced labor or banned chemicals and  
6 tariffs collected should be distributed to NOAA Fisheries to  
7 support fisheries management; suggest mandating country of origin  
8 labeling and authenticity testing for all seafood; support the  
9 promotion of domestic seafood consumption through national  
10 branding and marketing campaigns that use tactics, including  
11 storytelling and highlighting local fishing families and  
12 communities; consider allowing better utilization of bycatch for  
13 allowing retention for pet food, fish oil, and or fertilizer  
14 products.

15  
16 For IFQ programs: suggesting improving accessibility to IFQ loan  
17 programs to reduce barriers for fishermen; support increasing  
18 transparency and IFQ ownership for networking associated accounts  
19 to ensure that share caps are not exceeded.

20  
21 Labor issues: suggest reforming H2B visa program to increase  
22 availability, reduce cost, and improve timing; suggest expanding  
23 visa options applicable to fisheries, such as H2A or C1D visas;  
24 suggest modifications to citizenship requirements for crews that  
25 require 75 percent of workers to be citizens and 25 percent to be  
26 non-citizens and new requirements should account for fisheries  
27 with small crew sizes; support training programs for young  
28 fishermen to address aging workforce.

29  
30 Economic support: support working waterfronts with investments to  
31 docks, dry dock facilities, and fish markets; support improved  
32 timeliness of the distribution of disaster relief funds to charter-  
33 for-hire and commercial fishers; suggest the creation of federal  
34 insurance programs for fishers that mirrors the current federal  
35 crop insurance program; promote the procurement of funding for  
36 shrimp vessel tracking and data programs; suggest promoting more  
37 utilization of U.S. seafoods in schools, military, and food  
38 assistance programs.

39  
40 Species-specific management: support expanding shark harvest and  
41 remove the shark fin ban; support the transfer of shark management  
42 to the fishery management councils; support the development and  
43 acceptance of marine mammal deterrents.

44  
45 Executive Order 14192, Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation:  
46 remove and eliminate redundant reporting requirements, where  
47 appropriate; remove sea turtle release gear mandates; remove crew  
48 size limits; remove large vessel marking requirements; remove

1 shark fishery restrictions; remove the shark fin ban; and eliminate  
2 shallow-water grouper closures.

3  
4 Update on the Status of State Regulations for Wahoo, Tab E, Number  
5 6, Mr. Dakus Geeslin, of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department,  
6 indicated that the State of Texas does not plan on adopting  
7 management measures for wahoo.

8  
9 Mr. Chris Schieble, of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and  
10 Fisheries, gave a presentation on Louisiana wahoo regulation bag  
11 limit regulations and discussed the State of Louisiana's request  
12 to extend wahoo regulations in federal waters. Mr. Schieble noted  
13 NOAA's favorable response to the request, indicating that  
14 Louisiana may regulate those vessels that are registered with the  
15 state and are fishing for wahoo in federal waters.

16  
17 U.S. Coast Guard Safety Requirements to Carry Observers, Tab E,  
18 Number 7, Lt. Jackson Morton, of the U.S. Coast Guard, gave a  
19 presentation on radio telecommunications safety requirements for  
20 commercial fishing vessels. Lt. Morton discussed NOAA's safety  
21 requirements for carrying observers and noted that vessels will  
22 have different requirements based on several criteria, including  
23 vessel characteristics and operating area.

24  
25 Lt. Morton discussed radio telecommunication requirements and  
26 indicated that, based on current regulations, Starlink is not an  
27 approved emergency radio telecommunication method.

28  
29 Committee members discussed their experience using Starlink and  
30 noted that it provided effective service, based on their on-the-  
31 water experience. The committee approved the following motion.

32  
33 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to recommend the council**  
34 **write a letter to the U.S. Coast Guard requesting they certify**  
35 **Starlink as an acceptable satellite communication device as soon**  
36 **as possible.** The motion carried with no opposition.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. We have a committee motion  
39 on the board. Mr. Sanchez.

40  
41 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I just wanted to ask something, and I don't know if  
42 this is the appropriate place, but, going back, we were discussing  
43 citizenship, you know, requirements for crews, the 75/25, and I  
44 don't know if this is the spot, again, but it seems like that would  
45 have the mindset of a large crew, large vessel, whereas, in the  
46 Florida Keys, there's a lot of smaller operations that don't have  
47 the number of crew for that 75/25, yet they're facing a lot of  
48 challenges right now, with the not having crew members that were

1 non-citizens to be able to work, and it's really impacting the  
2 fishery, and so I don't know, at some point, if we could kind of  
3 suggest that they consider that, because it's impactful. I don't  
4 know how to rope that into this.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

7  
8 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Mr. Sanchez. I mean, we're going to write  
9 a subsequent letter about the deregulation executive order, right?  
10 I think maybe that could fall under that.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Banks.

13  
14 **DR. BANKS:** So, on that letter, remove crew size limits is on the  
15 deregulation letter already.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and so we have a motion on the board. Is  
18 there any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there any**  
19 **opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.**  
20 Dr. Banks.

21  
22 **DR. BANKS:** Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. So next up on the agenda is Reef Fish,  
25 and what I would like to do is entertain the council, and if this  
26 would be a good break point for everyone, before we get into Reef  
27 Fish. Everyone is okay with that? Then let's take a fifteen-  
28 minute break.

29  
30 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right, folks. We're going to get started in  
33 a few moments. Okay, folks, and can we make our way back to the  
34 table? We'll get started. Okay. Thank you. We're going to get  
35 started with Reef Fish, and, Mr. Schieble is going to walk us  
36 through.

37  
38 **REEF FISH COMMITTEE REPORT**

39  
40 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chair. We have the Reef  
41 Fish Committee report from August 26, 2025. The committee adopted  
42 a modified agenda, Tab B, Number 1, and the minutes, Tab B, Number  
43 2, from the June 2025 meeting were approved as written.

44  
45 Final Action: Draft Abbreviated Framework Action: Modifications to  
46 the Federal For-Hire Red Snapper Fishing Season, Tab B, Number 4,  
47 council staff reviewed public comments received regarding the  
48 proposed modification to the federal for-hire red snapper fishing

1 season. Council staff then reviewed the purpose and need and the  
2 current preferred alternative, and the Southeast Regional Office  
3 staff reviewed the draft codified text.

4  
5 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to approve the Abbreviated**  
6 **Framework Action: Modifications to the Federal For-Hire Red**  
7 **Snapper Fishing Season and that it be forwarded to the Secretary**  
8 **of Commerce for review and implementation and deem the codified**  
9 **text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license**  
10 **to make the necessary changes to the document. The council chair**  
11 **is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as**  
12 **necessary and appropriate. The motion carried with one opposed.**  
13 Mr. Chair, we have a committee motion on the board.

14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Do we have any  
16 discussion on the motion on the board? Not seeing any, is there  
17 any opposition to the motion? Sorry, Dr. Simmons. We have to do  
18 a roll call vote.

19  
20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** It's final action.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Final action. Dr. Simmons.

23  
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Osborne is  
25 absent. Dr. Banks.

26  
27 **DR. BANKS:** Yes.

28  
29 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Overton.

30  
31 **DR. OVERTON:** Yes.

32  
33 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Schieble.

34  
35 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I miss the clickers. Yes.

36  
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

38  
39 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes.

40  
41 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Walker.

42  
43 **MR. WALKER:** Yes.

44  
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Sanchez.

46  
47 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.

48

1 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Allen.  
2  
3 DR. ALLEN: Yes.  
4  
5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Captain Frady.  
6  
7 MR. FRADY: Yes.  
8  
9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Geeslin.  
10  
11 MR. GEESLIN: Yes.  
12  
13 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Ms. Ballard.  
14  
15 MS. BALLARD: Yes.  
16  
17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Marquez.  
18  
19 MR. MARQUEZ: Yes.  
20  
21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Dr. Sweetman.  
22  
23 DR. SWEETMAN: Yes.  
24  
25 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Broussard.  
26  
27 MR. BROUSSARD: Yes.  
28  
29 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Anson.  
30  
31 MR. ANSON: Yes.  
32  
33 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Burris.  
34  
35 MR. BURRIS: Yes.  
36  
37 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS: Mr. Dugas.  
38  
39 CHAIRMAN DUGAS: Yes.  
40

Names	Vote		
Mr. Osborne	Absent		
Dr. Banks	yes	Absent	1
Dr. Overton	yes	yes	16
Mr. Schieble	yes	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>17</b>
Mr. Strelcheck	yes		
Capt. Walker	yes		
Mr. Sanchez	yes		
Dr. Allen	yes		
Capt. Frady	yes		
Mr. Geeslin	yes		
Ms. Ballard	yes		
Mr. Marquez	yes		
Dr. Sweetman	yes		
Mr. Broussard	yes		
Mr. Anson	yes		
Mr. Burris	yes		
Mr. Dugas	yes		

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**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** The motion carried sixteen to zero with one absent, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Mr. Schieble.

**MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Final action: Draft Reef Fish Amendment 58B: Modification to Deepwater Grouper Management Measures, Tab B, Number 5, council staff reviewed public comments received regarding the proposed modifications to the management of the deepwater grouper complex.

Council staff then reviewed the purpose and need and the current preferred alternatives. Under Action 1, a committee member acknowledged public comment requesting that the amendment be delayed, but recognizing that yellowedge grouper is undergoing overfishing, and that the council must act to end overfishing as soon as possible, per the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Another committee member thought additional recreational reporting for deepwater grouper species was necessary to better understand recreational catches, especially since the Marine Recreational Information Program, MRIP, was not designed to reliably sample species like those in the deepwater grouper complex. A committee member also thought that phasing-in the catch limit reductions for deepwater grouper would ease expected negative economic and social effects.

1  
2 Under Action 2, a committee member noted the high proportional  
3 standard error about the recreational landings data, stating that,  
4 by NOAA Fisheries' own standards, those data should not be used  
5 for informing management. However, no other recreational landings  
6 data are available, leaving NOAA Fisheries nothing else to use to  
7 manage the recreational sector.

8  
9 NOAA General Counsel encouraged the committee to reinforce its  
10 justification for Preferred Alternative 3 in Action 2. A committee  
11 member recognized that there is an increasing amount of  
12 recreational fishing effort for deepwater grouper species, and  
13 thought that, while an equal reduction in sector ACL had prior  
14 support at the council's June 2025 meeting, the increasing trend  
15 in recreational fishing effort was evident.

16  
17 Another committee member noted that Preferred Alternative 3 is  
18 based on recent recreational landings, which are clearly  
19 increasing on these species.

20  
21 Under Action 3, a committee member thought that using a three-year  
22 simple moving average will help smooth out larger fluctuations in  
23 landings. Council staff clarified that Preferred Alternative 4  
24 uses the average recreational landings over a three-year period  
25 against the average recreational ACL from the same three-year  
26 period and the average deepwater grouper complex landings over a  
27 three-year period against the average deepwater grouper complex  
28 ACL from the same three-year period to determine whether to apply  
29 the accountability measure in the following year. We need to talk  
30 about run-on sentences.

31  
32 **MR. RINDONE:** Sorry about that. Mr. Chair, I actually have a  
33 demonstration of this to show to the council, to make this more  
34 clear, since there were some questions about it.

35  
36 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Roger that.

37  
38 **MR. RINDONE:** I'm going to migrate over to Bernie's seat. All  
39 right, and so what I did was, in the document, on page 26, we  
40 detail how this alternative would ultimately function for year-  
41 one, year-two, and then year-three and subsequent years.

42  
43 In the first year after implementation of the amendment, we would  
44 only use that first year of data. In the second year, we would  
45 average the first year and the second year. Then, in the third  
46 year, and every year thereafter, we would be using that three-year  
47 moving average.

1 I've made up some numbers here for the recreational landings, which  
2 is this column, against the recreational ACL, which is Column C.  
3 The deepwater grouper complex landings assume -- The deepwater  
4 grouper complex landings here in Column D, they assume that the  
5 commercial quota, which is currently 478,424 pounds, under  
6 Alternative 3 in Action 2, and it assumes that that's going to be  
7 caught, which, based on the historical landings, seems a safe  
8 assumption to make.

9  
10 Basically, what we're doing is we're adding the recreational  
11 landings from Column B to the assumption that that commercial quota  
12 will be landed in Column D. Then we are comparing that against  
13 the deepwater grouper ACL in each year. This satisfies our  
14 requirement under Magnuson to still be monitoring landings in each  
15 year. We're not just going to ignore them or anything.

16  
17 Under the example, as it's on the screen right now, you guys can  
18 see everything looks great. The average recreational landings  
19 don't exceed the average recreational ACL for that three-year  
20 period, nor do the complex landings exceed the complex ACL.

21  
22 Well, let's say that we have a larger bit of landings in one of  
23 the years, and we have a situation where the three-year average of  
24 recreational landings exceeds the recreational ACL, and so that's  
25 why that box turns red, but the complex landings haven't been  
26 exceeded, and so we still wouldn't trigger the AAM under that  
27 circumstance, but, you know, let's say it's even bigger.

28  
29 Then we end up in a situation where we have exceeded both. The  
30 recreational landings averaged over that three-year period exceed  
31 the average recreational ACL, and the complex landings averaged  
32 over that three-year period also exceed the average complex ACL,  
33 and so that would trigger the accountability measure for the  
34 following year. NMFS would close the season when the recreational  
35 ACL is projected to be met.

36  
37 Now, why we have to average the ACLs also is let's say we're in a  
38 situation where the Science Center is able to do an interim  
39 analysis, and that interim analysis says things are getting better,  
40 and we're going to increase the catch limits, and you guys decide  
41 we're going to increase it 50,000, and it's going to go up 100,000  
42 pounds, and we're going to split that evenly between commercial  
43 and recreational, just because that makes this demonstration  
44 easier for me to do.

45  
46 We change this to 106,000 here, and we add 50,000 pounds here, and  
47 we add that sum of 100,000 pounds here. Now you can see why it  
48 matters. The reason why we're still averaging what happened in

1 the years prior to that ACL change is because whatever happened in  
2 these years right here, before that ACL change, in some way or  
3 another, through fishing effort or the effects on the biomass, has  
4 led us to whatever new stock condition that we're in that's  
5 resulting in the new catch limit that we're implementing, and so  
6 that history matters, and so that's why you would continue to  
7 average that recreational ACL, but, in this circumstance, again,  
8 we're in a situation where we wouldn't be triggering the AM,  
9 because only the recreational -- The average recreational landings  
10 compared to the average recreational ACL is exceeded, but not the  
11 complex landings against the complex ACL. We're still safe there,  
12 and so that would not trigger the accountability measure in this  
13 example.

14  
15 This can be sent around to you guys, and you can play with it a  
16 little if you like, but are there any questions? All right.  
17 Great. Bernie, it's yours again.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Mr. Schieble.

20  
21 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. All right. So then, next,  
22 SERO staff reviewed the draft codified text. Do we have any  
23 interest in making a motion to take final action on this document,  
24 58B?

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So, we're looking for a motion. Dr. Banks.

27  
28 **DR. BANKS:** Bernie, can you pull up the motion for final action  
29 for 58B? We just need like the usual final action text, and we're  
30 not making any changes to it for 58B.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Is there any other discussion while Bernie pulls  
33 up the motion? Okay.

34  
35 **DR. BANKS:** So, my motion is to approve the Draft Reef Fish  
36 Amendment 58B: Modifications to Deepwater Grouper Management  
37 Measures, and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce  
38 for review and implementation and deem the codified text as  
39 necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make  
40 the necessary changes to the document. The Council Chair is given  
41 the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary  
42 and appropriate.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. We have a motion on the  
45 board. Is there a second? It' seconded by Mr. Walker. Ms. Levy.

46  
47 **MS. LEVY:** Yes, and I just -- We may have to make minor changes to  
48 the codified text, because it doesn't necessarily reflect the

1 average language, because there is no -- There's one ACL, right,  
2 and so we'll have to think about how we might want to change that  
3 to reflect that we're using the average ACL, if there's ever a  
4 change.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

7  
8 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I just want to note that I have concerns with using  
9 the average, and as illustrated, and particularly when it says  
10 accountability measure not realized, if there's an overage from  
11 one sector, and, conceptually, I always think that the sector that  
12 does the overrun should be the one sharing -- You know, having to  
13 deal with the payback, and not the other group, that's not  
14 overrunning, subsidizing that. I don't kind of like that concept  
15 at all.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

18  
19 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. John, I understand the  
20 concern there, but I think why we're trying to navigate this is  
21 because of the uncertainty in the data, that we all recognize is  
22 highly uncertain there, and so it accommodates for that, but, kind  
23 of to that point, I mean, I can support this motion, at the end of  
24 the day.

25  
26 I think we even heard from some of the commercial folks in the  
27 audience, who had previously not wanted to support this, but I do  
28 think, following passing of this motion, we do need to have a  
29 discussion about some sort of better data collection program for  
30 this fishery right now, so we can try and get out of this situation  
31 here, and, you know, have better data, where we can actually manage  
32 this, so we're not dealing with some of these issues here.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Rindone.

35  
36 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, just to clarify, there  
37 are no payback provisions right now for deepwater grouper, and so  
38 that's -- That wouldn't be a thing here, and the accountability  
39 measure is still specific to the recreational sector.

40  
41 The commercial sector would still receive its quota exactly as  
42 prescribed, even if the recreational sector were to go over. The  
43 recreational sector would be closed in the year when -- Like the  
44 year following the accountability measure being triggered, based  
45 on when NMFS projects that they would be landing their ACL. That  
46 wouldn't have a direct effect on the commercial sector at all, and  
47 so the accountability measure still applies explicitly to the  
48 recreational sector, and there is no payback that would affect the

1 commercial sector.  
2  
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for that, Mr. Rindone. Is there any  
4 further discussion on the motion? Not seeing any, is there --  
5 Sorry. Roll call. I forgot again. Dr. Simmons.  
6  
7 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. All right.  
8 Captain Walker.  
9  
10 **MR. WALKER:** Yes.  
11  
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Schieble.  
13  
14 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes.  
15  
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Geeslin.  
17  
18 **MR. GEESLIN:** Yes.  
19  
20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Sanchez.  
21  
22 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.  
23  
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Burris.  
25  
26 **MR. BURRIS:** Yes.  
27  
28 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Banks.  
29  
30 **DR. BANKS:** Yes.  
31  
32 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Anson.  
33  
34 **MR. ANSON:** Yes.  
35  
36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Overton.  
37  
38 **DR. OVERTON:** Yes.  
39  
40 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck.  
41  
42 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes.  
43  
44 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Captain Frady.  
45  
46 **MR. FRADY:** Yes.  
47  
48 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Sweetman.

1  
2 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes.  
3  
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Dr. Allen.  
5  
6 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes.  
7  
8 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Osborne is absent. Mr. Marquez.  
9  
10 **MR. MARQUEZ:** Yes.  
11  
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Ms. Ballard.  
13  
14 **MR. BALLARD:** Yes.  
15  
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Broussard.  
17  
18 **MR. BROUSSARD:** Yes.  
19  
20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Dugas.  
21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes.  
23

Names	Vote		Vote	Count of Vote
Capt. Walker	yes			
Mr. Schieble	yes		Absent	1
Mr. Geeslin	yes		yes	16
Mr. Sanchez	yes		<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>17</b>
Mr. Burris	yes			
Dr. Banks	yes			
Mr. Anson	yes			
Dr. Overton	yes			
Mr. Strelcheck	yes			
Capt. Frady	yes			
Dr. Sweetman	yes			
Dr. Allen	yes			
Mr. Osborne	Absent			
Mr. Marquez	yes			
Ms. Ballard	yes			
Mr. Broussard	yes			
Mr. Dugas	yes			

24  
25  
26 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** The motion carried sixteen to zero  
27 with one absent, Mr. Chair.  
28  
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Before we move on, Chris,

1 I didn't -- I'm going to go back to Dr. Sweetman. You made a  
2 comment that you wanted to have a conversation.

3  
4 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, obviously, for those  
5 that were here, we received that presentation from Mr. Pausina  
6 about a data collection program for the recreational sector. I  
7 will say, you know, even in public comment that we heard last  
8 night, where -- The recreational sector typically does not like  
9 mandatory reporting, but it sounded like most people were onboard  
10 with this, because we have really low catch levels, and the data  
11 precision of what we currently have is not sufficient enough to  
12 manage this.

13  
14 I would like to have a discussion around the table to see if  
15 there's any interest in trying to set something like this up, what  
16 that might look like, and I realize there's probably going to be  
17 a lot of details that need to be ironed out in between, but at  
18 least trying to figure out what we need there.

19  
20 I mean, I think at a very basic level, you know, and I think  
21 Captain Walker mentioned HMS reporting, where it's something as  
22 simple as did you go fishing, and did you catch something, and we  
23 don't need to know the size. There's no minimum size limits here  
24 for these species here. Then how many people are on your boat.

25  
26 It can be something as simple as that. I think we do need to work  
27 out the details for, you know, how dockside intercepts would occur,  
28 things along those lines, but I would like to see if there's any  
29 interest in the council putting something forward like that.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Sanchez.

32  
33 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes, I agree, and I appreciate the segue. I'm not  
34 sure, and I do want to make a motion that we, you know, pursue  
35 something, but I'm not sure what that something is, because I would  
36 think, intuitively, we're not ready for a document, because we  
37 don't really know what we're advocating, or wanting, but I  
38 definitely would like maybe some help identifying at least a  
39 presentation, where we review different mandatory reporting  
40 systems for this fishery.

41  
42 It might be something along the lines of what was presented to us  
43 this week, or something from the HMS playbook, with, you know,  
44 some kind of requirement that there's a deepwater grouper permit  
45 in the Gulf of Mexico, with the same similar requirements as the  
46 HMS, using that as a template, and then we go from there, and we  
47 evolve it.

48

1 You know, we have a lot of technology now, to be able to do things  
2 with apps in real time and all that, and my only concern is I want  
3 to do this as quickly as possible, because of the PSEs in managing  
4 this, because of the status and the life history of the fishery,  
5 and that we need to do something to try to, you know, bring this  
6 back, and I'm not sure which one would be quicker, because we're  
7 going to have funding questions. We're going to have which  
8 platform do we use, and all that. I would like to have that  
9 discussion now, with a goal of ending up in a motion that we start  
10 to do something.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Sanchez. Dr. Allen.

13  
14 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would just -- I would like  
15 to speak in support of us exploring a way to get better reporting  
16 data, some kind of -- I would lean towards some kind of mandatory  
17 reporting.

18  
19 I think that the most prudent approach is to work with the states  
20 on how that could be accomplished. There are several models out  
21 there right now that do that for some of the reef fish stocks, but  
22 just to acknowledge, and I haven't heard anyone here this week  
23 that disagrees with the idea that the current reporting for  
24 deepwater grouper is never going to give us the precision to have  
25 reliability in the recreational landings, and I think we should  
26 explore working with the states to figure out a way to get better  
27 data for reporting this complex.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Allen. Mr. Anson.

30  
31 **MR. ANSON:** I agree with Mr. Sanchez and Dr. Allen's comments as  
32 to where we are right now and the potential for such a program,  
33 but it will be -- I think it still will be a challenge, certainly,  
34 to get it off the ground.

35  
36 I would -- As far as -- Depending upon, again, the motion we decide  
37 to go with, but, if we decide to go down a path of, you know,  
38 seeing what other programs might -- How they're set up, and how  
39 they might be able to provide us some data that we're looking for,  
40 relative to the HMS program, I would be interested, if that's what  
41 we decide, to have them provide us any information they might have  
42 on the effectiveness, or the reporting rate, because, from  
43 Alabama's perspective at least, we have been mandatory reporting  
44 on three-species, red snapper, gray triggerfish, and greater  
45 amberjack, and there is a declining trend in participation as you  
46 move down to the frequency in catches of those three species.

47  
48 It's pretty significant, and so, although the deepwater grouper is

1 a fairly unique, small group of anglers, I think, and so it might  
2 not be a challenge to educate them, and get the word out for  
3 reporting, and I think, the smaller the number of anglers you have,  
4 it's still going to be difficult in trying to get them to -- And  
5 to get the participation that you need in order to get the  
6 precision in those things that we are trying to address. Thank  
7 you.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. Next, I have Dr. Banks,  
10 followed by Andy.

11  
12 **DR. BANKS:** I just wanted to mention, with the discussion here  
13 about the HMS reporting, there is an HMS Advisory Panel meeting  
14 next week, and so we should have an update on whether they have  
15 decided to go forward with rulemaking on reporting for all species  
16 or not, and so that might actually negate some of this conversation  
17 here.

18  
19 Also, I would like to just state support for maybe working with  
20 the states on this. I think this is such a unique fishery that  
21 the states would have a better handle than one-size-fits-all across  
22 the entire Gulf in trying to get deepwater grouper landings.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. Mr. Strelcheck.

25  
26 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and I'm in agreement with, obviously, a lot  
27 of the points around the table. Where I see value right now is  
28 information that could be shared with us, right, and so looking at  
29 other models that might exist for more of these rare-event species,  
30 the states, obviously, whether there's opportunities to integrate  
31 with those state surveys or not, you know, requiring permits for  
32 deepwater species, and I think we probably need to look kind of  
33 holistically at what's the suite of options on the table.

34  
35 The challenge with this fishery is it's rare event, and hard to  
36 sample, large vessels coming into private docks, you know, and  
37 lots of factors will go into, you know, how we can collect that  
38 data, and understanding kind of the pros and cons of the various  
39 approaches could be very helpful to best design a data collection  
40 program. You know, it would really be good to maybe figure out a  
41 way to pilot test something and think through how we could start  
42 something up, just to see the value of it.

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

45  
46 **MR. WALKER:** I think most of us, that I've spoken with anyways,  
47 kind of agree. At the very least, if we could do some kind of a  
48 permit, or an endorsement, it would give the universe of people

1 that are deepwater fishing, rather than trying to extrapolate it  
2 from everybody that leaves at the dock.

3  
4 On the reporting part of it, and I've just mentioned it to a few  
5 people, and it's a little different, but the swordfish HMS app is  
6 already in existence. We report swordfish when we catch one. You  
7 just fill in like four or five boxes, and you hit "send", and it's  
8 -- There's a record of it, and it's on a NOAA page, and a NOAA  
9 app, and it looks to me -- Maybe it's not this simple, but you  
10 could put deepwater on there, and the framework and everything is  
11 right there.

12  
13 It seems like it could be worked right in. I might be  
14 oversimplifying that, but there is an app. I don't know about  
15 validation and all that kind of stuff, but there's something in  
16 existence, that is pretty simple to report, that a lot of us  
17 already have.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Walker. Mr. Burris.

20  
21 **MR. BURRIS:** I've got a question, or I guess two questions. On  
22 these HMS species that are being reported, are there quota involved  
23 with those species, or is this just reporting, and then, obviously,  
24 being from Mississippi, we're no strangers from reporting apps.  
25 I'm curious, and would this have to be -- If whatever system was  
26 decided on, would it have to be calibrated, similar to the way  
27 Tails 'n Scales and Snapper Check were calibrated?

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

30  
31 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I think those are all fair questions. I would say,  
32 no, if it's a commensurate system across-the-board here, but, at  
33 the same time, I think, to Mr. Strelcheck's point, maybe the most  
34 prudent course would be to -- Because I don't think we want to be  
35 too prescriptive here. I think we still have some questions about  
36 how this would work, right?

37  
38 Like I don't know if I can commit right now for, you know, the  
39 state agency, on my perspective, to do all these dockside  
40 intercepts, or validation, and so I think maybe the most prudent  
41 course of action would be to see what options are available. You  
42 know, I think Andy highlighted -- Well, someone highlighted a  
43 permit requirement, at a basic, or, you know, something like what  
44 Mr. Pausina put forward, or something like an HMS app, or something  
45 like that, that's just very straightforward.

46  
47 I would like to maybe see pros and cons associated with each, to  
48 help us make that decision, but, without seeing it, it's tough to

1 answer, whether calibration or anything would need to happen there,  
2 Mr. Burris.

3  
4 **MR. BURRIS:** Thanks, C.J. It's just the calibration part is really  
5 concerning, with such a small ACL, and so I just want to get that  
6 out there.

7  
8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Sanchez.

9  
10 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I appreciate the discussion that we're having, and,  
11 just to keep this on track, I would like to make a motion, and I'm  
12 going to try to be as open, so that -- Since this is very chicken-  
13 and-egg, we could do it, but at least we have something on the  
14 record to keep us on track here.

15  
16 **The motion is to request a presentation, or presentations, that**  
17 **explore the use of a mandatory reporting system for the**  
18 **recreational sector of the deepwater grouper fishery.**

19  
20 I'm just trying to keep this open, so that these different things  
21 that we just kicked around the table we can bring them in the form  
22 of a presentation, and then get a little more involved in this.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Mr. Sanchez. Bernie has your motion on the  
25 board. Do we have a second? It's seconded by Dr. Overton. Chris,  
26 I know you had your hand up. Does it pertain to the motion?

27  
28 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** No, and it was to the discussion prior, but it's  
29 relative, I guess, and so I agree with the motion on the board.  
30 Also, I agree with what Mr. Sanchez said earlier about this needs  
31 to be integrated, or at least working with the states, because I  
32 think having the state landing data also, to supplement what a  
33 reporting app would have, would be critical, and the example I'll  
34 use is the HMS reporting.

35  
36 There's a significant difference between what's reported through  
37 HMS and what is actually observed dockside with LA Creel. I can  
38 tell you that, and so I think having both of those would make this  
39 work very well, and so we need to make sure that I think this is  
40 run at the state level, also.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for your comments. Mr. Schieble. Is  
43 there any more discussion on Mr. Sanchez's motion? Dr. Simmons,  
44 followed by Mr. Walker.

45  
46 **MR. WALKER:** Just a question. We're requesting a presentation  
47 from staff on this. Would that be your intent, John, or who are  
48 we requesting a presentation from?

1  
2 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I don't really care, as long as we get one.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

5  
6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I was  
7 speaking with Mr. Donaldson, and I don't know if, at the commission  
8 meetings, during, you know, GulfFIN, or any of the meetings where  
9 we've talked about the different data collection programs with the  
10 states and the licensure and all that, and we did have a motion,  
11 and I think it was way back from 2022, where we were looking into  
12 those reporting requirements for offshore anglers, but, during  
13 that process, and I don't know if the states and staff discussed  
14 any type of app for reporting in the past, like the iSnapper or  
15 Fish Rules or anything, using anything like that.

16  
17 **MR. DONALDSON:** I mean, we have discussed that, but it wasn't a  
18 general discussion of all the various apps. It was specific to a  
19 particular project, and I don't know that we have something that's  
20 consolidated that we could share, I mean, that would help with  
21 this.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.

24  
25 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So we kind of went through some of these apps at  
26 the IRA Discard Workshop, particular to discards, of course, right,  
27 but I think the common consensus, at that workshop, was that, you  
28 know, self-reporting apps are good for rare-event species  
29 occurrences, like you can maybe consider this, but not necessarily  
30 for high-abundance intercepts like red snapper, right, and so  
31 there's a difference there with self-reported data, versus what  
32 you're going to have at dockside and effort validation and all  
33 that, and so, yes, that would be perfect for this, I think.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

36  
37 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I was just going to highlight that, I mean, over on  
38 the Atlantic coast there, we do have a reporting app right now  
39 relative to our exempted fishing permits for red snapper out there.  
40 We're collecting a ton of information in there, and so it would be  
41 a lot more simplistic with something like this, but, I mean, I  
42 could offer that up as an example for potentially some sort of  
43 platform to utilize there.

44  
45 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. So, in some of the  
46 conversation I've had off the record with Chris, it seems like  
47 Louisiana could do something in a simple fashion, in a quicker  
48 fashion. The challenge is the funding, to me, whether it's Gulf-

1 wide, state-specific, regardless, and we're going to have a funding  
2 issue somewhere, or everywhere, and so I just wanted to -- No one  
3 mentioned funding, and I wanted to bring that up. We have to be  
4 thinking about that as well.

5  
6 I would support, and be in favor, of something like Mr. Pausina's  
7 app, if it was funded and implemented into a state program of some  
8 sort. I think it would be more streamlined, and quicker. We have  
9 asked Mr. Pausina, off the record, to come back with some estimated  
10 pricing, or what it would cost to fund some of it, and so I'm  
11 hopeful he gets back with myself, and/or Dr. Simmons, and maybe we  
12 can update the council. Mr. Sanchez, and then Mr. Walker.

13  
14 **MR. SANCHEZ:** I was going to ask Dave for the money.

15  
16 **MR. WALKER:** I don't know if it's practical, but, if there was a  
17 fee for a deepwater grouper permit, I don't know how much you could  
18 raise, or what the cost would be, but, if there were a \$50.00 fee  
19 for a deepwater grouper permit, and, I mean, these guys spend  
20 \$1,500 a trip on gas. I think they would be fine. I mean, I don't  
21 want to speak for everybody, but maybe you could fund it through  
22 the fee for the deepwater grouper permit, and don't tell anybody  
23 I said that.

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

26  
27 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and so I think part of this presentation would  
28 be pros and cons associated with each option that we might have  
29 there, right, and funding certainly would be one of those. I will  
30 say that adding a fee on -- If this is ultimately like a state-  
31 run thing, that creates some issues with our respective rulemaking,  
32 and legislative authority that we have there on that particular  
33 thing, and so I just wanted to highlight that, but I think this is  
34 why like we need to have a presentation to kind of flesh some of  
35 this stuff out.

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Mr. Schieble, and then  
38 we're going to wrap it up.

39  
40 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, and I concur with what Dr. Sweetman said. We  
41 have the same situation in Louisiana, where, you know, if we were  
42 going to do dockside validation of this, the vision I would have  
43 is more of a SEFHIER-level type of thing, where we have federal  
44 employees that come, and are administered and scheduled by the  
45 state, but run that way federally to do that, because we can't.  
46 We cannot administer a mandatory reporting system through LA Creel.  
47 It's in rule, and so we would have to have a supplemental side-  
48 by-side, but then, you know, you're still getting the dockside

1 intercept and effort data from LA Creel, like you normally would  
2 get, which would definitely benefit this.

3  
4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Back to the motion on  
5 the board. **Is there any opposition? Not seeing any, the motion**  
6 **carries.** Mr. Schieble.

7  
8 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Back to Draft Options: Reef  
9 Fish Amendment 58A: Shallow-Water Grouper Complex Management  
10 Considerations, Tab B, Number 6.

11  
12 The committee discussion focused primarily on considerations for  
13 distributing individual fishing quota, or IFQ, among the new  
14 complexes, IFQ flexibility measures, the black grouper complex  
15 accountability measure, scamp complex catch limits, and scamp  
16 complex recreational accountability measures.

17  
18 The new scamp complex IFQ management measures, Actions 1 and 2,  
19 some committee members advocated for distributing shares such that  
20 shareholders would receive the same percentages in each of the two  
21 new categories that they held upon dissolution of the other  
22 shallow-water grouper complex.

23  
24 Some committee members also advocated for removing the IFQ  
25 accountability measures, including the additional 4 percent buffer  
26 between the commercial ACL and quota, since the catch levels being  
27 considered are already greatly reduced as a result of the latest  
28 stock assessment.

29  
30 Another committee member reported hearing support for allowing  
31 some flexibility measure within the scamp complex, especially for  
32 speckled hind, aka kitty Mitchell. SERO staff indicated they could  
33 provide some additional information on possible IFQ scenarios  
34 based on management decisions presented in the document at Full  
35 Council. Mr. Strelcheck.

36  
37 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so, based on what I presented yesterday,  
38 I feel like there's some additional alternatives that we need to  
39 consider in Actin 1, and so, Bernie, if you could bring up my  
40 motion.

41 **My motion is, in Amendment 58A, Action 1, develop new alternatives**  
42 **for distributing black grouper complex and scamp complex shares**  
43 **based on landings history, other shallow-water grouper**  
44 **shareholdings, or a combination of the two. Additionally, develop**  
45 **options for setting share caps for new complexes.** If I have a  
46 second, I'll explain more.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Mr. Strelcheck has a motion on the board.

1 Do we have a second? Dr. Sweetman seconds. Andy.

2  
3 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So I think there's pros and cons, obviously, to  
4 different approaches for potentially reallocating shares. This  
5 doesn't, obviously, bind us to choosing these, but I think we need  
6 to better understand some of these tradeoffs, like were discussed  
7 late yesterday. Additionally, I've added the share caps. That's  
8 something we hadn't thought of until this morning, and so thanks  
9 to Jessica Stephen, that we do need to make sure we specify share  
10 caps for the new complexes.

11  
12 Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Do we have any discussion? Dr.  
13 Sweetman, followed by Mr. Walker.

14  
15 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and, I mean, I recognize that we might need to  
16 consider other options, based on that presentation yesterday, and  
17 so thank you to you and Jessica for putting that up there, but I  
18 guess my question is we're adding new things in here, and there's  
19 somewhat of a time component associated with this amendment, and  
20 now we don't even -- I was under the assumption we were trying to  
21 select preferreds at this meeting for this, and, obviously, this  
22 would punt that back at least for this one particular action. I  
23 see Dr. Froeschke.

24  
25 That was just my concern, and, like I said, I support the concept  
26 of a motion. I realize that we probably need to consider other  
27 options here, but timing is going to be an issue.

28  
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** To that, Dr. Froeschke.

30  
31 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I guess just a little bit of guidance. In Appendix  
32 A of the document, we have an action that we -- The distribution  
33 of IFQ program shares to newly established share categories under  
34 the other shallow-water grouper complex, and it was removed  
35 previously to Considered but Rejected, and so do we need to undo  
36 that, or -- I guess, I mean, there's alternatives in there, if you  
37 want to look at them.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Froeschke. I'm going to go to Mr.  
40 Walker.

41  
42 **MR. WALKER:** So, in discussions with the staff yesterday after the  
43 meeting, it was demonstrated to me that trying to include catch  
44 history at all in this is going to be extremely difficult, because  
45 there's so many different scenarios of catch history. You might  
46 have leased some, and therefore you didn't land it, and so you  
47 don't get the history, and somebody that leased it actually got  
48 the history, and, you know, if anybody wants more information, Dr.

1 Hollensead and Dr. Diagne are the ones that pointed out that it's  
2 going to be extremely difficult to try and work catch history into  
3 it.

4  
5 They pretty much convinced me that it's probably not going to work,  
6 and brought me back around to just the regular one-for-one  
7 distribution, although I would throw in that I'm in favor of the  
8 second part of this, for sure.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Walker. Mr. Strelcheck.

11  
12 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so I remain very concerned about the  
13 unintended consequences of essentially distributing a lot of quota  
14 for one complex to people that aren't landing it, and vice versa,  
15 right, and I think this was trying to get at better understanding  
16 and exploring kind of the current dynamics within the fishery.  
17 Does this help balance out what are being caught by the fishermen,  
18 relative to how they're being allocated quota, and I appreciate  
19 John pointing out the Considered but Rejected section.

20  
21 That's, in large part, kind of that combination of the two, because  
22 it's looking at landings history and shareholdings, and I don't  
23 recall, obviously, when we took that out, but I feel like it is  
24 something that would be important to resurrect and bring back, and  
25 I was trying to be general, to give some IPT flexibility with  
26 regard to development of this.

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Do we have any other  
29 comments, or any further discussion on the motion? Dr. Simmons.

30  
31 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I guess, just to Dr. Froeschke's  
32 point, I mean, would we want to look at those alternatives, or do  
33 we want -- Do we know for sure we need new alternatives that are  
34 in the appendix, if this passes?

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.

37  
38 **MS. LEVY:** I mean you could start with Appendix A, but Appendix A  
39 was before we restructured this whole document, and so it considers  
40 both complexes, black grouper and the other one, and calls them  
41 Subcomplex A and B. We're only talking about the scamp complex  
42 here, and so you could start with these, if you want to, but it  
43 needs to be modified to reflect that it's just scamp, and we don't  
44 have to keep all of these options, necessarily.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy. I'm looking around the table  
47 for an appetite on a path forward.

48

1 **MS. LEVY:** Sorry, ignore that comment. I was thinking it was just  
2 scamp, but you're doing it for both complexes. We would just need  
3 to rename them and stuff.

4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

6

7 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So, Mara, we previously moved options and  
8 alternatives to Considered but Rejected. They would have to be  
9 wordsmithed, but they were largely the intent I'm trying to  
10 accomplish, and so would it be better for me to just make a motion  
11 to add those back to the document? What's the cleanest approach  
12 here, because, otherwise, we're going to have a Considered but  
13 Rejected section that includes alternatives that are very similar  
14 to what would be in the amendment.

15

16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.

17

18 **MS. LEVY:** Yes, and, I mean, if that's what you're thinking of,  
19 then you would move them back, but then you would also want to  
20 include your component, with the shared caps, right, and I guess  
21 you could make a different motion, if you wanted to.

22

23 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Can we go back to my motion?

24

25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I'm going to give Mr. Strelcheck an opportunity  
26 to filter through this.

27

28 **MR. STRELCHECK:** It's always hard to wordsmith on the fly, but,  
29 you know, something along the lines of, in Action 1, include the  
30 alternatives from the Considered but Rejected section, or re-add  
31 the alternatives from the Considered but Rejected section, and  
32 maybe that would be better put. The statement at the bottom of  
33 "Additionally, develop options" would be added at the end of that.

34

35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.

36

37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think  
38 this was removed last August, but I'll look at staff to see, and  
39 I guess I'm a little -- I haven't -- I apologize that I haven't  
40 read that section of the minutes, but I guess the question is why  
41 did we take it out last year, and so do we remember why we did  
42 that?

43

44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Hollensead.

45

46 **DR. LISA HOLLENSEAD:** Okay, and so, from last year, and I've got  
47 the minutes pulled up from Full Council, and so this is like  
48 something out of a nightmare, right, where we pull out like the

1 what you said verbatim about this, but so there was a motion to  
2 put this to Considered but Rejected, which is reflected in the  
3 document.

4  
5 Some of the rationale provided was the concept of moving shares,  
6 and everything like that, needs to really be considered if it's on  
7 its own amendment, if it needs to be applicable to all IFQ species  
8 and not just the four shallow-water, because, at the time, as Ms.  
9 Levy has pointed out, it was also deepwater.

10  
11 These four shallow-water grouper and deepwater that we're talking  
12 about here, and, just give it some personal perspective, I don't  
13 think that it's reasonable, or appropriate, to take away shares  
14 from someone who purchased it, and so I think, after working on 59  
15 and 60, it's probably an appropriate place to discuss that kind of  
16 thing.

17  
18 It seemed like, while this concept was something that perhaps the  
19 council was interested in investigating a little bit more, the  
20 feeling of the committee at the time was not in this document, and  
21 something in 59 and 60 might be more appropriate, as sort of a  
22 more holistic look at the program, was the rationale provided, and  
23 so just to give you a little bit of history, and so that's why it  
24 was ultimately moved to where it is now.

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

27  
28 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thank you, Lisa. I appreciate that background.  
29 I'm still struggling with -- I think this is where we have, you  
30 know, fast forward a year, right, and we have now more information.  
31 We have, you know, the presentation that I discussed yesterday,  
32 and the consequences, obviously, of this distribution.

33  
34 59 and 60 have been stalled out for quite some time, right, and so  
35 do we do it here? Do we wait? If we wait, I think we're still  
36 talking years down the road before we complete 59 or 60 and deal  
37 with this, and so I would rather address it in 58A, the best we  
38 can, and, even if these options aren't selected as preferred, I  
39 think it will benefit us with 59 and 60, in that we can better  
40 understand the dynamics as we move forward with those amendments  
41 later.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. The one thing we did  
44 not do is check with the seconder after the motion was revised.  
45 Mr. Walker, then Dr. Diagne.

46  
47 **MR. WALKER:** So, Andy, is Alternative 1 here -- Are these pretty  
48 much what we're -- Alternative 1 would just be distributed out

1 like we discussed yesterday, one and one, and so these are similar  
2 to what your motion was?

3  
4 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So Alternative 1 is already in the document. You  
5 know, we're going to have to reword, or renumber, these  
6 alternatives regardless, and so it's really Alternatives 2 and 3  
7 that look at landings history, or a combinational of landings  
8 history and shareholdings.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Diagne.

11  
12 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and, I mean, no opinion really one way or another  
13 on the motion. I mean, it has two parts. Obviously, I mean, the  
14 share caps -- That we need, because, I mean, other shallow-water  
15 grouper will no longer exist as a share category, but what I wanted  
16 to point out is that, I mean, credit to Reef Fish Amendment 29,  
17 which established the IFQ, and this type of scenario was  
18 envisioned, and 29 did include text saying that, although we  
19 defined these share categories, I mean, which we then list, but -  
20 - Let me see what was said there.

21  
22 The share categories may be amended in the future to allow the  
23 council to further its conservation mission or improve the  
24 administration of the program. For example, if, let's say, you  
25 know, a species is overfished, or needs management, we can redefine  
26 the share categories, and we have to remember that this whole thing  
27 was started because we received catch advice for scamp. Without  
28 it, we would have, you know, left it as it was, but, to be able to  
29 do that, we had two choices, to give everyone a massive haircut,  
30 to make sure that we protect scamp, or create these new  
31 subcomplexes, and that is what we have done so far.

32  
33 Amendment 29 went further and said that, you know, once you  
34 redefine, you can just stick with the method of distribution that  
35 you already specified, and so probably evaluating an alternative  
36 distribution method in this case would help some, but the likely  
37 beneficiary, if there are any, would be those people who only fish  
38 for black grouper, and those are very few, as far as we know. They  
39 are not really a majority, and so, at the end of the day, really,  
40 it's a balance.

41  
42 Do we want to probably help a very small group, at the expense of  
43 others, or do we want, at the end of the day, to let the fishermen  
44 sort it out, which is what the program was designed for, and that,  
45 you know, is a decision that, I guess, as a body, you guys want to  
46 make. Thank you.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Diagne. Dr. Sweetman.

1  
2 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Assane, and thank you, Dr. Hollensead,  
3 for reading those minutes, because now that's sparking my memory  
4 for why we booted that out, and that's why I appreciate what Dr.  
5 Diagne was saying there, and so I think, at the end of the day,  
6 inclusion of this does not necessarily mean we're going to be  
7 selecting these as our preferred, and so I think I'm okay with the  
8 updated language in here, as the seconder.  
9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Is there any  
11 more discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there any**  
12 **opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.**  
13 Mr. Schieble.  
14  
15 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so the next thing in the  
16 committee report that we moved to is a motion on Action 4. Is  
17 there any appetite, or willingness, or want, to look at alternative  
18 -- I mean, Action 2 or 3 in the document, before we move that far  
19 in the committee report?  
20  
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.  
22  
23 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks for bringing that  
24 up, Chris. I think, and as I was kind of mentioning, my concern  
25 with the previous motion was the timing aspect of it, and when  
26 this would ultimately be implemented, because now we're going to  
27 have that separate season component, where we'll be impacting black  
28 grouper, and so I think it makes sense to try and move this forward  
29 as quickly as possible, and so I've got ideas.  
30  
31 Council, feel free to push back on any of my suggested preferreds,  
32 but I'm going to try to move this forward a little bit here. **With**  
33 **that, I would move to make, in Action 2, Alternative 1 the**  
34 **preferred.**  
35  
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We have a motion on the board. Is there  
37 a second? I'll let Bernie get it up.  
38  
39 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Second.  
40  
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble seconds.  
42  
43 **DR. SWEETMAN:** This is related to flexibility measures, for those  
44 that haven't memorized this document yet.  
45  
46 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Mr. Chair, do you want me to read Alternative 2 in  
47 the document, while we're getting this pulled up, so people know  
48 what it says?

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, and that would be fine, Chris.  
3  
4 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So Action 2, Alternative 2 states create a  
5 flexibility measure for warsaw grouper and speckled hind that  
6 accounts for the new share categories in Alternative 2 of Action  
7 1. Create a flexibility measure that allows warsaw grouper and  
8 speckled hind to be designated as DWG, deepwater grouper, share  
9 category species to be landed under scamp complex allocation once  
10 all deepwater grouper allocation in an account has been harvested.  
11 The scamp complex quota would be 4 percent below the scamp complex  
12 ACL established in Action 6.  
13  
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman, is your motion correct on the board?  
15  
16 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, sir.  
17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble is the seconder, and is that correct?  
19  
20 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, sir.  
21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Is there any more discussion on the motion? **Is**  
23 **there any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion**  
24 **carries.** Mr. Schieble. Dr. Sweetman.  
25  
26 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So that's Action 2. The committee report dives  
27 right back into Action 4, and so, if we want any discussion on  
28 Action 3, we need to do it now.  
29  
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Dr. Sweetman.  
31  
32 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so we've got Action 3 is  
33 status determination for maximum sustainable yield for the black  
34 grouper complex. Alternative 1 is not viable. **Alternative 2 is**  
35 **our only other option there right now, and so I would move to make**  
36 **Alternative 2 the preferred alternative under Action 3.**  
37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We'll give Bernie a chance to pull that  
39 up. Is there a second for Dr. Sweetman's motion? Dr. Allen  
40 seconds. Looks good, Dr. Sweetman?  
41  
42 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, sir, Mr. Chair.  
43  
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Do we have any discussion on the motion?  
45 **Not seeing any, do we have any opposition to the motion? Not**  
46 **seeing any, the motion carries.** Mr. Schieble. Dr. Froeschke.  
47  
48 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Just a quick step back. In Action 2, on the

1 flexibility measures, if you select move that -- If you select  
2 Alternative 1 as preferred, no action, could we consider just  
3 removing the action to Considered but Rejected? There's nothing  
4 else in that action.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

7  
8 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Sorry.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.

11  
12 **MS. LEVY:** I mean, I guess you can do that. It just complicates  
13 things if you get maybe comment or something, and you decide that  
14 you actually want to change your preferred, right, and then you've  
15 got to put it back in, and so, I mean, you can do either. It's  
16 just it's -- There's no analysis in this document. It's not  
17 fleshed out at all, and so, if you think that you may want to  
18 consider it, reconsider it, I would leave it. If you're pretty  
19 clear that you don't want it, I guess you could put it in Considered  
20 but Rejected.

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

23  
24 **MR. RINDONE:** So, if you are pretty clear that you don't want it,  
25 from the staff perspective, we would encourage you to move it to  
26 Consider but Rejected, because we are going to have to write all  
27 of this up, and prepare Chapter 4, 3 and 4, and get things ready  
28 to, you know, develop a public hearing draft for you guys to  
29 review, and you just added additional material for Action 1.

30  
31 That's going to be a very heavy lift to get written up in that  
32 way, and so anything that can be done to remove things that you  
33 know that you don't want to do, and move things to Considered but  
34 Rejected that you know that you don't want to do, you know, we  
35 compel you to do so, because it will make it much more efficient  
36 on the staff side of things, to ensure that we can have things  
37 prepared for the timeline that we're trying to hit.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Rindone. Dr. Sweetman.

40  
41 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Point taken. **I am just one council member, and so**  
42 **I would look around the table about this, but I would move to**  
43 **consider Action 2 -- Or to move Action 2 as Considered but**  
44 **Rejected.**

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We have C.J.'s motion on the board, and  
47 Ms. Levy's hand is up.

48

1 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** We can let her speak, but I think it's going to be  
2 the same thing as I'm going to say. I think we need to dispense  
3 with this motion first, and then go backwards, correct, or you may  
4 have the housekeeping -- We didn't vote on it.

5  
6 **MS. LEVY:** Yes, and I think we need to -- If we already had a  
7 motion, and I don't remember, but, to this point, I'll just say,  
8 I mean, that's fine, but I don't think it's fully fleshed out, in  
9 terms of what this does to discards, you know, bycatch, minimizing  
10 bycatch mortality, all of that, and so we can move it to Considered  
11 but Rejected, but this document I think is going to need to address  
12 that we are not doing this, and indicate somehow that that's still  
13 not going to, you know, do something negative with respect to  
14 discards and discard mortality.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. I have Dr. Simmons, and then Mr.  
17 Strelcheck.

18  
19 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I guess,  
20 to that point, I think our staff, Dr. Hollensead, has tried to  
21 work with, I believe, Dr. Sagarese on this, to see if we had some  
22 information on discards, using this mechanism, and I don't think  
23 there's any really available, and so I don't know that we have a  
24 whole lot of data on this right now to say much, really. As you  
25 ratchet down these quotas though, we know there could be discard  
26 issues across-the-board, right?

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Mr. Strelcheck.

29  
30 **MR. STRELCHECK:** My concerns are similar to what Mara has already  
31 mentioned, in that we don't have an analysis on this. We don't  
32 have, obviously, a lot of strong rationale as to why we're removing  
33 it. We've just had a limited amount of discussion at this meeting,  
34 and so my preference is to continue to keep it in.

35  
36 I recognize that it's a little more burden on staff to develop  
37 this section, but I also was hearing, yesterday, some public  
38 testimony for maintaining some flexibility measures. This is  
39 something that's built into the IFQ system, that we're familiar  
40 with, in terms of how to, you know, include them in the system,  
41 and so, if we need to come back and change our preferred, we can  
42 do that at a later meeting, if we so choose to.

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

45  
46 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Well, one thing I just wanted to clarify, but just  
47 to point out, and so the one thing with regard to discards that we  
48 do know is, if you select Alternative 2, that's going to reduce

1 the scant by 4 percent, as it says, and so that 4 percent is going  
2 to be converted to discards, you know, by that same logic, and so  
3 the discards always work both ways.

4  
5 If you allow more discards for flexibility, you have to reduce the  
6 quota, and so then those discards and something -- When you're  
7 ratcheting it down, it's probably going to be converted to  
8 discards. You know, the information that I'm aware of, that we've  
9 looked for the discards, we just don't have much, and so it's  
10 mostly -- I wouldn't say hypothetical, but these kinds of scenarios  
11 of, well, it could create discards this way, and you could  
12 alleviate discards this way, and I don't think, in terms of --  
13 When you get down to brass tacks, and start making quantitative  
14 things, we're not going to have much.

15  
16 The other thing I was just going to ask is, if we got rid of this,  
17 I think this would address that 4 percent buffer in the deepwater  
18 grouper document, and so I just want to make sure we all had that  
19 understanding as well.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.

22  
23 **MS. LEVY:** I don't think that this is written correctly. I think,  
24 because it's only going one way, deepwater to scamp, we would not  
25 take the 4 percent off of scamp. It would be the deepwater grouper,  
26 to protect the deepwater grouper that would be landing under scamp,  
27 to account for that and so I don't think this would reduce the  
28 scamp complex quota. Jessica can speak to that if you want, but  
29 we talked about this, and I think this is written backwards.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Do we want Jessica to speak to it? I'm  
32 looking at council members. Mr. Schieble.

33  
34 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Stephen.

37  
38 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, and I think that would help us understand. I'm  
39 trying to wrap my head around it only going one way.

40  
41 **DR. JESSICA STEPHEN:** Yes, and so Mara is correct. Because you  
42 would be landing the deepwater grouper species under a different  
43 share category, you would reduce the -- You would have the buffer  
44 in the deepwater grouper to account for where they would be landing  
45 on the other category and so the category, the secondary category,  
46 would be the one that doesn't have the buffer, because, in essence,  
47 by landing your deepwater species say under scamp, you're not  
48 landing as much scamp, and so scamp could be equal to the ACL,

1 but, because you're leaning in excess of what we set for the  
2 deepwater, you want the 4 percent buffer, because you're landing  
3 them under another care share category, and apologies that we  
4 didn't catch that earlier.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Froeschke.

7  
8 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Okay, and so say the scamp ACL is 100,000 pounds,  
9 okay, and you land all 100,000 pounds of scamp, but you land an  
10 additional 4 percent in the scamp complex of deepwater grouper.  
11 Then you're over the scamp ACL, and that's what I don't understand.

12  
13 **DR. STEPHEN:** No, because you're using the scamp allocation to  
14 land the deepwater grouper, right, and so, when you're landing  
15 under the flexibility measure, you're using the other category's  
16 allocation, and so, if I land ten pounds of deepwater grouper under  
17 the scamp allocation, that scamp allocation cannot be used to land  
18 scamp, and so, in essence, scamp's landings are decreased by the  
19 flexibility measure.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Dr. Froeschke.

22  
23 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Okay. I understand that, and so that means you  
24 are reducing the allowable harvest of scamp further, another  
25 additional 4 percent, which is kind of -- That's what I was  
26 pointing out about the discards then, and so any of those scamp,  
27 to the extent that we're cutting them down, you're just  
28 contributing more to discards, potentially, based on that.

29  
30 Again, this is speculative, but I was just pointing out to the  
31 committee, or the council, that all of the discard information  
32 that we would bring, that I'm aware of, is going to be those kinds  
33 of tradeoffs, but it's -- The hard data pretty sparse.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.

36  
37 **MR. STRELCHECK:** John, the way you worded it is not correct. We  
38 are not reducing the scamp catch limit, or quota. Fishermen have  
39 the choice though to choose how they're going to harvest that scamp  
40 quota, right, and, if they choose to harvest speckled hind and  
41 warsaw in place of scamp, that's their choice. That's why it's a  
42 flexibility measure. They're out on the water. If they're  
43 encountering those species more so than scamp, then that's what  
44 they can do to use the scamp, or this flexibility measure.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Walker.

47  
48 **MR. WALKER:** But that's only if they're out of the other category,

1 correct, and so it's not -- It's not really meant to be dealer's  
2 choice. It's to cover unusual circumstances, when you don't have  
3 enough to cover it. I think it's being discussed here like it's  
4 just whatever you choose to use it for, and it's really not.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Back to the motion. We need a second. We  
7 have a second by Mr. Walker. Dr. Stephen.

8  
9 **DR. STEPHEN:** I just wanted to say it is derived by the system,  
10 and like you have to be at a one category before the other, but  
11 it's also a different circumstance for every person, depending on  
12 how much allocation they have in both of the categories, and so  
13 that can play a factor as well. I just wanted to mention that,  
14 based on Ed's comments.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Stephen. So, Bernie, we had a  
17 second by Mr. Walker for the motion. Any further discussion? **Any**  
18 **opposition? One in opposition, and one absent.** The motion  
19 carries. Mr. Schieble.

20  
21 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Back to the committee report,  
22 and so the committee discussed the recreational accountability  
23 measure for the new black grouper complex, Action 4. Some  
24 committee members advocated for removing the consideration of a  
25 recreational in-season closure, Alternative 2. Several others  
26 suggested leaving that alternative in the action and recommended  
27 modifying the language in Alternative 3 to provide for the  
28 possibility of recreational access, should the commercial sector  
29 not land its quota.

30  
31 **The committee recommends, and I still move, in Action 4, to modify**  
32 **Alternative 3 as follows. Alternative three is a post-season**  
33 **recreational accountability measure would be implemented for the**  
34 **black grouper complex if the recreational ACL and the black grouper**  
35 **complex ACL are exceeded. In the year following an overage,**  
36 **National Marine Fisheries Service would close the recreational**  
37 **black grouper complex to harvest when the recreational ACL is met**  
38 **or is projected to be met, unless National Marine Fisheries Service**  
39 **determines, based upon the best scientific information available**  
40 **(BSIA) that closure of the recreational fishing season is**  
41 **unnecessary.** The motion carried with no opposition and one absent.  
42 We have a committee motion on the board, Mr. Chair.

43  
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Do we have any  
45 discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition**  
46 **to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.  
47 Dr. Simmons.

1 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I wasn't  
2 sure on this, on this action here for accountability measures, and  
3 we kind of talked a little bit about Alternative 2, with the in-  
4 season monitoring. I mean, black grouper is a pretty, I think,  
5 rare-event species, right, and I don't know what the PSEs are,  
6 right off hand, but do we want to have an in-season management  
7 measure for black grouper?

8  
9 Is that -- To me, we could replace it with something else that was  
10 potentially in the deepwater grouper document that could be more  
11 doable. I just worry about having that in-season measure in there  
12 right now. We don't really know a whole lot about black grouper,  
13 and I don't know if we need that. We're supposedly getting the  
14 MSE, and, if we think we can do that in the future, to me, that  
15 seems more relevant, but I think we've taken a lot of the in-  
16 season management measures out, when we didn't need them, and we  
17 thought it was a rare-event species, but someone can check me on  
18 that.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

21  
22 **DR. SWEETMAN:** The PSEs are relatively high, but so, I mean, Dr.  
23 Simmons, are you suggesting removal of in-season, if that's not  
24 something that we're interested in.

25  
26 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, and I am suggesting that, and,  
27 if we feel like we need another alternative, maybe we could look  
28 at what was in the deepwater grouper document, in addition to the  
29 one you just tweaked, and consider adding it in there. If we don't  
30 need another alternative, I think two is fine, and let's just run  
31 with that.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Mr. Rindone.

34  
35 **MR. RINDONE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. For four of the last six  
36 years, the PSEs for black grouper, aggregated across the year for  
37 West Florida, which is what we would be talking about for the Gulf  
38 anyway, exceed 50 percent, and, in the two years that they don't,  
39 they're 47.6 and 43.4, and so high.

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

42  
43 **DR. ALLEN:** I would agree that we should take out the in-season  
44 and and move it to post-season. I am looking for help with a  
45 motion there with wording, but -- **I would like to move, in Action**  
46 **4, Alternative 2 to Considered but Rejected.** Thank you, and I'm  
47 still new to this, but we want post-season and not in-season, is  
48 what the motion is.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Allen.  
3  
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Alternative 2, and is that correct,  
5 Dr. Allen, and not the whole action? Alternative 2 in Action 4,  
6 correct?  
7  
8 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes. Thank you. Thank you, Carrie. Alternative 2 in  
9 Action 4.  
10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have a second? Dr. Sweetman seconds. Any  
12 further discussion? **Is there any opposition? Not seeing any, the**  
13 **motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.  
14  
15 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Okay, and so, in the committee report, the next  
16 section --  
17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Hold on, Chris. Sorry. Mr. Strelcheck.  
19  
20 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Carrie suggested adding a new alternative, similar  
21 to what we've done for deepwater grouper, and so just, before we  
22 move on, are we wanting to do that? It seems reasonable.  
23  
24 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess I was  
25 just saying, if we needed to add another alternative, we could  
26 look at those and see if there was one that might be better suited  
27 as a post-season measure, but, if we don't need more than two,  
28 based on the changes we made to the new post-season alternatives,  
29 then I think that's fine. I just was bringing that up.  
30  
31 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Dr. Simmons, so, when you're referencing deepwater,  
32 you're referencing the three-year average that we kind of put  
33 forward in that amendment?  
34  
35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, and I think that's the one I'm  
36 suggesting. Sorry, and I was just looking at the modification we  
37 made to Alternative 3, and that does not have that in there, and  
38 is that right? Could you, could you please go back up?  
39  
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.  
41  
42 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks. Sorry, and I had to think about this on  
43 the fly here. I mean, because, to a degree, this would be -- I  
44 mean, relative to those PSEs, kind of a bit of a rare-event  
45 species, I guess, and from that perspective, and so that was  
46 basically the entire justification for why we tried to move forward  
47 on that AM in the deepwater complex.  
48

1 I do suppose that could be an alternative that we might want to  
2 consider here, and not necessarily one that we would choose. I do  
3 think that the modification in Alternative 3 is okay, but, if  
4 there's another option that we wanted to consider there, and I'm  
5 going to look around the table, to see if anyone is interested in  
6 that, or trying to -- Okay. All right. I do see some interest in  
7 that, and so all right. That's going to add another alternative  
8 here, Bernie, in Action 4. Change that language. Hold on.

9  
10 **MR. RINDONE:** Bernie, if you want, you can just copy that Pulitzer-  
11 award-winning work from the deepwater grouper document.

12  
13 **DR. SWEETMAN:** That's where I was going to go too. Thank you, Mr.  
14 Rindone.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Dr. Sweetman.

17  
18 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Okay. Thank you for working on that, Bernie. **So,**  
19 **my motion is, in Action 4, to add a new alternative as follows for**  
20 **the recreational sector: If the average recreational black grouper**  
21 **complex landings exceed the average recreational ACL, and the**  
22 **average black grouper complex landings exceed the average black**  
23 **grouper complex ACL over a three-year moving period, the Regional**  
24 **Administrator would reduce the duration of the recreational season**  
25 **by the amount projected, such that the recreational ACL is not**  
26 **exceeded during the following fishing year, unless NMFS**  
27 **determines, based upon best scientific information available, that**  
28 **no adjustment to the recreational fishing season is necessary.**

29  
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Dr. Allen. Seconded by  
31 Dr. Allen. Any discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, any**  
32 **opposition? The motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.

33  
34 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. In the committee report, the  
35 next course of action is to move into Action 6. Is there any  
36 appetite to want to discuss Action 5 before moving on?

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

39  
40 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I'm probably annoying the council at this  
41 point, but I'm just trying to move forward on some of these, and  
42 so I would move, in Action 5, to make Alternative 2 the preferred.  
43 Alternative 1 is not viable, and it does seem appropriate for my  
44 -- I'll stop here and provide rationale if I get a second.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Action 5, Bernie. Okay. Do we have a second to  
47 Dr. Sweetman's motion?

1 **MR. BURRIS:** I'll second it.  
2  
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Mr. Burris seconds. Any discussion?  
4 Dr. Sweetman.  
5  
6 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So, again, for those that don't have this right in  
7 front of you, this is the SPR and status determination criteria  
8 for the scamp complex. We got SSC recommendations, obviously,  
9 that FMSY proxy at 40 percent SPR is probably appropriate. I do  
10 recognize that there were some considerations with that, relative  
11 to the council here, but, for this, for scamp in particular here,  
12 I do think 40 percent is appropriate, and I think the SSC has  
13 justified that.  
14  
15 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Any other discussion on  
16 the motion? **Any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion**  
17 **carries.** Mr. Schieble.  
18  
19 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Returning to the committee  
20 report, the committee reviewed the sector allocation alternatives  
21 for the scamp complex, Action 6, and decided to wait until after  
22 public comment to select the preferred option.  
23  
24 Additionally, a committee member requested that staff provide  
25 values for a potential new option that would incorporate an equal  
26 reduction based on historical total landings from the new complex  
27 ACL. The resulting reduction percentage would then be applied to  
28 each sector ACL for the new scamp complex, with both sectors using  
29 a longer time series, 2012 through 2023. Council staff stated  
30 they would report back at Full Council.  
31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Hollensead.  
33  
34 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, Bernie, if you  
35 wouldn't mind pulling up that Word document that's got the table  
36 on it that I sent this morning. Just, as was reiterated in the  
37 report, there was -- You know, just asking some clarification of  
38 how to look at some of these values.  
39  
40 What's in the document now is in that top gray period, and so  
41 Option 2b looks at the longer time series, and so it doesn't  
42 include the COVID year, and Option 2c takes the average of the  
43 most recent three years, and so you can see the values for the  
44 commercial ACL, the rec ACL, and then what those percentages would  
45 be, and so that's just a straight-up average. That's what comes  
46 in -- That's what's in the document currently.  
47  
48 If we do the exercise using that same time series, but we do the,

1 quote, unquote, sort of equal haircut approach, where we take, you  
2 know, everything off the top, and then take that percentage and  
3 apply it to different sectors, we actually get very similar values  
4 to what was just a straight-up average for each of those time  
5 series.

6  
7 That's because there's actually not a lot of variability in these  
8 landings. When you total it up for the total ACL, it's only about  
9 a difference of 50,000 pounds, and so that's why you see that here.  
10 There's just not a lot of contrast in the data, when you do it  
11 either way, and so perhaps a decision point for the council at  
12 this point would be do you want staff to leave these values in as  
13 just the averages of these time series, or would you like to go  
14 ahead and say, well, we don't want to be consistent with  
15 potentially using this haircut approach, when we've discussed  
16 these sort of things, and that's up to you, because the value is  
17 at six, and half-dozen of another, and staff would certainly --  
18 Whatever direction you would like to go, those are the values that  
19 we would use.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for the information, Dr. Hollensead.  
22 Dr. Sweetman.

23  
24 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for looking at  
25 this, Dr. Hollensead. So, obviously, just the equal haircut across-  
26 the-board really doesn't change much relative to the average that's  
27 in 2b there. I do like using the longer time series approach, and  
28 I do like, just philosophically speaking, kind of the equal haircut  
29 across-the-board there, and so it's, you know, trying to be fair  
30 and equitable across those sectors.

31  
32 Even though it doesn't change it, perhaps there would be  
33 consideration from the council to replace Option 2b with this new  
34 option that's an equal haircut, rather than just using the average,  
35 but, if there's no appetite for that, in the grand scheme of  
36 things, it doesn't really change the numbers at all.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.

39  
40 **MS. LEVY:** I have a question, maybe for Lisa, and so, the way  
41 Option 2c is written in the document, it's reducing catch limits  
42 equally based on -- So that looks like it is a proportional  
43 reduction, like the same thing that you did. I'm confused.

44  
45 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Yes, and I was confused too, and so I think the  
46 language is written like that, but, when you do the math, it comes  
47 out as a straight average, and so we'll have to look at that, but,  
48 when I just took the average of that value, that's what I get.

1 When I do the haircut value, it comes out a little different, and  
2 so it's -- It looks like it was written that, but the values that  
3 were in there were the straight-up average, and so, even in that  
4 case, we would have to have gone back and amended that.

5  
6 **MS. LEVY:** But, in the table you just showed, they seem to be the  
7 exact same numbers. Were they not?

8  
9 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** For the various approaches, they came out very  
10 similar.

11  
12 **MS. LEVY:** But it looked -- Bernie, can you put the other table  
13 back up there for me? The average 2021 to 2023 looks exact. Oh,  
14 and I see. The numbers are very close, and so the percentage are  
15 exactly the same.

16  
17 **DR. HOLLENSEAD:** Correct. Yes. When you round up.

18  
19 **MS. LEVY:** Okay. Thanks.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Looking around the table, if there's any  
22 more discussion. Ms. Levy.

23  
24 **MS. LEVY:** So, I mean, if there's not a desire to change the way  
25 the alternatives are written from the average standpoint, we could  
26 at least note, in the discussion, that we've also looked at it  
27 based on this proportional reduction, right, and it's come out to  
28 be essentially the same percentage, right, and we've done the work,  
29 and so however you want to approach it. I think it would be  
30 helpful, in the discussion, to note that we've done both of these  
31 ways, and they've come out essentially the same.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, C.J.

34  
35 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I mean, because the numbers don't change, we don't  
36 need to overly complicate things here. It's just really how the  
37 council wants to deal with this kind of issue, as like maybe more  
38 or less a philosophy here, but, if that's not -- Whatever, and  
39 then we can choose to, like Mara said, we've considered this, and  
40 we can just move forward with what we have right here, but, in  
41 that light -- I mean, I am trying to move these forward here a  
42 little bit here, and so I would like to select a preferred, but  
43 I'm not seeing too much appetite to replace something. In that  
44 sense, Bernie, are you ready again? **In Action 6, to make**  
45 **Alternative 2b the preferred.**

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Dr. Sweetman has a motion on the board,  
48 and it is seconded by Mr. Sanchez. Any discussion on the motion?

1 Not seeing any, is there any opposition?  
2

3 **MR. WALKER:** I would like to -- Can we put a motion up there, and  
4 so I can make a positive that I know what I'm voting for here.  
5

6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Understood, Mr. Walker. Bernie, can we put the  
7 entire motion up? Go ahead. C.J.  
8

9 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and just to -- Again, for those that aren't  
10 paying attention here, or, well, don't have this information in  
11 front of you, basically, it would set it up based on 2012 through  
12 2023 landings, excluding 2020, and it would set it up at 38.6  
13 percent commercial and 61.4 percent recreational. It's the average  
14 catch of those years.  
15

16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We'll take a moment to let council members take  
17 a look at it. Go ahead, Dr. Sweetman.  
18

19 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I'll read it in. **In Action 6, in Alternative 2, to**  
20 **make Option 2b the preferred. This would establish catch limits**  
21 **for the scamp complex. The ABC is equal to the stock ACL, which**  
22 **equals the combined sector ACLs that would establish sector**  
23 **allocations for the scamp complex as follows. Commercial and**  
24 **recreational allocations are based on the proportion of average**  
25 **landings for 2012 to 2023, excluding the 2020 COVID year. The**  
26 **commercial sector is allocated 38.6 percent of the scamp and**  
27 **yellowmouth grouper combined ACL, and the recreational sector is**  
28 **allocated 61.4 percent.**  
29

30 A quick question for Lisa. Do we -- Since it's proportion of  
31 average landings that's in here, do we need to modify that  
32 language, based on it's just straight average now?  
33

34 **DR. HOLLENSSEAD:** Yes, and I will probably get with IPT and make  
35 sure that we've got that language correct, or, you know, reflective  
36 of what is happening here. If it needs to be clarified, we'll  
37 work with the IPT on that.  
38

39 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So we would delete that from this, although it's  
40 not -- I guess it's technically within the document.  
41

42 **DR. HOLLENSSEAD:** Right. Yes, and I think -- Certainly I think we  
43 understand that we were just looking at a straight-up average, and  
44 so we'll talk to the IPT, to make sure that that's reflected.  
45

46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Mr. Sanchez was the seconder. Are you  
47 okay with this?  
48

1 **MR. SANCHEZ:** Yes.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Is there any further discussion on  
4 Dr. Sweetman's motion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition?**  
5 **Seeing none, the motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.

6  
7 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Okay, Mr. Chair. Moving on to Action 7 in the  
8 document, the committee decided that implementing an ACT for the  
9 new scamp complex, Action 7, would be appropriate, given the  
10 uncertainty in scamp complex landings. SEDAR 68 assessed scamp  
11 and yellowmouth together, and categorizing those species as a  
12 complex within the council's ABC control rule was deemed  
13 appropriate by several committee members.

14  
15 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 7 to make**  
16 **Alternative 2 the preferred. Alternative 2 is establish a**  
17 **recreational ACT for the scamp complex by applying the council's**  
18 **ACL/ACT control rule and assuming that scamp and yellowmouth**  
19 **grouper are considered a single stock. Use landings data from**  
20 **2019 to 2023, excluding the 2020 COVID year. The ACT would be set**  
21 **at 14 percent below the recreational ACL. The motion carried with**  
22 **no opposition and one absent. Mr. Chair, we have a committee**  
23 **report, a committee motion, on the board.**

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Do we have any  
26 discussion on the motion on the board? **Not seeing any, is there**  
27 **any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.**  
28 Mr. Schieble.

29  
30 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** The committee considered establishing a payback  
31 provision for the recreational sector of the scamp complex, Action  
32 8.2. Southeast Regional Office Staff suggested modifying  
33 Alternative 2 such that a payback would only be triggered should  
34 the scamp complex be designated as overfished.

35  
36 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 8.2, to modify**  
37 **Alternative 2 as follows: Alternative 2 is if recreational scamp**  
38 **complex landings exceed the complex recreational ACL in a fishing**  
39 **year, and the stock complex is overfished, National Marine**  
40 **Fisheries Service would reduce the recreational ACL and ACT for**  
41 **the following fishing year by the amount of the ACL overage in the**  
42 **prior fishing year, unless the best scientific information**  
43 **available determines that a greater, lesser, or no overage**  
44 **adjustment is necessary. That motion carried with no opposition**  
45 **and one absent. Mr. Chair, we have a committee motion on the**  
46 **board.**

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Is there any discussion

1 on the motion on the board? **Seeing none, is there any opposition?**  
2 **Seeing none, the motion carries.** Dr. Simmons.

3  
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so we're  
5 trying to get prepared for the discussion of the priorities at the  
6 end here of the meeting, and, just regarding this document for  
7 scamp and black grouper, we've made several changes here to the  
8 amendment, and I know the administrative piece of the IFQ program  
9 is going to have to change, because we're splitting the complex,  
10 and that's why we had to do that framework action, as a stop-gap  
11 measure, and all those types of things.

12  
13 I guess, based on the action that we added in, and I don't know,  
14 Dr. Stephen or Mr. Strelcheck, if you guys could speak to if that's  
15 going to delay the potential implementation of this document to be  
16 effective in 2027 or not.

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

19  
20 **MR. STRELCHECK:** So you're referring to Action 1, the new -- I  
21 mean, at this point, I mean, I think, you know, we're committed  
22 to, obviously, prioritizing this work. We have to discuss,  
23 obviously, all the overall priorities, and so it's hard for me to  
24 say if it's going to delay it or not, until we, obviously, do the  
25 work between now and the November meeting, and so I don't know,  
26 Jessica, if you have any further thoughts, or input.

27  
28 **DR. STEPHEN:** I do think we already have a decision tool. I'll  
29 just have to modify it slightly, so we can get that out to the  
30 constituents within the IFQ program. We built a couple of tools  
31 that they can easily get their data to put into that, and so, from  
32 the industry side, I think we can provide information from that.  
33 Likewise, a lot of those tools allow us to easily pull together  
34 the data, and I'm not necessarily envisioning it as being something  
35 that should overall slow things down.

36  
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, and so, to that point, I  
38 guess though -- That's great for the development of the amendment,  
39 but what I'm asking is, when we transmit it, and you have to make  
40 the changes to the actual program, do you envision, if the council  
41 selects to go forward with that, that that will slow down the  
42 implementation of this change?

43  
44 **DR. STEPHEN:** So the actual development to put everything into  
45 place? No, because we're going to have to create the new share  
46 categories regardless, right, of doing all that, and so how we're  
47 allocating that is we'll have the time from when it's final to,  
48 you know, do all the math, and do the double-check of all that.

1  
2 Appeals might be still required, regardless of any option that we  
3 go through, because we're creating new share categories, and so  
4 we'll be working in advance with the appeals office, to make sure  
5 we've done exactly what's appealable and what's not, considering  
6 it's all based either on what's -- It is all based on what's in  
7 the IFQ system, whether it's the shares or any other just, you  
8 know, landings or combination, and that's all within the program,  
9 and I wouldn't expect that there would be a lot of appeals.

10  
11 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Great. Thank you.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So, Mr. Schieble, before we get started on red  
14 grouper, I'll look around the table and look for opinions on lunch,  
15 before we get into red grouper. Go ahead, Mr. Schieble.

16  
17 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** The only opinion I have is, regardless of that  
18 decision, maybe a five-minute restroom break, before we dive into  
19 red grouper, and/or lunch, either one, what everybody wants, but  
20 at least five.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So our scheduled lunch is 12:00 to 1:30. I would  
23 propose we take lunch now, and come back at 1:15. It's still an  
24 hour-and-a-half, before we get into red grouper, but I would also  
25 like other council members' opinions as well. Okay. Let's do it.  
26 Let's take lunch now, and then come back to red grouper. Let's  
27 come back at 1:15 sharp.

28  
29 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on August 28, 2025.)

30  
31 - - -

32  
33 August 28, 2025

34  
35 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

36  
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39 The Full Council of the Gulf Council reconvened at the Hilton  
40 Palacio Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas on Thursday afternoon,  
41 August 28, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman J.D. Dugas.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, folks. Welcome back. Thank you for coming  
44 back on time. We're going to get started and continue the Reef  
45 Fish Committee report. We're going to start with red grouper.  
46 Mr. Schieble.

47  
48 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Returning back to

1 the committee report, Draft Options: Reef Fish Amendment 62:  
2 Modifications to Gulf Red Grouper Management Measures, Tab B,  
3 Number 7, council staff reviewed the purpose and need statements  
4 and the draft actions and alternatives.

5  
6 A committee member recommended referencing SRFS in the purpose of  
7 need statements. Another committee member inquired if the  
8 recreational sector would have closures with the phase-in approach  
9 of Action 1, Alternative 3. Council staff referenced Table 2.2.3  
10 and noted that, when total ACL equals 70 percent of the ABC,  
11 closures are anticipated with some of the Action 2 alternatives if  
12 a phase-in approach is selected.

13  
14 A committee member noted that no closure is expected with the red  
15 grouper emergency rule in 2025 and recommended avoiding a closure  
16 in 2026. Another committee member commented that a possible  
17 recreational season closure in November of 2026 would be an  
18 improvement over the season closure dates in recent years. He  
19 added that an update on red grouper landings for this year would  
20 be helpful for council discussions.

21  
22 A committee member stated that setting the total ACL at 70 percent  
23 of the ABC in the first year seemed arbitrary, and he would like  
24 to avoid recreational season closures. Another committee member  
25 recommended setting the total ACL equal to 80 percent of the ABC  
26 in 2026.

27  
28 A committee member stated that a full assessment of red grouper  
29 from FWC would be available in 2028. Council staff noted that an  
30 interim analysis has been requested and will come to the SSC in  
31 February of 2026. Another committee member referenced the  
32 Executive Order 14276, Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness,  
33 and recommended avoiding season closures.

34  
35 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 1 to modify**  
36 **Alternative 3 as follows: Alternative 3 is revise the MSY proxy**  
37 **and catch limits for red grouper based on the results of SEDAR 88**  
38 **and recommendations of the Gulf Council's SSC using a three-year**  
39 **constant catch scenario. The OFL and ABC for red grouper will be**  
40 **set based on an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at F 40 percent**  
41 **SPR and the yield when fishing at 75 percent of the FMSY proxy,**  
42 **respectively. The OFL and ABC are derived in part using SRFS data**  
43 **for private recreational vessels. Total ACL is set at 80 percent**  
44 **of the ABC in 2026, 90 percent of the ABC in 2027, and 100 percent**  
45 **of the ABC in 2028 and subsequent years. The OFL, ABC, and total**  
46 **ACL, in million pounds gutted weight, are as follows, and there's**  
47 **a table.** Totion carried with no opposition and one absent. Mr.  
48 Chair, we have a committee motion on the board.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Do we have any  
3 discussion on the motion on the board? **Not seeing any, is there**  
4 **any opposition to the motion on the board? Not seeing any, the**  
5 **motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.  
6  
7 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Committee member discussed having a new alternative  
8 in Action 1 which would implement a permanent buffer, such that  
9 the total ACL is equal to 90 percent of ABC. Committee members  
10 stated the council members and the SSC have expressed caution  
11 towards the large increase to the OFL and ABC, and so a buffer  
12 would account for management uncertainty until the next stock  
13 assessment.  
14  
15 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 1, to add an**  
16 **Alternative 4 where the total ACL is set at 90 percent of the ABC.**  
17 That motion carried with no opposition and one absent. Mr. Chair,  
18 we have a committee motion.  
19  
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Do we have any  
21 discussion on the motion on the board? Dr. Sweetman.  
22  
23 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you. I'm the one that put this forward here,  
24 and I was kind of curious to see what public input would be on  
25 this. It did not seem there was appetite for this total setup of  
26 a 90 percent, and, just for the sake of not increasing the  
27 complexity of this document, I might be in favor of not doing this  
28 here.  
29  
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Dr. Sweetman, and do we have any other  
31 thoughts on Dr. Sweetman's motion? Mr. Schieble.  
32  
33 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So, Dr. Sweetman, you're thinking about moving it  
34 to Considered but Rejected, the motion itself?  
35  
36 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just vote it down.  
37  
38 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Just vote it down? That's what we do?  
39  
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** It's not in the document as of now, and so we can  
41 just vote it down, if the committee chooses. Okay. Well, any  
42 further discussion on the motion? Mr. Schieble.  
43  
44 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So do we need a motion to vote against it?  
45  
46 **DR. SWEETMAN:** No, and we just vote.  
47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Let's do this. I guess we can get a show

1 hands of who opposes, or you don't need that?

2

3 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** No.

4

5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Is anyone in favor of the motion on the board?  
6 No one is in favor. The motion fails. Mr. Schieble.

7

8 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** We've got Dr. Sweetman.

9

10 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Well, I will wait until you finish your next  
11 paragraph, because I think there's some relevant information.

12

13 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Understood. A committee member noted that, in  
14 discussions of other amendments like deepwater grouper,  
15 recommendations for sector allocations to be based on longer  
16 timeframes of landings have been made, but he noted that the  
17 resulting sector allocation percentages for red grouper are all  
18 very similar, regardless of the timeframe selected.

19

20 Another committee member inquired if any of the current  
21 alternatives in Action 2 could be considered but rejected, given  
22 the similarities in resulting sector allocation percentages. NOAA  
23 General Counsel stated that the current alternatives all have  
24 appropriate rationales for inclusion in the amendment and  
25 encouraged stating the rationale for the preferred alternative  
26 when selected.

27

28 Another committee member stated Alternative 2 made the most sense  
29 to him as a preferred alternative, as it is based on SRFS data and  
30 also retains the years used to establish sector allocations in  
31 Reef Fish Amendment 53. I'll pause.

32

33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

34

35 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks, Mr. Chair, and so I would move to make, in  
36 Action 1, Alternative 3, the new one that we just modified, as the  
37 preferred alternative.

38

39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We'll give Bernie a moment to put that up  
40 on the board. Okay. Do we have a second for Dr. Sweetman's  
41 motion? Seconded by Mr. Sanchez. Dr. Sweetman.

42

43 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just some discussion, since we're asking for some  
44 rationale here, and so, setting it up in this way, kind of the  
45 tiered approach, the phase-in approach for the quota bump, I think  
46 that accounts for any uncertainty that people might have with some  
47 of these catch limit projections out into the future there.

48

1 I think it provides us a buffer. We're not going to see any  
2 closures associated with this, and so I think it's kind of the  
3 middle-of-the-road ground here that can make people comfortable  
4 without having any recreational closures. Thanks.

5  
6 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. I'm looking at Mr.  
7 Walker. Do you want all the language up there?

8  
9 **MR. WALKER:** Okay. Bernie, can you pull all the language up,  
10 please? Dr. Sweetman, do you want to read the full motion for us  
11 into the record?

12  
13 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Sure thing, Mr. Chair. **In Action 1, to make**  
14 **Alternative 3 the preferred. Alternative 3 is revise the MSY proxy**  
15 **and catch limits for red grouper based on results of SEDAR 88 and**  
16 **recommendations of the Gulf Council's SSC using a three-year**  
17 **constant catch scenario. The OFL and ABC for red grouper would be**  
18 **set based on MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at F 40 percent**  
19 **SPR and the yield when fishing at 75 percent of the FMSY proxy,**  
20 **respectively. The OFL and ABC are derived in part using SRFS data**  
21 **for private recreational vessels. The total ACL is set at 80**  
22 **percent of the ABC in 2026, 90 percent of the ABC in 2027, and 100**  
23 **percent of the ABC in 2028 and subsequent years. The OFL, ABC,**  
24 **and total ACL in millions pounds gutted weight are listed below in**  
25 **the table.**

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Do we have any further  
28 discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition**  
29 **to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.

30  
31 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Action 3 considers removing the recreational season  
32 closure for shallow-water grouper, and a committee member  
33 expressed that he still has concerns about this change resulting  
34 in an increase in recreational landings and noted it was put in  
35 place as a conservation measure.

36  
37 Another committee member stated that, with the recent stock  
38 assessment for red grouper, conservation measures may be of less  
39 concern currently, and recommended Alternative 2 as the preferred.  
40 Another committee member added that removal of this closed season  
41 was listed during the council's discussion of Executive Order  
42 14192, Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation.

43  
44 **The committee recommends, and I so move, in Action 3 to make**  
45 **Alternative 2 the preferred. Alternative 2 is eliminate the**  
46 **February 1 through March 31 recreational closed season for shallow-**  
47 **water grouper in federal waters seaward of the twenty-fathom**  
48 **boundary. The motion carried with no opposition and one absent.**

1 Mr. Chair, we have a committee motion.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Do we have any  
4 discussion on the motion? Mr. Strelcheck.

5  
6 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, just briefly, it was pointed out, during  
7 committee, and I wanted to reemphasize it, that a lot of the  
8 shallow-water grouper species are also now closed during this time  
9 period, and so it's not just that red grouper is in better shape,  
10 but the purpose of this closure is probably, you know, no longer  
11 needed, simply because of changes in management that have occurred  
12 over time.

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Any further  
15 discussion? **Any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion**  
16 **carries.** Mr. Schieble.

17  
18 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** A committee member inquired about the timeline for  
19 this document, given the emergency rule is only in effect until  
20 the end of 2025. Council staff are planning for a public hearing  
21 draft at the November 2025 council meeting and a final action at  
22 the January 2026 council meeting.

23  
24 Council staff requested that the committee consider if virtual  
25 public hearings would be sufficient or if any in-person public  
26 hearings would be needed, and, if so, locations for those in-  
27 person public hearings.

28  
29 A committee member stated that discussion about inclusion of  
30 additional actions in Amendment 62 that would assist with some of  
31 the updated goals of the IFQ program from 2023, by establishing a  
32 commercial quota set-aside for red grouper allocation, was  
33 warranted.

34  
35 Proposed actions would assist in implementing alternative  
36 mechanisms for equitably redistributing shares and allocations to  
37 accounts harvesting IFQ species and in creating an allocation bank  
38 to further reduce bycatch and discards of IFQ species.

39  
40 A committee member thought, given the proposed large increase in  
41 red grouper commercial quota, this appears to be an opportune time  
42 to not only reward shareholders with larger amounts of allocation,  
43 but to also pilot an alternative mechanism for distributing  
44 commercial red grouper allocation. Several committee members  
45 expressed concern that these proposed actions would delay progress  
46 in the current amendment and supported exploring the concept in  
47 another amendment.

1 Another committee member inquired if these actions would assist  
2 new entrants, and SERO staff responded that the actions would  
3 possibly assist if a fisher had entered the fishery in the last  
4 few years and had a landings history.

5  
6 A committee member stated that past conversations about share  
7 distributions included the requirement of a referendum. NOAA  
8 General Counsel replied that these actions would not be creating  
9 new shares. To allow time for committee members to consider the  
10 proposed actions, and to allow for public testimony, the committee  
11 will wait to consider the motion until Full Council. I'll pause  
12 here.

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

15  
16 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I've had a lot of discussions, obviously, since  
17 the committee meeting. Obviously, there seems to be the sentiment  
18 of not including this in Amendment 62, for fear that it would slow  
19 down the amendment. My preference, obviously, is still to include  
20 it, but, if that's not the view of the council, and you have that  
21 concern, then I would be willing to make a motion for a new  
22 amendment.

23  
24 I think the key though is, if we're going to do some sort of  
25 separate amendment, that it would have to pretty much be in tandem  
26 with the red grouper Amendment 62, and we would have to vote it up  
27 likely in April, and so it's not allowing a lot more time.

28  
29 It would allow us one more council meeting, and we would have to  
30 figure out where this slots in with other priorities, which we'll  
31 be discussing here toward the end of the meeting, but, as I noted,  
32 and I think the minutes really capture, or the summary captures,  
33 my sentiment, right, and this is an opportune time. If we wait  
34 too long, we're going to miss that opportunity, and I would really  
35 like to act quickly. I think this is something that could be good  
36 for the fishery, and fishermen, as well as for the Executive Order  
37 for Seafood Competitiveness.

38  
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Mr. Walker.

40  
41 **MR. WALKER:** I agree with Andy. I would like to see it separated,  
42 just in case it goes slower than we thought, and it won't drag the  
43 rest of it down, but it's definitely a unique opportunity to try  
44 out this whole quota-bank-type thing, because of the increase.  
45 There will be some allocation to play around with, without taking  
46 anybody else's away, and so it's a rare opportunity, on the  
47 proposed three-year sunset, just to see how it works. It could be  
48 a big benefit to some of the fishermen, but I would also like to

1 see it given a shot, and I support separating it, and whatever we  
2 can do to fast-track it to keep it moving, and that would be my  
3 preference.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. I have a question,  
6 Mr. Strelcheck. Regardless of whether it's in this document or  
7 not, if this gets implemented by April, the question I have is, in  
8 the future, if there is ever a decrease in quota, what does that  
9 look like? Is the entire red grouper fishermen affected, or just  
10 the new folks? I'm trying to find the right words.

11  
12 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, and I think that would be things we would  
13 work out in this separate amendment. When I presented the draft  
14 during committee, we included a provision that, if the quota  
15 dropped down below the amount that was allocated to the  
16 shareholders, that the program would, you know, go away. Bernie,  
17 if you could bring up the draft motion I've sent.

18  
19 **My motion is to direct staff to develop a new reef fish amendment**  
20 **that establishes a pilot program for setting aside a portion of**  
21 **the red grouper commercial quota. The amendment should consider,**  
22 **but not be limited to, alternative set-aside amounts, criteria for**  
23 **qualifying for set-aside allocation, restrictions on**  
24 **transferability, and methods for distributing set-aside**  
25 **allocation. The council's goal is to take final action in April**  
26 **of 2026, with a target pilot program start date of early 2027.**

27  
28 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We have a motion on the board. It's  
29 seconded by Mr. Walker. Is there discussion on the motion?

30  
31 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Just to add to the rationale, obviously, it's  
32 leaving flexibility for the IPT, but the constructs of what I  
33 presented the other day are essentially, you know, what I've tried  
34 to list in this motion, but I'm sure there's other ideas. I'm  
35 saying it's a goal for final action in April, and, obviously, if  
36 it takes us longer, it takes us longer, but we may miss the window,  
37 or have to think about timing of implementation based on that.

38  
39 Then I'm intending this to be a pilot program. I think we can  
40 talk about it as the amendment develops, how long we want to run  
41 the pilot program, and get into a little bit more of the details,  
42 in terms of the mechanics of it, but I think the key will be how  
43 much are we going to set aside, what are the qualification  
44 criteria, and any kind of restrictions with regard to participation  
45 in the program.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. I have another  
48 question for you, Andy, and so how does it look in 2026 with the

1 ACL increase? The original shareholders are going to get an  
2 increase for one year, and then it's going to get retracted from  
3 them in 2027 for the pilot program?  
4

5 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Potentially, but the motion that C.J. just led  
6 has that phase-in approach, and so there is going to be a bump-up  
7 in quota from the phase-in, and so, depending on our decisions  
8 about how much is set aside for this program, that might be within  
9 the bounds of that increase in the phase-in.

10  
11 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Mr. Walker.

12  
13 **MR. WALKER:** To your question there, I'm fairly certain that  
14 they're not going to catch all that quota next year anyway.  
15 There's so much of it that I don't think they'll land it, and so  
16 I don't think it will be a big hindrance the following year.  
17 That's just a guess, but --

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Walker. Any further discussion  
20 on the motion?

21  
22 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I'm going to abstain.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** One abstention. **The motion carries.** Dr. Simmons.

25  
26 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to  
27 make sure that we have a plan in place that we're going to hold  
28 virtual hearings for this Amendment 62, and we can do a push-out  
29 on Fish Rules for the private anglers, and bring those summaries  
30 back to the council before taking final action.

31  
32 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and if that's going to be the most prudent  
33 way. I certainly would prefer in-person, if possible, but, if we  
34 think that virtual is going to be the best bet here, given the  
35 rapid timeline here, then I'm okay with that. I am, but I also do  
36 want to, before we finish this Action 2, I think we need to talk  
37 about it a little.

38  
39 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so thank  
40 you for that leeway. I mean, I think it's good news. I think,  
41 with the new follow-on amendment, the Ad Hoc IFQ AP is probably  
42 going to want to take a look at that, and that's probably the more  
43 important change that we should bring to them, and we'll figure  
44 out the timing on that internally, and get back to you all.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Okay. Dr. Sweetman.

47  
48 **MR. SWEETMAN:** Sorry. Since we're just trying to move this forward

1 as quickly as possible, I thought it would be prudent to address  
2 Action 2, and maybe try to select a preferred alternative there as  
3 well that we could bring out there. **Bernie, my motion will be**  
4 **here, and it would be to select, in Action 2, Alternative 2 as the**  
5 **preferred, and I'm happy to lend rationale if I get a second.**  
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, and we'll give Bernie a chance to get it up  
8 on the board. Okay. We have a motion on the board. Do we have  
9 a second for Dr. Sweetman's motion? Mr. Sanchez seconds. Dr.  
10 Sweetman.

11  
12 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just some rationale here.  
13 You know, the differences between Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 are 0.2  
14 percent, and so, I mean, we're not talking big differences here,  
15 but Alternative 2 is the one that lines up with Amendment 53. I  
16 did hear that from the public, that that's an important  
17 consideration here, and so that is why I am pushing this one  
18 forward as the preferred.

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Any other, or further,  
21 discussion on the motion? **Is there any opposition to the motion?**  
22

23 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Abstain.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** One abstention. **The motion carries.** Thank you,  
26 Bernie. Mr. Schieble. Wait. Ms. Levy.

27  
28 **MS. LEVY:** I just wanted to clarify one thing that says about my  
29 reply that these actions would not be creating new shares. I don't  
30 want it to be read that I said that it's just new share creation  
31 that would trigger a referendum.

32  
33 What I said is a referendum is required when you create the  
34 program, and so the issue would be whether you would be creating  
35 a new program, and, given the experience with red snapper, you  
36 know, that would be a very limited circumstance, or no circumstance  
37 at all, and you would actually have to do away with the program,  
38 and recreate it, essentially, and so I just wanted to clarify that  
39 it was not related just to creating new shares. Thanks.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for the clarification, Ms. Levy. Mr.  
42 Schieble.

43  
44 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** All right. Moving on to Review of Recreational  
45 Initiative Recommendations and Prioritization Schedule, Tab B,  
46 Number 8. Council staff reviewed the recreational initiative  
47 working group's recommendations and categorized them by type of  
48 action, education or management, status of action, timeline to

1 action, and contributors required to complete the action.

2  
3 Of the working group recommendations presented, the committee  
4 highlighted twelve recommendations for the council to consider  
5 continuing or initiating action on in prioritization. Committee  
6 members shared the sentiment of the working group encompassing  
7 overarching goals of increased communication with the recreational  
8 angling community and increased access amongst anglers.

9  
10 It was highlighted that, for Working Group Priority 4.4, the  
11 council should continue to delegate authority for setting red  
12 snapper management measures for private recreational anglers and  
13 state guideboats to each of the five Gulf states, was not included  
14 in the recommended list for prioritization, as it has already been  
15 completed by the council, but continues to be an ongoing priority  
16 to maintain state management of red snapper.

17  
18 A committee member highlighted that, when the council is  
19 prioritizing actions, staff capacity across all agencies and  
20 alignment with Executive Orders 14276, Restoring American Seafood  
21 Competitiveness, and 14192, Unleashing Prosperity Through  
22 Deregulation, should be considered.

23  
24 What follows now is the table of our selected preferred, or  
25 prioritized, recommendations, and Ms. Gardiner is going to kind of  
26 walk us through those, to potentially reprioritize, or better  
27 prioritize, some of them, correct?

28  
29 **MS. SARAH GARDINER:** I think the intent today is to make sure that  
30 the council is okay with the recommended working group  
31 recommendations to move forward. I don't know that we're going to  
32 go through the whole prioritization activity today, but, at this  
33 time, if the council wishes to review the recommendations, and  
34 then a subsequent meeting, Ms. Muehlstein and I will bring forward  
35 a full workplan.

36  
37 I want to highlight that some of the recommendations that are on  
38 here, specifically looking at 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3, all have to deal  
39 with regional and/or state management. Some of those are for  
40 either gag grouper, red grouper, greater amberjack, or all reef  
41 fish, and I think that the council should consider which of these  
42 they would like to initiate first, as this is a pretty lengthy  
43 process, and so that would be pretty time consuming for staff  
44 capacity, and not saying that those need to be removed from the  
45 document.

46  
47 You could take the next couple of weeks, or until the next council  
48 meeting, to think about it, but it's something to consider from

1 this list, and so I think, at this time, you know, we just wanted  
2 to make sure Full council is okay with the recommended  
3 recommendations.  
4

5 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Okay, and so the understanding is that, if we go  
6 forward with all of these on the list, each one of them is going  
7 to require basically an action plan that you all have to develop,  
8 correct?  
9

10 **MS. GARDINER:** That is correct. Most of these will be full  
11 amendments.  
12

13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Ms. Gardiner, and so I will  
14 open up the floor for discussion or recommendations to prioritize  
15 the list, if someone so chooses. Mr. Anson.  
16

17 **MR. ANSON:** Just a clarification on Ms. Gardiner's last statement,  
18 relative to what Mr. Schieble was asking on the path forward. I  
19 thought I heard you say that we would have to develop an amendment,  
20 a plan amendment, to address each of these. Did I misunderstand?  
21

22 **MS. GARDINER:** Thanks for the question. For a majority of the  
23 management ones, there would be amendments. I think, for the  
24 education ones, they're a little bit different, as they'll go to  
25 the Outreach and Education Committee.  
26

27 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, and I just wanted that clarification. Thank you.  
28

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

31 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I guess just a recommendation, and maybe this isn't  
32 correct, but 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 are all interrelated. It seems  
33 like we could sort of, I guess, restructure the wording for 4.2  
34 and 4.3 to fall underneath 4.1, as one action, since they're all  
35 reef fish. Just a thought.  
36

37 **MS. GARDINER:** I think that can be done, and, if there are no other  
38 suggestions, then I think me and Ms. Muehlstein can bring back  
39 another version of the workplan for the council at the following  
40 meeting.  
41

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

44 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks. Focusing on the red and gag grouper one,  
45 that one makes me a little uncomfortable, to be perfectly honest  
46 with you, and I get what it's saying there. I just don't know how  
47 that would work for year-round retention. One stock we've got  
48 overfished, and undergoing overfishing, and red grouper is in good

1 shape, obviously, but that makes me a little uncomfortable, with  
2 that one in particular.

3

4 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Emily.

5

6 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Just to give you a little context, C.J., because  
7 the working group spent quite a bit of time sort of discussing  
8 this, and I think the idea is, you know, the grouper, those two  
9 grouper species, are harvested most frequently off of the State of  
10 Florida, but that they would be -- You know, we talked about  
11 increasing recreational satisfaction, and essentially folks in the  
12 western Gulf, and places where we're sort of fishing off Florida,  
13 we're saying that, you know, on the rare event that they catch a  
14 gag grouper, maybe once a year on a fishing trip, or a red grouper,  
15 once a year on a fishing trip, it would really increase their  
16 satisfaction with the fishery if they could retain that fish,  
17 rather than have to throw it away, since it's not their primary  
18 fishery.

19

20 I would not want you to pigeonhole yourself into thinking it has  
21 to be year-round retention. There may be other novel ways that  
22 the council could achieve that specific goal for those like super  
23 rare-event species in different parts of the Gulf, and so I hope  
24 that helps.

25

26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Dr. Sweetman.

27

28 **DR. SWEETMAN:** My concern still remains for gag grouper, along  
29 those lines, and how that would be accounted for, given the very  
30 low quota that we have, the fact that 98 percent of the fishery is  
31 Florida, and so I don't necessarily know why the council would put  
32 a lot of time and effort into something that is really going to be  
33 negligible, in terms of the overall impact, and could actually  
34 have a deleterious impact on the stock, if it's not done  
35 appropriately here, and so I just have some concerns about this  
36 one still.

37

38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, C.J. Mr. Marquez.

39

40 **MR. MARQUEZ:** I just wanted to add a little more context to that  
41 as well, because I think the discussion around that in the group  
42 was all the grouper is identified here. It was looking at stocks,  
43 and so for -- You know, where you've got an imbalance, and so, for  
44 example, groupers are a Florida-specific stock. People catch them  
45 elsewhere but not in big numbers. You know, could you have a  
46 management measure that allows fishing more year-round, and it  
47 doesn't have to be all year. I don't think that was what was the  
48 intent in here.

1  
2 At the same time, you could have management measures in Florida,  
3 and so, in the Reef Fish Committee, when we talked about when to  
4 set the season for groupers a while back, there was a desire from  
5 some in Florida, and Captain Walker will remember this, to push  
6 the season for grouper later in Florida, but there was pushback  
7 from, you know, the other members, because that would pretty much  
8 disenfranchise other fishermen around the Gulf.

9  
10 Nobody is going, in Mississippi, for example, in my state, to go  
11 fish for grouper in November and December, but that might be  
12 advantageous in Florida, and so I think this was more of a general  
13 thought of how we could look at management in a way that's not a  
14 one-size-fits-all.

15  
16 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

17  
18 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Yeah, and understood. I get it. The concern I  
19 still have here is that, regardless -- We're in a very short  
20 fishing season right now. Regardless of how you separate this  
21 out, you're going to reduce the season in Florida, one way or the  
22 other, and that's 98 percent of the fishery, and so, like I'm  
23 saying, like I just -- I understand what people are saying.

24  
25 Maybe there is a better way to approach this there, so we can  
26 accommodate for some of these issues here, but, when a stock is so  
27 heavily Florida, it's almost like we're prioritizing other  
28 components of the Gulf there, relative to where the fishery is  
29 centered, and so that's where I stand on it.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Walker.

32  
33 **MR. WALKER:** I think maybe this isn't the best terminology. I  
34 don't know that anybody in that group was looking for Florida to  
35 manage these two.

36  
37 More of what I heard, and what Mr. Marquez was saying, is like  
38 Alabama, and maybe Mississippi, and I don't know if you guys catch  
39 groupers, but I think maybe they were looking for like 2 percent  
40 over there, that they could use all year, in case they caught one.

41  
42 I don't know that they really even cared what happened with Florida  
43 management and all that, and they were like, look, this isn't our  
44 priority fish over here, but, if we catch one, and we had some  
45 little piece of allocation that we could use to ourselves over  
46 here to throw one in the box from time to time -- I think, and  
47 Johnny can correct me if I'm wrong, but I think that was more like  
48 the intent of what this was meant to be.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Marquez.

3  
4 **MR. MARQUEZ:** Again, I think this all kind of swirled together  
5 with discussions about regional management, and how we might manage  
6 stocks not as a one-size-fits-all, when they're prosecuted  
7 differently across the Gulf.

8  
9 You know, you could have the same kind of discussion around  
10 amberjack, where people fish them, you know, differently in the  
11 western Gulf and eastern Gulf, and so grouper will happen to be  
12 highlighted here, because they are so, you know, specific to  
13 Florida, and, you know, this just may not be timely for action  
14 right now. I mean, you may look down a few years, and, when gag  
15 is hopefully recovered, then that's, you know, maybe a more timely  
16 action at that time.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.

19  
20 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks, and so understood what people are saying,  
21 and I'm wondering now if it's more appropriate to move forward  
22 along this regional management perspective more with greater  
23 amberjack, where all of our states have concerns there, rather  
24 than pressing forward on this one particular issue, and so, Chris,  
25 I know you were saying 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 are the same, but part of me  
26 would rather focus on the more immediate concern that we have right  
27 now with greater amberjack, rather than these two other species,  
28 given how I referenced that these are just very much so Florida  
29 fisheries, and I'm not sure the added benefit we're getting there.

30  
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Chris.

32  
33 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I was thinking that they could just be sub-bullets  
34 under 4.1, and then we could combine stuff, but, you know, we could  
35 modify the language in 4.2. That's just verbatim out of the  
36 working group, correct, that we copied and pasted sort of, and so  
37 I think it's our prerogative to maybe modify that when we come  
38 back to this. When do we see this, Ms. Gardiner? When is it next  
39 in the action guide? When does it come back up?

40  
41 **MS. GARDINER:** To be determined. I'm going to look to Carrie for  
42 that one, because I think we're sorting that out.

43  
44 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So we're setting it now. This is the get set and  
45 bring it back in the schedule when we can next, right?

46  
47 **MS. GARDINER:** Yes.

1 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** This is the first attempt? Okay.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Walker.

4  
5 **MR. WALKER:** I'll pass. I'm still thinking about that.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson.

8  
9 **MR. ANSON:** I don't know if we're ready to move on to a different  
10 item under the management list here, but I'm looking at 3.1, and,  
11 to me, it almost looks like maybe it shouldn't be on the list at  
12 this point, maybe, or at least should be reprioritized, or  
13 reordered, in that, in how it's written, and I'm specifically  
14 focusing on the second half, with the evaluation of fishery-  
15 dependent or independent indicators.

16  
17 We had some discussion during Reef Fish, as we're, you know, moving  
18 into an environment where we're going to have less data, and that  
19 was one of the things that I think we were expecting the Science  
20 Center to kind of, you know, be thinking about, if they haven't  
21 already, and how we might be approaching our interim assessment-  
22 type evaluations of the stocks, and so -- But that -- I see that  
23 as -- I mean, although I could see that being put on the list, I  
24 see that being as kind of like the first step, before you would  
25 then jump into the harvest control rule approach.

26  
27 Again, I just am thinking that it may not need to be on the list,  
28 or, if it is, that you have it so it's kind of organized such as  
29 the evaluation occurs for the fishery-independent or dependent  
30 indicators, and then the council will then explore with -- Through  
31 a document of looking at the harvest control approach rule  
32 approach. That's just how I'm looking at it. Thank you.

33  
34 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. Dr. Simmons.

35  
36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so for this,  
37 and I think it's 3.1, I think the working group received a  
38 presentation on what the Mid-Atlantic Council had been working on  
39 in regards to, you know, trying to automate some changes in the  
40 recreational sector for very specific species and then having, you  
41 know, triggers, where the data is available, and then you can  
42 streamline it through the regulatory process.

43  
44 We do have contractors that are working on looking at what other  
45 councils are doing, including this control rule that came out of  
46 the Mid-Atlantic Council, and we are slated to get a draft report  
47 from them in November, and so, as part of that, they're also  
48 looking at, you know, the data that's necessary to operationalize

1 what's happening in those regions as well, as part of it, just,  
2 you know, so we keep that in mind, compared to what we currently  
3 have.

4  
5 That doesn't mean that's exactly what we have to use, but, when we  
6 get that report, it could shed more light on that one, and help us  
7 potentially identify what we could be interested in moving forward,  
8 through that process.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Dr. Banks.

11  
12 **DR. BANKS:** Thanks, and so I guess I have a quick question. Are  
13 you asking us to potentially remove, or prioritize, is what you're  
14 asking, because, right now, I think we're just talking about the  
15 list again, and, if we're like trying to say, hey, we would like  
16 these to be one, two, and three, and the rest can stay on the list,  
17 but these are -- Then I think we need some direction.

18  
19 **MS. GARDINER:** Thanks. Yes, and I think that might be helpful. I  
20 mean, we don't have to do like a final prioritization, if we want  
21 to keep all these on the list, but, from what I've heard from the  
22 conversation, I think there was a lot of interest in moving forward  
23 with the regional management for greater amberjack. You know, the  
24 DESCEND Act obviously is a high priority. We've heard that at  
25 this meeting.

26  
27 If the council wants to highlight a few others that they're  
28 interested in getting a more in-depth workplan on, for the next  
29 time we bring this forward, that would be great. Otherwise I think  
30 Emily and I are planning to bring a full workplan for any of the  
31 recommendations that are on this list, and so, if you would like  
32 to remove any at this point too, I think that's prudent. Thank  
33 you.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Gardiner, and so, from what I've  
36 heard, it seems like amberjack regional management should be moved  
37 up to the top of the list, and the DESCEND Act should be moved up  
38 to the top of the list, and I'm asking other council members if  
39 there's any others that should be moved up to the top of the list  
40 at this point, and I'm asking Ms. Gardiner now, and how many more  
41 do you want?

42  
43 **MS. GARDINER:** I think that how many more is up to the council,  
44 and how many they would like to see. I mean, obviously, these all  
45 have different timeframes associated with them. They're not going  
46 to happen immediately, and so it's really up to the council. Thank  
47 you.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. I've got a list. Mr. Anson, C.J., and  
2 Chris.

3  
4 **MR. ANSON:** So, in the spirit of trying to make the list less  
5 cumbersome, you know, I'm looking at 6.2, and I'm thinking of it  
6 being removed from the list, but only removed from the list from  
7 the aspect of developing a workplan and trying to, you know,  
8 develop some sort of document that then would address this.

9  
10 I mean, that should just be an overarching priority that we have,  
11 as we have our deliberations for any of the species when we're  
12 talking about setting seasons, but, if it needs to be on the list  
13 in order for it to get, you know, direct attention, and it's  
14 recognized, and very transparent to the public, then I don't mind  
15 that, but I'm just thinking in terms of, again, trying to, for the  
16 workload and the workplan development, and all the things that  
17 would go with that, and that's all I'm thinking of.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Kevin. I want to ask Sarah, and do we  
20 benefit today from removing anything, or just maybe dropping down  
21 to the bottom of the list? Is there -- Is one way better than the  
22 other?

23  
24 **MS. GARDINER:** I think, if you choose to remove any, obviously, it  
25 allows the council to really hone-in on those priorities that  
26 they're interested in. If you remove them from the list today, it  
27 does not mean that you're never interested in them ever again.  
28 They can always be brought forward for additional consideration,  
29 as we explore some of the other working group recommendations, and  
30 so, if you would like to remove them, I think that's fine.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. I'm going to let Mr. Strelcheck chime-  
33 in, and I have C.J. and Chris.

34  
35 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I guess I have a few ideas here. I like just the  
36 idea of, okay, do we want to prioritize a couple of these, and put  
37 them on the workplan, or allow staff to build them into the  
38 workplan, knowing that, as we work through our workplan, and free  
39 up space, that other things might be prioritized, and so we always  
40 can come back to this list, right?

41  
42 I think I'm comfortable with everything that's on the list. I'm  
43 not necessarily seeing a need to remove anything, from that  
44 perspective. All of us seventeen members, or sixteen members here  
45 today, may have different perspectives on how we want to prioritize  
46 these, and so we could do a survey or something before the next  
47 council meeting, and just get some general feedback, and input, on  
48 kind of where people feel with regard to the prioritization, and

1 that could help guide some conversations, but, overall, from what  
2 I've heard, the last several council meetings, right, greater  
3 amberjack regional management and the DESCEND Act seem to be the  
4 right two for the top of the list, and so I'm in agreement with  
5 those.

6  
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you for that explanation, Andy. Dr.  
8 Sweetman.

9  
10 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Thanks, and I agree with what Mr. Anson was saying  
11 there relative to 6.2, and so thank you for the clarification about  
12 how this would be used, because I do think we already do that.  
13 It's just within specific amendments, right, and like we're talking  
14 -- Whatever species we're talking about, we do have discussions  
15 about other fisheries that are open at that time, how to reduce  
16 discards, and so I do think that's actually kind of incorporated  
17 into our process, even if it's not like a bullet item that we have  
18 that we need to check off the list.

19  
20 I do agree with kind of the things that have been recommended so  
21 far relative to considering implementing like 4.1 and 4.3. I think  
22 we've kind of discussed those in detail, and 6.1, and, if this is  
23 the way we want to approach it, with just kind of a general straw  
24 poll across the board there, since, you know, then 4.2 will be up  
25 for consideration again.

26  
27 Just another concern I want to highlight on that is, if these are  
28 basically rare-event species in some of these other states, we  
29 need to understand how this gets extrapolated. We see all these  
30 issues that are associated with some of the other states that don't  
31 necessarily encounter some of these fisheries.

32  
33 Greater amberjack in Mississippi, and one fish translating into  
34 300,000 pounds, and think about what that would do to gag grouper  
35 under this low quota, with just some incidental harvest in some of  
36 these other states there, and so that would potentially blow it  
37 out of the water, and we're using the State Reef Fish Survey for  
38 management of this, of private recreational at least there, and so  
39 just a lot of complexities there, and that makes me very concerned  
40 about that one in particular, and so, if the straw poll is how we  
41 want to do that, just keep that in the back of your mind, please.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, C.J. Mr. Schieble.

44  
45 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I agree with C.J.'s sentiments on that as well.  
46 Also, I think potentially moving 3.2 a little higher in the  
47 priority order just because, you know, we have one item in the  
48 action guide already that is eventually where the states are going

1 to have to discuss allocation of red snapper, and so having a  
2 carryover provision in place may change the way those discussions  
3 go among the states, I think, and so, if we can get that moved up  
4 in the priority list, that would be helpful.

5  
6 Also, we were trying to add to the action guide the potential for  
7 allocation to be divvied among the states, between each other, as  
8 we've been working with -- Especially General Spraggins has been  
9 pushing that a lot. If we're going to try to prioritize that in  
10 the action guide eventually, I think this needs to also be in place  
11 before we go to that, that route.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Chris. Dr. Simmons.

14  
15 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so I think  
16 we have plenty to start with. Some of them are already on our  
17 action schedule, and we'll go through the nitty-gritty details  
18 here at the end. We have some bulleted items to just say what  
19 we're going to try to accomplish between this meeting and November,  
20 and there's definitely one of them on there that is the document  
21 to replace the gear requirements outlined in the DESCEND Act, and  
22 so I think we have plenty to work with.

23  
24 I guess I'm not sure about sending a poll out. I don't know if  
25 it's needed. I think we've gotten a lot of feedback on the  
26 management prioritization side of the recommendations. I don't  
27 know, Emily, do you feel good about the education recommendations  
28 we have on there, and don't feel like we're over committing?

29  
30 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Well, I guess, if the -- If, in November, we're  
31 going to have an opportunity to remove things, after I provide a  
32 little bit of context, then I'm very comfortable with that as-is.  
33 It's a lot, but I think, if I give some context, then the council  
34 might be ready to say, okay, maybe we don't move forward with this.

35  
36 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I think staff has a good plan, and so  
37 I don't know that a survey is really needed, unless you really  
38 want us to do that.

39  
40 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Seeing no, okay. I'm going to go to Mr. Anson,  
41 and then we're going to wrap this up.

42  
43 **MR. ANSON:** Yes, and that was one of my questions, is whether or  
44 not there would be a poll that was going to be sent out for the  
45 council members, and so that answers that question.

46  
47 Then my comment was -- Well, it was pertaining to 1.1, and it's -  
48 - In my mind, it's a priority, but, as Emily just described the

1 process going forward, I think -- I think I can explain, or provide  
2 some rationale, for where I would put that on my list at the  
3 November meeting. Thank you.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. Mr. Schieble.

6  
7 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Next, the committee worked on Draft Options for  
8 Reef Fish Amendment 55/Snapper Grouper Amendment 44: Modifications  
9 to Mutton Snapper and Yellowtail Snapper Management Measures, Tab  
10 B, Number 9.

11  
12 Council staff reviewed the proposed action and alternatives for  
13 modifying the jurisdictional apportionment and catch limits for  
14 southeastern U.S. mutton snapper and yellowtail snapper. NOAA  
15 General Counsel recommended dividing the action into two, with one  
16 addressing each species. A committee member preferred  
17 consideration of the bowtie approach to determining the  
18 jurisdictional apportionment and was not opposed to maintaining  
19 the current apportionment percentages. Other Business, we moved  
20 to Update on MRIP-FES --

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Hold on, Mr. Schieble.

23  
24 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Sorry.

25  
26 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman. Go ahead, Mike.

27  
28 **DR. ALLEN:** I was going to make a motion on this one, for mutton  
29 snapper and yellowtail. Let's see. I haven't written it out yet,  
30 but maybe if I could get some text for where I can -- What I want  
31 to do here is make a motion that we consider -- **We move to eliminate**  
32 **Alternative 4, and add it to Considered but Rejected, and keep the**  
33 **others intact, before it goes to the South Atlantic.** It will just  
34 simplify this document and leave Alternative 2 and Alternative 3  
35 on the table for comment by the South Atlantic council.

36  
37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. We're going to give Bernie a little bit to  
38 get your motion on the board, Dr. Allen. Mr. Rindone.

39  
40 **MR. RINDONE:** I guess I could have wandered back up there, but  
41 it's comfy back here. Just for everybody's -- Just to remind  
42 everybody that we're going to have to bounce this document back  
43 and forth between us and the South Atlantic Council, to make sure  
44 that we have parity on everything, and so anytime along the way  
45 where you guys want to remove something, they'll need to agree to  
46 it. If they want to remove something, you all need to agree to  
47 it.

1 Here, if this motion is seconded, and ultimately passed, we'll  
2 make sure that that's included in the presentation at the South  
3 Atlantic Council, about removing the direct reference year  
4 alternative, which was Alternative 4, and the Gulf Council's  
5 justification as to why. If the South Atlantic Council agrees,  
6 then they make the same motion to remove it to Considered but  
7 Rejected, and then, the next time you guys see it, it would be  
8 taken out.

9  
10 **DR. ALLEN:** Yes, and then we would just have those two.

11  
12 **MR. RINDONE:** The process is just a little bit different when we  
13 have a shared document like that.

14  
15 **DR. ALLEN:** Thank you, Ryan.

16  
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Dr. Simmons.

18  
19 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. **I guess, just**  
20 **for completeness, do we want to put "Action 1" in the motion?**

21  
22 **DR. ALLEN:** **Yes.** Thank you, Carrie.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman seconded the motion, but my question  
25 to the council is do you need all want the full literature in the  
26 motion? Okay. Any further discussion? Dr. Sweetman.

27  
28 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just to provide some rationale, maybe for the  
29 record, you know, I think retaining the jurisdictional  
30 apportionments, right, and that one is for consideration, and I  
31 envision that might be amenable to the Gulf Council in some  
32 instances here, maybe for mutton in particular, but, also, you  
33 know, giving the leeway to have the South Atlantic Council -- They  
34 use the bowtie approach, and this is their kind of standard method  
35 for addressing some of these things, and so I think this would be  
36 amenable to them.

37  
38 At the same time, you know, we would not be expecting really any  
39 closures for any of these species, based on that, and neither would  
40 the South Atlantic Council, and so it's just trying to be  
41 considerate of kind of both councils, what might be a broad suite  
42 of options to them, versus the set reference period, which, you  
43 know, a lot of that is already accounted for within the bowtie  
44 method. Thanks.

45  
46 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Sweetman. Is there any further  
47 discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there any opposition**  
48 **to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.** Mr. Schieble.

1  
2 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** All right. Now moving on to Other Business items  
3 in Reef Fish. Update on the MRIP-FES Pilot Study, a committee  
4 member requested a brief update on the status of the MRI-FES pilot  
5 study. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center indicated the study  
6 has been completed on schedule and will undergo a desk review by  
7 the Center for Independent Experts.

8  
9 Updated calibrations for federally-managed species are expected to  
10 be available in the spring of 2026. The NOAA Office of Science  
11 and Technology will provide a more thorough update on the study's  
12 progress to the council's SSC in October of 2025.

13  
14 Moving on to the DESCEND Act, a committee member noted the  
15 council's continued interest in the use of descending devices for  
16 reducing discard mortality on reef fish species. Council staff  
17 recalled that the council has already requested staff to develop  
18 a document to extend and enhance the DESCEND Act. However,  
19 enhancement of those measures will take more time.

20  
21 The committee noted that the DESCEND Act sunsets in January of  
22 2026. Council staff commented that timing for expected  
23 implementation of any continued measures will be subject to current  
24 staff workload. SERO staff echoed the concern about the  
25 prioritization of the current council document workload.

26  
27 **The committee recommends, and I so move, to direct staff to draft**  
28 **an abbreviated framework action to continue the measures in the**  
29 **DESCEND Act in the Gulf, with the goal of taking final action in**  
30 **November of 2025.** The motion carried without opposition. Mr.  
31 Chair, we have a motion.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Do we have any  
34 discussion on the motion on the board? Not seeing any discussion,  
35 is there any opposition? Mr. Schieble.

36  
37 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Just a technical question. Do we need to specify  
38 the Gulf is the Gulf of America in this, or do we need, I mean, to  
39 make sure it's not -- I mean, what gulf would it be, right, but is  
40 it particular to that? Do we need that?

41  
42 **MR. STRELCHECK:** We'll include a range of alternatives, Gulf of  
43 Maine, Gulf of Alaska, Gulf of America.

44  
45 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** You tell me. Mara says no, and so it's fine.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons says we are okay. **Is there any**  
48 **opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.**

1 Mr. Schieble.

2

3 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Moving on to IFQ Marketplace, SERO staff detailed  
4 the release of a new feature within the Southeast Gulf catch shares  
5 online system called the IFQ Marketplace, which will serve as a  
6 platform to facilitate connections between IFQ participants who  
7 are interested in buying or selling shares, and I think that should  
8 be "of allocation for the Gulf red snapper and grouper/tilefish  
9 catch share programs." NOAA Fisheries thinks this platform will  
10 increase IFQ marketplace transparency and accessibility. SERO  
11 staff provided a brief demonstration of the platform for the  
12 committee.

13

14 The final Other Business item was greater amberjack. A committee  
15 member recalled that the planned state start date for the  
16 recreational fishing season for greater amberjack was September 1,  
17 and, to date, no clarity has been provided to the public. SERO  
18 staff replied that decision for closure remains under review, but,  
19 to date, no decision has been made, and, as such, the season is  
20 currently scheduled to open as planned.

21

22 The committee member replied that the lack of communication on  
23 this issue to the council and the Gulf states has made  
24 communicating with anglers very difficult and requested that SERO  
25 communicate such developments more effectively in the future.

26

27 Another committee member asked SERO for an explanation of the lag  
28 in communications. SERO replied that a closure notice was prepared  
29 and sent to NOAA Headquarters some time ago, and that closure  
30 notice remains under review. A committee member asked what would  
31 happen if the recreational sector exceeded its ACL again in 2025.  
32 SERO recommended that the council send a letter regarding its  
33 concerns to NOAA Fisheries.

34

35 A committee member recalled the long rebuilding period and multiple  
36 stock assessments, which have indicated that greater amberjack is  
37 overfished. A committee member acknowledged needing the fish to  
38 catch, but also not wanting to see the council do anything to harm  
39 the rebuilding of the stock. SERO added that a commercial closure  
40 for greater amberjack has been prepared and submitted, and  
41 fishermen will be given at least a five-day notice before the  
42 commercial fishery closes.

43

44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble.

45

46 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Any discussion, before we end?

47

48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Do we have any discussion? Mr. Frady.

1  
2 **MR. FRADY:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I prepared a motion that I would  
3 like to put on the board, and, if someone would give me a second,  
4 I'll explain a little bit more in detail why this is important.

5  
6 **The motion I have on the board is the council draft and transmit**  
7 **a letter to the NOAA Fisheries Assistant Administrator expressing**  
8 **the council's concern that the agency has not yet finalized the**  
9 **rulemaking for greater amberjack management measures in federal**  
10 **waters of the Gulf of America, despite requirements under the MSA,**  
11 **the Magnuson-Stevens Act, to implement accountability measures**  
12 **when catch limits are exceeded. The letter should inquire about:**  
13 **Number 1, the reason for the delay in the finalizing rule; Number**  
14 **2, the expected timeline for publication and implementation; and**  
15 **Number 3, how NOAA Fisheries intends to ensure compliance with the**  
16 **accountability measure requirements that mandate adjustments to**  
17 **prevent overfishing, account for overages, and ensure continued**  
18 **progress on rebuilding.**

19  
20 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Frady. We have a motion on  
21 the board, and it has been seconded by Dr. Allen. Is there any  
22 further discussion on Mr. Frady's motion?

23  
24 **MR. FRADY:** Well, if you don't mind, sir, ever since I've been  
25 involved in the council process, we've always dreaded to have  
26 accountability measures put in place, and we're limited to about  
27 five species that are real popular amongst charter fishing and  
28 private recreational anglers.

29  
30 The greater amberjack is one that we really prize, and we really  
31 need for our businesses. However, in the past year, we've seen  
32 that greater amberjack stock completely decimated, to where you  
33 couldn't hardly catch amberjack, and, last year, an anomaly  
34 happened. We had a couple of hurricanes in Florida that apparently  
35 blew, or washed, a bunch of amberjack our way, into our waters off  
36 of Alabama.

37  
38 Now, one would say that the abundance of amberjack last fall would  
39 give you a sense that this fishery has rebuilt, but, being on the  
40 water almost every day during the summer and in the fall, those  
41 fish range in size, which gives me the professional opinion that  
42 we're starting to rebuild, especially in our area, but we're not  
43 out of the woods yet.

44  
45 My caution would be, if we open amberjack up right now to harvest,  
46 we're going to decimate a large breeding population this fall, and  
47 that's just going to set the timeline of rebuilding back further,  
48 and so we heard comments from everybody talking about the business

1 uncertainty, and even myself have chosen not to book tens of  
2 thousands of dollars in fishing charters this fall for amberjack,  
3 simply because I'm a rule follower, and an accountability measure  
4 means there's no exception.

5  
6 It's going to happen, and so, therefore, I've lost a lot of money,  
7 because I was going to sit here and wait on the council and the  
8 Assistant Administrator and the Secretary of Commerce to do what's  
9 right, or do what we're used to, or do what the Magnuson requires,  
10 and so my frustration is I'm sitting here feeling like a Johnny-  
11 come-lately, because I don't have the trips, because I knew the  
12 amberjack fishery was going to close.

13  
14 Deep down, I know it's the right thing to do, to wait another year  
15 and let those big broodstock amberjack, you know, reproduce one  
16 more year, so we can gain on the rebuilding process, and so I made  
17 this motion out of frustration, because I'm not the only one who  
18 didn't book trips, trying to figure out how to plan a business  
19 model for this season, and there's many people who are private  
20 recreational anglers who want to go catch amberjack. I understand,  
21 and I'm just giving you my perspective from where I am, and I thank  
22 you for your time.

23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Frady. Dr. Banks.

25  
26 **DR. BANKS:** I really appreciate that, Captain Frady. It's the  
27 same in our neck of the woods. People are having trouble booking  
28 trips. That said, I don't know that a letter, in this case, is  
29 really going to be as helpful as we hope.

30  
31 I mean, we've already heard that the documents have been sent up  
32 to Headquarters, and so that's above like this council's purview  
33 at this moment, and I think Andy and team have enough from us to  
34 be able to express that frustration. I think they have also been  
35 inundated with phone calls and frustration, and, honestly, I think  
36 this is going to take -- Just knowing how long it takes for us to  
37 be able to write a memo, and send it out, I think we may have some  
38 answers prior to that letter.

39  
40 I won't stop the vote for this at all. I just think this might be  
41 an exercise that's not necessarily warranted at this time, but I  
42 do appreciate and have the same opinion you do, in the sense of  
43 this is not really something we want to be known for or be doing  
44 business as.

45  
46 **MR. FRADY:** Well, I appreciate your comments, but there comes a  
47 time when every man, woman, and child has to defend what they know  
48 is right, and we know that the current administration has done

1 some things that's got everybody in limbo right now, and everybody  
2 is sitting there watching, to see what happens, but, when you own  
3 a small business, and you've got people looking at you and  
4 depending on you -- I mean, I come from the corporate world, and  
5 not this government bureaucracy that often hinders commonsense.

6  
7 I want answers, and this is not going to stop with just asking the  
8 Secretary of Commerce. This means it's going to go beyond that,  
9 because the American public, the business people of this country,  
10 deserve answers, and just by simply saying, no, not at the council  
11 level, and we've got to start somewhere.

12  
13 You know, I'm used to going right to the top and getting the  
14 decision maker to say give me an answer, and so this is my  
15 frustration, as being a businessman trying to survive in a year  
16 that's been uncertain. It's been complicated, and I appreciate  
17 your comments, but I'm just used to being in the corporate world,  
18 where we make things happen, and I want someone who can make a  
19 decision to give me an answer and look me in the face.

20  
21 Are we going to ever listen to the MSA again, or are we just going  
22 to ignore the MSA, because it ain't worth the papers written on if  
23 you don't adhere to the law. Why have laws? Thank you.

24  
25 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Frady. I share some of the  
26 same concerns myself. I'm not in the charter industry, but I'm a  
27 little frustrated with the process as well. Mr. Strelcheck did  
28 make some comments, and I'm not picking on you, Andy, but you made  
29 some comments, during committee, of who we would send a letter to,  
30 and my question is, if this were to pass, it would only list one  
31 individual, so I guess my question is -- I thought I heard there  
32 were multiple folks that should be addressed in the letter, if  
33 that's what we so choose to do. Mr. Strelcheck.

34  
35 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, it's the right start, because you're going  
36 right to the top of the National Marine Fisheries Service. You  
37 know, you guys can choose to copy me, Sam Rauch, anyone else that  
38 you would want to on the letter, if you choose to send this to us,  
39 and so I think you have the flexibility there to decide how you  
40 want to send this, but going directly to Genio is really the key  
41 to this letter, in my view.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** My next question would be a formal letter, or an  
44 email would suffice?

45  
46 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I mean, I don't have any preference, and so I  
47 mean, I think you could do both or do one.

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Okay. I'm looking around the table,  
2 if we have any other comments on Mr. Frady's motion. Go ahead,  
3 Captain Frady.

4  
5 **MR. FRADY:** Mr. Strelchuk, it doesn't matter to me. In the federal  
6 government, there's paper trails, whether it be electronically  
7 submitted and/or a hard-written letter. It doesn't really matter,  
8 and so whatever is the simplest, easiest, the quickest, most  
9 efficient way to get to the person in charge, and just to ask them  
10 for a simple explanation, would suffice. Thank you.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So I think what I hear is what Mr. Frady is after  
13 is just some sort of information on how to proceed forward, and  
14 not necessarily what the plan is to, I guess, open or shut down  
15 the fishery. It's more of a longevity. You know, our fishermen  
16 in the Gulf, the charter-for-hire fleet, from a business  
17 perspective, I understand they need to know their future, and what  
18 to plan for.

19  
20 I'm okay with the letter, personally. I'm going to leave this up  
21 to the council, and the other members, and I'll open it up one  
22 more time before we vote, if someone else wants to chime-in. Mr.  
23 Geeslin.

24  
25 **MR. GEESLIN:** You know, there's an old quote that comes to mind,  
26 and that's, you know, where you stand depends on where you sit,  
27 and, Troy, I can certainly appreciate your perspective here. I'm  
28 not against writing a letter, but I think also sometimes saying  
29 nothing, and whoever that is, if that's the Secretary or the head  
30 of NMFS, and sometimes saying nothing says everything, and I think  
31 that may be what's going on here.

32  
33 They're keenly aware that we've got a situation, an overage, an  
34 accountability measure, and maybe sitting on it is, you know, what  
35 they're intent is to do right now. I think, also, we need to  
36 manage our expectations in these requests. It would be great if  
37 we got the reason for the delay, the expected timeline of the  
38 publication and how NOAA Fisheries intends to ensure compliance.  
39 I just -- I don't place a lot of stock that we're going to get  
40 full-blown explanations there, and so I want to just temper some  
41 of those expectations from the council.

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Geeslin. I have Mr. Marquez and  
44 Mr. Frady.

45  
46 **MR. MARQUEZ:** I really just have a question, I guess, related to  
47 this and what this means for us if we open the season on the 1<sup>st</sup>,  
48 where we already have an overharvest, and does this -- Would these

1 stack on, these seasons stack on, top of each other?

2

3 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** So I inquired the same question to Mr. Strelcheck  
4 in the committee, and I think what I recall is this year would  
5 fall off, and then next year it would start over, and is that what  
6 I remember, Mr. Strelcheck? It's not going to compile.

7

8 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Right, and so the accountability measures are  
9 implemented on an annual basis. Where it could be compounding is  
10 if you have consistent overharvest from one year to the next. When  
11 you get your next stock assessment, the health of the population  
12 might be not as good as it could have been.

13

14 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Frady.

15

16 **MR. FRADY:** Mr. Geeslin, thank you so much for your comments there.  
17 Really, I mean, I can make a living no matter what I do, whether  
18 if I've got fish to catch or no fish to catch. Coming from the  
19 corporate world, before I have been fishing for twenty-three years,  
20 you know, I'm just used to making things happen. Whether you're  
21 in control of it or not, decisions have to be made.

22

23 You know, looking at this right here, I'm just kind of thinking,  
24 and no answer is better than an answer, and I kind of agree that  
25 sometimes the quietest person in the room speaks louder than the  
26 one who speaks all the time. I get it, but my whole thing comes  
27 back to the precedent we're setting nationwide.

28

29 What if it's a species in Alaska, or off Cape Cod, up their way,  
30 or the South Atlantic, that really means something to someone, but  
31 we ignore the precedent? You know, I've thought about this, and,  
32 you know, I know people in Washington would not rather see an  
33 email. They may want to see a copy of a hard letter questioning  
34 the precedence that we're possibly setting by what's going on, and  
35 that's it, but I rest my case. Thank you all so much.

36

37 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Frady. Any other comments, or  
38 concerns? Captain Walker.

39

40 **MR. WALKER:** I would speak in favor of the motion.

41

42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Any other comments? **Is there any**  
43 **opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion carries.** Mr.  
44 Schieble.

45

46 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** All right. That's the end of the amberjack report,  
47 but I've submitted a motion also that may help with this a little  
48 bit, and Bernie should have that over there, hopefully, emailed to

1 you.

2  
3 Essentially, it's to help us try to see where things may be a  
4 little different, and so, as you all know, the state directors  
5 bring to all of us their state reported, or state monitored, red  
6 snapper private recreational landings in the months of April and  
7 November of the year at our council meetings.

8  
9 This is simply to add a request that the state directors add on to  
10 those reports, or make it a separate report if you want, their  
11 greater amberjack private recreational landings within their state  
12 survey units, but also include NMFS staff providing the greater  
13 amberjack private recreational landings Gulf-wide, in the MRIP-  
14 FES units, which it's currently monitored in. Then there's two  
15 sub-bullets that just explain the timing of it, so that, in the  
16 November council meeting coming up, our next one, it would include  
17 last September and October 2024 landings data, and then the  
18 subsequent April 2026 meeting, when we report our red snapper  
19 landings, the states would then supply the September and October  
20 2025 landings data, which will be this season that starts in four  
21 days. I'll read this formally.

22  
23 **The motion is to request the state directors to report their**  
24 **greater amberjack private recreational landings in their state**  
25 **survey reporting units when they report their private recreational**  
26 **red snapper landings during the November and April council**  
27 **meetings, with National Marine Fisheries Service staff providing**  
28 **greater amberjack private recreational landings in MRIP-FES units.**  
29 **The November 2025 council meeting will comprise September and**  
30 **October 2024 landings data, and the April 2026 council meeting**  
31 **will comprise September and October 2025 landings data.** I can  
32 continue further explanation of this, and my rationale, if I can  
33 get a second.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** We have a motion on the board by Mr. Schieble.  
36 Is there a second? Mr. Geeslin seconds. Go ahead, Mr. Schieble.

37  
38 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So I guess this is sort of a precursor to us moving  
39 towards what's already in the action guide, which is state  
40 management of amberjack, but it's also to help us look at the  
41 potential regional differences in the landings of amberjack, and  
42 so we have a large discrepancy, and C.J. and I have talked about  
43 this, the Florida landings versus what MRIP-FES reported, and the  
44 same thing for us.

45  
46 I think just being able to look at that, like we do our state-  
47 managed red snapper units, as we get into the November meeting,  
48 may help a little bit with this, and also provide a little bit of

1 transparency in the difference that's causing this right now.

2  
3 Moving forward, ultimately, if we go with state management of  
4 amberjack, we'll go down the same road we did with red snapper,  
5 where ultimately there will be a calibration of those state surveys  
6 with amberjack, but hopefully, at that same time, we'll be getting  
7 the results of the latest greater amberjack stock assessment, most  
8 likely around the same period of time, and so this is to lead up  
9 to that, at least to allow us to start to think about the things  
10 we need within that state management document. Do we have any  
11 questions?

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Froeschke, to that point?

14  
15 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes, and I'm just wondering if you would also want  
16 the charter-for-hire and headboat, since that's managed as part of  
17 the recreational ACL for amberjack, unlike red snapper.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.

20  
21 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Well, we could. We could do that in LA Creel units,  
22 but I'm not trying to impose that on the other states, and so,  
23 currently, what we report, when we do the snapper state landings,  
24 is just private recreational red snapper landings, because that's  
25 what we manage within the state, and so that includes our state  
26 charters and then our private recreational anglers.

27  
28 We can monitor the federal for-hire snappers, and we provide those  
29 numbers, but that's not part of the state allocation, and so I'm  
30 trying to keep it consistent with what we are required to report  
31 with regards to red snapper.

32  
33 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Froeschke.

34  
35 **DR. FROESCHKE:** I guess I was just -- If we wanted to compare it  
36 relative to the recreational ACL, and I guess I was envisioning  
37 that would be part of the NMFS provided. It would come from the  
38 federal for-hire survey and the headboats, but, if it's not  
39 necessary, it's fine. I just wanted to make sure.

40  
41 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have Mr. Geeslin, and then Mr. Anson.

42  
43 **MR. GEESLIN:** No, and I agree with that, John. If you want to  
44 look at the whole picture, then we should be looking at all those  
45 landings. I'll support that, and speak from Texas, that we can  
46 certainly work towards providing that in the timeline that the  
47 chairman is good with.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I have Mr. Anson, and then Mr. Burris.  
2  
3 **MR. ANSON:** Following up on Chris's comments, with some of the  
4 conversations that were had previously with red snapper, and it  
5 appears we might get off in the weeds a little bit about talking  
6 about how the estimates came to be, maybe in addition to that is  
7 to include sample sizes, for both intercepts as well as number of  
8 fish weighed and measured, to go towards the average weight, would  
9 be helpful to provide some context to the estimates that we're  
10 looking at.  
11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Anson. Mr. Burris.  
13  
14 **MR. BURRIS:** I was just going to speak in favor of the motion. We  
15 can definitely provide that.  
16  
17 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you. Mr. Strelcheck.  
18  
19 **MR. STRELCHECK:** It's really a question, or, well, first of all,  
20 I agree with John that I think we need to bring the whole picture  
21 of landings, right, and so I recognize this is just the motion for  
22 private, but we can bring for-hire and headboat.  
23  
24 The question is really for Mississippi and Alabama, and so you've  
25 been, I think, collecting this data through Tails 'n Scales.  
26 Snapper Check, you're converting over to the creel program, and so  
27 I assume you would be bringing it at least with the old system,  
28 and not necessarily the new data, because you just started  
29 collecting the creel data this year, correct?  
30  
31 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.  
32  
33 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I think Mr. Strelcheck is correct, and so, for what  
34 we would see in November, it would be the old data, but, by the  
35 time we get to the April 2026 meeting, we should be seeing the new  
36 LA Creel data from those states as well. That was kind of the  
37 idea why I wanted both.  
38  
39 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Chris. Any further discussion?  
40  
41 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** (Dr. Simmons' comment is not audible  
42 in the recording.)  
43  
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, and we're going to have to -- Go ahead,  
45 Chris.  
46  
47 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So we need to modify -- Well, someone is modifying  
48 it for me right now.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Yes, and Bernie is working on it, and so we'll  
3 give Bernie a chance to modify the motion.  
4

5 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I'm good with that. If Mr. Geeslin is good with  
6 that, as the seconder, we're good.  
7

8 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Geeslin is good. I would ask if you would  
9 read it into the record.  
10

11 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Roger that. **The motion is to request the state**  
12 **directors to report their greater amberjack private recreational**  
13 **landings in their state survey reporting units when they report**  
14 **their private recreational red snapper landings during the**  
15 **November and April council meetings, with National Marine**  
16 **Fisheries Service staff providing greater amberjack private**  
17 **recreational landings in MREP-FES units along with the federal**  
18 **charter-for-hire and headboat landings. The two sub-bullets are**  
19 **the November 2025 council meeting will comprise September and**  
20 **October 2024 landings data and the April 2026 council meeting will**  
21 **comprise September and October 2025 landings data.**  
22

23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Mr. Geeslin has said  
24 he's okay with the changes. Next, I have Mr. Anson.  
25

26 **MR. ANSON:** Just for some clarification, to follow-up on Andy's  
27 comment, I wasn't planning to bring any Snapper Check information.  
28 I had, you know, mentioned to you that we've been collecting that  
29 for some time, but that is -- My understanding is that that is not  
30 certified for that species, and so we were only sort of  
31 conditionally certified for red snapper, is my understanding, and,  
32 you know, there is not much data there.  
33

34 I can bring it for another discussion relative to mandatory  
35 reporting, but it doesn't provide much information relative to  
36 what we're trying to address here, and so I just wanted to make  
37 sure that's okay, and that's the expectation.  
38

39 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Bring what you've got. That's all I can say. I  
40 mean, we're going to try to look at the difference in discrepancies  
41 that may be between the two different reporting systems, but my  
42 thought process, going forward on this, is that the April 2026  
43 will be what we really need this for, right, and so we're going to  
44 do red snapper anyway in November, but, by the time we look at  
45 April next year, we should have a handle on what this season, that  
46 we're about to fish, will produce, and I fully expect, you know,  
47 with red snapper, and I can't say that this is how this is going  
48 to come out with amberjack, but Florida calibrates to 1.06 with

1 red snapper, and Louisiana calibrates to 1.06 with red snapper.  
2 Those are similar. Texas is one-to-one.

3  
4 You all, being in the LA Creel system, will probably calibrate  
5 similar to what Mississippi has, once you're done with your trial  
6 and benchmarking process this year, and so I'm thinking that the  
7 units, at least in pounds, as a currency, by the time we get to  
8 this, should be fairly similar among the five states.

9  
10 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Schieble. Mr. Anson, good? Okay.  
11 Any further discussion on the motion? **Not seeing any, is there**  
12 **any opposition to the motion? Not seeing any, the motion carries.**  
13 Mr. Schieble.

14  
15 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** That brings us to the end of the report. This  
16 concludes the Reef Fish report, Mr. Chair.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Schieble. All right.  
19 Next up, I have the anonymous voice mailbox for Ms. Muehlstein.

20  
21 **DISCUSSION OF ANONYMOUS VOICE MAILBOX**

22  
23 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** We don't have a report for this, because it wasn't  
24 really in a committee. We talked about it in Full Council  
25 yesterday, briefly, and I sort of gave you the summary, and so let  
26 me just summarize what we kind of discussed yesterday.

27  
28 There was some caution about the idea of publishing a full  
29 transcript of the comments. We did notice folks, when we launched,  
30 that that would be a reality, but we wanted to, you know, see how  
31 you guys felt. Ms. Levy did tell me that -- She did indicate that  
32 they would be FOIA-able, and so anybody that wants them could go  
33 through the process and get the full text anyhow.

34  
35 Also, I think it's important to bring up, and I think there's a  
36 new-ish FOIA regulation that says, essentially, if three people  
37 FOIA the same thing, then the agency has to go ahead, or we have  
38 to go ahead, and put it accessible anyways, and so I was just  
39 hoping for some guidance from you all about how you would like to  
40 handle the full text of the anonymous voicemails.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Thank you, Emily. Do we have any feedback  
43 or comments for Emily? Captain Frady.

44  
45 **MR. FRADY:** Yes, sir, and thanks. I really support the anonymous  
46 voicemail box. I've used it in a previous career, and what it did  
47 is it gave those people who were afraid to speak up, and stand up,  
48 and even though everybody would call it the 1-800-crybaby line,

1 deep down, 10 percent of the stuff that we received from it was  
2 very effective, and I would urge you to continue using stuff like  
3 this, or give them a chance to voice it, because not everybody  
4 wants to identify themselves, with a fear of retribution or  
5 embarrassment, and they don't communicate very well, and so I  
6 really, really support this, and I think it's a good idea to  
7 continue it.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Captain Frady. Dr. Banks.

10  
11 **DR. BANKS:** Okay, and so, based on that guidance from Ms. Levy, I  
12 suggest that we just go ahead and release them, or post them, on  
13 our website, because it sounds like it's likely to get FOIA-ed  
14 anyways, and at least we're out there, and that also allows us to  
15 see the context of what's in them, because there were some great  
16 summary ideas, but I would love to see the details of that, and so  
17 my vote is to post them on our website. They were notified when  
18 this came up, and they have the ability to not give any additional  
19 identifying information.

20  
21 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Banks. Any other comments?  
22 Captain Walker.

23  
24 **MR. WALKER:** So I'm not opposed to that. I will say that you can  
25 see them now, I believe, if you want to, without them being posted  
26 on the -- Emily can show them to you, if you want, without them  
27 being listed, but, I mean, as Mr. Geeslin pointed out, if people  
28 want that public, they'll post it somewhere anyway, and so I don't  
29 know that it makes much sense to try and fight it. Hopefully it  
30 won't deter people from saying what they want to say.

31  
32 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay. Any other comments regarding the voicemail  
33 box? I'm not seeing any.

34  
35 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I don't think we need a motion, Mr.  
36 Chair. I think we're okay.

37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Emily, are you okay?  
39 Good? Okay. The next agenda item is Discussion of Council  
40 Planning and Primary Activities. I'll turn it over to Dr. Simmons  
41 to say a few words.

42  
43 **DISCUSSION OF COUNCIL PLANNING AND PRIMARY ACTIVITIES**

44  
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before we get  
46 to that, I wanted to do just a little bit of housekeeping on our  
47 longer list of things that's posted on the website under the A  
48 tab, and so back in, gosh, and it looks like August of 2023, you

1 all passed a motion for us to look at the spatial area closures  
2 for gag and other groupers, and I think that's what it says.  
3  
4 We really haven't had much discussion on that. We have the  
5 rebuilding plan in place right now. I guess we're just asking,  
6 from a staff perspective, is that still something that needs to  
7 remain on the list? Is it something that we could remove from the  
8 list? If we need more information, we could always bring it back,  
9 but I was trying to see if there was still a lot of interest in us  
10 trying to do something with that or not.  
11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman.  
13  
14 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I'm just one person, but, in the grand scheme of  
15 things, for things that we're working on here, that one would be  
16 a low-priority item for me, Dr. Simmons.  
17  
18 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I mean, it is currently listed as the  
19 lowest, as we have kind of given it the ranking already. I just  
20 didn't know if it could actually be removed. If you feel it needs  
21 to stay on there, or you need more information, that's fine. I  
22 was just going to see if we could take it off.  
23  
24 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Any questions for Dr. Simmons?  
25  
26 **MR. WALKER:** We could always bring it back up at another time, if  
27 we take it off, right?  
28  
29 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** That was my question.  
30  
31 **MR. WALKER:** We've got -- There's enough protective measures on  
32 gag right now, I think, for a while. Being closed for three-  
33 hundred-and-something days a year is sufficient. It's almost all  
34 of them, and so I don't think we need to talk about closing areas  
35 at this time, but down the road, maybe. A motion to remove it  
36 from the list?  
37  
38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, Mr. Walker.  
39  
40 **MR. WALKER:** I would make a motion that we remove -- Does it have  
41 an item number? I guess spatial area closures for gag and other  
42 groupers from consideration at this time from the list.  
43  
44 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** From the action guide.  
45  
46 **MR. WALKER:** It's the action guide? Okay. From the action guide.  
47  
48 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** It's Number 17 on the list, Bernie.

1  
2 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Second.  
3  
4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** In case my number is off, just as the  
5 spatial area closures for gag and other groupers.  
6  
7 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** While Bernie finishes typing up the motion, Dr.  
8 Sweetman seconded. Mr. Strelcheck.  
9  
10 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Well, while we're waiting, try to be efficient,  
11 is there other ones, Carrie, that you would want us to consider?  
12 We could do it all in one motion. I'm trying to be efficient.  
13  
14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Not any one in particular I want to  
15 endeavor in right now, no, but, if there's one you would like to,  
16 we can talk about it.  
17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Walker, are you okay with your motion?  
19  
20 **MR. WALKER:** Yes, Mr. Chair.  
21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Sweetman is the seconder, and he is good with  
23 the changes made. Is there any further discussion on the motion?  
24 **Not seeing any, is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing**  
25 **none, the motion carries.** Dr. Simmons.  
26  
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. Now if  
28 we could bring up, I guess, our more concise workplan between this  
29 meeting and November, that would be good. Okay, and so I'll just  
30 go ahead and start.  
31  
32 We have the public hearing draft for Reef Fish Amendment 62, which  
33 is the modification of red grouper management measures, the new  
34 amendment, which we think is going to be 63, the program to  
35 establish a set-aside of red grouper commercial quota. Potential  
36 public hearing draft of Reef Fish 58A, the modification of shallow-  
37 water grouper management measures. Then a final action document  
38 for Shrimp Amendment 19, the permit moratorium requirements  
39 consideration.  
40  
41 Draft options for yellowtail and mutton snapper measures, and we're  
42 going to try for a draft final abbreviated framework action for  
43 the document to replace the gear requirements outlined in the  
44 DESCEND Act. A draft options for the essential fish habitat  
45 amendment, and that largely will be our staff working with the SSC  
46 between now and November, and so I don't know that, other than the  
47 review, the Regional Office staff would have to get to any weeds  
48 on that one right now.

1  
2 Then possibly a presentation to start considering the delegation  
3 of the federal for-hire red snapper management to the Gulf states,  
4 and then, if you go down, Bernie, we now have four actions that we  
5 have to complete sections on, which requires both of our staffs to  
6 complete some of those, and some just the Regional Office staff to  
7 complete, and then complete the final reviews, have the Science  
8 Center conduct their reviews, and then transmit. We think we've  
9 identified these in priority order, listed below, and so still a  
10 lot to do, Mr. Chair. Is there feedback?

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons, for the update. Do we  
13 have any questions for Dr. Simmons? Dr. Sweetman.

14  
15 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Just general feedback, and so, if we're running  
16 into time constraints, obviously, I see it says draft/final for  
17 the DESCEND Act abbreviated framework. I was hoping that would be  
18 final, but I understand that's the goal we're trying to set there,  
19 but, I mean, that one, to me, is more important than if we need to  
20 take time from staff relative to the modified essential fish  
21 habitat draft options. I feel like, if need be, I would much  
22 rather prioritize staff time on the DESCEND Act, to move that  
23 through as quickly as possible, Dr. Simmons, but that's just my  
24 preference.

25  
26 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I hear you. I think maybe, also --  
27 I mean, there's no way we're going to get it in place in time  
28 before it expires. We just can't do it, right, based on even us  
29 taking final action, or you taking final action, in November.

30  
31 **DR. SWEETMAN:** So why?

32  
33 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I'm sorry?

34  
35 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Why?

36  
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** To get it through the rulemaking  
38 process. By the time we transmit it to the Regional Office, they  
39 have to develop all the rule package, and all that, and go through  
40 their comment period. It is abbreviated, but I don't see that  
41 happening before January, and is it the 16<sup>th</sup>, or the 26<sup>th</sup>, and so I  
42 guess I would just ask, you know, if there's other things we can  
43 do to educate and keep the public informed about the use of these  
44 gear types, with Return 'Em Right and all those types of things.  
45 There's a little -- It's the smallest gap we can, but still  
46 continue to push out the information with outreach on that.

47  
48 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Ballard.

1  
2 **MS. BALLARD:** But at least can we try? I mean, I don't see a  
3 problem with putting as much effort into it, when so many of us  
4 are requesting it, and try our hardest to get it done, and, if we  
5 don't make it, maybe we're so close, you know, and you never know  
6 what's going to happen. You never know what kind of push and  
7 influence that we have on people, you know, for them to see it,  
8 and so I don't -- I don't think it's, oh, well, we're not going to  
9 make it, and so let's just not try at all. I feel like we should  
10 still put every -- Like 217 percent into it to get it done as soon  
11 as possible.

12  
13 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I mean, I hear you all loud and clear.  
14 Just keep in mind what we just went through and discussed about  
15 the amberjack rule package. Everything is taking longer to review.  
16 We are having to submit things for meetings forty days in advance  
17 right now, for it to be reviewed, and so just everything is kind  
18 of being bottlenecked right now, as far as the review process goes,  
19 and that is completely outside of our hands, and so I just want to  
20 make that clear.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Ms. Levy.

23  
24 **MS. LEVY:** I mean, the council can do what you can do, right, and  
25 so, if it can get -- With the regional staff, if they can get done  
26 for November, for you to take final action, that's the best you  
27 can do. That's the next meeting. The agency has to do the best  
28 they can do. We're required to have a comment period. We're  
29 required to respond to comments. We're required to do economic  
30 analysis for our rulemaking.

31  
32 You know, it goes up through DOC, and so there's a lot of process  
33 involved. I'm not saying not to do it, but I wouldn't expect it  
34 to be in place by the time the DESCEND Act expires. We generally  
35 have to do a thirty-day comment period, and then we have to have  
36 a thirty-day cooling off period, and so that's two months right  
37 there. That doesn't even involve creating the documents and  
38 getting it cleared, right?

39  
40 I would also just say, I mean, they're currently required to have  
41 these things onboard. Like just because the DESCEND Act expires,  
42 are people just going to throw them off their boat? I mean, I  
43 feel like, if people are really invested in this, right, they would  
44 keep them onboard. There's no requirement to use them now. We're  
45 not going to require them to use it, and so hopefully people will  
46 just keep them onboard, and use them as appropriate, but I think  
47 everybody will work as hard as they can to get it implemented as  
48 fast as they can.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Dr. Simmons.  
3

4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so that's  
5 -- I mean, I guess that's why I was suggesting. I mean, I think  
6 we can do some big pushes, in coordination with the states and Sea  
7 Grant and Return 'Em Right and everything, to try to keep it front  
8 and center, until this is replaced, and I think we can definitely  
9 do that as well, and so I don't think people are going to just  
10 quit using them as soon as the DESCEND Act expires.  
11

12 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Strelcheck.  
13

14 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Because we have three new council members, one of  
15 the things I just want to reiterate is, since January of this year,  
16 the Southeast Regional Office lost over twenty employees, about 20  
17 percent of our workforce. It, obviously, has hit us differently.  
18 One of the areas that we've been hit hardest is our economics  
19 branch, right, and so this is in no way an excuse, but we have a  
20 huge bottleneck there right now.  
21

22 We can't hire people. We have brought on a contractor, and so,  
23 looking at this list, right, my goal is always, after meetings,  
24 making sure Frank is communicating with the council staff, and I'm  
25 communicating with council staff, and we're prioritizing what we  
26 can get done, being realistic with regard to especially our  
27 economics branch and our data analysis branches, as to what  
28 capacity we're going to have to get all this work completed, and  
29 so we'll continue to, obviously, focus on these priorities, with  
30 the recognition that there are some areas where we're bottlenecked.  
31

32 The things that you've finalized, and haven't transmitted yet,  
33 we're still working with the council staff, obviously, to get those  
34 transmitted as well, and so a lot on our plate, and we'll do our  
35 best, obviously, to prioritize what we can between now and  
36 November.  
37

38 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Andy. Go ahead, Mr. Geeslin.  
39

40 **MR. GEESLIN:** I can certainly appreciate and recognize and comply  
41 with our very own processes along the way, but, you know, just  
42 hearing from public, hearing from council members, what I know to  
43 be true related to the DESCEND Act is there's a groundswell of  
44 support. I don't think I heard anyone speak out against it.  
45

46 What I am hearing is some challenges, some hurdles, and some, you  
47 know, some timeline concerns, all justifiable, all understandable,  
48 but I would encourage us, and what I am hearing is a commitment to

1 find some solutions and work as hard as we can to get that  
2 accomplished, with the goal of having that for final action in  
3 November, and so I appreciate the 217 percent effort there.

4  
5 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Geeslin. I have a question for  
6 Ms. Levy. Mara, you mentioned the timeframe after final action.  
7 You mentioned two thirty-day periods, but my question to you is,  
8 is there a difference, because this is an abbreviated framework  
9 action, or is there no difference?

10  
11 **MS. LEVY:** Regardless of the council process, which is the  
12 framework action, the agency has to go through APA rulemaking, and  
13 that requires a comment period, and it requires a cooling-off  
14 period. The Magnuson Act says a fifteen to forty-five-day comment  
15 period, but I will say the Department of Commerce has been very  
16 forceful about a minimum of thirty days. Sometimes we can get  
17 fifteen, but sometimes we can't, and so, at a minimum, you're  
18 looking at forty-five days just for a comment period and cooling  
19 off. That doesn't include any of the documentation that needs to  
20 be prepared for the rulemaking.

21  
22 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Ms. Levy, and so a question, and what  
23 about an emergency rule action? Does that change anything?

24  
25 **MS. LEVY:** This has been expiring for five years. Like this is  
26 not an emergency. We knew that this was going to go away, and so  
27 this is a self-created emergency. It's not -- I don't think  
28 there's going to be justification for that.

29  
30 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** I'm sorry. I had to ask. Okay. Dr. Simmons  
31 doesn't have anything else. That's going to move us to Other  
32 Business. Mr. Strelcheck.

33  
34 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and, knowing there's going to be a lapse,  
35 whether we get it done in November or have to finalize it in  
36 January, I guess my question would be for the state directors.  
37 You know, Dakus mentioned, earlier this week, they have this  
38 requirement in place, and, in fact, it's more restrictive, and so  
39 do all the states have similar descending device requirements, and  
40 do they have a time certain when they expire, like we're talking  
41 about with the DESCEND Act, or are they going to remain in place?

42  
43 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Go ahead, C.J.

44  
45 **DR. SWEETMAN:** Ours is similar to what Texas has, with the  
46 requirement to use the descending device, or venting tool, if a  
47 reef fish is experiencing barotrauma on a private recreational  
48 vessel, and there is no expiration date on it.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Geeslin.

3  
4 **MR. GEESLIN:** Andy, excellent question, and our commission retains  
5 the authority to withdraw that, just as with any other rules and  
6 reg package, but it's in -- As it's teed-up, it's in perpetuity  
7 until a subsequent change.

8  
9 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Anson.

10  
11 **MR. ANSON:** We don't have any regulation regarding its use.

12  
13 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Mr. Schieble.

14  
15 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** Similar, and we do not have any state regulation  
16 for it, and we're just following the DESCEND Act.

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

19  
20 **MR. BURRIS:** The same in Mississippi. We follow the federal  
21 guidelines.

22  
23 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** You good, Mr. Strelcheck? All right. That's  
24 going to move us to Other Business. Do we have any other business  
25 to come before the council? Captain Walker.

26  
27 **OTHER BUSINESS**

28  
29 **MR. WALKER:** We heard from the public testimony, several times,  
30 about trying to work the SEFHIER program back into the schedule.  
31 I see the schedule is pretty full, but I know we had made quite a  
32 bit of progress on that, and we were getting close, and so, to the  
33 extent possible, I would like to, you know, put that on the list  
34 as soon as we can.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Okay, Mr. Walker, and note taken. Any other  
37 business to come before the council? Not seeing any, before we  
38 leave Other Business, a few announcements. I would like to thank  
39 Texas Parks and Wildlife and CCA for the social on Tuesday, and it  
40 was a great event. I would like to thank the presenters, and Ms.  
41 Lee spent some time here, and definitely the staff. The staff has  
42 been working very hard, and we just added to the list, and so I  
43 hope everyone is aware of that. Thank you, staff.

44  
45 Then, also, the Texas Parks and Wildlife agents, Les Casterline  
46 and team, and thank you for being here this week. We appreciate  
47 it, and we will have a full meeting in November, at the Golden  
48 Nugget in Biloxi, and I will turn it over to Mr. Donaldson for the

1 Election of the Chair and Vice Chair.

2  
3 **ELECTION OF COUNCIL CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR**  
4

5 **MR. DONALDSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will now open the floor  
6 for nominations for council chair, chairman. Mr. Schieble.

7  
8 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** I would like to nominate our existing chairman for  
9 chair, J.D. Dugas. I think he's been knocking it over the fence  
10 this past year.

11  
12 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Second.

13  
14 **MR. DONALDSON:** It's seconded by Andy. All right. Any other  
15 nominations? **Seeing none. Mr. Dugas has been re-elected chairman**  
16 **by acclamation.** Congratulations.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Thank you, Mr. Donaldson, and I would like to  
19 thank everyone, all the council members, for supporting me in doing  
20 this, and I couldn't do it without Dr. Simmons, for sure, Dr.  
21 Froeschke, all the staff. Thank you, and even Kesley. This is a  
22 job. This is another job, right, but thank you, all. I appreciate  
23 the support.

24  
25 **MR. DONALDSON:** All right. I'll now open the floor for nominations  
26 of council vice chair. Dr. Sweetman.

27  
28 **DR. SWEETMAN:** I would like to nominate our esteemed current vice  
29 chair, Dr. Kesley Banks.

30  
31 **DR. DONALDSON:** We have a second. **Seeing no other nominations,**  
32 **congratulations to Dr. Banks.** With that, I will turn it back to  
33 you, Mr. Chairman.

34  
35 **CHAIRMAN DUGAS:** Congratulations, Dr. Banks. Okay. We're going  
36 to adjourn, and we're going to see everyone in Biloxi, at a full  
37 council meeting. Safe travels, everyone.

38  
39 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on August 28, 2025.)  
40

41 - - -  
42